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In From the Cold: Notes on Sixteenth-Century English Catholic History

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Abstract

English Catholic history continues to tread new ground, revisit old theories, and draw together theoretical and geographical frameworks. However, it continues to struggle to be accepted as part of the “mainstream” narrative of English history. In this review essay, I explore three key areas of growth related to the study of sixteenth-century English Catholicism: returning Catholics to the “high politics” of England; a renewed emphasis on gender, particularly the role of religious women; and an international/transnational orientation that reaffirms the close ties between Britain and the Continent. Recently reviewed works include Lillian Lodine-Chaffey, *A Weak Woman in a Strong Battle: Women and Public Execution in Early Modern England* (2022); Michael Questier, *Catholics and Treason: Martyrology, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Reformation* (2022); Susan Cogan, *Catholic Social Networks in Early Modern England* (2021); Javier Burguillo and María José Vega, eds., *Épica y conflicto religioso en el siglo XVI: Anglicanismo y luteranismo desde el imaginario hispánico*, (2021); Cormac Begadon and James E. Kelly, eds., *British and Irish Religious Orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (2022); Frederick Smith, *Transnational Catholicism in Tudor England: Mobility, Exile, and Counter-Reformation, 1530–1580* (2022); Alexander Samson, *Mary and Philip: The Marriage of Tudor England and Habsburg Spain* (2020); Deborah Forteza, *The English Reformation in the Spanish Imagination: Rewriting Nero, Jezebel, and the Dragon* (2022); Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (2019) as well as work by Michael Questier and Peter Lake.

Though it is tempting to lament English Catholic seclusion from “mainstream” English history, the state of the field is such that it cannot be seen as a marginal or a (completely) marginalized topic. We can reach back to John Bossy—the *grand maître* of a revived version of English Catholic history—to witness incipient tendencies mitigating confessional forms of historical scholarship that were once sources of great derision by historians of England.¹ Later, Eamon Duffy and Christopher Haigh further signaled a step toward the legitimacy and “relevance” of English Catholic things.² Both, in assuredly different ways, forcefully argued against an inclination to understand the changes in English religious life during the sixteenth century as a light switch phenomenon, a preordained demise of English Catholicism, which had become a thin carapace easily crushed by the forces of (Protestant) reform. If a narrative of Catholic putrefaction does not work, then the place

¹ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (Oxford, 1976).

² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in Early Modern England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, 1992); Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993).

of Catholicism and Catholics within the, for lack of a better phrase, Protestant imaginary might take on new meaning. It is not only the case that anti-popery makes sense within the inversionary matrix of early modern mentalities, but it has become clear that various forms of local and international English Catholic recalcitrance—and less adversarial forms of persistence as well—could not but be taken seriously in a post-Reformation world immured in anxieties about the threats of international Catholic forces and more local concerns about proper ecclesiology and forms of worship among Protestants.³ Despite such insights, which seem retrospectively so clear, it is nevertheless true that Catholic historiography only fitfully emerged from the precincts of confessional scholarship. Thus, at the dawn of the new millennium, Ethan Shagan could rightly say that those involved in English Catholic studies remained “for the most part both uninformed by the wider scholarship on early modern England and unable to influence that scholarship with its important interventions.”⁴ But the edited volume in which he said this already suggested a profound shift that would, in less than a couple of decades, lead James Kelly and Susan Royal to claim that Shagan’s concerns had been largely overcome.⁵ However, for Catholicism to be included within traditional English scholarship, more than the limitations of Catholic scholarship needed addressing. English history would have to claw back against a certain geographic insularity that tended to excise or ignore “foreign” elements intrinsic to versions of the Catholic story that is often colored by movements on the European mainland. More importantly, traditional scholarship would have to reckon with the ghosts of (explicit, implicit, and accidental) Protestant triumphalism given life by an antiquated understanding of Protestant consensus. Both the placement of English things within broader British and European landscapes and a profound understanding of variegated forms of Protestantism have created an environment conducive to the inclusion of Catholic things. And so, while Diarmaid MacCulloch’s 2009 survey of the Reformation can still take a dismissive tone toward English Catholicism, a look at Peter Marshall’s more recent survey of the English Reformation is more forthcoming about how integral Catholics were within a fractured religious (dis)settlement well into Elizabeth I’s reign.⁶

