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Confession in Literature from Webster to Defoe

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This thesis is all my own work, and I have not previously obtained a degree on the basis of any of this work.

List of Abbreviations

<i>EEBO</i>	Early English Books Online
<i>ODNB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
<i>PMLA</i>	Publications of the Modern Language Association

Introduction

Catholic confession is determined by the beliefs that the individual has free will and can atone for sin, and that the priest has the right to absolve sins and impose penance. In the sixteenth century, Luther configured private confession to a priest as a ‘papist’ invention which was not justified in the Bible. Bearing no relation to early Christian penitential practices, it was an instrument of church control which disrupted what ought to be an unmediated relationship between God and the individual Christian. He further argued that confession did not aid salvation – which was achieved by faith alone. Rather, confession before God (as opposed to a priest) cleared the conscience of destructive guilt which might otherwise impact negatively on spiritual development. He advocated a public confession of sinfulness before the congregation, but this did not entail enumeration of individual sins. Only public sins – such as theft and adultery – were deemed a matter for church discipline. Otherwise, self-examination, guided by the individual’s conscience, was the means to determine what was sinful and needed to be confessed.¹ Later, Calvin argued that the concept of predestination meant that only a few – the elect – were singled out by God to be saved from damnation.² In Calvinist thought, while self-examination and confession before God were duties of all, there was no guarantee that God would forgive sins. It was a sign, not a guarantee, of election to engage in self-examination and confession. As England attempted to define its Confession of faith during the Reformation, there were vacillations between Catholicism and Protestantism, *via-media* Protestantism and orthodox Calvinism.³ This led to widespread debate about the performance of confession.

This thesis demonstrates continuities and contrasts between Protestant and Catholic confession, examines the impact of changing confessional practices in England on wider relations pertaining to authority and the individual and on notions of sin, and explores how these changes facilitated the development of more complex identities. These issues are examined through a genre-based framework, which employs the

¹ See Martin Luther, ‘The Pagan Servitude of the Church’, in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1961).

² John Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1578).

³ To avoid confusion caused by similar terminology, Confession as referring to a profession of faith is denoted by using the upper case C, confession of sin through the lower case c. See Diarmaid MacCulloch for difficulties experienced by other countries when defining their Confessions of faith during the Reformation (New York: Penguin, 2003), Chapter Ten.

methodologies of textual analysis and historical research, and which examines theological positions on confession. In Chapter One, I explore the theological bases for Catholic and Protestant confessional practices. Through an analysis of Augustine's *Confessions*, written between 397 and 398, I examine late antiquity and the medieval period for historical and theological developments that influenced the development of Catholic confession. I then examine debates about confession during the Reformation, and explore socio-religious factors that impacted on confessional practices in Reformation England. The subsequent chapters explore a variety of early modern English literary and autobiographical texts which depict fictional or actual confessions, and which engage with, or offer perspectives on, Reformation debates about confession. Chapter Two explores three Jacobean tragedies: John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623), Thomas Middleton and Richard Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622), and John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633)⁴; Chapter Three explores two Calvinist spiritual autobiographies: Elizabeth Isham's *My Booke of Remembrance* (written between 1638 and 1639) and Richard Norwood's *Confessions* (written between 1639 and 1640); and Chapter Four examines the portrayal of confession in three novels by Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724).

Norton's thesis, 'Confession in Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century Protestant Literature', also explores confessional discourses in various English Protestant writing forms, including spiritual autobiography and the three Defoe novels explored here. However, he assesses how confession acquired 'more religious and political meaning and rhetorical uses' after the Reformation; how Protestant confessional language became central to defending Protestant religious beliefs and confessional practices in opposition to Catholic ones; and the 'Protestant uses of criminal confession for purging England of heresy'.⁵ Thus, our studies differ in terms of their overall objectives. Tambling's socio-political examination of confession includes analyses of Protestant spiritual autobiography and literary confessions. However, his study spans the medieval period to the modern era and draws on cross-cultural works.⁶

⁴ Chronologically, *The Duchess of Malfi* is the first text. 1623 refers to the date of its first publication. The exact date of its first performance is unknown, but it was before 16 December 1614. On this date the actor who first played Antonio died. See *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Brian Gibbons, New Mermaids, (London: Black Publishers, 2006), p. xxxvii.

⁵ James Harris Norton, 'Confession in Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century Protestant Literature' (unpublished PhD dissertation: Indiana University, 1994), 1-2.

⁶ Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

The principal cultural and historical locations of my study position early modern English attitudes to confession as an important prism through which to explore the socio-political aspects of confession. Like Tambling, I draw on Foucault's analysis of confession as a disciplinary tool of authority. However, while a Foucauldian perspective is important, this study also diverges in key ways from Foucault. Before discussing these differences, it is expedient here to outline his approach to confession, and illustrate its relevance to this study.

Foucault argued that in Christian confession, individual desires, thoughts and dispositions that do not accord with the tenets of Christianity are renounced. Confession thus produces an individual subjectivity which sees the self as a source of sin.

Emphasising the power dynamics of confession, he argues that it:

unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile.⁷

He argues that the advent of auricular confession was a crucial development in confession's evolution as a 'technology of the self' which defines subjectivity, entails self-renunciation and instils deference to authority.⁸

Auricular confession is the term used for the Catholic practice of an individual privately confessing sins to a priest, which he then absolves. In early Church penitential practices penitents confessed only major sins, such as adultery, or denunciation of the Church in times of persecution.⁹ These confessions were made before the bishop. The penitent then had to undergo a period of cleansing penance before s/he was allowed re-admission to the Church. With the advent of auricular confession in the sixth century, Christians confessed not only overt behavioural sinning – acts that were in clear defiance of Church doctrine – but also sins that had been secretly committed and sinful thoughts and dispositions. The confessor then imposed a penance which accorded with

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: The Will to Power*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1978), pp. 61-62.

⁸ See Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: the Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Robert Hurley (New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 242-249, and Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, pp. 57-65.

⁹ The use of the upper case c with reference to Church signifies the Christian Church before the Reformation division. When referring to both the Catholic and Protestant traditions after the Reformation, I use the lower case c.

the severity of the sins confessed. While early Church penance had a confessional element, it was the public penitential aspect that defined the sacrament. Confession to the bishop amounted to an admission of wrongdoing so that the penitential part of the sacrament could proceed. In auricular confession, over time, this emphasis was reversed. Gradually, the fullness of the confession became more important, penance more a token symbol of repentance.¹⁰

Early Church penitential practices, as they applied only to major, public transgressions, were undertaken by only a small minority of the faithful. Auricular confession, which allowed for the confession of private sins to a priest, or other (male) religious figure, saw more of the Christian community undergo confession and penance. As the practice gained in popularity, the public element of penance was retained in ecclesiastical courts. These courts disciplined flagrant public sinners and reconciled them to the Church, and punished heretics.

Initially undertaken voluntarily, in the medieval period many local religious authorities throughout Europe enforced private confession as a religious duty. Practised with varying degrees of regularity, in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that auricular confession was a Christian obligation, to be conducted at least yearly. According to Aers, in the medieval period private confession was the basic form of ‘personal religious formation’.¹¹ Little’s study of medieval confession demonstrates that the 1215 decree led to an enormous production of penitential literature providing a ‘language and system of knowledge’ to aid the confessor in discerning the fullness of a penitent’s confession, and the attitude expressed towards his or her sins.¹² She argues that, as this language of sin was transferred to individuals in confession, through sermons about confession and, later, through confession instruction manuals designed for the laity, a ‘capacious psychological language [was] given to penitents by the priest to think about their identity’.¹³ Consequently, Christian identity became more thoroughly and systematically defined in terms of personal sinfulness and obedience to religious authority.

¹⁰ Alexander Murray, ‘Confession before 1215’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3 (1993), 56.

¹¹ David Aers, ‘A Whisper in the Ears of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the “History of the Subject”’, in David Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 195.

¹² Katherine C. Little, *Confessions and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 52.

¹³ Little, *Confessions and Resistance*, p. 53.

Foucault's analysis of auricular confession as instilling obedience and a Christian-based subjectivity which entails self-renunciation has been extremely influential. According to Little, 'despite his much criticised "unitary" vision of the medieval period . . . accounts of medieval selfhood remain much indebted to a Foucauldian approach to confession'.¹⁴ Referring to critics who explore the depiction of Catholic confession in Reformation drama, Stegner argues that 'they have generally followed Foucault's connection of the rite to the establishment of a power relationship between the individual and authority figure and the development of individual subjectivity'.¹⁵ Tambling, who includes Protestant spiritual autobiographies in his study, acknowledges that Foucault underscored that Protestant personal confessional practices correspond to the disciplinary function of Catholic confession.¹⁶ The similarities in terms of discipline between Catholic and Protestant confession are also discussed by Botonaki in her article on Protestant women's religious diaries – a written confessional mode that preceded the spiritual autobiography. Botonaki argues that 'the removal of the Catholic confessor who had listened to, scrutinized, and evaluated the Christian's conduct did not result in the elimination of surveillance but in its replacement by a similar mechanism: self-surveillance'. She discusses how, ostensibly, a union between the individual and God, Calvinist self-examination was in fact directed by a vast array of literature and sermons that in effect acted as external supervision of self-examination and personal confession.¹⁷ My analysis highlights the disciplinary correspondences between Protestant and Catholic confession by exploring both written confessional modes that developed out of Protestant personal self-examination and the confessional disciplinary functions of Protestant ecclesiastical courts in England.

I also explore an issue neglected by Foucault in his examination of confession as discipline. I argue that the demise of the father confessor and the Protestant emphasis on personal conscience impacted on the relationship of confessor/confessant. It is evident that Protestantism produced resistance to Catholic confession. Outside of a Catholic/Protestant opposition, and often in relation to Foucault's wider argument that confessional discipline is a central feature of modern disciplinary practices, various Foucauldian critics have explored the degree to which a confessant can resist the

¹⁴ Little, *Confessions and Resistance*, pp. 4-8.

¹⁵ Paul D. Stegner, "'Try what repentance can": Hamlet, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority', *Shakespeare Studies*, 35 (2007), 106.

¹⁶ See Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', pp. 242-243 and *History of Sexuality*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁷ Effie Botonaki, 'Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen's Spiritual Diaries: Self-Examination, Covenanting and Account Keeping', *The Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 30 (1999), 4.

confessor's authority, and have examined factors that can compel or facilitate this resistance.¹⁸ However, within these analyses there is little explicit engagement with the idea that the Reformation attack on the authority of priests to demand confession, combined with the Protestant emphasis on personal conscience as the guide for sin, could produce resistance to Protestant confessional discipline. Certainly, as I discuss further below, with regard to Protestant confessional writing, early modern critics have highlighted the issue of Protestant rebellion against English socio-religious authority. But Botonaki is one of the few to have presented this rebelliousness in a confessional context.¹⁹ Developing this approach to rebellion, I explore how changes that resulted from upheavals in the traditional confessional system and the designation of the Protestant subject as a self-confessor could produce resistance to Protestant confessional authority, and, consequently, impacted on wider relations pertaining to authority and individuals.

