

ANTI-CATHOLIC POLEMIC IN JACOBEAN PRINT CULTURE:

CONTEXTUALIZING *WESTWARD FOR SMELTS* (1620)

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The 1620 anonymous prose fiction *Westward for Smelts* does not identify itself as a participant in the popular anti-Catholic polemic rampant in Jacobean England. Instead, *Smelts* relies heavily upon stereotyped caricatures of Catholics which were made popular through the anti-Catholic polemic; *Smelts* seems to assume that these stereotypes are clear and distinguishable. The fiction is comprised of a controlling frame story, set in Lenten London, and sextet of short tales, all of which stereotype Catholic behavior negatively. The tales that make up *Smelts* are told by six fishwives, much in the tradition that recalls Chaucer, Boccaccio, and de Navarre. This format allows for six “different” voices to communicate to one another, contributing to a greater or lesser degree to the Jacobean anti-Catholic climate.

Contextualizing *Smelts* in this way works to aid readers in their own comprehension of the fiction; many of the anti-Catholic sentiments represented in *Smelts*

have either completely vanished from society and others have “grown up,” forgetting their early modern English roots. This study aims to inform *Smelts*’ readers in such a way that will clarify the ambiguities and assumptions within the fiction; in misunderstanding or overlooking these anti-Catholic attitudes, one risks losing *Smelts*’ insight into the religious climate of 1620.

Style manual used: Chicago Manual Style, 15th ed.

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INTRODUCTION

“I had dreamed of speaking with the dead, and even now I do not abandon the dream. But the mistake was to imagine that I would hear a single voice, the voice of the other. If I wanted to hear one, I had to hear the many voices of the dead. And if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice. The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property.” Stephen Greenblatt¹

I find in Stephen Greenblatt’s dream more than inspiration; in it, I see my own dream reflected—the overwhelming desire to hear the voice of an anonymous, dead Jacobean writer, to distinguish it from the many voices of the dead. I am taunted by the unnamed voice of *Westward for Smelts’s* writer, wanting nothing more than to give him (or her) a name, a sex, a social class, a solid cultural identity. However, I am aware of a more important question: if this writer wished to remain anonymous, what would be the point in struggling to identify him or her? *Smelts’s* writer, under the pseudonym “Kinde Kit of Kingstone,” wove social commentaries into the tapestry of the prose, proving himself (or herself) socially cognizant. As I came to understand the red herring my obsession with the anonymity of *Smelts’s* writer had become, I widened my scope as Greenblatt has done, listening for the voices of the many as they are represented in the 1620 prose fiction, specifically in regards to the religious climate in Jacobean England. However, when I listened to the voices of the dead, as Greenblatt instructs,² it was not the voice of the rising feminist body I heard loudest; it was the voice of the oppressed

¹ *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 20.

² *Ibid.*

Catholic Englishman and –woman, and, with it, the influential anti-Catholic polemic that rose above all other voices. I gave in to the voices I had not expected to hear and have attempted to strengthen their respective voices as *Smelts*'s anonymous Kinde Kit presents them.

It is important to note that the fishwives do not expressly state that their tales will reveal anti-Catholic sentiments; rather, their use of common stereotypes draws attention to the need to contextualize their tales.³ *Smelts*' overarching concerns argue for attention to gender studies, not necessarily religious studies. The fishwives' tales all portray women as, for better or worse, strong-willed and capable of achieving their desired end, which is often at the male characters' expense; the one exception is the fishwife of Hampton's tale, which punishes its main female character Millisant for her unkind cunning against her suitor.⁴ After the fishwife of Brainford's tale, the remaining five fishwives compete to show in their tales a woman who is stronger, more capable, and more praiseworthy than the women in the tales which precede them. The fishwives tell tales of women who aid other women in order to emasculate possessive men, women who are loyal to jealous husbands and manage to escape manipulative plots, who are disloyal to jealous husbands and use their cunning to achieve their goals, who are good

³ *Westward for Smelts* has not received much scholarly attention; however, the following sources make note of it: H. Neville Davies, *The Cobbler of Canterbury: Frederic Ouvry's Edition of 1862 with a New Introduction*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1976; Marie-Hélène Davies, *Reflections of Renaissance England: Life, Thought, and Religion Mirrored in Illustrated Pamphlets, 1350-1640*, Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986; James L. Harner, *English Renaissance Prose Fiction, 1500-1660: an annotated bibliography of criticism*, Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1978; Charles C. Mish, *Short Fiction of the Seventeenth Century*, New York: New York University Press, 1963; Charles C. Mish, *English Prose Fiction 1600-1700: A Chronological Checklist*, Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1967; and Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction 1558-1700: A Critical History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

⁴ See the forthcoming article from Constance Relihan, "Fishwives' Tales: Narrative Agency, Female Subjectivity, and Telling Tales Out of School," *Early Modern Prose Fiction*, Naomi Conn Liebler, editor (Routledge).

wives and loyal to loving husbands, who defend themselves and other women against dangerous men, and who foolishly manipulate men and receive due punishment for their bad behavior. The women in these tales all act as models for female behavior, their respective storytellers hope; their behavior is either to be followed or avoided.

While gender studies are the most likely avenues to pursue, and arguably the controlling interest in the *Smelts* tales, I have chosen instead to focus upon the anti-Catholicism which facilitates the fishwives' characterization of capable women. The fishwives utilize stock characters and images from the Jacobean anti-Catholic polemic; anti-Catholicism works as a vehicle which aids the fishwives, and ultimately *Smelts'* anonymous author, in characterizing the women in their respective tales. Most of the women in the tales are to be emulated by other women, and perhaps avoided by men, because they are smart enough to rise above the teachings of the Catholic church. The women who are not to be emulated in the tales, specifically Hampton's Millisant and Twitnam's Beblam, accept their religion's teachings and adhere to them strictly; their Catholicism (or Catholic sympathies) facilitate their strength, ultimately working against them. The fishwives do not find role models in either of these two women: the first cons her suitor into taking a vow of silence; the second, a queen and not a fishwife, agrees to a celibate marriage. The women who do not accept Catholic teachings as a means to achieve a greater end, and who rather rebel against or altogether ignore such instruction, are women worthy of emulation.

The anti-Catholicism present in *Smelts* varies from tale to tale; however, it is this variety that makes *Smelts* a compendium of socially acceptable anti-Catholic views. In my first chapter, I describe the important anti-Catholic polemic at work in *Smelts*,

including a brief look at period propaganda. I do not approach the tales of *Smelts* in the order in which they appear (that is, Kinde Kit's frame, followed by the tales of the fishwives of Brainford, Stand on the Greene, Richmond, Twitnam, Kingstone, and Hampton); instead, I explore the common issues at work within the tales. Kit, responsible for the frame story as *Smelts*' narrator and writer, sets the story in Lenten London. His keen attention to the importance of this season alerts the reader to the implied religiously charged climate; the fishwives themselves are raised in importance in London's marketplace, for example, because it is their product (the fish) that Londoners desire.

The fishwives of Brainford and Hampton make less use of the anti-Catholic dialogue than do the other four female storytellers; the polemic exists on the periphery of Brainford and Hampton's tales, never quite entering them directly. Brainford's tale ends in a misunderstood miracle—the husband in her tale is duped into believing an injury he gives to his wife has been healed because she is truly innocent of her sins. In truth, the wife had a stand-in (Brainford) who took the punishment in her stead, unbeknownst to the husband. Rather than focusing its attention on the perception of miracles, Brainford's tale prefers to represent women as capable of emasculating the dominant men in their lives. Hampton's tale, similar to Brainford's, uses the predominantly Catholic practice of taking a vow of silence not as a religious commentary but as a means to prove her argument that women should not use their wit against men. In her tale, a beautiful woman convinces a suitor to prove his love for her by vowing to remain silent for two years; he commits to the vow immediately. The tale, although it alludes to an awareness of such a practice, does not rely upon the vow of silence as a means to facilitate anti-

Catholic sentiments. Instead, Hampton's use of the vow serves as proof that the woman was unjust and unkind in her treatment of her suitor.

The fishwife of Stand on the Greene's tale provides commentary on anti-Catholic feelings toward religious articles, specifically focusing on the importance of the crucifix to a woman. The woman in Stand on the Greene's tale is not given an apparent religious affiliation, which serves to underscore the polemic of the time that women were attracted to the Catholic religion by its pretty baubles and jewelry, including crucifixes. The wife in Stand on the Greene's tale does not miss her stolen crucifix, an item she seems to cherish; she seems to represent the common woman duped into Catholicism by its fashionable objects.⁵ Such a criticism of women and their willingness to embrace Catholic teachings supports Jacobean Anglican confusion about the nature of Catholic women's attachment to religious objects. The fishwife of Kingstone's tale directly attacks the Catholic sacrament of penance. The wife in Kingstone's tale visits her confessor who is quickly identified as a lecherous man, not in the least holy. The tale's premise echoes warnings within anti-Catholic polemic that holy men who are forced into celibacy by religious vows will find release in unwitting female parishioners, most often in the privacy and secrecy of confession.

Anglicans' interpretation of Catholic divorce and marriage customs, considered archaic and unreasonable, are presented in the fishwife of Richmond's tale and the fishwife of Twitnam's tale, respectively. The fishwife of Richmond's tale comments upon the difficulty an unhappy couple must undergo in order to obtain a legal divorce.

⁵ Frances Dolan, 27. "...it was widely believed that Catholicism lured women with its ritual paraphernalia, offering them trinkets and toys rather than a Bible they could not read."

Jacobean English Protestants were beginning to cry out for more lenient divorce laws.⁶

Richmond hyperbolizes this unhappy situation in order to comment upon the unrealistic and outdated divorce customs still existent in Jacobean English churches; of the fishwives who focus their tales on the anti-Catholic polemic, Richmond is the only one who sets her story in her present day. Her tale represents the Jacobean anti-Catholic sentiment toward divorce customs in a more direct method than the other *Smelts* fishwives' representations of anti-Catholic polemic. The fishwife of Twitnam responds to Richmond's tale, deciding to illustrate a happily married couple living in celibacy. Twitnam is the most likely Catholic storyteller of the sextet because she honors the celibate marriage of Saint Oswald⁷ and his wife (whom she names Beblam). Twitnam hopes to prove with her tale that Beblam is worthy of emulation because she is happy to follow her husband's orders to entertain a guest (a local hermit) and to treat him as she does her husband. The hermit is eager to enjoy Oswald's conjugal rights with Beblam, unaware the couple has agreed to a life of marital celibacy. While Beblam does treat the hermit the way she would treat her husband, she is careful to remain faithful to her husband and to her celibacy. Jacobean Anglicans would have taken issue with this arrangement—to live in celibacy, even in marriage, was abnormal and even grounds for annulment.⁸ Although the tale offers some fascinating insight into a possible pro-Catholic viewpoint in the honoring of the celibate marriage, it is the other five fishwives' reaction to Twitnam's tale that voices

⁶ Alan Macfarlane explains that by this period, "[t]here...arose a situation whereby divorce with right to remarry became more and more difficult. Moderately easy until the tenth century, increasingly difficult in the medieval period, just possible in the later sixteenth century, the net closed tighter and tighter" (227). Jacobean Anglicans not only wished for easier methods of divorce, but they also desired the possibility of remarriage after divorce.

⁷ Twitnam herself recognizes Oswald as a canonized saint, though Anglicans and Puritans were demonstratively opposed to honoring the saints' lives in the tradition which Catholics honored them.

⁸ Macfarlane, 227.

the culturally acceptable anti-Catholic polemic. The fishwife of Kingstone argues that Beblam is a queen; fishwives would not be able to remain married to their husbands if they practiced celibacy.⁹

Rather than try to answer my initial question of *who* would write such a text as *Westward for Smelts*, riddled with religious commentary, I focused my search on answering the *what*. What does the publication of such a piece say about its society and its readers? Greenblatt argues that it is the responsibility of the scholar to “...ask how collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption.”¹⁰ The collective beliefs, or outwardly expressed beliefs, of Jacobean Anglicans are represented in *Smelts*, specifically in regards to anti-Catholic propaganda and practices.