A subject of ever-more intense research cannot be contained in a short essay, but it seems to me and to the editors of this journal that it is worth considering the “field,” or at least a very thin slice of it, to highlight some important scholarly emphases in the (mostly) recent past. I cannot pretend to assume this task in the spirit of comprehensiveness, but instead in the spirit of bald partiality, touching—and lightly at that—on themes that are of interest to me and that also have the virtue of being, I would argue, fundamental to the current scholarly enterprise. In the following pages, I want to gesture at three important trends that have fundamentally marked sixteenth-century English Catholic studies: what we can call a “political turn,” a renewed emphasis on gender (the study of women, really), and an international/transnational orientation toward the understanding of English Catholicism. Those who are already conversant with English Catholic history will surely note that these themes are not precisely “new,” and should be well aware that a good deal that seems novel today was discussed many decades—indeed, centuries—ago in Catholic scholarship we sometimes ignore too hastily. Nevertheless, the aforementioned topics have gained depth and become more “mainstream” in the recent past.

Early modern English Catholic history has been fertile ground for forms of political history. This should not be surprising. Despite varieties, the Catholic experience was—both in

³ Peter Lake, “Anti-popery: The Structure of a Prejudice,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603–1642*, ed. Richard Cust and Anne Hughes (London, 1989), 181–210.

⁴ Ethan H. Shagan, ed., *Catholics and the “Protestant Nation”: Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2005), 1.

⁵ James Kelly and Susan Royal, eds., *Early Modern Catholicism: Identity, Memory, and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017), 1.

⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York, 2004); Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven, 2018).

terms of everyday existence and in terms of spiritual fulfilment or torment—tied to the function of state and its local and “national” institutions. Different bodies of justice and governance profoundly marked English Catholic ways of life and, just as importantly, how individuals (and groups) imagined and presented themselves. While some aimed to skirt confrontation with the state, some early moderns recognized that the English Catholic “problem” could not be extricated from dynamics of resistance; to be and claim to be Catholic was to take a stance in tension with the desires of governing regimes. Among those who embraced a harder, more uncompromising Catholic line, there was no doubt that they were going against the laws of those governing regimes and had few qualms about involving themselves in political intrigue. Some—most famously the Jesuit Robert Persons—jumped into the realm of dirty polemics and shadowy espionage with gusto. The fisticuffs were not only with Protestants but could be intramural, as dissension among Catholics about how to deal with confessional enemies led to tough battles tightly knit into the fabric of post-Reformation religio-politics.⁷ It is precisely because political engagement was, retrospectively, so obvious and forward—manifest, for example, in reams of back-and-forth polemics from the sixteenth century onward—that an older historiography written in a more confessional mode tended to avoid the topic altogether. Ascendant forms of cultural and social history at the expense of politics per se did not help either.

The study of English Catholicism requires a return of (high) political narratives. As Michael Questier has recently argued, by pinning Catholic issues to important political turning points “one could try to work out an event-led account of the period that would tend to incorporate rather than exclude the post-Reformation Catholic community.”⁸ What we are talking about is a revamping of English political stories with Catholics left in, thus providing a more accurate version of the English past because of the capaciousness of the latter. The enterprise is not only about a more faithful rendering of political events and concatenations, but is also an attempt to reimagine loci and forms of political involvement. There has been a good deal written about early modern “public spheres” and different modes of participation in them that require a more ample understanding of the participatory tools for, and the varied types of, political action, including those pertinent to the realm of print or public fora like the theater.⁹ It turns out that the study of Catholics has helped fine-tune our understandings of these dynamics. For example, the Elizabethan succession crisis (and later dynastic concerns) that so plagued the queen’s tenure concerns high politics and diplomatic intrigue that can be rendered more accurately with the reinsertion of Catholics as active participants in those wrangles. Just as important, exploring the relevance of their polemical interventions teaches us about how the issue was imagined and discussed among various audiences. Recognizing and acknowledging this furthers our understanding of the ways in