Issues relating to confessional discipline and resistance are examined in the autobiographical texts and dramatic works. I argue that the Jacobean plays, set in Catholic countries, depict the decline of Catholic confession and highlight the confessional significance of Protestant disciplinary practices. Throughout the thesis I also explore another contrast between Catholic and Protestant confession: how the Protestant prohibition on auricular confession – the verbalisation of sins to an external authority who pronounced absolution – often led to more rather than, as Luther had hoped, less guilt about sin. In Chapter One, I discuss Luther's concern that irresolvable guilt could lead to fear of damnation. I examine how the negative consequences of Protestant confession were further exacerbated by the Calvinist theological position of predestinarianism, which argued that the vast majority could not achieve repentance and were destined for eternal damnation. Foucault presents consolation as intrinsically tied up with the disciplinary functions of confession.²⁰ In Chapter Three, when examining the popularisation of Calvinist self-examination in the seventeenth century, I identify

¹⁸ Susan David Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 3, 27-40. Leigh Gilmore, 'Policing Truth: Confession, Gender, and Autobiographical Texts', in Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, Gerald Peters (eds.), *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 56. Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, Chapter 7 and p. 212.

¹⁹ Botonaki, 'Englishwomen's Spiritual Diaries', 8.

²⁰ Drawing on the interpretation advanced by Jodi Bilinkoff in *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450-1750* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) pp. 24-27, Stegnar argues that Foucault grafts 'the consolatory potential of confession onto a power relationship'. 'Try What Repentance Can', 106.

efforts by Calvinism to provide consolation in relation to discipline. However, I demonstrate that these efforts to address potential negative consequences of predestinarianism were dependent on individuals achieving a sense of election. In Chapter Four, there is a change of focus from consolation as discipline to the benefits to the individual of consolation. Here, I examine Defoe's critique of Calvinist theology and confessional modes; I argue that he depicts them as impeding repentance, thus preventing believers from relieving guilt about sin and gaining assurance of salvation.

The thesis begins by exploring the development of auricular confession, Protestant attacks on the sacrament, and attitudes to confession in England. Structured into three sections, the first section of Chapter One explores one foundational confessional text, St. Augustine's *Confessions*. In the seventeenth century, the *Confessions* influenced the development of Calvinist spiritual autobiography. Its impact on post-Reformation confessional practices makes it an important text for inclusion in the thesis. Equally important is the impact of Augustine's thought on auricular confession. Although early modern Protestants saw the text as reflecting early Church practices, the *Confessions*, I argue, sits in uneasy relation to these early penitential practices.

Section One explores the relationship between the text and medieval confession. In the fourth century, the common perception was that baptism – which in the early Church was usually undertaken well into adulthood – was a miraculous deliverance out of sin. In his biography, Brown argues that Augustine's spiritual autobiography complicates the popular view of spiritual purity after baptism.²¹ Developing Brown's argument, I demonstrate that this critique of baptism (which located all Christians, not just the one-time, wilful sinner, in relation to sin) had implications for the confessional practices of the early Church and the development of auricular confession. I also examine how the theological position on original sin, which supported Augustine's position on sin after baptism, impacted on confession in the medieval period; and how his attitudes to sexual morality influenced Catholic confession's focus on sexual sins during the medieval period.

I also argue that the text may have been influenced by monastic confessional practices, which were later crucial to the development of auricular confession. Another way that the work is unusual in terms of early Church confession is that, for a text written centuries before the institutionalisation of auricular confession, it demonstrates

²¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

prodigious interiority. Root locates the development and institutionalisation of auricular confession as being crucial to the formation of the ‘autobiographical subject’, or ‘confessional self’. He argues that, since early Church confessional practices did not have ‘a well codified institutional frame’, there are difficulties in seeing the *Confessions* as ‘the foundational text for the confessing subject’.²² But to better understand the *Confessions*’ interiority, I draw on Tambling’s argument that the text reflects monastic confession.²³

Section Two examines debates about confession in the Reformation. I draw on historical research on Catholic and Protestant confessional practices, such as Murray’s ‘Confession before 1215’ and Tentler’s *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, and primary early modern texts which debate confession. A broad range of research on the Reformation, including MacCulloch’s overview, provides additional cultural context for my discussion.²⁴ I begin by assessing Luther’s attack on confession in the sixteenth century and the council of Trent’s pronouncements on confession in response. I also explore how the issue of consolation eventually resulted in Luther softening his attitudes towards auricular confession and priestly absolution. I then discuss how issues pertaining to both discipline and consolation informed attitudes to confession in Reformation England. Exploring the English Reformation from the reigns of Henry VIII to James I, I particularly focus on the Elizabethan period. By the time of Elizabeth’s reign, Calvinism was replacing Lutheranism as the popular brand of Protestantism in England. But as historical critics such as Tyacke and Lake have demonstrated, there was significant resistance in many quarters to attempts by Calvinists to dominate the English church.²⁵ Exploring religious and political reasons for Elizabeth’s resistance to Calvinism and promotion of a *via media*, I also look at Elizabethan anti-Calvinism in relation to the disciplinary and consolatory aspects of confession.

By the early seventeenth century the Reformation had seen the effective demise of auricular confession in England. But because Catholic confession had encompassed the

²² Jerry Root, “*Space to Speke*”: *The Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 7.

²³ Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 30.

²⁴ Murray, ‘Confession before 1215’, 51-81. Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1977). MacCulloch, *Reformation*.

²⁵ Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c.1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

entire Christian community, and provided effective discipline and absolution – a solace absent from Calvinist confessional practices – Catholic confession, and the theological positions that supported it, continued to hold an allure. In Section Three I explore Sir Toby Matthew’s attempt, as an exiled English Catholic in France, to tap into the continued appeal of auricular confession and growing anti-Calvinist sentiment in seventeenth-century England. Matthew provided the first English translation of the *Confessions*, published in 1620. It is preceded by a long introduction in which, I argue, he attempts to validate, via Augustine, the theological positions that support auricular confession. I also examine the hostile response it provoked from seventeenth-century Calvinist polemicist, Matthew Sutcliffe, published in 1626. Both Matthew’s introduction and Sutcliffe’s reply offer a means to explore Reformation polemics on confession. They also facilitate further discussion, relevant to the exploration of confession in the subsequent chapters, of how Augustine was an import source of authority for both Confessions, and how his thought influenced both faiths’ confessional practices.

Issues explored in Chapter One – how confession instils a sinful identity and obedience to authority; the Protestant repudiation of confessional authority; the consolatory and disciplinary functions of confession; and the influence of Augustine on medieval confession, and issues pertaining to his authority and influence in Calvinism – form the background for Chapters Two, Three and Four. These chapters examine various manifestations of confessional issues in a variety of early modern English texts, each focusing on a particular genre.

Chapter Two explores confession in three Jacobean tragedies written in the early seventeenth century. It has been established that evolving confessional modes in England are thematically important in many seventeenth-century dramas. In her study of the depiction of confession on the stage, Griffiths-Osborne explores representations of Catholic and Protestant confession in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (1604); Stegner explores Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601) as depicting a lingering attraction to medieval confession in Reformation England; and Hirschfield explores *Hamlet* and Tourneur’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1606) as plays that depict the ‘negotiation of the penitential practice’ in the context of the decline of sacramental confession.²⁶ In terms

²⁶ Claire Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation, Early Modern and Shakespearean Drama’, (unpublished PhD dissertation: University of Liverpool, 2007). Stegner, ‘Try What Repentance Can’, 105-129. Heather Hirschfield, ‘The Maternal Penitent in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy’, in Dymrna

of the plays explored herein, Stegner references *The Duchess of Malfi* when arguing that instances of ‘auricular confession and confessional language . . . appeared with noticeable regularity in almost every dramatic genre’ on the early modern stage.²⁷ However, while these plays’ clear thematic concerns with sin, crime and repentance have led to explication of particular dramatic moments for confessional significance, Kerrigan is one of the few critics to explore confession in any of these works in an in-depth manner.²⁸ Focusing on the actions of the Duchess’s brothers, the Cardinal and Ferdinand, and their agent, Bosola, in the last act, he argues that *The Duchess of Malfi* dramatises the idea that the absence in England of auricular confession – traditionally a forum for expressing guilt about sin and gaining absolution – promotes despair and violence. In contrast to Kerrigan, I argue that an emphasis on confession’s disciplinary functions is dominant in Webster’s exploration of confession.

Through confessional language and allusions to confessional practices, Webster, I argue, locates the Duchess’s rebellion against her brothers’ attempts to prevent her re-marrying in relation to the Protestant rejection of confessional authority and embracing of personal conscience. The Duchess represents moderate Protestantism in the play, while her brothers, I demonstrate, represent traditional and emergent confessional discipline; the Cardinal – evidently – Catholic, Ferdinand representing a Puritan form of Calvinism. Throughout the thesis the word ‘Puritan’ is applied to Calvinists who opposed *via media* Protestantism and were intent on fully reforming the church, and refers to those who sought assurance of their election by their devotional practices. When depicting Ferdinand as a Puritan, Webster draws on the stereotype of the austere, sexually repressive extremist commonly represented in early modern comedy.²⁹ His characterisation, however, is taken beyond the stereotype and given historical validity when Ferdinand orders the murder of the Duchess. Through this development, Webster connects Ferdinand with efforts by extremist Puritans to seek the instigation of the death penalty for sexual sinners. Through the close association of the brothers, Webster associates the form of Puritanism represented by Ferdinand with Catholic confessional

Callaghan (ed.), *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 53-66.

²⁷ Stegner, ‘Try What Repentance Can’, 107.

²⁸ John C. Kerrigan, ‘Action and Confession, Fate and Despair in the Violent Conclusion to *The Duchess of Malfi*’, *Ben Jonson Journal*, 8 (2001), 249-258.

²⁹ See Huston Diehl, ‘Disciplining Puritans and Players: Early Modern English Comedy and the Culture of Reform’, *Religion & Literature*, 32 (2000), 89-90. See Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* and Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* for critical re-definitions of the term ‘Puritan’.

discourses and practices. Drawing, I argue, on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, he underscores links between Catholic and Protestant confessional discipline.