⁹ *Smelts*, 32; hereafter, all *Westward for Smelts* quotations will be cited parenthetically based on the page numbers from the original manuscript from the 1964 microfilm.

¹⁰ Greenblatt, 5.

CHAPTER ONE

The Jacobean anti-Catholic polemic

Catholics in Jacobean England experienced great instability in their nation and their leader—not only were they encouraged, when James I ascended the throne, to consider their religion tolerated by James, but they were also forced to face social stigmas that had accumulated during Elizabeth’s reign. Not far into James I’s reign, recusant Catholics found themselves in greater danger and instability than before. On 24 March 1603, mere months after James had ascended the throne, he met with Parliament, and released a document requiring all Catholic priests either to be converted to the Church of England or to be exiled to foreign countries (most likely continental Europe) where they could no longer endanger the king.¹¹ These mandates were to be carried out no later than 19 March 1604, six days before Parliament was due to meet again. If these individuals were not properly disposed of by this deadline or if they attempted to return to England or Scotland, they faced dangerous consequences:

...they shalbe left to the penaltie of the Lawes here being in force
concerning them, without hope of any favor or remission from Us.

Wherefore We will and command all Archbishops, Bishops, Lieutenants,

¹¹ The decree reads: “Wee doe hereby will and command all maner of Jesuits, Seminaries, and other Priests whatsoever, hauing Ordination from any authoritie by the Lawes of this Realme prohibited...that they doe before the nineteenth day of March next ensuing the date hereof, depart foorth of our Realme and Dominions, And that for that purpose it shall be lawfull to all Officers of our Ports to suffer the sayd Priests to depart from thence into an Foreine parts” James I. 1 James I, 24 Mar. 1603. By the king.

Justices of Peace, and all other our Officers and Ministers whatsoever, to be vigilant and carefull after the said nineteenth day of March past, to doe their duties and vigilance in discovering and apprehending of all Priests that shall remaine here contrary to this our declaration.¹²

Although he may appear unjust or too severe in his declaration, James had due reason to dispose of the Catholics. James justifies himself by reminding citizens that the Jesuits and other priests do not accept the national religion, thereby characterizing *themselves* as enemies to the king. No prince, James continues, would allow dangerous enemies to remain in his country; forcing them into foreign lands is an acceptable course of action.¹³

Catholic citizens must have recognized the sudden change in James' attitude toward them and their church leaders; they were led to believe in James' tolerance for their religion, even going so far as to rejoice at his accession.¹⁴ The sudden exile of church officials from James I's dominions (England, Ireland, and Scotland) came straight on the heels of another movement, this time in print: anti-papist writings.¹⁵ Protestant ministers were among the most prodigious writers of such propaganda and could be respected because of their position in the Church of England: these men had access to the Bible, they were assumed to have understood its teachings better than their parishioners, and they were personally in need of proving their loyalty to the King and the King's religion. Such anti-papal propaganda as the Elizabethan *A Dialogue between a Papist*

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Alison Shell, 142. "Even while king of Scotland, James had allowed both English and European Catholics to think that he was in favour of toleration, and their jubilation at his accession was increased by one of the first acts of his reign, the release of the priest William Weston from prison."

¹⁵ Anthony Milton, 31. "In Jacobean times anti-papal writings, at least in the first half of the reign, were the most distinctive feature of English Protestant theology and occupied the energies of all the principal members of the Jacobean episcopate."

and a Protestant (1583,¹⁶ written by George Gifford, a preacher in Maldon), the Jacobean *A Blow for the Pope* (1615, written by Bartholomew Robertson, a “Minister of Gods Word”), and the two broadsides published by the Signe of the (Golden) Faulcon¹⁷ *Which of these fower that here you see, in greatest daunger you thinke to bee* and *The Popes Pyramides* (1623 and 1624, respectively) tore down Catholic practices and teachings, pointing to specific references in the Bible as proof that the Catholic Church had misled its followers.

The two broadsides printed at the Signe of the (Golden) Faulcon in 1623 and 1624 respectively provide visual testimony to the pervading sense of anti-Catholicism in Jacobean England. The broadsides are blatant in their attacks, leaving very little room for misinterpretation or confusion of meaning. The first broadside¹⁸ depicts four sets of dual predators flanking weaker prey, asking its audience to ponder the riddle, *Which of these fower that here you see, in greatest daunger you thinke to bee*. From the top-left, working counter-clockwise, the four trios represented are: “A Clyent, betweene two Lawyers”; “A Goose, betweene two Foxes”; “A Rat, betweene two Cats”; and “A Maide, betweene two Friers.” Each of the predators in the trios attempts to convince its prey to succumb to its seductive speech, while the prey argues for its safety. While each trio has its own dangerous predicament and certainly makes a case as an answer to the riddle, it is

¹⁶ The span of the publication years for the documents I cite indicates the larger social conversation which *Smelts* represents. This social anti-Catholic conversation took place not only in 1620 Jacobean England, but also in Elizabethan England and in James’s last two reigning years.

¹⁷ After research, no other publications from the Signe of the (Golden) Faulcon have survived. For more on early modern English publishing houses, please see Peter W.M. Blayney’s “The Bookshops in Paul’s Cross Churchyard,” *Occasional Papers of the Bibliographical Society*, no. 5, London: Bibliography Society, 1990.

¹⁸ Please refer to Appendix A.

the maid between two friars who comes out as in the most danger. The dialogue for this trio is as follows:

Maide. What say you holy man to me?

Friar. I say, faire holy maide, leane thou to me, and on my loue, let all thy sinnes be laide:

Maide. And what say you good man?

Friar. I say shew all to me, that better then that aged man, can helpe and comfort thee.

Maide. Now in what perill standes a Maide, in shrieft betweene two Friers? That only make the Church a Cloake, to couer foule desires.

The maid in the image is topless, wearing her collar, sleeves, stomacher, skirt, and shoes, but her breasts are fully exposed. One friar, the elder, stands to her right, clutching her hand with his right hand, his left hand pressed on the small of her back, as though he is attempting to lead her away. The second friar, the self-proclaimed younger, stands on her left, the fingertips of his left hand grazing the side of her ribcage, precariously below her left breast. His right hand squeezes the top of her left shoulder, and if he were to succeed in pulling her toward him, he would have easily cupped her breast in his open left hand. The maid seems to be pushing the younger friar away, but also not acquiescing to the elder friar's persuasion. Beside her head is a balloon in which is written, "I still shall doubt, when two such doe me shrieue."

This image plays against the anti-Catholic fear that Catholic women were in danger of their confessors' hottest desires, made even clearer when the maid mourns,

“Now in what perill standes a Maide, in shrieft betweene two Friers? That only make the Church a Cloake, to couer foule desires.” The maid echoes the anti-Catholic polemic which argued that under the guise of confession, “holy” Catholic men could take advantage of their female parishioners with great ease. Women were taught to trust the men in their lives, especially the holy men in their lives; and because the Catholic Church offered the Mass in Latin and used a Latin Bible, male and female parishioners alike were subject to the priest’s personal understanding of the text to act as a guide. If a priest were cunning and lustful, he could easily deceive most female parishioners, especially women coming to him for the sacrament of penance, into believing that his lusty advances were considered acceptable in the Bible. These are the fears of the anti-Catholics; these are the fears depicted in the broadside *Which of these fower...*; these are the fears likewise addressed in *Westward for Smelts*, especially in the fishwife of Kingstone’s tale. Women were considered vulnerable when alone with any man, especially a holy man. Holy men, who lived celibate lives, conducted themselves against their natural and baser instincts; the anti-Catholic knew the holy man would not be able to withhold his desires if a vulnerable Catholic woman sought his guidance.

The two holy men of this broadside represent lecherous clerics not only in their words but in their actions; these men are touching the young maid in highly suggestive ways, obviously expecting more to come from her confession than absolution. If the maid lives up to the expectations placed upon her in Jacobean England, she will submit to them; they are the leaders of her church and ought to be trustworthy. But through its riddle, the broadside warns that the woman is in danger; in this case, it is not the woman herself who is in danger—she will unlikely be murdered like the goose or rat of the other

trios. Rather than the maid's life, it is her soul that is in the greatest danger (answering the riddle). Should the maid follow her religion and confess her sins to one of the lascivious friars her soul is destined for Hell, an end to which all Catholics were doomed according to the second Signe of the Faulcon broadside, *The Popes Pyramides* published in 1624.

The Popes Pyramides depicts the hierarchy of the Catholic church as a pyramid of intertwined snakes, the largest snake coiling to the top and taking its place as a symbol for the pope. From its mouth comes the word, "Blasphemie." The smaller snakes wrap themselves around the largest, all symbols of Catholic cardinals and bishops, and all "speaking" words echoing anti-Catholic polemic that describes the Catholic church: heresie, prophanes, pride, hypocrisie, couetousnes, idleness, gluttonie, enuie, sodomie, cruelty, rebellion, and ignorance. Scattered at the base of the snake pyramid are items commonly associated with Catholic sacraments and rituals: a pile of host wafers beside a chalice for wine, replicas of the keys of Heaven, rosary beads. Flanking the image of the snakes and Catholic items on either side is a poem condemning the pope and Catholic church as the Antichrist; in scathing language, the unnamed compiler of this image calls into question whether or not the pope can deem a person saved, admonishes the Holy See for its covetous relationship with money, and declares the entirety of Catholicism a hypocrisy: "They fasting teach, yet daintiest cates doe buy, / to please the tast, and serue their gluttony...."

In larger text below the image is a short poem written as a caption to the pyramid of snakes: "A Pyramis, of Serpents poysonous broode;/ (Rome,) here behold, erected is on high / Vpon seauen hills, where once thy glory stood / Sad Monument of thy Impietie:

/ Which all the world infecteth, farre, and nigh, / Like the Cerastes, threatening speedy death, / If vnawares we come within her breath.” The writer seems to be sympathetic with the poor, duped Catholic lay people, but he rails against the church’s leaders, likening them to the most poisonous of snakes and Antichrist, declaring that the Church was once aligned with Heaven’s teaching but has now become tainted and likewise taints “this hatefull broode....” The writer acknowledges that those who die Catholic will remain in Hell with their Catholic brethren, and, more specifically with the sinful serpent who first tainted them; however, the writer closes his short poem with a reassurance of forgiveness and redemption from God: “But pray the Lord, that he his grace would send, / And in his Truth instruct you to the end.” This “end” would be, to good Anglicans, Heaven, and perhaps if God were merciful toward the reformed and remorseful Catholic, then that Catholic will be directed to Heaven and saved through the Church of England.

Perhaps more startling than the anti-Catholic diatribe on the broadside is the presence and number of the Catholic items scattered at the base of the pyramid of snakes. The items represent a number of Catholic sacraments and practices, including baptism, communion, and praying the rosary. When these items are combined, they create a representation of a fallen Mass at the snakes’ tails; for the English Protestant not interested in investigating the true meaning behind these items, their mystery precedes them and likewise incurs intense feelings of confusion and fear. The creator of this broadside was apparently more concerned with the celebration of Eucharist than with any other Catholic practice, considering the quantity of hosts lying upon the ground (seven). The eighth host is housed in a monstrance whose curtain falls slightly open to reveal the host inside. As Dolan explains, English Protestants feared that the objects in the Catholic

church, rather than the Word, would lure people into its folds.¹⁹ Although Dolan's argument focuses on small items of religious jewelry (specifically, "...trinkets and toys..."²⁰), the fear seems to have carried over into other elements of Catholicism and the Catholic lifestyle to include the celebration of the Eucharist, as depicted in *The Popes Pyramides*.

English Protestants used these writings not only to preach against the sins of Roman Catholics, but they also looked to their anti-papist propaganda as a way of publicly announcing one's loyalty to the King and to the so-called True Religion: "[o]ne of the most public manifestations of anti-popery was the publication of anti-papal controversial literature. Whatever their other ends, the composition of these works was seen as serving a positive spiritual function for the individual engaged in it, as a demonstration of his commitment to the true faith."²¹ To be truly Protestant was to be able to compose these pieces of literature and to stand up against Catholics in a unified force in support of the Church of England, for "Catholicism acted as the demonized antagonist in opposition to which English nationalism first crystalized."²² Proper Englishmen, and proper English ministers, had a responsibility to the Crown to reinforce its Church and its Church's teachings, which often resulted in anti-papist propaganda; their nationalism depended upon whether they sympathized with the Catholic or Anglican church.²³

¹⁹ Dolan, 27.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 37.