⁷ For a seminal book dealing with many of these issues, see Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550–1640* (Cambridge, 2006). On Catholics and the law, see Leslie J. Ward, “The Law of Treason in the Reign of Elizabeth,” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1985). See also the very useful, much shorter synthesis: Michael Questier, “Historical Introduction,” in *Papal Authority and the Limits of the Law in Tudor England*, ed. Peter D. Clarke and Michael Questier (Cambridge, 2015), 103–20. See also Stefania Tutino, *Law and Conscience: Catholicism in Early Modern England, 1570–1625* (Burlington, VT, 2007). For a rich selection of primary sources with a useful introduction on conformity and resistance, see Ginevra Crosignani, Michael Questier and Thomas M. McCoog, eds., *Recusancy and Conformity in Early Modern England: Manuscript and Printed Sources* (Toronto, 2010). See also Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of Elizabethan Catholics* (Oxford, 1982); Ginevra Crosignani, “*De adeundis ecclesiis protestantium*”: Thomas Wright, Robert Parsons, S.J. e il dibattito sul conformismo occasionale nell’Inghilterra dell’eta moderna (Rome, 2004); Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity, and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993).

⁸ Michael Questier, “Going Nowhere Fast? The Historiography of Catholicism in Post-Reformation England,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2021): 405–31, at 423.

⁹ For a foundational statement on the topic, see Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (April 2006): 270–92; Peter Lake, *How Shakespeare put Politics on the Stage: Power and Succession in the History Plays* (New Haven, 2017); Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess: Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Cambridge, 2016).

which succession controversies manifested publicly (in print, from the pulpit, through dramatic performances) and thus how politics “worked.”¹⁰

A more expansive definition of politics beyond the institutional or courtly has also allowed for a reassessment of central issues in Catholic scholarship, most importantly martyrdom. Of course, there is no doubt that the quest for martyrdom and the ideals it embodies reflected true devotion and that the phenomenon, for this reason, was so pertinent to Protestants and Catholics alike.¹¹ Still, there is no doubt that the representations of martyrdom by Catholics (and Protestants in a similar vein) were used as polemical tools in specific circumstances.¹² Indeed, the gallows could be a site of public pitch making, where the regime intended to relay certain ominous messages to recalcitrant subjects and where Catholics could deviate from prescribed scripts to challenge the authority of the executioner publicly. Thus, execution grounds could become another locus of the “public sphere” and one that both punisher and punished increasingly saw as essential (though to different ends). Such an understanding of the representations and realities of martyrdom require a highly—politically—contextualized “reading” of martyrological performances (or, from the Crown’s perspectives, the performance sedition) that, for modern scholars, highlight the interlacing of “political” and “devotional” instincts and intents, a topic that deserves more attention.¹³ In treating martyrdom thus, scholarship of the last few decades has taken a topic long the preserve of confessionally tinted scholarship and rubbed off its heroic sheen, thus embedding it further into a cultural and political matrix that cannot be deemed “merely” Catholic.¹⁴

Women are increasingly part of the political narratives as well. Most prominently, scholarship has shown their participation in that hybrid realm of religio-political combat. For example, the story of Margaret Clitherow, who was crushed to death for her role as priest-hider and for her audacious public piety, offers the opportunity to tell an extraordinary version of a more quotidian story about female entanglements in anti-Protestant efforts and intra-Catholic divisions as well.¹⁵ She is not only interesting as a pious woman doing pious things but, for modern observers, her travails serve as reminders that her devotion was highly polemical both in its performance and in the subsequent retelling of her story. As discussed by Lake and Questier, studying Clitherow offers a means to critique a certain kind of scholarship concerning “holy women.” There is a tendency—much mitigated now—to sanitize their lives and soften their political engagement. This was true of, for example, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, a Spanish noblewoman who was neck deep in all sorts of political machinations in England, but who is only now receiving proper treatment as a political actor.¹⁶ Other women, such as the well-known émigré to Spain, Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria, are just starting to receive more attention decades after innovative work on Dormer was first published—a rather slow acknowledgment of how crucial she was to the

¹⁰ Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes, eds., *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England* (Manchester, 2014); Michael Questier, *Dynastic Politics and the British Reformations, 1558–1630* (Oxford, 2019); Lake, *How Shakespeare put Politics on Stage*.