Webster depicts confession as a socio-religious force, which, through the control of will and desire, regulates social hierarchies and facilitates patriarchal control. My analysis reveals a strong correlation between his concept of confession and Foucault's identification of its disciplinary function, and Bernstein's argument that confession 'largely reinforces conventional power relations of domination and submission, especially in terms of gender'.³⁰ Displaying the influence of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the other two plays, I argue, are also fundamentally concerned with critiquing Protestant disciplinary practices as correlating with Catholic confession in that they interfere with private conscience, seek to protect social hierarchies and facilitate female subjugation.

In Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* the play's themes of desire, rebellion and control are situated in relation to confession through the dramatic moments that revolve around Alsemero's closet. The closet was the Protestant personal space where the individual conducted his/her devotional practices and confessed and renounced sin. It was conceived as the opposite of the Catholic confessional box, which installed a mediator between confessant and God. The confessional significance of Alsemero's closet has been neglected by critics. Through Alsemero's closet, I argue, Middleton and Rowley show that, like Catholic confession, many Protestant ideas about sin are rooted in fears surrounding female will and desire; and, as in Catholic thought, the Calvinist sense of confessional discipline facilitates patriarchal control of women. Disputing the critical opinion that sees this play as replicating the stereotype of women as innately corrupt, sexual and rebellious, I then locate Beatrice's fall into disobedience, crime and 'sin' in relation to conflicting messages in the seventeenth century regarding the inherent corruption of the sexual. This idea, rooted in traditional confessional discourses and practices, had been somewhat modified by Calvin's views on the virtue of sex in marriage. The playwrights demonstrate that this Protestant view on sex is undermined by the continual association of women with sexual corruption – an idea which justifies female subjugation.

I then demonstrate that the representation of confession in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is not limited to the portrayal of the Catholic figure of the friar, who seeks the

³⁰ Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p. 19. Bernstein engages with feminist criticism which argues that, in his concern with power and discipline in his general philosophy, Foucault 'does not consider social categories like gender that are organised according to unequal power relations'. She argues that the social category of gender is missing from Foucault's description of confession. Ibid.

repentance of the incestuous siblings, Giovanni and Annabella. A critique of confession, I argue, dominates the play, framing depictions of transgressive sexuality, social and patriarchal control, religious division and revenge. Drawing on his predecessors, Ford presents Calvinist confessional discipline as according with Catholic confessional discipline insofar as it controls sexual behaviour, 'heretical' beliefs, and female wilfulness, and protects social hierarchies. Chapter Two locates issues of rebellion and conformity in these Jacobean tragedies in relation to confession, and positions the genre as highlighting the confessional significance of the disciplinary function of Protestant church courts.

Chapter Three explores issues of rebellion and conformity in spiritual autobiography, the culmination of written forms that reflect Calvinist personal confessional practices. The chapter begins with an examination of the popularisation of Calvinist self-examination, and its evolution into written practices. In England, Protestant church courts replaced Catholic ecclesiastical courts, punishing public sinners and prosecuting heretics, while Protestant self-examination was meant to fill the disciplinary vacuum left by the demise of auricular confession. However, the doctrine of predestination meant that there were no tangible rewards (guilt appeasement, absolution) on offer for undergoing self-examination; thus, there was little incentive to stick with confession. I explore how, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Calvinist theologians encoded methods to ease consciences afflicted by guilt about sin into literature on self-examination. They also presented self-examination as a way to discern election, thereby providing the devout with a means to find assurance of salvation. By the mid-seventeenth century, Calvinist self-examination had become popular, and a huge emphasis came to be placed on conversion, which entailed true repentance for past sins and the search for signs of election. Tracing the evolution of self-examination and conversion into written forms, I then examine portrayals of rebellion and conformity in Isham's and Norwood's spiritual autobiographies in relation to confession.

In recent years the genre of spiritual autobiography has garnered much attention. Historians and literary critics have explored the genre for the development of autobiographical and confessional techniques which allow the construction of the Calvinist self in writing; shown how conversion narratives illustrate the central elements of Calvinist conversion schemas; and examined the adoption of the idea of conversion by non-orthodox Protestant sects. Another focus has been exploration of how spiritual

autobiography promotes the expression of individuality, and its influence on the emergence of secular autobiographies and the novel.³¹ Women's spiritual autobiography has provided a particularly rich arena for exploring how the genre displays a tension between individuality and the identity prescribed by religious authority. In the early modern period, female religious identity was conditioned by a vast amount of conduct books, and other 'male-penned writings', which prescribed a domestic role for women and female obedience to patriarchal authority figures.³² Works of female spiritual autobiography often display both a conditioned femininity that adheres to religious and patriarchal authority and an individuality that is resistant to prescriptions on female behaviour.³³

While drawing on the critical assessments of the genre outlined above, my analysis is also informed by the view that explorations of early modern confessional writing do not usually pay adequate attention to the confessional significance of the genre as a whole, and often fail to place issues of religious identity, individuality, rebellion and conformity in a confessional context. The confessional significance of the form is generally explored through the writer's confession of sins in the text. My analysis demonstrates that it is not just the confession of sin in spiritual autobiography that demonstrates the form's confessional significance. Beginning with Isham, I argue that her spiritual autobiography demonstrates that portrayals of rebellion against patriarchal and religious authority are equally relevant to discourses of confession. Isham's text negotiates issues relating to the subjugation of women and Calvinist dictates on matters of faith. She describes and justifies her rebellion against the

³¹ For an overview of these issues see Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Autobiography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972). Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997). John Stachniewski with Anita Pacheco (eds.), *Grace Abounding with Other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Paul J. Hunter, *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990).

³² Effie Botonaki, *Seventeenth-Century English Women's Autobiographical Writings: Disclosing Enclosures* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p. 3. See also Suzanne Trill, 'Religion and the Construction of Femininity', in Helen Wilcox (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³³ See Elspeth Graham, et al (eds.), *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings of Seventeenth-Century English Women* (London: Routledge, 2002). Marie-Louise Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language in Early Modern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter Six. Avra Kouffman, "'Why Finest Thou Thyself to be Another Woman?': Constraints on the Construction of Subjectivity in Mary Rich's Diary", in Linda S. Coleman (ed.), *Women's Life Writings: Finding Voice/Building Community* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 11-22.

prevailing idea, presented in Calvinist sermons, treatises and guides to self-examination, that a woman's religious calling was limited to the roles of wife and mother. Rather than marriage and motherhood, Isham chose to give her herself to God and remain single. This choice entailed rebellion against her father, who wished her to marry. In the early modern period, in general, and particularly with regard to women, filial rebellion was perceived to be synonymous with rebellion against God.

As opposed to the explicit justification for her filial rebellion, I argue that Isham also justifies, in an oblique manner, her desire for celibacy. Demonstrating that her religious sensibilities were heterodox, I argue that her views on celibacy align her with Catholicism. Due to its linkage with the idea of priestly superiority, and as it conflicted with the idea of the godliness of sex in marriage, celibacy was rejected by Calvinists. I argue that it is because she is fearful of the adverse consequence of openly admitting unorthodox beliefs, which from a strict Calvinist perspective would have been construed as a confession of sin, that Isham's admission of celibacy is hidden in the text. I interpret her justification for her filial rebellion and her views on celibacy as resistance to socio-religious confessional authority.

My examination of Norwood's text underscores the confessional significance of conversion and conversion narratives. Norwood's depiction in his narrative of his aversion to Calvinism and attraction to Catholicism, to which he briefly converted, shows that, for some early seventeenth-century English subjects, Calvinism was an unappealing faith. However, Norwood was ultimately unable to transcend ideas of election and reprobation, and he converted to the faith. His depiction of his conversion illustrates that this entails a more brutal self-renunciation than traditional confession: part of the self is killed off at conversion. His text demonstrates that the conversion narrative is a confessional 'technology of the self' which reinforces self-renunciation. Yet, I argue, the form also facilitates confessional resistance. Norwood's text reveals that the self-discovery, self-expressive and 'truth' injunctions of the form facilitate resistance to the brutal self-renunciation demanded by conversion.

Returning to fictional depictions of confession, Chapter Four explores three novels by Daniel Defoe. It has long been established that Defoe adopted the form of spiritual autobiography in his first-person, fictional narratives *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll*

Flanders, and *Roxana*.³⁴ My discussion of the texts demonstrates that he also engaged in debate about the performance of confession. I argue that in all three works Defoe critiques Calvinist attitudes to salvation, conversion and confession. The central elements of his criticism are that Calvinism fails to provide adequate consolation to sinners, and fails to provide confessional outlets for the relief of plagued consciences. This stifling of repentance, he posits, promotes sinfulness; and with increasing candour in each successive novel, he reveals his appreciation of Catholic attitudes to confession. Defoe's critique of Calvinist confession and conversion is facilitated, I argue, through the placing of hidden sins in the narrative: sinful acts which are not confessed as sinful in the confessional texts. Uncovering these sins, I argue, allows new perspectives on old debates about the novels.

I begin by arguing that Crusoe's killing of Caribbean natives and his religious domination of Friday are acts which are necessary for his psychological survival, but which go against his faith and his conscience. These sinful acts are committed after his conversion to Protestantism. Most Calvinist debate about sinning after conversion centred on the degree of spiritual purity that was achieved at conversion. The seventeenth-century minister, John Rogers, believed that conversion was a 'decisive victory over sin'. For his contemporary, Henry Walker, at conversion 'the enemy was defeated, but not annihilated'.³⁵ It was generally maintained that the sign of true, as opposed to false, conversion experience was that the Christian was no longer tempted to commit wilful or major sins. Because it would undermine his sense of election, I argue, Crusoe refuses to fully acknowledge these acts as sinful. Rather, he eventually justifies them and re-enacts them on a greater scale. My analysis of Crusoe's sins and subsequent spiritual decline engages with debate about the relationship between the religious, the colonial and the economic features of the text.³⁶ Crusoe's initial sins, I demonstrate, correspond to Spanish missionary methods, which aid their economic colonial expansion. Later, his attitudes evolve fully in line with Spanish attitudes. The novel depicts how, when it comes to colonial matters, Protestantism is not averse to assuming corrupt Catholic practices; yet a beneficial aspect of Catholicism – a mode of

³⁴ George Alexander Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). See Hunter for more on the adoption of spiritual autobiography and the eighteenth-century novel. *Before Novels*.

³⁵ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 48. Quoting Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), vol. 1, p. 177.

³⁶ See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Pimlico, 2000), and Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

confession that allows the conscience to be alleviated at regular intervals, and thus allows renewed progress to be made in the spiritual journey – has been rejected by English Protestants.