²² Raymond D. Tumbleson, 17.

²³ Milton, 31. "In 1600 Andrew Willet had urged anti-popery as the main vocation of the Church of England. He urged that it would unite puritans and bishops, enabling them to put the presbyterian upheaval behind them, and would stimulate an awareness of a common identity which conformists and precisians

The protection and growth of the national religion were solidly entwined with English national identity and loyalty: a citizen could not adhere to one element of “Englishness” without accepting all its elements:

...[D]isloyalty towards the sovereign was to the Protestant statesman what idolatry was to the Protestant theologian. Both identified papalism as a prime Catholic ill, and more generally, both were comprehensive accusations levelled against Catholics, acting as unifying theories to explain all manifestations of popish perversity and misbehaviour. Both, too, are misrepresentations inspired by the warped generalities of anti-Catholic polemic.²⁴

The bond between religion and law in Jacobean England created a specific type of nationalism, one that accepted religion as a strong guiding force in lawmaking and one that accepted politics as a reinforcement of Protestant teachings. Even those Catholics who obeyed every English law, besides those which required citizens to recognize the Church of England as the true Church, were considered unlawful.

In order to secure themselves as nationally allegiant, Catholics had to either truly deny their faith and convert to the king’s, or publicly reform while privately worshipping according to the teachings of the Catholic Church. The battle between both English Protestants and Catholics waged so greatly that even rival clergy were “deemed to have failed or succeeded purely on the basis of their track record in persuading the unresolved

shared.” It was precisely this unlikely unification of puritans and Anglicans that would create a strong front against English Catholics during James’ reign.

²⁴ Shell, 110.

either to become recusants or to conform.”²⁵ Although Catholics were publicly pushed to the wayside, if they could convert others to their church, they would feel a victory over the English Protestants; the sentiments were the same for English Protestants who successfully converted Roman Catholics. The fight was strong on both sides, but the Protestants had a great advantage over the Catholics: the king was on their side.

During this period of religious unrest and reform, women of either religion were also fundamentally affected. As the Church of England continued to reform and shift itself so that it created a distinct doctrine, the institution of marriage was likewise altered; Protestant couples needed a purely Protestant union, different from their married Catholic neighbors’ union. The English Protestant marriage became one centered on a different sort of chastity from the Catholic ideal: rather than praising sexual abstinence in a marriage, Protestants were praised for fidelity to their spouse.²⁶ Women experienced a duality in their public and religious education from the growing humanist and reformative movements:

Protestant marriage doctrine, as expressed in a sequence of advice books and manuals, followed that of humanists like Erasmus in arguing that wives should be treated with consideration and affection, as helpmeets and companions, rather than obedient servants, though such arguments were

²⁵ Michael C. Questier, 168.

²⁶ Kate Aughterson, 9. Aughterson points out that “[t]wo crucial intellectual and political revolutions had a continuing impact throughout this period in England both on the ideology of womanhood and on women’s actual lives: humanism and the Reformation. Each emphasized a radical restructuring of moral and public life, focusing, for example, on the re-evaluation of chaste marriage, rather than virginity, as central to salvation, and also on the family as a unit of ethical education for an individual’s role in life.”

employed to reinforce the existing patriarchal order, rather than to cast doubt upon it.²⁷

This theory reinforces a behavioral ideal that if a woman felt as if she were cherished, rather than enslaved, in her home, she would be more inclined to serve and trust her husband. A restructuring of the marriage doctrine to reevaluate chaste marriage for Protestant couples would, in a way, release the wife from tyrannical subjugation (while upholding the ideals of the patriarchy):

Another specific focus was the emphasis on the New Testament, particularly the Pauline epistles, which advocated a spiritual life and spiritual equality between men and women, both in the eyes of God and in terms of their eventual salvation. But depending on the exegesis of preachers or commentators, they also advocated womanly submission and bodily inferiority.... For many women this was a source of hope and an opportunity for individualism: for others it meant postponing independence to the after-life.²⁸

The wife who viewed herself as more independent was so because she held more power over her spirituality than before: a Protestant wife did not have to submit to the demands of her husband if she did not feel they were in line with Christ's teachings in the New Testament.

²⁷ Julia Briggs, 49.

²⁸ Aughterson, 9.

The Protestant woman was now questioning her husband's authority over the marriage, which becomes evident in such literature as *Westward for Smelts*.²⁹ While the previously held belief in innate masculine authority was under reconsideration, the great humanist Erasmus argued that "...a wife was not obliged to obey if she was ordered to do something 'contrary to faith or good manners' by her husband, 'if he persists in wishing to be obeyed, remember that it is better to obey God than man.'"³⁰ Just as a Jacobean Englishman could determine whether or not he would obey the laws of men based upon their agreement with the laws of God, a married Jacobean Englishwoman was also permitted to decide when the laws of men, especially her husband's orders, agreed or disagreed with her understanding of God's commands and whether or not she would obey them.³¹ The humanists and Protestant reformers encouraged spiritual agency³² in Jacobean Englishwomen by helping these women maintain a firm understanding of the vernacular Bible, a different approach from that of their Catholic counterparts who still performed the Mass in Latin:

The educational programme of the humanists and the Protestant insistence on a personal reading of the vernacular Bible meant that individual and

²⁹ Briggs, 48. Briggs explains that "[t]he claims to authority made by the monarchy and extended to the father as the head of the household had grown up at a time when the Church's authority over secular affairs was dwindling as a result of the Reformation, which also created changes in attitudes to marriage itself."

³⁰ Qtd. in Briggs, 64.

³¹ This is not to say that Catholics ignored the striking paradox in biblical teachings of obeying God and submitting to the laws of men: "there was no greater determinant of Catholic loyalist behaviour throughout this period than the need to reconcile the double biblical duties of obeying God and submitting to the ordinances of man..." (Shell 141). Catholic loyalists attempted to smooth over this paradox by reminding themselves and Catholic followers of James I's authority, despite his troubling attitude toward their religion.

³² That is, encouraging women to feel that they had a sense of control over their spiritual lives. For instance, if their husbands' mandates did not match the laws of the Lord, women could exercise their spiritual agency to decide whether or not to follow their husband's demands.

private reading and interpretation became increasingly important during this period, for both women and men.³³

If a woman were educated enough to read the Bible in the vernacular, she could easily use her personal copy for private study, coming to a better understanding of the Bible's teachings on her own.

A Protestant Englishwoman was thought by Englishmen to hold powers; these powers could be expressed in the confines of her religion, giving her a sense of a private, spiritual agency. Despite this perceived female power in spiritual matters, the Englishwoman's agency did not extend into the political arena:

Though women's power was strictly limited in official ways, various different kinds of information, from ecclesiastical court records to the prevailing misogyny of much contemporary writing, suggests that at some level women were felt to possess powers that men could neither understand nor control.³⁴

Such a power is clearly expressed in all six tales of *Westward for Smelts*. All six fishwives tell stories of women who recognize themselves as freethinking agents, regardless if it is at the expense of their husbands', or another man's, dignity. Women were expected to know more in regards to housekeeping and family affairs than men and such knowledge could be seen as a threat; as seen in *Smelts*, the wives in the tales use their understanding of their domestic agency³⁵ against the men who attempt to dominate them in some way. If *Smelts* is to serve as a window into the perceived lives of women

³³ Aughterson, 9.

³⁴ Briggs 50.

³⁵ That is, the agency women would have felt in the home, especially considering decisions that would directly affect the home and family.

of different social classes, then it may also be reversed to serve the purpose of identifying common flaws in the misogyny of Jacobean England. A husband who is truly in control of his wife should not be so easily duped into performing her will.

One who acts upon one's agency, however, faces challenges. If a woman is to believe she is an independent and able entity, she should be likewise accountable for her actions:

If in the legal context, women were scarcely answerable for themselves, in matters of religion their position was rather different. Though excluded from Church government, they were expected to have beliefs, and because these were subject to divine, rather than human, law they were treated with greater respect. Where freedom of (religious) conscience was concerned, women's rights were upheld even when they differed from those of their husbands....³⁶

Therefore, a woman behaving in a way that mirrored her understanding of spiritual agency under James and the Church of England could defend her behavior as religious and within her belief system. Many of the women in the *Smelts* tales point to their personal religious beliefs when required to justify their behavior or action. In some cases, the women demonstrate their violently protective belief in an existent cultural belief structure; while in others, the wife will defend her actions by justifying them against the cruelty of her husband, recalling her personal belief in a specific understanding of a holy marriage. Such defenses of demonstrated spiritual agency comment upon the misogyny of Jacobean English culture:

³⁶ Briggs, 64.

The misogynist diatribes against women as inherently vicious gave husbands the right to beat their wives and, at its most extreme, led to torture and death of “witches.” The women defenders of women hold up instead a more idealized view of the compassionate marriage in which the husband treats his wife as a cherished good to be loved and respected, while the wife can submit to a husband who is her friend and protector.³⁷

As storytellers describing independently thinking women surviving in a heavily patriarchal culture, the six fishwives defend their very female characters, and could, in fact, be indirectly defending Jacobean Englishwomen as a whole. The wives in the six tales all strive for the ideal of compassionate, cooperative marriage; and if circumstance does not seem to allow for that ideal to exist, the wives remember their domestic agency and punish their overly domineering husbands.

The fishwives themselves might be considered public agents, working to earn a living, in London’s fish market during Lent. The fishwives exhibit great independence when all six board the ferry at the end of their workday: none mentions needing to wait for a male companion; they travel alone. By the end of *Smelts*, the six fishwives have convinced each other to take the ferry all the way to Kingstone, the final stop, in order to enjoy each other’s company and to finish the day with drink. None of the fishwives seems concerned about a dominant husband who might not approve of his wife’s drinking; they are independent enough to make such a decision on their own, and their independence is reinforced when it becomes clear they intend to spend the day’s wages on alcohol—they do not require their husbands’ permission.

³⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 133.

Further, the fishwives of *Smelts* embody the very expectations of female domestic agency within the text in regards to their culturally assigned importance at home³⁸ during Lent:

...what a family was to eat fell into the area of the household activity for which a wife or womanfolk generally were responsible: the ritual importance of making correct decisions about it does something to explain the role of women in Elizabethan Catholicism.³⁹

This sentiment seems to have carried over into Jacobean England as well, spreading into both English Protestant and Catholic arenas. The household's head female member would be responsible for going to the market; while during Lent, "...Fishmongers are in their height of pride, dashing water in their ill-sented street..." (3). The fishwives go beyond the commonly held cultural designation for female responsibility in the home, located in the market not as shoppers but as shopkeepers. As fishwives, they locate their importance and responsibility not in selecting the food for their own homes but in selling their fish to other women whose agency is located in domesticity. These six fishwives find themselves in possession of public agency⁴⁰ and are likewise considered useful as they sell their product during the most ascetic time of the year for both Catholics and Protestants. While many of their clients are changing their diets to accommodate strictly

³⁸ Although in the text the fishwives do not reveal their status in the home, the reader can identify common cultural feelings toward women's domestic responsibilities.

³⁹ John Bossy, 112.

⁴⁰ Public agency differs from private agency in that public agency, as I consider it, in the extent to which a woman feels able to voice her opinions or to behave as she likes in the public, social realm. According to Hunter Cadzow, Alison Conway, and Bryce Traister in "New Historicism, second ed. 2005" on *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Louis Montrose "...argues [in "The Poetics and Politics of Culture"] that individual agency is constituted by a process he calls 'subjectification'...on the one hand, culture produces individuals who are endowed with subjectivity and the capacity of agency; on the other, it positions them within social networks and subjects them to cultural codes that ultimately exceed their comprehension and control."

fish, these fishwives find themselves “...having made a good market..., and their purses full of coine...” (4). There is no mention that these women intend to turn the money over to their husbands, and by the end of the text it is clear that they exhibit an awareness of their financial independence, resulting in a deep feeling of personal agency which they bestow upon the wives in their individual tales.