¹¹ Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Susannah Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹² Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535–1603* (Farnham, 2002).

¹³ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, “Agency, Appropriation and Rhetoric Under the Gallows: Puritans, Romanists, and the State in Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 153 (November 1996): 64–107; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, “Puritans, Papists and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England: The Edmund Campion Affair in Context,” *Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 3 (September 2000): 587–627.

¹⁴ Michael Questier, *Catholics and Treason: Martyrology, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Reformation* (Oxford, 2022).

¹⁵ Lillian Lodine-Chaffey, *A Weak Woman in a Strong Battle: Women and Public Execution in Early Modern England* (Tuscaloosa, 2022); Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England*, 2nd ed. (London, 2019).

¹⁶ Glyn Redworth, *The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal* (Oxford, 2008); Kathryn Marshalek, “Luisa de Carvajal in Anglo-Spanish Contexts, 1605–1614,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 882–916. This is part of my aim in a forthcoming book: *Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza: The Pious Politics of an Anglo-Spanish Life*.

maintenance of the English Catholic community and how she stood at the nexus of piety and (political) activism.¹⁷

The work on figures like Clitherow reinforces how important women were to the maintenance of Catholicism. This is not, of course, a new insight but has been something of an assumption going back many decades in, for example, the work of Bossy and John Aveling.¹⁸ This was not news to contemporaries either; it is not surprising that among missionaries, women would be targeted for benefaction. From the Protestant side, it is also by no means surprising that they would agonize over the threats Catholic women posed to the social order.¹⁹ However, if their roles as benefactresses and absconders of priests signaled women as being important to the English Catholic community, there is room to add texture to that relationship. As Lake and Questier point out, it is almost axiomatic to think of women as acting in concert with their husbands to maintain a Catholic household: men would publicly conform while wives would keep the faith in the domestic sphere. However, that relationship could be, and was just as likely to be, in tension, underlining that there need be no link between forms of domesticity and docility.²⁰ As the Clitherow case also suggests, domesticity as code for realms of privacy is not quite right for a society where the private and public were porous, where the home was (or could be) part of public spheres. Further, the study of Catholic women reminds us of the outer reaches of the home well beyond the house. In scholarship that coheres with the study of noblewomen elsewhere in the early modern world, it is increasingly clear that English Catholic women maintained the household in ways that looked outward (and in ways not primarily focused on spiritual health). For example, they could act as petitioners and proxies for their husbands, who were sometimes disenfranchised.²¹

By far, the literature on Catholic women has focused on nuns. In this realm, there is no more important foundational work than the “Who Were the Nuns?” project that flourished under Caroline Bowden’s guidance.²² The project revealed a portion of the English Catholic population that was, in a way, hidden in plain sight. Against a sense that English Catholic survival took place in hidden nooks, we now have a better idea of the extent to which English Catholic women took the veil and of the geographical coverage of their presence in mainland Europe. Knowing that English Catholic nuns existed in substantial numbers and that they lived in different contexts pushes against an instinct to talk about them as a homogeneous group, enclosed and steeped in a life of unsullied devotion, exemplars of something like feminine piety. The trick has been to move from numbers to actual women and their experiences, which were at once structurally corporate while remaining varied.