Exploring the tacit confession of sin in *Moll Flanders* illuminates the question of whether Moll sincerely repents at Newgate prison. This question has been much explored. To illustrate Defoe's concern with the impact of post-conversion sin that cannot be confessed nor, therefore, repented, this question is revisited here in tandem with a much neglected question: why is Moll's sentence reduced from execution to transportation? I argue that Moll does, with the aid of a minister not affiliated with the prison, undergo a conversion experience, but her sense of repentance is then altered by a sin arising out of survival. In contrast to this minister, the prison minister is presented in the novel as corrupt, merely wanting a confession from Moll to help the authorities with uncovering other criminals. Regarding the reduction in her sentence, I argue that Moll tacitly admits that, after conversion, she gave in to temptation and secured her release by informing – under the guise of confession – to the Newgate minister. Because it leads to the execution of other criminals, this act impinges on Moll's conscience. However, if Moll were to admit explicitly to committing a wilful sin after 'true' repentance it would mean that she had undergone a false conversion. Moll's failure to confess this act as a sin erodes her sense of repentance. Through presenting dissolution of religious identity as the end result of an afflicted conscience plagued by fear of damnation, Defoe again suggests the value of a confessional system that acknowledges and reconciles serious lapses, and allows renewed spiritual progress.

A focus on hidden confessions in *Roxana* solves the mystery of the disappearance, presumed murder, of Susan; validates the critical opinion that Roxana is depicted as mentally ill; and provides new avenues to explore Defoe's portrayal of mental illness. These issues are centrally important to the critique of Calvinism and its confessional modes in this novel. I situate Roxana's mental decline in relation to her self-representation as reprobate following her initial prostitution of herself, and her inability to find relief from her tormented conscience. Charting the development of religious melancholy into full-blown insanity, I also draw on Freudian analyses of moral masochism and psychosis. These Freudian perspectives, which are rooted in ideas of guilt, sin and confession, are compatible with Defoe's sophisticated depiction of madness. I then explore how Roxana's mental instability leads to increasing sinfulness, and criminal acts which are not explicitly confessed in the narrative.

Through *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* Defoe complicates the idea that confessional autobiography represents truth; in *Roxana* he presents a narrator who deliberately lies. Roxana expresses guilt over the disappearance, presumed murder, of her daughter and implicates her maid Amy as the murderer. I argue that hidden confessions reveal that Roxana is Susan's murderer, and that she had earlier arranged another murder, that of the jeweller – the man whose mistress she becomes to save herself from starvation. Her psychosis means that, as protagonist, Roxana is, to a large extent, unaware of her involvement in the murders. In reviewing her sinful past through her life-narrative, however, she grows in awareness about her involvement. Rather than confess her crimes, she implicates Amy as Susan's murderer, and declares that she herself is 'neither better nor worse' than a 'whore'.³⁷ Roxana hides her crimes because she is fearful of the death penalty – which both here and in *Moll Flanders* Defoe critiques as negatively impacting on repentance. But Roxana's belief that she is reprobate contributes to her failure to make a full confession: since she is damned anyway, confession is futile and true repentance impossible.

The conclusion explores connection between the portrayals of confession in the various genres, showing recurrent themes across the works. These relate to the impact of Protestant confession on early modern authority/individual relations; the development of an individualism that was resistant to Protestant discipline; and the emergence of more complex, divided identities, whether due to a conflict between conformity and rebellion, or an inability to repent. The thesis's genre approach to confession in early modern literature, I argue, highlights that the Protestant emphasis on personal conscience, and the loss of the consolation of auricular confession (relief from guilt and absolution) are central factors of differentiation between the early modern English subject from his/her medieval counterpart, and reveals ways in which Reformation upheavals in confession impacted on the modern era.

³⁷ Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunate Mistress*, in P. N. Furbank (ed.), *The Novels of Daniel Defoe*, W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank (gen. eds.), 10 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), vol. 9, p. 48.

Chapter One

Confession, Augustine, and the Reformation

This chapter explores the development of auricular confession; the theological basis for Protestant attacks on the sacrament, and the development of alternative confessional systems; and socio-religious factors that influenced attitudes to confessional practices in England during the Reformation. It begins with an examination of St. Augustine's spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions*, written in Africa in the late fourth century.

Augustine and Confession

In his spiritual autobiography Augustine confesses his youthful sinfulness and records how God's providence guided his conversion to the Christian faith. When he wrote the *Confessions*, between 397 and 398, the Church in Africa – where he was born and spent the larger part of his life – was rapidly expanding. When Augustine was a child, however, Christianity was very much a minority religion. He was introduced to the faith by his Christian mother, Monica. His father, Patricius, who is barely mentioned in the text, was a Pagan who converted to Christianity on his deathbed. As was the custom at the time, Augustine was not baptised as a child. One reason why baptism generally took place in adulthood was that it allowed the believer to participate in the catechumenate – 'the rigorous program of instruction and preparation that preceded baptism'.¹ In early adulthood Augustine came to view Christianity as a primitive belief system supported by an unsophisticated, ill-defined theology. Much to his mother's annoyance and regret, he moved away from Christian orthodoxy, becoming a 'hearer among the Manicheans' – a Christian sect which attempted to explain the problem of evil by positing dualisms of good and evil, light and dark, soul and body.² However, he found little satisfaction in Manichaeism either. While travelling in Milan and Rome in his thirties, Augustine encountered a form of Neo-Platonist Christian theology which broke through the 'intellectual barriers that had prevented him from fully embracing the

¹ Judith Chelius Stark, 'Introduction', in Judith Chelius Stark (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 1

² Michael Mendelson, 'Saint Augustine', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 4, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/augustine/>> [accessed 10 June, 2011].

Christian faith'.³ This renewal of belief saw Augustine confront his sinfulness. At conversion, God provided the strength for him to commit to a Christian life:

you hear the groans of captives and set us free from the bonds we have forged for ourselves, providing only we no longer defy you in the arrogance of a spurious freedom.⁴

Soon after his conversion experience, at the age of thirty-three, Augustine was baptised into a 'more orthodox [than Manichaeism], if more neoplatonizing, Christianity'.⁵

The *Confessions* was written ten years after Augustine's conversion. Consisting of thirteen books (or chapters), the first nine books depict Augustine's life until just after his baptism. Book X is told from Augustine's present position. Departing from autobiography, the last three books meditate on philosophical and theological questions, and include an interpretation of the book of *Genesis*. The text is addressed to God, but Augustine also intended for it to be read by other devoted Christians. When he wrote the *Confessions* he was an influential bishop; the work served as a means to develop and promote his doctrinal beliefs.

During the Reformation, Augustine's writings were used by both mainstream Protestant polemicists and Catholic writers to display continuity between their beliefs and practices and those of the early Church. This was in order to prevent their beliefs being rendered schismatic, and to demonstrate the opposite regarding their opponents. In terms of confessional practices, Protestants seemingly had the upper hand. It was argued that the *Confessions* demonstrated that auricular confession was not practised in the early Church. Rather, the text illustrated the importance of confessing directly to God. Its public nature also resonated with the Protestant emphasis on public confession. This analysis argues that to see the *Confessions* as reflecting early Church penitential practices obscures the fact that Augustine was himself an early Church reformer. I explore the degree to which the *Confessions* corresponded to the confessional practices of the early Church, and examine ways in which the text intersected with the development of auricular confession.

To provide context for the text's critique of contemporary confessional practices, I will begin by assessing key ideas that frame Augustine's confession of sin in the text.

³ Felicia McDuffe, 'Augustine's Rhetoric of the Feminine in *The Confessions*: Woman as Mother, Woman as Other', in *Feminist Interpretations*, p. 102.

⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York, New City Press: 1999), pp. 87-88. Hereafter, references to this work are provided parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Mendelson, 'Saint Augustine', p. 4.

The first is Augustine's understanding of original sin and the significance he places on the corruption of the sexual instinct. I also explore how he negatively construes Church attitudes toward adult baptism as promoting sin. I then locate Augustine's view on original sin in relation to a textual critique of early Church beliefs about the transforming effects of baptism. I argue that this critique of post-baptismal purity has implications for confession. With reference to the text and the confessional practices he performed as Bishop of Hippo, I then further consider Augustine's relationship to the penitential practices of the early Church and the development of auricular confession.

Augustine believed that the disobedience to God that occurred in the original Fall was caused by 'human appetites, the chief of which is sexual desire'.⁶ He argued that following the Fall, the sexual instinct became thoroughly corrupted and original sin is transmitted to each individual at conception.⁷ In arguing that wo/man were born sinful, Augustine departed from the prevailing view of the early Church: that humans were born sin-free. While it was '[l]argely as a result of Augustine's later writings' that the doctrine of original sin was to become accepted in Christianity, he first laid out this doctrine in broad strokes in the *Confessions*.⁸

From the first book of his spiritual autobiography Augustine locates his sinfulness in relation to postlapsarian corruption. Another reason why children were not baptised in the period was because '[b]efore original sin became an accepted doctrine in Christianity . . . infants were not considered sinful and so did not need baptism as much as those who were able to sin'.⁹ Disputing the view that infants are innocent of sin, Augustine observes babies' jealous greed for milk at the expense of their 'fellow-nurslings' (46). This leads him to conclude that '[t]he only innocent feature in babies is their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent' (46). Because he is unable to remember his own infant years, Augustine uses observation, rather than memory, to locate his own infancy in original sin. He can, however, recall his childhood, and he describes himself during this period of his life as a 'great sinner' (52).

In Book II, Augustine links his adolescence – the period of life which he depicts as the most sinful – to the Fall of man. While as a child Augustine was a 'great sinner', he nevertheless took care to keep himself 'whole and sound' and so 'preserve the trace'

⁶ Horton Davies, *The Vigilant God: Providence in the Thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 36.

⁷ E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 45-46.

⁸ Stark, 'Introduction', p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

in himself of God's 'profound mysterious unity' (60). With the onset of adolescence Augustine becomes consciously 'intent on pleasing [himself] and winning favour in the eyes of men', taking his 'fill of hell' through the twin sins of lust and pride (62). The centrepiece of Book II is the famous episode where he steals pears from an orchard: Augustine's equivalent of Adam's first sin.¹⁰ Brown contends that Augustine treats sexual sins as 'not very important'. He claims that 'in [Augustine's] eyes they paled into insignificance before . . . [t]he pointless robbing of a pear tree', arguing that it is this 'single act of vandalism' that really interests this 'great connoisseur of the human free will'.¹¹ As Brown suggests, there is little mention of sex in Augustine's substantial discussion of his motives for stealing the pears. Suggesting pride rather than lust, he calls the theft 'a shady parody of omnipotence by getting away with something forbidden' (71). However, in his doctrine of original sin, 'the [postlapsarian] sexual instinct is never without some flaw of egotism'.¹² Placed immediately after his initiation into adolescent lust, the theft of pears implies that, when it comes to expression in adolescence, the corrupt sexual instinct generates rebellious pride.