CHAPTER TWO

Honorable women: Kinde Kit of Kingstone and the tales of the fishwives of Brainford and Hampton

Four of the six *Smelts* tales make use of common Jacobean anti-Catholic sentiments; however, the frame story and the remaining two tales also contribute to this emphasis. As argued in the above introduction, *Smelts* has an interest not in entering the anti-Catholic polemic directly but in identifying the elements that make a woman praiseworthy and a suitable role model. The six tales build upon each other, responding negatively to Kit's interest in the romance tradition's depiction of the beautiful woman as a goddess. Kit discusses religion in a general sense, setting *Smelts* in Lenten London, concerned only with the importance of fishwives during this religious season. The two other "non-religious" tales, the fishwife of Brainford's tale and the fishwife of Hampton's tale, use secular examples of women as objects of desire. However, the wives in these two tales utilize their own cunning to control their statuses as objects of desire. In Brainford's tale, the wife succeeds in her use of cunning and ultimately protects herself against her husband's wrath; the wife in Hampton's tale is punished for her cunning because she uses it to take advantage of a suitor. Religion in these two tales, and in the frame story, is not a strong indicator of women's praiseworthiness; religion is not given the same attention in these tales as it is in the other four. Although the frame story

repeatedly acknowledges the Lenten season, Kit's attention to religion is interested only in setting the scene.

Kinde Kit makes it clear throughout the prologue that the behavior of Englishmen and –women is under strict mandates not only by religion but also by James' law forbidding the consumption of meat during Lent.⁴¹ According to Kit, “[a]t this time of the yeere the Pudding-house at Brookes-wharfe is watched by the Hollanders Eeles-ships, lest the inhabitants, contrarie to the Law, should spill the bloud of innocents, which would be greatly to the hinderance of these Butter-boxes” (3). Londoners were clear in the prohibitions placed upon them during Lent, so Kit characterizes his story in these familiar terms. He exaggerates the importance of the fishmonger and diminishes the butcher, describing slaughterhouses on Thursdays as shut up “...like houses infected of the plague...” and characterizing the streets as “ill-sented” from the fishmongers' goods. Such explicit description is necessary in explaining the importance of the fishwives' presence in London; the women who make up his fare are the women who are among the most important in the marketplace during Lent.

As for Kit, he introduces himself in the tale as a boatman interested in drinking, when not employed by a fare; he describes himself as a soldier, one who can face “that most valiant and hardy Champion of Queene-hiue, commonly called by the name of the Red Knight” (4). Without express context, such a characterization makes Kit appear valiant and hardy himself, a soldier willing to defend “the Water-mans Garrison of Queene-hiue” against the Red Knight. However, *Smelts*'s writer does not seem to expect

⁴¹ On 7 February 1625, James I released a proclamation mandating “...the restraint of killing, dressing, and eating of Flesh in Lent, or on Fish daies, appointed by the Law, to be hereafter strictly obserued by all sorts of people.” Although the cited source was published five years after *Smelts*, this proclamation is a revision of an existing law by James I in 1608, which recalls Elizabeth I's similar law in 1589.

readers to equate Kit with a strong soldier; a marginal gloss in the original manuscript explains that “[t]he Red Knight is an Alehouse Signe at Queene-hiue, where the Watermen vse to tipple” (4). Kit is not as interested in armed combat as he is interested in consumption of alcohol, although, without the aid of the gloss, Kit’s characterization of his visit to the Red Knight is convincing as a battle, characterizing alcohol’s effects as “sore blowes” (4). Kit has not been drinking long before his man enters the pub to announce they have a potential fare heading westward (4). After the boat “...pass[es] the troublesome places of the Thames (where the Wherries runne to and fro like Weauers shuttles) and being at Lambeth...,” Kit acknowledges the fishwives’ drowsiness, for they too had been drinking after a full day of work (4). He sprinkles their faces with water from his oars, rousing them, and promises to sing to them in order to keep their spirits high. The fishwives agree but ask that Kit “...not...cloy their eares with an old Fidlers Song, as Riding to Rumford, or, All in a Garden Greene” (4). Kit offers to sing to them a new song about a serving-man and his mistress, a ballad in the tradition of the songs the fishwives begged not to hear; the fishwives agree to the song, not yet knowledgeable of its contents, “...promising that each of them would requite [his] Song with a Tale” (5). Kit is pleased with the agreement and begins his song.

The narrator in Kit’s poorly written ballad, riddled with forced rhyme and meter, speaks of a deep running love for a beautiful woman, but he bemoans his position because he does not find himself capable of speaking to her for fear of her rejection. The song is comprised of five stanzas of ten lines, each stanza repeating the idea that the woman’s beauty inspires his love, while his own fear of rejection inspires his silence. Because the song is so formulaic and characterizes women as inactive objects of

adoration, worthy of love only for their looks, the fishwives do not respond well to it.⁴²

The fishwives' tales reveal their ideas of an honorable woman, which are almost opposite to Kit's poem. Such lines as "I honour still this comely creature, / And euer will doe while I liue: / And for her grace and goodly feature, / All honours due to her I'le giue" attempt to mark the song as a debased form of courtly lyric. Despite the fishwives' silence, readers may guess their reactions: this song is old-fashioned and does not correctly depict a worthy woman. Although the fishwives say little in response to the song, they hold to their earlier promise and individually tell tales. The fishwife of Brainford volunteers to begin because they will come to her destination first and she wants to keep her promise; Brainford's tale does not respond directly to Kit's song, and likewise the remaining five fishwives' tales largely ignore the boatman's poorly written poem; instead their tales are interested in characterizing women as worthy beyond their appearances, especially in regards to their wit.

Brainford, as the first storyteller, sets a precedent the other women avoid: she tells a story about herself; whether or not it is completely true is left to speculation, but to the other five fishwives, her story serves its entertaining purpose. Brainford, an aging woman whom Kit describes none too kindly, sports a trait unlike most women: her nose is grossly scarred. Aware that her nose is disfigured (though she claims at the end of the tale that the women can "...scarce see it on [her] nose"⁴³), Brainford tells the story of her scar. Before she became a fishwife, Brainford, who calls herself Mother Jone in the tale, was a bawd, "...deal[ing] with flesh exchange..." (6). A woman in her town requests the services Mother Jone has to offer, but the service quickly becomes more than Mother

⁴² Relihan.

⁴³ *Smelts*, 11.

Jone initially anticipated. The wife asks Mother Jone to help conceal her adultery by taking her place at the empty home while her husband is away on business. One night, the husband returns home earlier than expected, before the wife has had a chance to leave for her appointment with her lover; her husband berates her for her alleged affair, and ties her to a post at the entrance of the house. That same night Mother Jone returns to the wife's home to fulfill her promise when she sees the wife tied to the post; the wife convinces Mother Jone to trade places so she can rendezvous with her lover while her husband sleeps. Mother Jone agrees and takes her place at the post, an imposter on behalf of the wife. The husband wakes up, still angry with his wife, and slices Mother Jone across the bridge of her nose (assuming he has, in fact, injured his wife). After the wife returns and replaces Mother Jone at the post, Mother Jone is forced to lie to her own husband regarding the injury she has sustained that night. The wife, however, successfully dupes her husband into believing that she is innocent of his charges because her nose has been perfectly restored by morning.

This particular tale, though worth a closer examination of its implications, does not explicitly take a position on Catholic issues.⁴⁴ The issues at work within the fishwife of Brainford's tale center on her agency not only as a woman but also as a businesswoman. She provides a service so that her (presumably) female clients are better equipped to dupe their husbands; she shines as an example of a strong-willed, confident,

⁴⁴ This is not to say that Brainford's tale is bereft of any religious commentary. Her tale does respond to the religious belief in miracles, although the "miracle" performed in her tale is hardly true. The husband in Brainford's tale is duped into thinking he cut his wife across the nose at night, though by morning her nose is fully healed. The husband exclaims, "...with this knife did I giue thee this present night, a wound on the face, the which most miraculously is whole: which is a signe thou art free, and spotlesse, and so will I euer hold thee" (Smelts 11). The husband foolishly believes in a miracle which never occurred, forgiving his wife of her adultery. Because the discussion of the miracle is given so little attention in Brainford's tale in comparison to the representation of an independent woman, I chose to focus on the tale's initial argument that a strong woman has the power to emasculate dominant men.

and capable woman who does not rely on the instruction of a patriarch to thrive. Mother Jone maintains a working business who goes to extreme lengths to ensure the safety and pleasure of her clients, even if it means she risks physical injury. Mother Jone's tale sets itself apart from the other five tales as an apology under the guise of fiction: the other fishwives do not reveal themselves as characters within their own tales and go to lengths in order to distance themselves from their tales, such as setting them in the distant past.

The fishwife of Hampton, like Brainford, does not directly respond to anti-Catholic propaganda or Catholic teachings of the time; however, Hampton's tale does indirectly represent the anti-Catholic attitude toward the practice of taking a vow of silence. While one may argue that this tale is commenting on Catholic friars and nuns who practice such a vow, the link from this tale to the Catholic tradition is not overt. The main female character, Millisant, is a beautiful creature, who is unfortunately plagued by vanity: she torments all potential suitors who show an interest in her. One unlucky suitor braves a confrontation with Millisant and asks her why she ignores him as she does:

...long time...have I dearly loved you, yet never did I receive the least token of acceptance at your hands: disdain you my Birth? I am a Gentleman, though not descended of the highest houses, yet not of the meanest. Mislike you my wealth? I have enough to maintaine a private Gentleman. Mislike you my parts of body? They are as nature gave them, I could wish they were more pleasing to your minde. Doe you mis-doubt my love to you? Set mee some taske in mans possibility to performe, and it shall confirme the same. (37)

Millisant, unmoved by his speech, replies that women are unfairly marked by stereotypes: "...our mirth is counted immodesty, our civilest lookes lascivious, our words loose, our attires wanton, and all our doings apish..." (38). She reasons that a woman cannot look kindly on a false suitor out of mere kindness; the suitor must *earn* her warm look. Because this young suitor offered to do whatever she ordered of him, Millisant challenges him to prove his love by taking a voluntary vow of silence for two years (38). She explains to him that this vow is strict: he may not speak to a soul, sing, or "use any kinde of sound, whereby [his] meaning may be understood..." (38). The suitor is crushed by such a harsh command, but silently accepts the vow, and likewise silently walks away from her.

After the young suitor has left his home and finds himself living with the Duke of Cornwall, he has remained diligent in his promise to Millisant. The Duke, troubled that the young man has never spoken nor sang, calls for physicians, who cannot heal him for they find nothing ailing him. Finally, the Duke publishes a declaration: "that whosoever could restore his [the suitor's] speech, five hundred pounds should be their reward: but they not performing the cure, should give the Duke so much money, or else have imprisonment till they paid it" (39). Millisant hears of the challenge, and knowing full well who this silent man is, decides to relieve him of his vow and so win the five hundred pounds. Unfortunately for Millisant, her suitor is stalwart in his resolve to fulfill his vow, and she cannot relieve him of his duty; she is therefore imprisoned until her suitor's two-year period has been met. Upon the deadline, the suitor approaches the Duke, confesses the truth behind his vow of silence, asks forgiveness for never speaking, and is rebuked by his host; the Duke "...praised [the suitor's] wit for using so ungentle a person

[Millisant] so untowardly: yet blamed him withall, for keeping so rash, foolish, and unreasonable a vow so straightly..." (40). Millisant is then released from prison, pregnant; her suitor will not have her, nor will he acknowledge the unborn child is his, which leaves Millisant appearing as an unwed strumpet. Hampton leaves Millisant in this state, explaining that she has two options for the course of her life: "...shee was to looke a new customer, or else endure the open shame belonging to a Strumpet: which of them she did, I know not, eyther of them was bad enough..." Hampton finds no happy ending for women who abuse their wit in such a wicked manner as Millisant did (40).