Convents crackled with spiritual and devotional energies. Women were active participants in confecting and working out different styles of devotion, choosing and creating among menus of devotional concepts and precepts established by men. Indeed, it seems clear that while nuns were intent on nourishing their close relationship with God—sometimes in deeply ascetic ways, sometimes less so—decisions as to how to do so engaged with competing visions of devotion proposed by, for example, Jesuits and Benedictines who were at

¹⁷ João Vicente Melo and Lauren Working, “‘Means of Persuasion’: The Material Culture and Oppositional Politics of Two Counter-Reformation Female Agents, Jane Dormer and Luisa de Carvajal,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 53, no. 1 (2022): 135–68.

¹⁸ For example, John Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York, 1558–1791* (London, 1970); Bossy, *English Catholic Community*.

¹⁹ Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth Century Print Culture* (Notre Dame, 2005).

²⁰ Lake and Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow*, 24.

²¹ Susan Cogan, *Catholic Social Networks in Early Modern England* (Amsterdam, 2021).

²² “Who Were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of the English Catholics in Exile,” <https://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>. Caroline Bowden and James Kelly, eds., *English Convent in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture, and Identity* (London and New York, 2013). For a crucial set of sources, see Caroline Bowden, ed., *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 6 vols (London, 2012–13).

each other's throats. That said, it is also important to underline that nuns were not simply parroting their superiors, but also developing their own approaches toward spiritual enlightenment. Consequently, it is insufficient to pin any one woman or any one convent a specific devotional style without considering lived experience, even the feel and smell of piety.²³

While the story of English Catholic nuns is invariably one of enclosure, this is not a story of self-effacement. Indeed, nuns were attuned to the power of words as means of self-fashioning and self-understanding. They wrote a lot. The scope of nuns' output is rendered that much more impressive if we take a generous approach to conventual genres: aside from life-writings, we could, and should, take into account devotional texts and even administrative writings (statutes, account books, etc.) that together show the multifarious ways in which individual impulses and needs could be grafted onto the communitarian identities forged. These works, though of conventual origin, were not devoid of public functions as they were often intimately linked to more generalized English Catholic concerns and inter-necine polemics. Further, following champion efforts to integrate English Catholics within broader English literary scholarship,²⁴ it is wise to consider how women's writing—much of it conventual—got under the skin of male writers for whom conventual life became a source of great interest, either from the standpoint of Protestant enemies or coreligionists.²⁵

And so, religious women could speak to things outside conventual walls. On a basic level, the quest for patronage and solvency among English nuns required an engagement with benefactors in their new homelands and back home in England as well. In part because of this dynamic, there is no doubt that by sustaining kinship bonds with families in England nuns were crucial binders of the English Catholic communities. These bonds were vital for more than monetary reasons: nuns were actively involved in recruiting more nuns from back home. In turn, where these new recruits landed and the forms of spiritual satisfactions they achieved could manifest greater dynamics and tensions within Catholic communities, including the aforementioned debates about spiritual style and various forms of political alignments. Nuns were also active participants in transnational Counter-Reformation movements, implicitly and explicitly involved in considerations about the nature of Catholic reform *tout court*.²⁶

As scholarship on nuns plainly shows, it makes little sense to think about English Catholicism without considering matters beyond England and, indeed, beyond Britain. The bibliographic work A. F. Allison and D. M. Rodgers left no doubt that English Catholic books were produced on both sides of the Channel, and that English Catholics were carving out discursive spaces both in Britain and mainland Europe.²⁷ This international bent is no secret and has received attention for a long time. One thinks, for example, of the work by John Bossy, in particular his dissertation on English Catholics in France, and the dissertation of Albert Loomie on English Catholics in Iberia. Still, older works that once took into account the fact that English Catholics—especially exiles—played varied roles in their new settings and contexts remained somewhat narrow.²⁸ Loomie, for example, wrote a breezy book

²³ Nicky Hallett, *The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600–1800: Early Modern “Convents of Pleasure”* (New York and London, 2013).

²⁴ Foundational in the study of the worth of English Catholic writings and concerns about the English literary canon, see Allison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558–1660* (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁵ Victoria Van Hyning, *Convent Autobiography: Early Modern English Nuns in Exile* (Oxford, 2019); Jaime Goodrich, *Writing Habits: Historicism, Philosophy and English Benedictine Convents, 1600–1800* (Tuscaloosa, 2021); Jenna Lay, *Beyond the Cloister: Catholic English Women and the Early Modern Literary Culture* (Philadelphia, 2016).