The fruit-stealing episode serves as an analogy for how postlapsarian corruption becomes fully manifest in adolescence. Augustine describes how his rampant lust leads him to form a non-marital sexual relationship. His adolescent corruption also leads to greater pride. Worldly ambition sees him become a teacher of rhetoric – a profession he would denounce after his conversion. As well as illustrating how sinfulness is increased with the onset of sexual desire, Augustine's depiction of his fall also serves as a means to critique wider society's sinfulness, and its potentially destructive influence on the individual. Augustine claims that the stealing of pears is a crime he is sure he would not have committed on his own, but was the result of 'a seduction of the mind' by the group (71). Later his mind is seduced by those propounding the heretical beliefs of Manichaeism. Augustine also includes Monica – his Christian mentor – as one whose influence hindered his spiritual development. Through Monica, he also criticises the Church. This occurs when Augustine describes how Monica had denied him baptism although he had begged for it when seriously ill as a child; and how she later sanctioned his non-marital relationship and encouraged his academic career. In the early Church,

¹⁰ Kenneth Burke describes the theft of pears as Augustine's version of Adam's original sin. *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 94. Cited in Lyell Asher, 'The Dangerous Fruit of Augustine's *Confessions*', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 66 (1998), 237.

¹¹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 166.

¹² Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 46.

chastity was one thing expected of the baptised Christian: the channelling of the sexual instinct solely towards procreation in marriage. Augustine suggests that Monica deferred his baptism because she feared that the responsibilities of fatherhood and marriage would have stifled his ambition, dashing her hopes for his 'academic success' (67). Yet, in delaying his baptism and sanctioning his sexual relationship, Monica adhered to dominant views held by the wider Christian community. Another reason why baptism generally took place in adulthood was that it was believed that it was better to indulge the excesses of adolescence rather than to seek to prevent them by early baptism. Critiquing adult baptism, Augustine remarks that, because he was not baptised as a child, 'the restraints against sinning were in some degree slackened' in him (51). Later, when Augustine describes his difficulty in embracing chastity before his conversion, he locates this struggle in both the weakness of the postlapsarian will and this slackening of the restraints against sinning. The latter is suggested when he attributes the intensity of his struggle to habit:

The force of habit that fought against me had grown fiercer by my own doing, because I had come willingly to this point where I now wished not to be. And who has any right to object, when just punishment catches up with the sinner? (193).

While he says he willingly came to this point, there is also a continued criticism of the Church's practice of delaying baptism, which contributes to the satisfaction of sexual desire becoming a 'compulsion' (192).¹³ Thus, Church attitudes to baptism are depicted as promoting sinfulness.

Another of Augustine's main objectives is to undermine the view that baptism constituted a dramatic breach with the sinful past. This critique of baptism, informed by his doctrine of original sin, leads to a concomitant critique of early Church confessional practices. Murray has referred to the sacrament of penance as being 'the result of a paradox that runs down the spine of Christianity': after baptism one is born again in Christ, yet one is still a human being liable to sin.¹⁴ Early Church penitential practices did not acknowledge that, in general, the baptised Christian was liable to commit sin after baptism. The sacrament was used to reconcile to the Church individuals who had

¹³ At this point, on his mother's wishes, Augustine had broken off his fifteen-year relationship with his 'concubine'. His relationship with this woman (unnamed in the *Confessions*), the mother of his son Adeodatus, was now hindering his career. He had agreed to an arranged marriage. But, while waiting for his fiancée to come of age, he had started another non-marital sexual relationship.

¹⁴ Murray, 'Confession before 1215', 54.

committed once-off, ‘wilful and major’ sins.¹⁵ It was commonly used for lapsed Christians who wanted to return to the fold after denouncing the Church in times of persecution. Brown has explored how Augustine’s text contests the view held by many of his contemporaries that conversion was ‘as dramatic and as simple as the “sobering up” up of an alcoholic’.¹⁶ Drawing on Brown, I will now demonstrate that by inscribing the baptised Christian in relation to sin, Augustine challenges the efficacy of early Church penitential practices.

Augustine undercuts the popular view of a dramatic difference between pre- and post-baptismal states in Books VIII-X of the *Confessions*. In Book VIII, he critiques the idea of post-baptism purity by highlighting the inherent theatricality and unreality of this idea. This links with a wider textual denunciation of theatre, which in turn links to Augustine’s views on the corrupt sexual instinct. One sin Augustine confesses to in the text is his love of theatre. For the converted, Neo-Platonic Augustine, watching shows is no mere waste of time, but an insidious love of illusions that brings one away from God. In Plato’s view, expressed in *The Republic*, art is ‘by nature’ a ‘third removed from the throne of truth’.¹⁷ Augustine’s influence on Christian thinking is, in large part, due to his merging of Neo-Platonism with Christianity. In the *Confessions* he infuses Plato’s anti-theatricalism with the doctrine of original sin by using the same language, when describing how theatre corrupts, that is used in the text to describe how his lust was ‘rotting’ him to death (199). This occurs as he dismisses the Aristotelian idea that, through its cathartic potentialities, theatre is a pleasure that benefits the emotions. He remarks:

When the theme of the play dealt with other people’s tragedies – false and theatrical tragedies – it would please and attract me more powerfully the more it moved me to tears . . . when I listened to such doleful tales being told they enabled me to superficially scrape away at my itching self, with the result that these raking nails raised an inflamed swelling, and drew stinking discharge from a festering wound (77).

Thus, he locates the theatrical in the realm of the ‘sticky morass of concupiscence’ by a shared visceral language (264).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 171.

¹⁷ Plato, ‘Part X, Theory of Art’, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 339.

Augustine's connection of theatre to the same festering of the soul that results from indulging the pleasures of the flesh underpins the attack presented in Book VIII on the notion that baptism was a spiritual climax. Paglia has argued that in dramatic literature there is a shared quality between male sexuality and the dramatic climax: 'dramatic and sexual climax [operate] in shadowy analogy'.¹⁸ This shared character is suggested by Augustine in the *Confessions*. Regarding Book VIII, Boulding notes the 'drama' with which the conversion episode is filled, but argues that Augustine 'interrupts the account with a long discussion on the nature of free will'.¹⁹ This interruption is purposefully utilised to disrupt the dramatic climax of the scene. At other moments in the text, the rhythms of sexual descriptions are disrupted, desexualised at crucial moments. Sawyer has demonstrated that 'Augustine stops recounting his sexual exploits at the very moment when the reader wants to know more'.²⁰ By highlighting a link between the sexual and the theatrical, and by disrupting the drama of the relation of his conversion, Augustine tacitly suggests that the Church needs to purge itself of theatrical practices and beliefs, especially the dramatic view of conversion. This idea of a spiritual climax – which corresponds to the sexual and theatrical climaxes – promotes illusion and corruption by glossing over the existence of post-baptismal sin.

He continues to critique the notion of baptism as a rebirth in Book IX. This idea is portrayed as simplistic, theatrical and illusory when Augustine describes how he announced, or rather failed to announce, his conversion. To suggest a clean break with the past, conversions were dramatically announced.²¹ According to Brown, the way Augustine announced his conversion was 'notably unspectacular: for he had merely retired punctiliously from a chair of Rhetoric in Milan, at the end of term, on grounds of ill-health'.²² Before his baptism, Augustine held the view that a person was reborn at conversion. He says of his spiritual struggles before conversion: 'how ardently I longed, O my God, how ardently I longed to fly to you away from earthly things' (79). The anti-dramatic way he broke from his old life suggests that soon after baptism Augustine became wary of this belief. His remark; 'I thought it wise to retire unobtrusively rather

¹⁸ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 7.

¹⁹ Boulding, *Confessions*, p. 21.

²⁰ Erin Sawyer, 'Celibate Pleasures: Masculinity, Desire, and Asceticism in Augustine', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6 (1995), 6. Sawyer argues that this is a consequence of Augustine creating 'a new type of asceticism that turns from the pleasures of the body to the pleasures of the struggle against sexuality carried out through foregrounding sexuality'. 'Celibate Pleasures', 3.

²¹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 171.

²² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 156.

than make an abrupt and sensational break’, demonstrates this wariness (210). As Brown argues, Augustine was intent on demonstrating that ‘[n]o such dramatic experience should delude his readers into believing that they could so easily cast off their past identities’.²³

In Book X Augustine more explicitly demonstrates the limitations of spiritual advancement by baptism. Here, for the edification of ‘believing men and women . . . the companions of my joy’ (240), he confesses ‘not as I have been but as I am now, as I am still’ (239). Augustine’s later writings were to posit that ‘though Baptism is the sacrament of the remission of sins both actual and original . . . no believer attains perfection, being tied to the body’s desires’.²⁴ It is because he is still bound by the corrupt flesh that he is open to continued sinfulness despite baptism. There is also a constant battle with the old self. Brown has argued that Augustine believed that by ‘such destructive acts of free-will’ as the stealing of the pears, when ‘a man came to choose the good, he found himself unable to follow his conscious choice wholeheartedly: for his previous actions had forged a “chain of habit”’.²⁵ Continuing his critique of adult baptism, Book X shows that becoming habituated to sin prior to baptism contributes to the struggle with sinfulness afterwards. One reason why Augustine chose to remain single and celibate rather than to take a vow of chastity in marriage after baptism is because the phantom of habitual sin continued to cast a shadow. Through habit, sexual pleasure had become a ‘compulsion’, and he evidently feared that he would be tempted in marriage to engage in sexual actions for sexual pleasure. Even in a celibate state, Augustine finds that he climaxes sexually when he sleeps. Because baptism does not return one to an (illusory) innocent childhood state, Augustine is a man who is ‘a burden’ to himself (262). Despite any spiritual change in himself through conversion and baptism, despite any hope of future spiritual development (aided by meditation and

²³ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 171. During the period, announcements of conversion also gave publicity to the cause. Augustine’s failure to dramatically announce his conversion is made up for by depicting it in the *Confessions*. But it is a public example of conversion that is told in an anti-dramatic, prayerful and introspective style, showing the slow, painful journey to the moment of conversion, and then disrupting the drama of the conversion scene itself.

²⁴ Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 45-46.

²⁵ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 166. Here again Brown – disturbed by what he sees as too strong an interest by readers in Augustine’s sexual ‘sins’, an emphasis, he believes, not warranted by Augustine’s treatment of these sins – attempts to downplay the importance of sexual sin to Augustine. Similarly, Rigby argues that ‘the original and enduring source of [Augustine’s] bondage is not . . . the flesh, but rather proud concupiscence inherited in the soul from Adam’. Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1997), p. 78. According to Sawyer, however, Augustine insisted that the ‘reproductive member’ does not ‘serve the will’ and is the cause of ‘the warfare of the body against will with which Augustine is obsessed’. ‘Celibate Pleasures’, 9.

biblical exegesis promoted in Books XI-XIII), in life, bound to the corrupt body, man's sinfulness remains in opposition to God's glory.