Hampton's tale, though it focuses and offers some commentary on vows of silence, does not necessarily link itself to anti-Catholic polemic; a stronger link could have been made had either of the characters been overtly Catholic. While the Duke calls the vow "...rash, foolish, and unreasonable..." this could be simply because the suitor made the vow for a woman rather than for a more worthy entity (40). Just as the storytellers preceding her tale did, Hampton writes her tale as a response to the issues presented in earlier tales; Hampton responds directly to the fishwife of Kingstone's tale, saying: "...for a woman out of the abundance of her wit, to abuse any man, or her selfe, in such dishonest courses, I thinke it not good: 'cause oftentimes the harme which shee intendeth, and the shame which shee deserueth, lighteth on her selfe..." (36). In response to Kingstone's tale (discussed in greater length below), which presents a woman in a position of self-defense against a clerical rapist, Hampton's tale addresses the issue of women punishing men unduly. According to Hampton, women who use their wit for wicked means risk harming themselves as a result.

CHAPTER THREE

Catholic trinkets and sacraments: the tales of the fishwives of Stand on the Greene and Kingstone

Women's agency and the appropriate consequences they reap from expressing their agency is a recurring theme throughout *Smelts*, which is made more tangled and difficult when the fishwives add an element of religion to their tales. The remaining four tales, told by the fishwives of Stand on the Greene, Richmond, Twitnam, and Kingstone, respond to this popular topic with such religious elements as a stolen crucifix acting as proof of fidelity, obtaining a parish priest's approval for divorce, a happily married couple who choose to live in celibacy, and a priest who rapes a female parishioner. These elements together complement the religious instability of Jacobean England—English Protestants had their own stereotypes of Catholic behavior and beliefs, and English Catholics could do little to contradict such stereotypes. In the case of the fishwife of Stand on the Greene's tale, for example, the use of the crucifix was not to prove the devout nature of the tale's main female character; the crucifix is instead treated more as a precious piece of jewelry than as a treasured religious object.⁴⁵

The fishwife of Stand on the Greene responds to the fishwife of Brainford's tale, saying that, "...her [Stand on the Greene's] Tale was pleasant, but scarce honest: shee taxed women with too much immodestie: to salue which, she would tell the aduentures of

⁴⁵ The sentiment that Catholics lured women into their folds with the promise of beautiful jewelry was not confined to *Smelts*, as Dolan explains (27).

a poore Gentlewoman, that was vsed vnkindly by her Husband” (12). She sets her tale during “...the troublesome raigne of King Henry the sixt,” locating her story’s setting in a Catholic England (1422-61 and 1470-1). Stand on the Greene’s tale is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*: a husband wagers that his wife’s chastity will not falter in his absence; and, just as in *Cymbeline*, a man accepts the wager and works to prove otherwise. When the man finds himself treated with chaste hospitality by the wife, he hides under her bed, more interested in winning the wager than treating the woman with honesty. As the wife sleeps, the man steals a little gold crucifix which the wife always wears around her neck and which she apparently treasures; he slips away the following morning and returns to the husband with the proof of her infidelity. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen’s husband Posthumus Leonatus gives her a bracelet as a sign of their shared fidelity during his forthcoming absence. After he leaves his wife, Leonatus enters into a bet with Iachimo, charging him to test his wife’s chastity and to return with the bracelet, believing his wife will remain faithful and will never remove the bracelet from her arm. After failing to woo Imogen by his own cunning, Iachimo deceives her into allowing his trunk to be placed into her bedroom. After she has fallen asleep, Iachimo emerges from the trunk and steals the bracelet from her arm. He returns to Leonatus, victorious in the bet. When she awakes the next morning, Imogen almost immediately misses her bracelet.

The wife in Stand on the Greene’s tale, in contrast, does not miss her crucifix until she discovers the plot against her. The crucifix becomes an ornament, a piece of jewelry that *can* be missed, falling in line with Jacobean English attitudes toward Catholic religious pieces. Stand on the Greene, as the storyteller, misleads her audience

into believing the crucifix plays a greater role in the woman's life, qualifying it as something "...daily she wore next to her heart" (15). The crucifix is not merely hanging around the woman's neck as a necklace; it is next to the heart, a place of intimate importance. But, if the ornament is truly more than a jewel, why would the woman not realize it is missing? If readers are to trust Stand on the Greene's depiction of the woman's relationship to her crucifix (and there is no evidence suggesting readers should not), then they are left with an interesting interpretation of Catholic ritual objects: they are expected to be intimately important, but perhaps they are only important for fashion's sake.

The English Protestant viewed the Catholic Church as a leering, luring, deceptive monster, serving a false God with the intent to mislead its people. Women were considered more vulnerable than men, for the Catholic Church had weapons the Church of England did not: religious objects turned into jewelry and trinkets. Because Jacobean men viewed the English woman as a much weaker entity, the Catholic Church's identity as a mysterious villain "...often corresponded to the assumption that women were illiterate and unlearned, and thus were loyal to a religion that coddled their incapacities, or, in the case of converts, were vulnerable to one that preyed on their ignorance."⁴⁶ The Church of England prohibited such use of religious jewelry, while society "...promoted a fashion for small wearable objects that could be kept on the person, and concealed if need be."⁴⁷ The Church of England attacked the fashion, "operat[ing] on the assumption that women are vain and fashion-conscious, drawn to ornaments and objects rather than the Word. [Fulminations against the fashion] also register an anxiety that, this being the

⁴⁶ Dolan, 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28.

case, Roman Catholicism has the advantage when it comes to recruiting women.”⁴⁸

When it came to religion, the Church of England was in overt competition with the Catholic Church; both sides boasted of higher numbers, using such statistics as proof of their status as the “true” religion.⁴⁹

Because the Catholic religion and its practices were mysterious to English Protestants, such stereotypes as the seductive priest were common images in anti-Catholic propaganda of the time. *Smelts* takes this very stereotype further than other examples of anti-Catholic discourse, allowing the priest to rape his victim successfully, but the victim takes advantage of her spiritual agency, so she can exact revenge against him. The priest in the fishwife of Kingstone’s tale is the woman’s confessor, a characterization that speaks to a Catholic sacrament that is all-too mysterious for the English Protestant: penance. Dolan explains, “The vivid fantasies of couplings between priests and their *dévotés* articulates the fear that Catholicism promotes unseemly intimacies between men and women, whether confessional, sexual, or both.”⁵⁰ It was well-known by the English Protestant faction that Catholics practiced the sacrament of penance by confessing to their priests, but the danger came when women were involved—confession by its very nature required a priest to be in a small room alone with a parishioner, male or female; and the priest was bound by Catholic law to hold all

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Questier, 168: rival clergy were “deemed to have failed or succeeded purely on the basis of their track record in persuading the unresolved either to become recusants or to conform.”

⁵⁰ Dolan, 92. Dolan continues to argue that in this view, holy men were not only suspect for seduction but for worshipping their parishioners: “Here the accusation is not that Catholic men seduce and dally with women, or even conspire with and depend on them. The accusation is that Catholic men worship women as goddesses and submit themselves to women’s advice or rule. These are fantasies not of the seducing priest who invades the home and family, preying on its most vulnerable members, or of women who stray outside the home into adultery, but of women’s empowerment within the household as wives and mothers, and of women as the conduits of priestly influence.” (97).

confessions in the strictest of confidence. So if a woman were to be alone with her confessor, not only was she susceptible to his advances, but she was also in danger of confessing something about which her husband would never find out.

The fishwife of Kingstone responds to the fishwife of Twitnam's tale (one praising the practice of a sexually abstinent marriage), saying, "...if wee would be thus chaste, alas, our husbands would not suffer vs to continue so; therefore, for my part, I will neuer goe about it: I will tell you a Tale of one that was a great woman (though she was no Queene) and yet kept a friend besides her husband" (32). The wife in the fishwife of Kingstone's tale is not only a great woman, but she is a great woman in despite of her ability to maintain a relationship with her husband *and* a lover. The wife meets with her priest to receive the sacrament of penance and, in her confession, asks him what the penance would be for committing adultery against her much older and aged husband, not wanting him to die without progeny; the priest, hopeful she will choose him, responds that the sin is minor (33). The wife's situation is not unusual: younger women could be paired with aging men because of the financial stability the older men offered. Although the wife's age is not revealed, it is clear that a large age difference exists between her and her husband, which is something she is concerned about on some level. G.R. Quaife explains that, for the married Jacobean Englishwoman, "...desire, bribery and violence were the most common factors leading to her adulterous consent. The hope of marriage was not easily absent from the married women's consideration. If your present husband was sick or aged, to cultivate a replacement was not unreasonable."⁵¹ It is neither bribery nor violence that convinces the wife to commit adultery in Kingstone's tale; she is

⁵¹ Quaife, 132.

concerned about her husband's old age and does not want him to die without a son.

While this seemingly kindhearted reason may be true, the wife first mentions that she does not have a husband who can meet her hottest desires; essentially, she is bored at home and could use some excitement in her sex life. She checks with her confessor first, looking for absolution before committing the sin. True Catholics, however, know that they may not receive absolution in anticipation of a future sin and even then may only receive forgiveness if they are truly contrite. The wife in this tale may, in fact, be an English Protestant misrepresentation of a stereotypical Catholic woman, based entirely on suppositions about Catholic sacramental mysteries.

The fishwife of Kingstone combines the two separate fantasies of the adulterous wife and the seductive priest when the priest acknowledges, at the very least to himself, that he desires to be the woman's adulterous lover. To the priest, this woman is an object of lust to be enjoyed, a weaker entity to be conquered through sexual advances (33). The English Protestant would recognize this priest, characterized further as a Friar (though his order⁵² is not specified), and would assume that priests hold an unhealthy and lustful obsession with women because of their tradition of celibacy. Because of his lust, he is willing to break his strict celibacy in order to sexually enjoy her; reason is not a factor. The priest spies upon the couple long enough to learn their secret password; he leaves "...thinking he had enough in knowing of that word which had the power to bring him to her bed" (34). Later that evening, the priest, disguised as the lover, sneaks to the woman's house before her lover arrives, uses the password to enter her home, and "...[catches] her in his armes, kissing and vsing other dalliance, so long, till hee had fully

⁵² Though, readers are aware that his hair is tonsured, as the fishwife describes the woman rubbing her hand over his bald head to identify him as her confessor.

satisfied his hot desires: Then quickly tooke hee his leaue without words, which she wondred at” (34). After the rape is complete, the wife is left to wonder why her lover would use her so unkindly, which was not his usual behavior.

The young lover finally arrives at the agreed-upon time, knocks on the door, and uses the password; the wife, confused that her lover has returned after abusing her, accuses him of lying to her. The lover protests and explains that “...euen then he came from his Chamber” (34). She realizes the deception but is still unsure of who could have taken advantage of her; the wife, keeping the rape secret, lets her lover enter her home and passes the night with him in enjoyment. The following night, the priest finds “...his appetite...rather sharpened, then any way slacked...” and returns to the woman’s home, using the password (35). She recognizes the disguised man by his voice as the same one who raped her the evening before, but she invites him in anyway. While they kiss, she “...[feels] by the short haire on his head, that it [is] the Priest” (35). Realizing that she has been deceived and raped by her very confessor, she devises a plan to exact her revenge. Sending the priest to the bedroom, she calls upon two of her most trusted servants, and sends them to tie him to the bed and there to “...cut out one of his genitours” (35). The servants do so, while the priest screams loudly, but the protestation is to no use: the servants “...make him lighter by a stone” (35).

The servants call to their mistress, who takes pity on the priest and assists to bind his wound, tying a paper to his neck before sending him out the door. When the priest awakens the next morning in his own bed, he discovers a threatening poem written on the paper:

Priest, if that thou chance to tell,

What pleasure through thy wit befell:
Likewise report not without care,
What thou hast lost, and what they are:
But neuer grieue there's none that can,
But must confesse th'art halfe a man.
But leaue thy riding, lest that stone
Be carued too, then hast thou none.
So sir, farewell: th'ast made amends,
For thy deceit: and we are friends.