²⁶ For this and above, see Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester, 2017); Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003); James Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe* (Cambridge, 2019).

²⁷ A. F. Allison and D. M. Rogers, *A Catalogue of Catholic Books in English Printed Abroad or Secretly in England, 1558–1640*, 2 vols (Aldershot, England, 1989).

²⁸ John Bossy, “Elizabethan Catholicism: The Link With France” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1960); Albert Loomie, “Spain and the English Catholic Exiles, 1580–1604” (PhD diss., University College London, 1957).

about the so-called Spanish Elizabethan, a kind of hybrid creature—English with allegiances to Spain—but the core of the monograph is really about English Catholics in Iberian lands, not the hybridity that the title suggests.²⁹ If Loomie cannot be accused of an insular approach, there is a sense that the book is written as a story of *recusancy* in its most radical form and thus speaks to rather focused interests. Indeed, sometimes there is an impulse to think about a supra-national community composed of (foreign) cells—English colleges in Europe, for example—and even to use English Catholics abroad to discuss emergent forms of English “nationalism,” which seems to provincialize pan-European actors.³⁰

That said, since the days of Loomie and Bossy (three quarters of a century ago!), plenty of work has been carried out that considers not only the English Catholic question itself, but also how English Catholics affected their host countries. As with the nuns, it is almost impossible to consider the lives of some of the most prominent English Catholic exiles without thinking about larger contexts. For example, how can one tell the story of the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion without considering the international geo-political context in which he lived and died, not to mention his important experiences in Rome and Prague? Moreover, the consequence of his life—his martyrdom—was by no means specific to the English Catholic community and lingered in the memory of believers across Catholic Europe—perhaps even on a global scale as well.³¹

Thomas McCoog, SJ, has, in three magisterial volumes, shown that English Catholic affairs were entwined with the Society of Jesus. His chronological narrative might seem to run the risk of hopeless pointillism (further ghettoizing English Catholic things, this time with Jesuit scholarship), but what emerges from McCoog’s painstaking work is the story of a group of men who identified as (mostly) English and were guided by that identity while still remaining active participants within their local contexts as well as within the broader workings of the Society, an order that was foundationally global in outlook, with attendant consequences. Thus, when English Jesuits intervened in Jesuit affairs—the vagaries of the Spanish purity of blood policy and opinions about political activism, for example—we become aware of how they (tried to) impinge on the Society in general.³² (Of course, it is important to remember that Jesuits were not the only religious show in town.)³³

More and more scholarship discusses the ways in which English Catholics infiltrated their host countries. Decades after Bossy, we now know more about the English Catholic ex-pat community in France, a needy lot that nevertheless inserted themselves into various French situations—especially during the Wars of Religion.³⁴ Indeed, French polemicists used English Catholic stories and discourses as tools during the bloody decades of confessional battle. A lot of work is being done within an Iberian context as well. For example, scholarship has tried to decipher the significance of texts written by Catholic exiles through various contextualized readings of polemic and propaganda. Moreover, there is little doubt that exiles seeped in the Spanish imaginary were all the while being influenced by certain

²⁹ Albert Loomie, *The Spanish Elizabethans* (New York, 1957).

³⁰ Christopher Highly, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2008). On the other hand, for a searching discussion of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, see Brian Lockey, *Early Modern Catholics, Royalists, and Cosmopolitans: English Transnationalism and the Christian Commonwealth* (Burlington, VT, 2015).

³¹ Thomas McCoog, ed., *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits* (Woodbridge, 1996); Gerald Kilroy, *Edmund Campion: A Scholarly Life* (Burlington, VT, 2015).