Augustine's self-confession as he is now in Book X promotes confession after conversion. A discussion of the confessional practices that he practised in his role as bishop, when he wrote the *Confessions*, allows a further means to explore its relationship to early Church penitential practices. Tambling argues that the *Confessions* is, in part, reflective of the public self-castigation encompassed in exomologesis – the first Christian penitential system which reconciled 'wilful and major' sinners to the Church.²⁶ Isidore, bishop of Seville (600-636), described exomologesis as:

the discipline of prostrating and humiliating the man, in garb and diet, by his lying in sackcloth and ashes, by his fouling his body with filth, by his casting down his mind in griefs, by his reforming in sorrowful care those things wherein he sinned.²⁷

After a period of public self-display the sinner was readmitted to the Church. A penitent was absolved at the end, but 'was under the power of penalties' – chastity, for example – always.²⁸ However, while compulsory exomologesis was not ended until the fifth century (by Pope Leo I (440-461)), the practice was already in decline when Augustine wrote his *Confessions* in the fourth century.²⁹ Exomologesis was starting to be replaced by canonical penance, a less humiliating form of public penance. Fitzgerald argues that canonical penance was the form of the sacrament practised by Augustine when he was bishop.³⁰ As evident from Isidore's description, exomologesis was overtly dramatic. Foucault also emphasises the theatricality of exomologesis, calling the practice 'a dramatic expression of the situation of the penitent as sinner which makes manifest his status as sinner'.³¹ As canonical penance was less theatrical, the view that this form of Church penance influenced the public nature of the *Confessions* would be in keeping with Augustine's efforts – evident in the *Confessions* and other of his writings – to purge the Church of dramatic practices.³²

²⁶ Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 30.

²⁷ O. B. Watkins, *A History of Penance* (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), p. 574. Cited in Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 30.

²⁸ Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 30.

²⁹ Murray, 'Confession before 1215', 80.

³⁰ Allan D. Fitzgerald, 'Penance', in Allan D. Fitzgerald *et al* (eds.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 643.

³¹ Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', pp. 248-249.

³² In a later sermon, Augustine expressed concerns about the expansion of the Church, which also illustrates his concern with theatrical Church practices: 'There are many now you see, beyond number

Fitzgerald argues that in his role as bishop Augustine also endorsed daily, private confession.³³ This reflects the emphasis in Book X on continued sinfulness after baptism requiring ongoing confession. There has been some debate about whether this form of confession was inspired by monastic confessional practices. Tambling sees the *Confessions* as mirroring both early Church public confession and, in its representation of confession as ‘a repeatable task demonstrating progress in the spiritual life’, the confessional practices of the monastic community.³⁴ Lending support to Tambling’s argument is the fact that when Augustine was in Italy he had ‘visited the first monasteries’; and following his conversion, ‘the monastic life had come to appeal to him’.³⁵ Foucault argues that, after the establishment of Christian monasteries, monastic confession ‘nourished the spread of [regular] confession among the laity’.³⁶

Placing monastic confession in opposition to exomologesis, Foucault contrasts the emphasis on sinful thoughts and dispositions in monastic confession with the overt behavioural sinning that was the focus of early Church penitential rites.³⁷ In ways characteristic of the emphasis placed in auricular confession on the confessant’s need to investigate his/her interior, Augustine explores hidden motives, habits and impulses that could cause him to act contrary to God’s will. He speaks of the importance of the intention of the agent, rather than just the ‘appearance of an action’ (88); and of the problem of interior sins that need to be revealed to oneself if they are to be confronted: ‘I am sorely afraid about my hidden sins which are plain to your eyes but not to mine’ (277). Thus, the argument that the *Confessions* reflects monastic confession may account, to some degree, for Augustine’s emphasis on his inner-sinfulness.

Later, Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, developed in the *Confessions*, directly impacted on the development of auricular confession. In the sixth century, tariff penance introduced by missionaries from Irish monasteries (so called because after confession, the confessor imposed a tariff of a penance, which, as in canonical penance, accorded with the severity of the sins confessed, but did not require temporary expulsion from the

that is, they come, they enter, they fill the churches; they also fill the theatres, the same ones as fill the churches, they fill them beyond number’. Sermon 250, 7:122. Quoted in Asher, ‘Dangerous Fruit’, 247. Asher argues that ‘throughout his career Augustine was intensely concerned with the nature of his audience’s attention—not merely with the state of their absorption but with its object: he wondered whether it was theology or theatrics that they were interested in’. ‘Dangerous Fruit’, 229.

³³ Fitzgerald, ‘Penance’, p. 643.

³⁴ Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 30.

³⁵ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 129.

³⁶ Foucault, ‘Technologies of the Self’, p. 249.

³⁷ See Foucault ‘On the Government of the Living’, p. 85, and ‘Sexuality and Solitude’, pp. 178-179 in *Ethics*.

Church) led to confession becoming ‘an established, recurrent practice that spread throughout the West’.³⁸ Tariff penance led to the production of the first body of penitential manuals, which described sins and gave appropriate penances. To underscore the importance of regular confession and penance, the manuals often:

employed the popular metaphor of the ‘shipwreck’ of the human condition of sin, consequent upon the Fall. The first plank that drowning humanity clings to is that of baptism, which redeems original sin. But the inevitable committing of sins means that the second plank, of penance, is necessary to remit sins and provide a means to reach salvation.³⁹

As the doctrine of original sin took hold, baptism became the sacrament for absolving original sin only, while penance became the sacrament for the remission of actual sins.

Augustine’s emphasis on the corrupt sexual will also heavily influenced the sins that were focused on in both this first body of penitential literature, and the second, more sophisticated, body produced after the 1215 decree.⁴⁰ In medieval penitential manuals, sexually transgressive behaviour – within and outside of marriage – was given pride of place.⁴¹ Mahoney argues that this emphasis on sexual corruption, which dominated Catholic thought in the medieval period, stemmed, in large part, from Augustine’s teaching on sexual morality.⁴²

Thus, Augustine’s *Confessions* stands in complex relation to the practice of auricular confession. As demonstrated, there is evidence to suggest that Augustine was influenced by monastic confessional practices, and that this influence is evident in the interiority displayed throughout the text, and Book X’s promotion of ongoing confession after conversion. At the very least, Augustine’s doctrine of original sin supported the need for recurring confession, and his focus on sexual corruption influenced the penitential literature which was to support auricular confession in the medieval period. Augustine’s confessional practices are, however, fundamentally different from auricular confession in one key regard. Monastic confessional practices

³⁸ Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation’, 35

³⁹ Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation’, 63.

⁴⁰ According to Mahoney, the first penitential manuals demonstrate an ‘appallingly rigid systemized approach to sin. . . . [they are] selective in their subject-matter, negative in their approach, and shocking in their more lurid passages’. *Moral Theology*, p. 14. In contrast, the 1215 manuals were “‘learned theological treatises’”. John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study in the Roman Catholic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 19. Quoting John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (London: S. C. M., 1952).

⁴¹ See Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, pp. 5-14, and Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 2.

⁴² Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, p. 43.

also included the subjugation to spiritual authority that later was to characterise auricular confession. In the *Confessions*, when Augustine promotes ongoing confession for struggles with sin after baptism, he does not advocate confession to a priest.

My discussion in Section Three of Toby Matthew's 1620 introduction to his Catholic translation of the *Confessions*, and Matthew Sutcliffe's response, provides a means to further examine the nature of Augustine's influence on Catholic and Protestant thought and confessional practices. The next section examines confession in the Reformation. It outlines Catholic and Protestant attitudes, and discusses socio-religious issues that informed confessional modes in England. According to Tentler, Catholic confession both disciplined the Christian in a socio-religious sense and provided consolation regarding salvation: 'social control and the cure of anxiety are accommodated in one institutional system'.⁴³ I examine how the traditional functions of confession as both discipline and consolation influenced attitudes to confession in Reformation England.

Confession and the English Reformation

During the sixth and seventh centuries, tariff penance competed with canonical penance. Eventually canonical penance took on a legal aspect and was used for holding public sinners to account, while tariff penance was used for absolving private sins.⁴⁴ Throughout Europe, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, some dioceses insisted – 'although not always without resistance' – that it was a Christian obligation to confess to a priest, receive absolution and do penance.⁴⁵ Confession was established as a universal Christian obligation in 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council, under Innocent III, decreed that all adults should make an annual confession to a priest. 1215 marks the full institutionalisation of Catholic confession. As Murray remarks, '[o]n the one side . . . [was] the individual critically rehearsing the memory of his private, inner life; on the other, an institutional functionary who listens and reacts according to principles laid down by his office'.⁴⁶ In 1227 the Council of Narbonne instructed all Christians over the age of fourteen to make at least a yearly confession, and in the fifteenth century the age of confession dropped to seven.⁴⁷

⁴³ Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 357.

⁴⁴ Murray, 'Confession before 1215', 56.

⁴⁵ Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Murray, 'Confession before 1215', 51.

⁴⁷ Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin: the Subject*, p. 44.

Before the Reformation, the spiritual validity of the 1215 decree was not universally accepted. For example, in the fourteenth century the English reformer John Wycliffe attacked the papacy on many issues, including auricular confession. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries Lollards, supporters of Wycliffe, attempted to disrupt ‘the traditional relationship between sin and the individual’.⁴⁸ According to Little, for Lollards, the concept of sin had less to do with ‘the process of self-examination that should lead to individual reform’ and more to do with the need for institutional reform.⁴⁹ In the late middle ages, the practice of indulgences – whereby some moneyed Christians cancelled out the penance imposed by the confessor by giving donations to the Church – aroused much discontent about the sacrament. By the beginning of the early modern period, many voices had joined in a call for reform of confession.

Appealing to existing discontent about the practice of the sacrament, Luther’s first line of attack on the Roman Catholic confessional system – the *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* (1517) – centred on the trafficking of indulgences. Mahoney notes that the ‘ominous connection . . . between money payments and the remission of punishments’ led ‘many protesters to Wittenberg’.⁵⁰ This, however, was just the beginning of Luther’s assault on confession. In 1520, in *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, he called into question the 1215 injunction to confess. Luther contended that the only objective behind the Church hierarchy’s insistence on confession was ‘to extend their own dictatorship by force and violence as far, widely and deeply as possible’.⁵¹ He presented auricular confession as bearing no relation to early Church penitential practices; rather it was initiated by the Fourth Lateran Council as an instrument of priestly control.