The friar is initially angered by the note and wishes he could exact a further revenge upon the wife, but he realizes her threat is weighty: "...by looking to his wound, hee rested himselfe content, and ventured to steale no more flesh..." (36). The wife is free to continue her affair, no longer bothered by the priest (36).⁵³

The wife in this tale is fortunate: although the priest attempts to continue raping her under the guise of her lover, she finds him out early on and is saved from having to live with the cultural effects of being raped. Briggs explains that:

[s]o extensive as the assumption of women's sexual guilt that sexual charges brought against men by women, for harassment, assault, seduction, or rape, commonly foundered because women's reputations were so easily blackened, and accusations of complicity were difficult to disprove. It was often simpler for a woman to accept and admit sexual

⁵³ "...[T]he Lady enjoyed her friend quietly, being neuer after troubled with the Fryer."

guilt in the course of bringing a charge against a man, even in circumstances where to do so was obviously inappropriate.⁵⁴

Although the wife is innocent, she would not necessarily have been cleared of responsibility in court. If she were to actively seek justice on her own, she had a better possibility of ultimately claiming her own guilt for, perhaps, seducing the priest with her beauty; what was a holy man to do in the face of such charm? Fortunately, the wife in Kingstone's tale did not have to seek justice in the English court system; she took matters into her own hands, coming out on top. Kingstone's tale represents a striking dichotomy in English Protestant thoughts toward Catholic women: Catholic men were dangerous because they could prey upon women and lure them into the religion with promises of sexual favors, and the women were susceptible to these tricks because of their very weakness as women. Kingstone's tale plays along with the stereotypes to an extent. She depicts a dangerously lustful priest who takes advantage of the sanctity of confession, falling in line with English Protestant stereotypes. The wife is also apparently uninformed on how to confess properly and seek absolution for her sins; if she had been better trained on the Catholic catechism, she would have known that her confession was inappropriate. The English Protestant preferred to construct a caricature of the Catholic woman who did not understand the full extent of her Catholicism; after all, she would have only been interested in the pretty jewelry and exciting Catholic dogma of worshipping the Virgin Mary and other female saints.

The wife in Kingstone's tale, although falling in line with some of the stereotypes of the period, fights these very stereotypes when she takes revenge and justice in her own

⁵⁴ Briggs, 70.

hands. Not wanting to reveal her adultery to the public, she punishes the priest by cutting off one of his testicles; the action also alludes to a female-to-female protection when coupled with the threatening poem: should he ever again attempt to rape her or another woman, she will return to remove the remaining testicle. This wife is empowered despite her religion; in the eyes of the fishwife of Kingstone, she is a role model not for her Catholicism but for her agency. When she concludes her tale, the fishwife of Kingstone asks her audience, “Now tell me...if this Lady bee not as much praise-worthy for her wit, as the other [the wife in the fishwife of Twitnam’s tale] was for her honestie...” (36). The fishwives do not respond as vocally to the fishwife of Kingstone’s tale as they had to the preceding ones: “[M]ost of them confirmed her argument to be sound, & the rest confirmed it by silence” (36). The fishwife of Kingstone is able to find her story’s main female character forgivable for her Catholicism because she comes through as a woman who acts upon her spiritual agency, a role model for all women despite religious boundaries and stereotypes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Divorce and marriage customs: the tales of the fishwives of Richmond and Twitnam

By 1620, there was a rise in English Protestant desire to differentiate from Catholic traditions and customs, including a reinvestigation of marriage and divorce customs. The Jacobean Protestant desired more marital sexual freedom; although they understood children to complete a marriage, they did not believe that every sex act should be performed with the intent to procreate.⁵⁵ Divorces, under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts, were difficult to obtain because of the extreme nature of the divorce law's requirements. A husband could ask for a divorce only if he had proof of his wife's adultery, while a wife could ask for a divorce if her husband were considered dangerously prone to cruel and violent abuse. The remaining two tales, the fishwife of Richmond's tale and the fishwife of Twitnam's tale, respond to customs regarding divorce and marriage in Jacobean England respectively. These two tales rely upon the readers' understanding of these customs as they stand in both religious and secular law.

Since Henry VIII and Edward VI, divorce in the Church of England was an available option for unhappily married couples, although the option was not particularly

⁵⁵ Macfarlane explains, "The possibility of divorce with remarriage is often related to the desire for children. If a couple are childless, they separate and each may try again with another partner. A marriage is not complete without children. Thus a society or civilization that forbids full divorce with the right to remarry, that views marriage, with or without children, as indissoluble, reveals certain attitudes towards the purposes of marriage. [...] Only in the tenth century in England did the easier freedom of divorce in Anglo-Saxon societies become crushed by the Church. In England one then sees almost a thousand years of the regime that forbids divorce with right to remarry. It was not until 1857 that civil divorce was made possible" (223).

preferred. Couples who sought a divorce were required to work through the ecclesiastical courts because “[t]here was no civil divorce under common law. [...] These [ecclesiastical] courts would grant divorce *a mensa et thoro*, from bed and board, to a wife whose life was in danger from her husband’s cruelty or to a husband whose wife committed adultery.”⁵⁶ The Catholic Church did allow divorces under these extreme circumstances to exist; however, “[s]uch a divorce was really a separation since spouses were not permitted to remarry. [The divorce] suspended marital obligations of the innocent spouse: a husband did not have to support an adulterous wife; a wife did not have to cohabit with a cruel husband.”⁵⁷ As the Church of England continued to separate itself and its practices from the Catholic Church, Protestant couples pushed for relief from the prohibition against remarriage, which required an act of Parliament and was often only granted to aristocratic couples who could afford such an act.⁵⁸ William Perkins, a famous Elizabethan Puritan preacher (1558-1602),⁵⁹ discusses divorce in his *Christian Economy*, “[...]making] it clear that adultery is the primary grounds for divorce,” but he also “takes the radical position, which is contrary to English common law, that marriage may be ‘dissolved’ for reasons other than adultery, specifically desertion or ‘malicious and spiteful dealing of married folks one with the other.’ (Although married persons in England could not obtain a divorce on such grounds...).”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Dorothy M. Stetson, 6.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Joan Larsen Klein, 152: “In his time, William Perkins (1558-1602) was one of the most famous and respected of Puritan preachers and writers. [...] In 1609, his *Works* were enlarged until they comprised three volumes. The handsome three-volume folio *Works* went through approximately ten editions by 1635.”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 153.

Perkins, a member of a religious minority himself, highlights the difficulty in obtaining a divorce, the difference between what *should* be available and what *is* available:

...it continueth here and there some special grounds of truth tending to the discovery of diverse errors of Popish doctrine in points appertaining to marriage, as namely these:...wherein is challenged the Jesuit's proposition that the sole consent of the parties is sufficient, that matrimony lawfully begun and consummate[d] is made void *only* by way of divorce in the case of adultery.⁶¹

Although an Elizabethan Puritan, Perkins expresses a sentiment in common with the mainstream Jacobean English Protestant, a sentiment which is likewise represented in the fishwife of Richmond's tale: divorce should not have to depend upon adultery or dangerous cruelty alone.

The framework which the fishwife of Richmond creates in her tale acts as a representation of the stereotypical divorce⁶² in Jacobean England: a wife receives cruel treatment by her husband who suspects her of adultery. It is not enough that the wife is unhappy in her marriage to an old widower, and it is not enough that the husband is jealous of his young wife. Richmond plays on the stereotype of the time, employing conventional impressions of the unhappy couple who seeks divorce. According to ecclesiastical customs and law, Richmond's fictional couple is permitted to receive a divorce *a mensa et thoro*: the wife cheats and the husband is intolerably cruel to her.

⁶¹ Ibid., 156. Emphasis mine.

⁶² As stated above, the Jacobean concept of "divorce" is not the present-day concept; although what she means is a separation *a mensa et thoro*, Richmond uses the word "divorce." To stay true to the text, I have chosen to use the same word, although such a use requires awareness of the Jacobean definition. A couple asking for a divorce in the early seventeenth century would have been separated from living under the same roof as each other; they were not permitted to remarry.

Both parties are absolved of any marital responsibility. The circumstances under which they are divorced fall in line, according to Perkins, with Catholic doctrine; however, identifying the perceived Catholicity employed by the tale does not necessarily imply Richmond's or even the anonymous *Smelts* author's affiliation with the Catholic church.

To Perkins, and other Puritan and Protestant believers, couples should be able to obtain a divorce under other circumstances as well. It seems possible that Richmond, as a storyteller, is making a comment about the state of marriage in religion. Should her characters have to take their marital unhappiness to such extremes in order to be divorced? The tale begins with a husband jealous of his young wife's beauty and lustfulness, so he locks her in the house to prevent her from having an affair, though there is no evidence suggesting she ever committed adultery in the beginning. The wife finds her husband's tyranny to be cruel and torturous, though there is no evidence that he has ever before physically abused her; but if the couple needs a divorce, and if they are Catholic, their relationship *must* reach the extremities it does. Although the anonymous *Smelts* author depicts Richmond's tale as a commentary on a woman seeking empowerment from an unfortunate situation, the tale itself could also exist as a statement on the difficulty of obtaining a divorce.

The fishwife of Richmond's tale is presented after the fishwife of *Stand on the Greene*, but she does not comment directly on *Stand on the Greene*'s tale; instead, she continues the trend set forth by *Brainford* and *Stand on the Greene* in telling a story of a man duped by an empowered woman. Richmond's tale is one of physical assault, verbal abuse, and jealousy between a husband and a wife, ending in a request for divorce. The wife in the tale, "a faire, yong and lusty Damozell" is characterized as witless by a friend

of hers for her willingness to stay in an obviously unhealthy relationship: the wife reveals that her husband sleeps with the key to the lock under his pillow, so she is unable to sneak out at night. Her friend, a female “pew-fellow” of hers, asks her, “...wherefore haue you hands, but to take the key when hee is asleepe, and to goe whither you will, onely you must be carefull to come in at the houre he vseth to wake...” (24). Such a thought has never crossed the wife’s mind before; she thanks her friend for the idea and agrees to steal the key that same night to come to her pew-fellow’s home. The wife is successful in her escape, returns later that night to her husband’s side in the bed, and is able to repeat her deception, undiscovered for several more nights.

On the night her deception fails, however, “...her good fortune [makes] her bold...,” and “she [tarries] a little longer then her houre...” (24). Her husband awakens to find her not home and decides to lock the door before she returns, resulting in a lengthy fight between the couple when she comes home. Angry, and desperate to enter her house, the wife fakes her own suicide, duping her husband into running outdoors while she sneaks back inside, locking him out in turn. The couple continues to fight and argue before the wife’s pew-fellow arrives and is “...[willed]...to goe to her Mother, and the rest of her friends, and (as she could well inough without her instructions) frame a complaint, how that her Husband of a long time had vsed to goe on whore-hunting in the night...” (28). The pew-fellow fulfills her friend’s request and returns with the wife’s mother, her friends, and the parish parson “...that hee might be a witnesse of her wrong” (28). The husband, his face battered and scratched by his wife’s physical abuse during their fight, is accused by his wife’s mother that of “...[giving] her [his wife’s] right to others...” (28), although the man never shows evidence of having ever had an

extramarital affair. After the mother completes her diatribe against the husband, she entreats the parson to witness the cruelty of her daughter's husband:

Beare witnesse, good Sir Iohn, and the rest of my neighbours, that see how my daughter is abused: for I purpose to teach this knave how to vse his wife better; and not to abuse her, and then threaten her with death, if she complaine.... (28)

The young wife goes down to where the parson, her mother, neighbors, and husband are, and "...[intreats] her (with fained teares) that she might be diuorced from her wicked husband, or else shee [says] her dayes were but short, for he assuredly would doe her a mischief" (29). Upon hearing her daughter's plea, the mother assures her daughter that her old husband would do well to return her dowry and divorce her; the husband "...perceiuing...that they were all on her side, and how that they would not heare him speake in his owne defence..." angrily agrees to her request for a divorce (29). The parson draws up the bill of divorce "...and the old man deliuered backe her portion, beeing glad that he was rid of his wife. His wife on the other side was glad that shee had escaped that punishment which shee deseured: so they all parted seeming friends" (29).