³² Thomas McCoog, SJ, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1541–1588: “Our Way of Proceeding”* (Leiden, 1996); Thomas McCoog, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1589–1597: Building the Faith of St. Peter upon the King of Spain’s Monarchy* (New York, 2016); Thomas McCoog, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1598–1606: Lest Our Lamp Be Entirely Extinguished* (Leiden, 2017); Javier Burguillo, “Primeras notas sobre la Historia del glorioso martirio de Edmundo Campiano, poema épico escrito en Perú hacia 1588,” in *Épica y conflicto religioso en el siglo XVI: Anglicanismo y luteranismo desde el imaginario hispánico*, ed. Javier Burguillo and María José Vega (Woodbridge, 2021).

³³ Cormac Begadon and James E. Kelly, eds., *British and Irish Religious Orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (Woodbridge, 2022).

³⁴ Katie Gibbons, *English Catholic Exiles in Late Sixteenth Century Paris* (Woodbridge, 2011).

Spanish sensibilities (though not only Spanish).³⁵ The shady world of diplomacy is an important locus for understanding these phenomena in a more comprehensively transnational way.³⁶

There is still much to investigate about the place of English Catholics in the realm of early modern Catholicism writ large. The English Question was a subject of concern in Rome, and English Catholics crucially informed those concerns and helped craft responses, or potential responses, to the challenges posed by English heresy. This was not simply a matter of foreign involvement in English affairs such as the Oath Controversy, but a matter of how English Catholic views influenced those polemics at home and abroad, something obviated by an understanding of how Cardinal Bellarmine in Rome and the likes of Robert Persons and Nicholas Sander worked in tandem (in life and posthumously).³⁷ We still need to know more about how intra Catholic strife among the English might have colored an understanding of the tensions within the Counter-Reformation: the positions taken by English Catholics might serve to expose struggles among different stripes of Catholics in and around Rome.³⁸

A more recent emphasis on “mobility” has emerged as an influential hermeneutic. Here Liesbeth Corens’s work has proven influential and controversial.³⁹ In contrast with much work on English Catholics that focuses on “exiles” as a category, implying victimhood and passivity, she instead chooses to use the term “confessional mobility,” the nomenclature for ambulatory practices that can encompass “exiles, fugitives ... pilgrims, Grand Tour travelers, school children in the colleges abroad, and short-term visitors.”⁴⁰ In all these variegated movements, she contends we see the extent to which English travelers remained linked to their English homeland, how their travel would be transformational and a process of spiritual growth. She identifies an impulse toward the formation of a community bound by identitarian developments. Moreover, she suggests that English travelers were an important feature of the “Counter-Reformation,” both as active participators in the movement and as individuals affected by it.

Frederick Smith, in a monograph on Catholic exiles before Elizabethan times, does not assimilate the notion of “confessional mobility,” but he does accept mobility as an important part of a transnational dynamic so crucial in the exilic experience. Like Corens, he wants to shift the narrative from familiar tropes about exiles as a downtrodden tribe by arguing for the possibilities of agency available to some of them as well as the complex interactions they experienced with host populations, the ways in which they were transformed, but also—as Corens intimated—the ways in which they transformed their new home bases. This story takes into account the multifaceted reasons for exile (not all of them heroic), the ways in which repatriated exiles translated (textual and other forms of translation) forms of Continental spirituality, and, ultimately, how those who returned to England during the Marian regime helped concoct a version of the English Church that would be profoundly influential to the Counter-Reformation, a “movement,” if we can call it that, that the English helped forge. Although he expresses some skepticism, he sees virtue in Eamon Duffy’s claim that the Marian regime effectively “created” the Counter-Reformation.⁴¹

³⁵ Freddy Domínguez, *Radicals in Exile: English Catholic Books During the Reign of Philip II* (University Park, 2020); Deborah Forteza, *The English Reformation in the Spanish Imagination: Rewriting Nero, Jezebel, and the Dragon* (Toronto, 2022).

³⁶ Jonathan Roche, “God’s Spies: The Spanish Elizabethans and Intelligence during the Anglo-Spanish War” (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2020).

³⁷ On the oath, see Stefania Tutino, *Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth* (Oxford, 2010).