In the context of Luther’s wider theology, auricular confession was inherently corrupt because it was based on the idea of salvation through an individual’s free will. In contrast, Luther believed that ‘people are unable to respond to God without Divine grace’.⁵² In Catholic theology, good works were one means through which the individual’s free will was expressed, and the works themselves aided salvation. The undertaking of the penance imposed by the confessor to remit sin constituted good works. For Luther, the idea of good works diminished the supremacy of God’s grace. He

⁴⁸ Little, *Confessions and Resistance*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Little, *Confessions and Resistance*, p. 36.

⁵⁰ Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, p. 11.

⁵¹ Luther, ‘Pagan Servitude of the Church’ p. 315.

⁵² Luther defined contrition as a ‘purely passive sorrow’, Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 354.

believed that the individual found salvation through faith alone.⁵³ Luther's highlighting of abuses lent support to his stance: the confessional practices of the medieval Church exemplified how false beliefs result in a degenerate Church. Another particular failing that Luther saw in auricular confession was its morally pernicious effect. He felt it was ineffectual in terms of directing moral behaviour, encouraging moral laxity by offering a get-out clause of a light penance to sinners.⁵⁴

The issue of priests absolving sins was also central to Luther's attack on auricular confession. In Catholicism, priestly absolution was justified by a biblical passage interpreted as them holding the power of the keys: 'a power entrusted to priests [by Christ] by which they could apply the passion of Christ and the forgiveness He won to the sins of penitent Christians'.⁵⁵ In *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, arguing against the Catholic interpretation of the power of the keys, he stated that only God absolved sins. His absolution could be conveyed to a contrite sinner by a fellow believer, but the declaration of God's absolution did not lie exclusively in the domain of the priesthood: 'Christ manifestly gave the power of pronouncing forgiveness to anyone who had faith'.⁵⁶ Luther divided sins into those that were a matter of church discipline and those that were not. Public sins – 'adultery, murder, fornication, theft, robbery, usury, slander, etc' – were a matter of church discipline and needed to be publicly confessed before the minister and the congregation. He also advocated a public confession of general sinfulness by the entire congregation at service. Private sins – 'the secret sins of the heart' (which, Bossy argues, largely meant 'internal sexual motions that affected no one') – were a matter of private communion with God. Luther argued that if you had sinned against an individual you were to confess to him/her, though s/he must not impose a penance. He also advocated that those tormented in conscience for other reasons were to confess to a compassionate believer.⁵⁷ This form of private confession was voluntary.

Tentler states that Luther's attack on private confession stemmed largely from the belief that it 'tormented rather than consoled'.⁵⁸ Luther argued that auricular confession promoted an obsession with the details and instances of sin, which led to scrupulosity: an

⁵³ Livingstone, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 359.

⁵⁴ See Murray, 'Confession before 1215', 52.

⁵⁵ Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 65.

⁵⁶ Luther, 'Pagan Servitude of the Church', p. 321.

⁵⁷ John Bossy, 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (1975), 26-27. Quoting from Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity*, in J. Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selected Writings* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 314-24.

⁵⁸ Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 351.

anxiety-ridden, incessant examination of the conscience. He argued that it was ‘enough if we sorrow for those sins which are actually gnawing our conscience’.⁵⁹ However, without the closure of priestly absolution, Protestant self-examination exacerbated the potential for scrupulosity. As Sinfield puts it: ‘Protestant self-examination is in a way confession, but it shifts the whole business inside the consciousness . . . [and] since there was no external resistance there could be no external reassurance’.⁶⁰ In addition, Tentler argues, while Luther’s teaching put the emphasis on consolation ‘even at the expense of discipline’, in the confessional practices he promoted, ‘Luther did not abolish the sense of sin that arises from the personal admission of a list of transgressions’. Over time, it became evident to Luther that, without the consolation of one of God’s ministers pronouncing absolution, self-examination could cause consciences to become afflicted. He came to believe that ‘to go to a minister of the word, unburden your conscience, and hear him pronounce absolution was a comfort essential to poor sinful Christians’.⁶¹ This eventual softening towards the issue of private priestly confession demonstrates an acknowledgement by Luther that auricular confession did console. It was, however, his initial, sustained attack on Catholic confession that was to have far-reaching, long-lasting, effects on Protestant thought.⁶²

As the spiritual validity of auricular confession came under scrutiny, for Protestant reformers the practice came to signify Catholic corruption. For other church reformers, debate about confession continued to centre on the corrupt and ineffectual practices of the medieval Church. To address the growing threat of Protestantism, and to appease Catholic reformers, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) saw the hierarchy reform church practices, defend established traditions, and define ambiguous doctrinal positions. At Trent, the Catholic church distanced itself from the excesses of the indulgence system (and from the general unhealthy obsession with sin that had developed in the middle ages in an atmosphere of fear of purgatory).⁶³ In the debate about confession, one issue that had come to prominence was the unsuitability of many clergymen to guide penitents through the penitential sacrament; an issue that many felt had rendered the 1215

⁵⁹ Luther, ‘Pagan Servitude of the Church’, p. 318.

⁶⁰ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 163. Quoted in Stegner, ‘Try What Repentance Can’, 106.

⁶¹ Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 349, 357. See also Bossy, ‘History of Confession’, 27.

⁶² For an examination of Lutheran attitudes to private confession in the sixteenth century, see Ronald K. Rittgers, ‘Private Confession and the Lutheranization of Sixteenth-Century Nördlingen’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 36 (2005), 1065-1067.

⁶³ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 10-16.

command impractical and open to abuse. The penitential manuals circulated after 1215 were meant to facilitate a greater responsibility among the clergy for the spiritual care of parishioners. But, despite increased literacy among the lay clergy, and theological support from the hierarchy, on the whole, the vision of the Fourth Lateran Council of parish-based spiritual guides/confessors did not materialise.⁶⁴ The practice of confessing to friars, who had traditionally facilitated confession, and who were generally better educated, persisted. According to Rex, in pre-Reformation England, friars were ‘especially valued as confessors’ and ‘enjoyed great credit in society . . . especially with the gentry and the civic elite’.⁶⁵ A friar was generally viewed as both more ‘worldly-wise’ and more spiritually knowledgeable than a parish priest.⁶⁶ In addition, friars travelled to facilitate confession, affording a comforting anonymity to penitents.

At Trent, under the broad aim of countering the Reformation by instilling ‘an activist, well-instructed laity, steered by an activist and well-trained clergy’, the issue of the training and education of the clergy was re-visited with renewed vigour.⁶⁷ Within the context of increased training, jurisdiction over confession was placed firmly with parish priests. To offset concerns about the confessor’s right to absolve sins, it was argued that Christ had bestowed on priests, by ‘virtue of the power of the keys’, the ability to ‘pronounce the sentence of remission or retention of sins’.⁶⁸ Addressing Luther’s opinion that God’s absolution could be pronounced by any of the faithful, Trent declared that this view was ‘false and absolutely foreign to the truth of the Gospel’.⁶⁹ In carefully chosen wording designed to marginalise friars, it was stated that the Gospel made clear that only ‘bishops and priests’ have this power.⁷⁰ This rejection of friars as confessors allowed the Catholic church to neuter much of the Reformation attack on abuses: reformers had portrayed friars as ‘prime representatives of the old corruption’.⁷¹ The introduction of the confessional box addressed the issue of anonymity – as MacCulloch notes, it provided a

⁶⁴ See Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, p. 22, n. 89.

⁶⁵ Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 2006), p. 155. According to Tentler, there was tension between friars and priests as parish priests fought for ‘sole jurisdiction’ over confession, and that this tension even erupted into ‘open armed conflict’. *Sin and Confession*, p. 64, n. 15.

⁶⁶ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 32.

⁶⁷ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 328.

⁶⁸ H. J. Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: English Translation* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1978), p. 92.

⁶⁹ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, p. 95. See also Lee W. Gibbs, ‘Richard Hooker’s “Via-Media” Doctrine of Repentance’, *The Harvard Theological Review*, 48 (1991), 67.

⁷⁰ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, p. 95.

⁷¹ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 33.

powerful combination of individual privacy and an intensely personal experience with one's parish priest.⁷²

Thus, the Council of Trent addressed the excess, corruption and ineptitude that had tainted the practice of auricular confession throughout the Middle Ages. It did not, however, change the theological assumptions that underpinned the confessional system. The doctrine of free will was affirmed. In direct opposition to Luther's views on man attaining salvation through faith alone – a belief dismissed at Trent as a 'vain and ungodly confidence'⁷³ – theologians continued to maintain 'that in some way man must take a share in the act of justification . . . he must co-operate with the grace of God'.⁷⁴ At the Council of Trent, confession was affirmed as 'instituted by the Lord . . . by divine law necessary for all who have fallen after baptism'.⁷⁵ As Trent encouraged the Catholic church to state exactly its doctrinal positions and practices, Lutheran and Reformed Protestants also 'buttressed their differing positions with an increasing array of [C]onfessional statements, saying exactly what they did and did not believe in'.⁷⁶ In Reformation England, as internal and external pressures caused vacillations between Protestantism and Catholicism, and later, struggles for power between *via media* Protestants (who valued some continuity with the medieval Church) and orthodox Calvinists (who sought the full reform of the English church), arriving at a Confession of faith that did not cause dissatisfaction to some sections of English society proved to be a long and arduous process.

The English Reformation began in 1532, when Henry VIII – to validate his divorce from Catharine of Aragon and his marriage to Anne Boleyn – broke with the Roman church and proclaimed himself the head of the English church. Some critics argue that Henry had more of a reforming spirit than he is generally given credit for: that the break from Rome had deeper roots than the Pope's denial of Henry's divorce, and threat of excommunication.⁷⁷ At best, however, Henry had mixed attitudes to Protestantism. This ambivalence, as well as significant internal and external opposition to

⁷² MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 412.

⁷³ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 3, 5.

⁷⁴ Hurbert Jedin, *Council of Trent*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), vol. 2, p. 177.

⁷⁵ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, p. 92.

⁷⁶ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 317.

⁷⁷ See John Schofield, *Philip Melancthon and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) p. 122, and G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

Protestantism taking hold in England, hindered a full-scale Reformation in England under his reign.

In 1539, Henry sanctioned a religious act designed to reaffirm Catholic doctrines and practices. This act enforced six articles, one of which ordered that auricular confession was to be retained. According to Schofield, this was in contradiction to Henry's own beliefs. He argues that, while in the Assertion (*Asserio Septem Sacramentorum* (1521), the Henrician church's initial defence of Catholicism against Protestantism⁷⁸) 'Henry had raged against Luther for denying that confession was proved by scripture', by 1539 he had changed his mind.⁷⁹ In opposition to one of his key advisors, Bishop Tunstal, Henry believed that 'confession was no longer a command of God. The reformers had done their homework, and had managed to convince Henry that the Church fathers did not insist on confession by law of God after all'.⁸⁰ Bernard agrees, arguing that for Henry it had become 'quite plain that confession was not required by God's law'. He agreed to keep sacramental confession because 'it was simply expedient, but no more'.⁸¹ While at this point it was convenient for Henry broadly to affirm Catholic doctrine and practices, discipline of the masses appears to have been an additional reason for the King's retention of the sacrament in contradiction to his own religious beliefs.