The fishwives disagree on whether or not the wife in this tale is a worthy role model: the fishwife of Brainford compares her to Amazon women "...who out of a braue minde cut their husbands throates: and so made themselues, rulers of themselues" (29). Brainford appreciates this woman's ability to defend herself against her abusive husband and to obtain a divorce from him rather than remain in his dictatorial control. The fishwives of Stand on the Greene and Twitnam disagree with Brainford and wonder whether or not it is possible to find this wife's actions praiseworthy. Stand on the Greene

points out, "...what praise...had shee deserued, if she had been discouered, or failed in this attempt? Nothing but curses in my mind, for she had giuen cause to all men to speak ill of vs women: it is not the euent, but the honesty of the intent, that iustifies the action" (29). Obtaining a divorce from one's husband was an issue that extended even beyond the realms of religious convention: a woman who was able to divorce her husband was one who outwardly expressed her agency and empowerment.

Another marital practice upon which Catholics and English Protestants differed was celibacy. Although the celibate marriage is traceable to medieval English works, such as *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Jacobean England had a much different idea of what constituted a chaste marriage. To the Catholic couple, living in chastity would be akin to living in celibacy, just as Margery and her husband lived, the couple denying to continue sexual intercourse with one another (or anyone else, for that matter). The Catholic church taught that "...virginity and celibacy were the holiest of states, ideals that all should aspire to, while marriage as an inferior way of life, a necessary evil, improved by sexual abstinence...."⁶³ To preserve their marriage from carnal exploitation, and to reach a holier state than other couples, a Catholic couple could agree to live in abstinence.

Such abstinence to the English Protestant, however, was reminiscent of the vows nuns and priests took to enter lives of celibacy; and such celibacy could be viewed as an unhealthy repression of natural sexual desires. The English Protestant worried that repressing these desires could lead to wanton sexual behavior, such as raping one's female parishioner under the secrecy of confession, as represented in Kingstone's tale.

⁶³ Briggs, 48.

Sexual abstinence in marriage was too much akin to priests' celibacy for the liking of English Protestants: "[i]n the reformers' view, celibacy had too often concealed sexual misbehaviour, or contributed to the clergy's mystique. Marriage, in their view, was the condition ordained for man by God, as the creation of Eve for Adam demonstrated."⁶⁴ The Catholic Church's teaching, therefore, of a holy, celibate marriage, did not agree with the English Protestant's understanding of God's will for man. The shift in Protestant England supported a sexually active married couple, for if the couple were happily satisfying each other's desires, they were less likely to stray into an extramarital affair. Marriage and sexual activity within that marriage were so advocated by English Protestants that "[m]arriage could now be enjoyed even by the clergy, while the traditional refuges from it, nunneries and monasteries, no longer existed. Chastity was no longer identified with celibacy, but rather with faithful wedded love...."⁶⁵ To the English Protestant, then, a chaste marriage was characterized by a faithful, most likely sexually active, couple.

The fishwife of Twitnam approaches this topic differently from her fellow fishwives; she wishes to tell a story of a happily married couple rather than one of a wanton wife. She does not tell her story to encourage the stereotype of the disempowered wife living in sexual abstinence with her husband. Instead, Twitnam seeks to prove that a wife can be both sexually chaste, even while married, and still exhibit great personal agency, especially if tempted. She conveniently sets her tale in seventh-century Britain, under the rule of King Oswald, when the country's official religion would have been Catholicism (although the denotation would not have existed in this time period).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Briggs, 49.

Twitnam's characters can comfortably adhere to the Roman Church's celebration of celibacy, especially because her main characters are Oswald and his wife (whom she calls Beblam), the sainted king⁶⁶ and queen of Britain. She claims that after this couple gives birth to a son "...they willingly agreed (that they might the better serue their Sauour) not to touch one the other after any carnall manner" (30). As with Catholic priests and nuns who agree to the vow of celibacy, Oswald and Beblam are focused entirely on properly serving their Lord, never again to enjoy sexual activity inside (or outside) their marriage.

Twitnam's tale proceeds from the fishwife of Richmond's tale; she responds to Richmond's tale, agreeing with the fishwife of Stand on the Greene, saying, "I think so too...I doe not like this foolish hardnesse: and men are apt to speake ill of vs without cause: therefore to make amends, I will tell of a vertuous and chaste Dame, and one whose life may bee a mirrour for all womene" (29). Twitnam's tale is indeed about a virtuous and chaste woman, though she maintains a characterization unlike many chaste women of Jacobean England: she is married. Twitnam's tale attempts to prove that women can be married and still lead chaste and exemplary lives; Twitnam would rather find a role model in a good, chaste wife than in a woman who dupes her abusive husband into divorcing her. To further Twitnam's case in finding a role model in Beblam, she opens her tale explaining that Oswald "for his iust gouernment and holy life, had the name of Saint giuen him" (30). Readers may assume if the husband is able to lead a holy life, the wife is holy by proxy, so when Twitnam plainly states the couple's intention to abstain from sexual activity, it does not come as a surprise.

⁶⁶ For a more detailed biography of the historical Saint Oswald, please see S. Anselm Parker's "St. Oswald," *New Advent: On-Line Catholic Encyclopedia*, K. Knight, editor, <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11348c.htm>>.

According to Twitnam's tale, Beblam and Oswald lived for the service of God, ignoring their baser instincts: "Thus liued this vertuous couple, vntill their deaths, onely esteeming the seruice of God, and the auoiding of worldly tentations for their cheife pleasure" (30). They are visited by a hermit and entertain him as a guest in their home; the hermit asks Oswald how he is able to maintain a holy life yet still claim a wife. The hermit's question is apropos as he seems to speak in place of the listening fishwives who could be wondering the same. Oswald responds to his question with patience: "Marriage is no hinderance to holy life, for therein doe we but follow the institution of God, which hee ordained for the increase of the world..." (30). The statement resounds with English Protestant overtones, although Twitnam tells her tale as though she has a general understanding of Catholic doctrine, while Oswald anachronistically anticipates clearly Protestant views.⁶⁷

To further encourage the hermit to test Oswald and Beblam's celibate marriage, Oswald gives the hermit his ring, entreating the hermit to ask Beblam to use him as she would use her husband. The hermit eagerly accepts the wager, "...hoping to haue kinde entertainment at his Queenes hands...and told her, that it was her Husbands will that she should vse him in all respects as shee would vse himselfe, if hee were there" (30). Beblam kindly agrees to fulfill her husband's request and feeds the hermit dinner. The hermit is admittedly disappointed when he is served mere bread and water, expecting something much grander for the king's meal:

⁶⁷ Recall Briggs's argument of the English Protestant reformers' view of chastity in marriage: "Marriage, in their view, was the condition ordained for man by God, as the creation of Eve for Adam demonstrated" (48).

When the time of supper was come, and the Hermet expected some delicate cheere, he onely was fed with bread, which was serued vpon a stately manner, by diuers Gentlemne that did attend him: likewise when he called for drink, they gaue him wholesome water to coole his hote desires: no other cates got hee, yet was it no worse then the Queene her selfe ate of. (30-1)

The hermit has not expected such an ascetic lifestyle between a king and queen, but the wager he set forth with Oswald has not yet been broken: the hermit has so far been treated just as the king himself would have been treated.

Once the meal is complete, a servant asks the hermit if he should be pleased to retire to bed for the evening; although the hermit is still disappointed from the scant dinner, he is overjoyed when entering the bedroom:

...for he saw no worser woman then the Queene should be his bedfellow. So quickly vndressing himselfe he went in bed to her (not forget-getting in his thoughts to praise her for obeying her Husbands will) where hauing lyne awhile, thinking of some strange things, lust and the euill disposition of his minde beganne to infect his soule so, that with a kinde imbrace hee besought the Queene to shew some mercy towards his hot affection. (31)

Beblam, not unprepared for such lascivious behavior, rings a bell and calls forth four women, "...who took this Hermet and cast him in a Cisterne full of water, that stood in the Chamber..." (31).

The hermit's desires are immediately quelled, though they do not remain so for long; he decides he should convince the queen by flattery to sleep with him:

Most rare, beauteous, admirable, and vnparalleled woman, I will not onely commend thee for thy beauty and greatnesse of Birth and place; but also I will adore thee with more than humane worship, for the extraordinarie vnderstanding which thou hast aboue others of thy sexe. (31)

The hermit continues to flatter the queen, commending her for her brilliant plan: she must have expected the servants would have been suspicious, so (the hermit reasons) the queen must have used her wit to plan to dump him into the cistern of water in order to fool the servants. He suddenly "...clip[s] her in his armes..." but Beblam is once again unreceptive to his advances and rings the bell once more (32). The four female servants return and "[duck] him twise so much as they did before, so that they laid him in the bed halfe drowned..." (32). By the time the hermit leaves Oswald and Beblam, he believes they have committed to a truly celibate marriage; out of shame over his behavior, he resolves "neuer after [to] looke into other mens liues, but [to mend] his owne" (32).

Oswald and Beblam, although married and supporters of a marriage that assists procreation, choose to continue in sexual abstinence for the increase of their holy lives. Because they have a son and heir, they recognize procreation will continue in his stead, and they have fulfilled their marital duties according to God's will for marriage. This sentiment aligns itself with both Catholic and Protestant doctrine; both branches of Christianity acknowledge the importance of procreation in a marriage. Once the couple has sufficiently procreated, however, they exhibit Catholic ideals: in order to continue serving God properly, they recognize a need to devote themselves entirely to God without the temptation of carnal lust. They are willing to remain married—to divorce would have been an unjustifiable sin when they can live in celibacy. Twitnam expects the fishwives

to agree that the wife in her tale is comparable to the wife in the fishwife of Richmond's tale, although she did not have to behave cruelly to her husband. Of course, to compare the two women is difficult, since the one is married to an old, abusive widower and the other a just, religious king. Although the fishwives agree that Beblam is a virtuous queen, and a woman to be admired solely for her virtue, they unanimously refuse to agree with Twitnam's view that Beblam represents a proper role model for them: "...they all said, This Queene was a vertuous woman, and worthy to bee had in memory, but shee was not to be any president for them, seeing shee was a Queene, and they were but Fishwives" (32). Before continuing with her own tale, the fishwife of Kingstone elaborates the sentiment, stating, "Truely...if wee would be thus chaste, alas, our husbands would not suffer vs to continue so..." (32). The recurring feeling is that a queen has more agency in her marriage, than does a fishwife, with which she may choose to remain sexually abstinent.

CONCLUSION

Westward for Smelts is rich with cultural implications, compiling many voices at once as it relies upon a fictional character within it to act as its writer. The strongest voices that cry for attention in this piece are the ones interested in women's roles, especially focused upon the ideal image of women: what makes a woman praiseworthy or a suitable role model? The fishwives and Kinde Kit are more concerned with the idea of the honorable woman and in identifying who she is based upon their knowledge of women's roles. To explore this side of the *Smelts*, gender studies would have been the obvious direction; however, I found myself drawn to the vehicle the fishwives use in order to depict the honorable woman: the anti-Catholic polemic of Jacobean England. This secondary voice is the voice that pointed to assumptions the fishwives made—the assumptions that their readers understood the religious climate of the time period and would respond “properly” to the little jokes or references at work within the individual tales.

Smelts serves a fascinating role in Jacobean prose fiction, especially as a piece that has been largely ignored by scholars. The work does not merely represent popular anti-Catholic polemic, but it weaves together the assumptions and stereotypes made by Jacobean Protestants into one piece. The fishwives respond to one another under the assumption that they are familiar with the anti-Catholic polemic; they are so familiar with it, in fact, that they are able to weave it into their own stories, treating the stereotypes

against Catholics as though they are socially normal behaviors and ways of viewing another faith background. As modern readers, experiencing *Smelts* without any foreknowledge of Jacobean assumptions and stereotypes could prove detrimental to our understanding of the text. A woman raped by her confessor may not be difficult to grasp, but a woman regarding her crucifix as a pretty jewel rather than an intimately important religious object is trickier to comprehend.

Of course, it is necessary to recall Greenblatt's argument that scholars should listen not for the one voice but the many voices when attempting to historicize a text. Admittedly, I listened to the many voices and found something in common with them: their responses to the anti-Catholic polemic. That is not to say that this is the only pattern within *Smelts'* many voices. In fact, the text is rich with other socio-political implications that require further study. It was my intention, however, to examine in as great detail as I could the pattern I found to be strongest. As I reread *Smelts* in the future, I fully expect further and perhaps stronger patterns to emerge. No matter how faint, *Smelts'* voices will be heard.