³⁸ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *All Hail to the Archpriest: Confessional Conflict, Toleration, and the Politics of Publicity in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford, 2019).

³⁹ Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (Oxford, 2019).

⁴⁰ Corens, *Confessional Mobility*, 3.

⁴¹ Frederick Smith, *Transnational Catholicism in Tudor England: Mobility, Exile, and Counter-Reformation, 1530–1580* (Oxford, 2022).

Indeed, Duffy might have been overstating things, but there is little doubt that studies of the Marian regime have revealed how embedded English Catholicism was within a greater Catholic framework. I remain unmoved by the apologetic tone of revisionist scholarship on Mary that seeks to rehabilitate a maligned and misunderstood monarch, but there is no doubt that the revival of Marian studies—still, I would argue, in an early-ish stage—has forced scholars to connect sensibilities of the European mainland to Marian England and, of course, to suggest how influence went the other way as well, in terms of ecclesiastical matters and devotional practices. Consequently, work on the Marian period offers a double opportunity, a means by which to understand the significance of English situation on an international scale and a way to also think about English Catholicism in England itself as a varied, complex phenomenon, within ample contexts, demonstrating shifts and continuities during a century of messy religious change.⁴²

The central challenge to English Catholic studies remains integration. Despite ambiguities about how one defines “English” or “Catholic” in the early modern period (these were not fixed terms), there is good reason to think that the category makes some sense, in part because actual historical actors would have well understood themselves as belonging to both categories. If we take English Catholicism to be a thing, then it is more than justifiable to make it a thing worth studying on its own terms, which does not mean falling prey to oversimplification. Indeed, the more we look, the more we see that English Catholicism was varied and dynamic, riven with tensions born of different conceptions of what it meant to be (a good) Catholic. Often these conflicts over how to define a right sort of Catholic reflected the difficulties of reconciling forms of devotion and seemingly more worldly forays into politics—the entwinement between these two realms of activity should concern us scholars as much as it did the contemporaries we study. Uncovering the varieties of English Catholicism in the early modern period adds flavor and is, indeed, a necessary ingredient for understanding the ambiguities of post-Reformation England itself. Thus, English Catholicism becomes a richer concept and a more vivid historical category when it is studied outside its lonely niche. If Bossy once described an English Catholic community, he never wanted to understand that community as a removed minority and so it is not surprising that the past couple of decades have *built upon* the study of that community to show that English Catholic history is something more than itself. And yet, on a pan-European scale—less so on a British one—scholars still need convincing about the importance of English Catholic history. A more powerful pitch, supported by innovative research, needs to underline how integral English Catholics were as doers within various contexts and how the idea of English Catholicism among the early moderns was integral to understanding many early modern predicaments in Britain and across the Channel. Moreover, there is a strong case to be made that English Catholic history is important as a case study that illuminates a range of pre-modern phenomena, including the dynamics of exile, the experiences of religious minorities, and the very nature of the “Counter-Reformation.” Indeed, there is no doubt that the English Catholic case should receive as much attention and esteem as other forms of global Catholicism (in Asia or the Americas, for example) because it was no less an extraordinary—sometimes downright bizarre—laboratory for Catholic reform, a mix of local and universal concerns in chorus and in tension.

And so, those of us who study forms of early modern English Catholicism are tasked with convincing people outside our subfield that their explicit (more likely implicit) underestimating of the subfield is not quite right. The goal should be two-fold. First, scholars need to deepen further the subfield itself, following many paths of current scholarship to pave new ones. This needs to be done in a way and to such an extent that English Catholicism will simply blend in or inject itself into stories that are not singularly or primarily

⁴² Alexander Samson, *Mary and Philip: The Marriage of Tudor England and Habsburg Spain* (Manchester, 2020); Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven, 2010); Thomas Mayer, *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* (Cambridge, 2000); John Edwards, *Mary I: England's Catholic Queen* (New Haven, 2013).

English Catholic. The excellence of the current work on English Catholicism augurs well for the future.

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