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Which of these fower, that here you see, In greatest daunger you thinke to be, Early English Books, 1475-1640. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1985.

A Lyons, betwene two Lawyers.



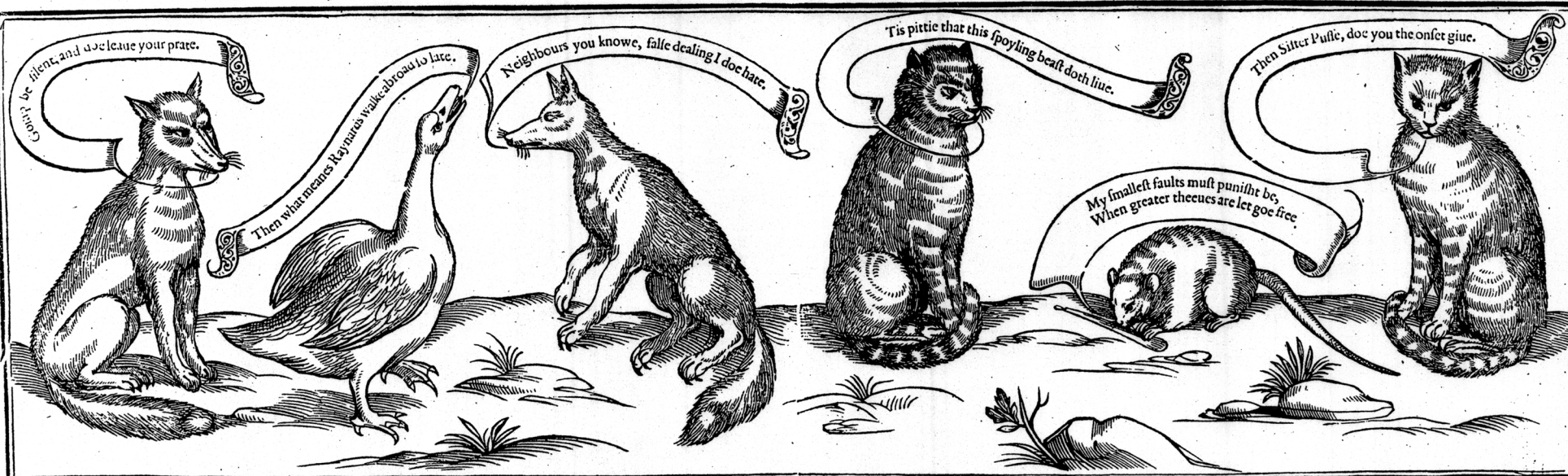
Client. Good Sir what thinke you of my case? *Lawyer.* Tis cleere, & good, & iust.
Client. But what say you Sir? *Lawyer.* This I say, take heed; to whom you run.
Client. Why Sir? thinke you he is not learn'd? *Lawyer.* Yes, but his power is small,
Giue me my fee, it is in me to make an end of all.
Client. Now in what daung I standes my case, in these two Lawyers handes?
That while I creepe to them for wordes, they creepe into my Landes.

A Goose, betwene two Foxes.

Which of these fower, that here you see,
In greatesst daunger you thinke to be.

Maide. What say you holy man to me? *Frier.* I say, faire holy maide,
Leane thou to me, and on my loue, let all thy lianes be laide:
Maide. And what say you good man? *Frier.* I say shew all to me,
That better then that aged man, can helpe and comfort thee.
Maide. Now in what perill standes a Maide, in shrieft betwene two Friers?
That only make the Church a Cloake, to couer foule desires.

A Rat, betwene two Cats.



Goose. Sir Raynard, what say you to me? *Raynard.* I say you itaine the gratie:
And you are like to answere for, the trespasse ere you passe.
Goose. And what say you good Sir? *Raynard.* Your keaking wak'd my Dame,
And you shall knowe, what tis to bring the house so out of frame.
Goose. Alas hard hap, one simple Goose, to be two Foxes prey,
When from one Fox, a flocke of Geese can hardly scape away.

LONDON Printed in
Shoe-lane, at the signe of the Golden
Faulcon. by R: S. 1623.

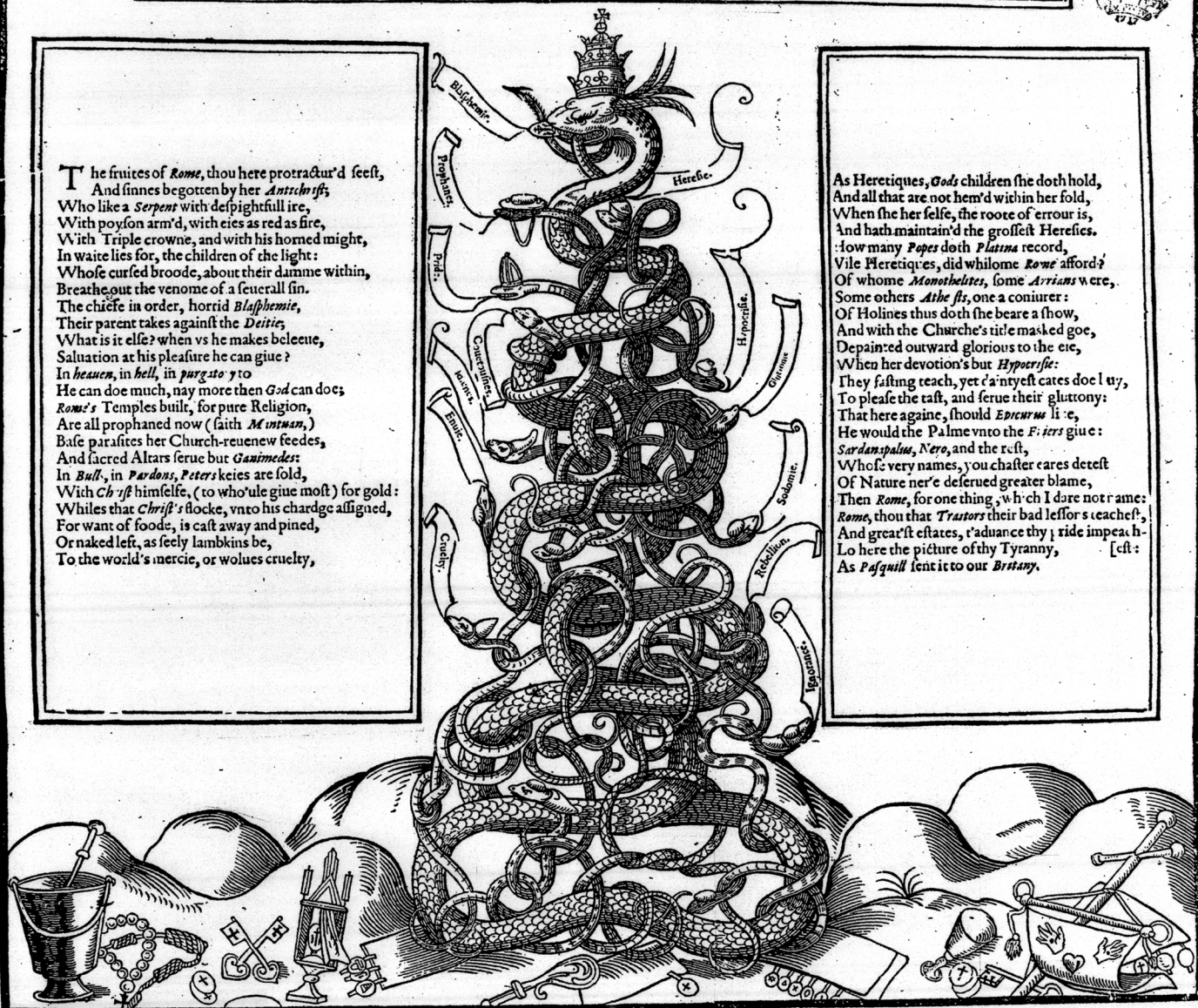
Rat. Good Mistris Pusse, tell me wherefore you aime thus at my head?
Cat. Because you stole my Mistris Cheefe, her Candles, and her Bread.
Rat. And what say you good Pusse? *Cat.* You gnaw'd my Mistris Ruffes,
Her Aprons, Towells, Handkerchiefs, her Falling Bands, and Cuffs.
Rat. Alas, that one poore Rat, should come, to die betwene two Cats,
When one good Cat, will serue the turne, to kill a world of Rats.

THE POPES PYRAMIDES.



The fruites of *Rome*, thou here protractur'd seest,
And sinnes begotten by her *Antichrist*,
Who like a *Serpent* with despatchfull ire,
With poyson arm'd, with eyes as red as fire,
With Triple crowne, and with his horned might,
In waite lies for, the children of the light:
Whose curst broode, about their dumme within,
Breathe out the venome of a feuerall sin.
The chiefe in order, hordid *Blasphemie*,
Their parent takes against the *Deities*,
What is it else? when vs he makes beleue,
Saluation at his pleasure he can giue?
In *heauen*, in *hell*, in *purgato* yto
He can doe much, nay more then *God* can doe;
Rome's Temples built, for pure Religion,
Are all prophaned now (saith *Mattus*),
Bafe parasites her Church-reuener feedes,
And sacred Altars serue but *Ganymedes*:
In *Bull*, in *Pardons*, *Peters* keyes are sold,
With *Chyft* him selfe, (to who'ule giue most) for gold:
Whiles that *Chyft's* flocke, vnto his chardge assigned,
For want of foode, is cast away and pined,
Or naked left, as feely lambskins be,
To the world's mercie, or wolues cruelty,

As Heretiques, *Gods* children she doth hold,
And all that are not hem'd within her fold,
When she her selfe, the roote of error is,
And hath maintain'd the grossest Heresies.
How many *Popes* doth *Platina* record,
Vile Heretiques, did whilome *Rome* afford?
Of whome *Monothelites*, some *Arrians* were,
Some others *Atheists*, one a coniuirer:
Of Holines thus doth she beare a show,
And with the Church's tide masked goe,
Depainted outward glorious to the eye,
When her devotion's but *Hypocrisie*:
They fasting teach, yet e' a nyest cates doe luy,
To please the taste, and serue their gluttony:
That here againe, should *Epicurus* liue,
He would the *Palme* vnto the *Friers* giue:
Sardanapalus, *Nero*, and the rest,
Whose very names, you chaster eares detest
Of Nature ner'e deserued greater blame,
Then *Rome*, for one thing, which I dare not name:
Rome, thou that *Trastors* their bad lesso' s teachest,
And great' st eitates, r'aduance thy ride impeach:
Lo here the picture of thy Tyranny, [c:]
As *Pagquill* lent it to our *Britany*.



A *Pyramis*, of Serpents poysonous broode;
(*Rome*,) here behold, erected is on high
Vpon seauen hills, where once thy glory stood
Sad Monument of thy Impietie:
Which all the world infecteth, farre and nigh,
Like the *Ceraster*, threatning speedy death,
If vnawares we come within her breath.

About whose head, in knots, and wreathings strange,
Her curst Impes, on euery side doe crall,
While she about her horned head doth raunge,
With poysoned spite, empeiring ouer all:
That Sheepeheard, nor his flocke hereafter shall
Be (*Tyber*,) with thy pleasaunt streames acquainted,
Which this foule *Serpent* with all sinne hath tainted.

VVhere once good *Pastors Halleluia's* sang,
And sat, their snowy flocks in quiet tending,
That all thy bankes with heavenly Musick rang,
The Laurell groues, their friend'y shadowes lending;
But now (alas) those happy daies haue ending,
And by thy shore, (as *Sybill* did foretell,)
This hatefull broode, of *Antichrist* doth dwell.

But loe exalted to the highest degree,
That *Pride*, or vaine Ambition could deuise;
Gods word (a double edged sword) we see
Doth deadly wound this *Serpent* from the skies;
That neuer feare him now, if you be wise:
But pray the *Lord*, that he his grace would send,
And in his Truth instruct you to the end.

LONDON Printed in Shoe-lane, at the signe of the Faulcon.