In a decisive move after splitting with Rome, Henry had ordered the dissolution of the monasteries, disbanding 'what constituted centres of papal religious education and discipline'. One of the 'specialisms' of the disbanded monasteries was auricular confession, the centre of Catholic church discipline in England.⁸² During the medieval period, both auricular confession and ecclesiastical courts operated to ensure discipline.⁸³ During the sixteenth century other Protestant countries reformed ecclesiastical courts in line with Protestant disciplinary procedures.⁸⁴ At this point in England, however, church

⁷⁸ Henry 'took the credit' for the work, and it earned him the title 'Defender of the Faith'. Livingstone, *Oxford Christian Dictionary*, p. 267.

⁷⁹ Schofield, *Philip Melancthon*, p. 122.

⁸⁰ Ibid. See S D. G. Newcombe, 'Tunstal, Cuthbert (1474–1559)', *ODNB*. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27817>> [accessed 14 Dec 2011].

⁸¹ Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, p. 505.

⁸² Griffiths-Osborne, 'Confession, the Reformation', 49.

⁸³ Murray, 'Confession before 1215', 56, 58.

⁸⁴ During the Counter-Reformation, both auricular confession and ecclesiastical courts were targeted for renewal. Carlo Borromeo, the Italian bishop who introduced the confessional box, also 'launched a successful campaign to restore the power and authority of the Church by reviving and expanding the jurisdiction of the old ecclesiastical courts'. Philip S. Gorski, 'Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300 to 1700', *American Sociological Review*, 65 (2000), 154.

courts were not generally held in high regard and had ‘influential enemies’.⁸⁵ Among other things, the courts were seen as infringing on common law. In addition, a large body of clergy was reluctant to disregard their Catholic heritage and change the system. Combined, this meant that the ecclesiastical courts system was not open to reform. In this context, Henry’s retention of the sacrament appears to have been motivated to some degree by a fear that the loss of a formalised disciplinary system would have severe social consequences. Even if, as Stegner argues, before the Reformation confession was little more than a routine yearly task for many English Christians, and that ‘most medieval and early modern Christians made poor confessants’, Catholic confession was, nonetheless, an institution of considerable social control and discipline, one which needed to be retained in Henrician England because there was no adequate alternative system to replace it.⁸⁶

After Henry’s death there was an advancement of Protestantism by Edward VI’s advisors. The 1552 Book of Common Prayer stated that at service a general confession was to be said by the whole congregation, and God’s absolution of the sins of the faithful was to be pronounced by the minister (rather than he himself remitting the sins).⁸⁷ MacCulloch argues that ‘lack of proper Reformed discipline was . . . significant in differentiating the English Church from the other Reformed Churches of Europe’.⁸⁸ Under Edward’s reign the English church began ‘tackling the problem’ of discipline by ‘proposing a new structure of disciplinary courts with an elaborate liturgy of public penance’.⁸⁹ But these efforts at reform were stifled. During Edward’s short reign there was a relative tolerance of Catholic practices. According to Ridley, ‘[t]hose who broke the law’ (for example, by celebrating mass) ‘were liable to fine, but they were not treated as heretics and burned’.⁹⁰ In the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary, auricular confession was reinstated.⁹¹ The Marian church was totally intolerant of religious non-conformity.

⁸⁵ See Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation: 1520-1570* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 10, 11.

⁸⁶ Stegner, ‘Try What Repentance Can’, 106.

⁸⁷ Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation’, 1-2.

⁸⁸ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 594.

⁸⁹ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 594.

⁹⁰ Jasper Ridley, *Bloody Mary’s Martyrs* (London: Constable Publishers, 2001), p. 29.

⁹¹ Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation’, 50-51.

Intent on unifying the country under one faith, ‘Bloody Mary’s’ zealous attempt to purge England of Protestantism included the burning of heretics.⁹²

Elizabeth’s reign saw Calvinism become more dominant in England. Like Luther, Calvin observed the mental anguish instilled by auricular confession. He argued that despite the ‘plasters’ the ‘cruel *butchers*’ offered (such as that ‘every man should do as much as he could’), auricular confession promoted a never-ending uncovering and naming of sins.⁹³ He also acknowledged that the lack of an external judging authority could lead to a lingering sense of sin. In such cases, he advocated confession, not as an obligation, and not leading to absolution, to a compassionate believer, who, ideally, should be a minister.⁹⁴ On the whole, however, Calvin was less concerned by issues of spiritual despair than was Luther. In Calvin’s thought, some degree of despair was vital for spiritual advancement: ‘despair had a necessary and unequivocally positive eschatological function. Properly interpreted, it was a sign of the working of divine providence, part of the punishment preceding redemption that manifested itself in the afflicted conscience’.⁹⁵ Overcoming despair about sin was a sign of election; despair separated the elect from the reprobate masses (see my discussions of spiritual autobiography in Chapter Three and *Roxana* in Chapter Four). In addition, the doctrine of predestination prohibited a movement towards ministerial declaration of God’s absolution, for how could a minister pronounce God’s absolution on the sins of the reprobate?⁹⁶

Traditionally, the promise of eternal salvation and the converse threat of hell had been the prime incentives for Christians to conduct themselves virtuously. In England, anti-Calvinists feared that the doctrine of predestination – which doomed the majority of Christians to eternal damnation – could lead to a general sense of spiritual defeatism, and this was seen as a threat to social order. In the Elizabethan settlement – a *via media* – the

⁹² For a recent view of Marian society which argues that Catholicism was both popular and respected in England before and during Mary’s reign, see Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 259, *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 10 June 2011]. Calvin is referring to the Council of Trent’s attempt to deal with the issue of scrupulosity.

⁹⁴ Calvin argues that while a compassionate believer would suffice, ‘yet we ought principally to choose the Pastor’, whose calling to the ministry was proof of compassion and wisdom. Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 257.

⁹⁵ Angus Gowland, ‘The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy’, *Past and Present*, 191 (2006), 104.

⁹⁶ In Calvinist spiritual courts elsewhere in Europe, sins were judged and the sinner had to demonstrate repentance before he/she was again embraced as a member of the church. Sometimes, ‘obstinate heretics and scandalous sinners’ were excommunicated. Re-admittance to the church, or lack thereof, did not amount to absolution, nor to a withholding of absolution – ‘the disciplinary judgement of the church must in no way prejudice the definitive judgement of God’. Davies, *Vigilant God*, p. 110. Quoting from Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Ford Battles, in vols. XX and XXI of *The Library of Christian Classics* (London and Philadelphia: S. M. C. and Westminster Press, 1962), III, xxiii, I.

English church initially displayed some resistance to promoting Calvinism. Tyacke argues that the Elizabethan Prayer Book (1559) – the staple devotional text of the people – ‘needed careful exposition in order not to contradict predestinarian theology’. Later, however, the thirty-nine articles (1563), ‘the English Confession of faith’, ‘favoured Calvinism’.⁹⁷ Despite resistance, Calvinist voices had come to dominate the English church.

To address the issue of socio-religious discipline, the Elizabethan church revived the old ecclesiastical court system. These courts dealt with, among other things, a range of sexual and marital issues, and prosecution for heresy. Early in her reign, Elizabeth had publicly bestowed toleration on Catholics by allowing Catholic friends to attend court. However, after she was excommunicated in 1570 she became fearful of a Catholic revolt, and prosecuted Catholics.⁹⁸ At certain times, torture was also used by the state to elicit a confession of heresy and, like Mary, Elizabeth burned heretics.⁹⁹ For the most part, Tyacke argues, ‘[i]n the early and middle years of Elizabeth’s reign Calvinism keyed in fairly consistently with political reality’. At home against English Catholics, and later abroad against the Spaniards, Protestants identified themselves as ‘the elect’ who were ‘chosen by God to do battle for the true religion’. However, as the threat of a Catholic revolt receded, as relations with Spain became less confrontational, and as English Calvinist teaching ‘itself [became] more extreme, in line with continental religious developments’, Elizabeth became once more resistant to promoting Calvinist doctrine.¹⁰⁰

One reason for this resistance was that Calvinism had come to encompass a threat to Elizabeth’s power. As Calvinists sought to eradicate the vestiges of Catholic structures and practices from the English church, some Puritans (those Calvinists who saw themselves as a ‘minority of genuinely true believers in an otherwise lukewarm or corrupt mass’) held that the church should be ruled by the elect.¹⁰¹ They advocated Presbyterianism as the appropriate form of church government. Presbyterianism, ‘predicated on a sharp distinction between civil and ecclesiastical power’, ‘effectively

⁹⁷ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Patrick Collinson, ‘Elizabeth I (1533–1603)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8636>> [Accessed 23 June 2011].

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 50. Hanson calls the judicial methods of the Elizabethan era ‘an aberration in English juridical practice’, arguing that ‘the use of torture in Elizabethan England was a brief departure from a legal tradition that abhorred and ridiculed the highly organised practice of judicial torture on the continent’. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, p. 7. Lake also uses the term Puritanism to denote ‘a broad span of opinion’ held by Calvinists who opposed popery. *Ibid.*

removed the prince from the day-to-day running of the church'. In 1572, with the publication of the *Admonition to the Parliament*, the 'full Presbyterian programme was set before the public'.¹⁰² This publication led to the admonition controversy, a debate lasting from 1572 to the 1590s between Presbyterians and *via media* conformists over the correct form of church and state rule. The leading spokesperson for Presbyterianism was Thomas Cartwright. His main opponent, John Whitgift (himself a Puritan), argued that, in their aim for rule by 'the godly',¹⁰³ Presbyterians confused the invisible church with the visible church: that is, they assumed to know God's invisible decree on who was and who was not one of the elect.¹⁰⁴

Another opponent of Presbyterianism was the promoter of Elizabeth's *via media*, Richard Hooker. According to Livingstone, the main aim of Hooker's *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* – his 'anti-Geneva polemic'¹⁰⁵ – was to counteract the Puritan view that 'whatever was not commanded in scriptures was unlawful'.¹⁰⁶ In the *Laws*, Hooker argued that the church 'is an organic, not a static, institution . . . [and that] the Church of England, though Reformed, possesses continuity with the Medieval Church'.¹⁰⁷ The *Laws* consisted of eight books, which were published between 1593-1662 (Books 1-5, before Hooker's death in 1600, Books 6-8, posthumously). Book VI, published in 1648, contains Hooker's *via media* Doctrine of Repentance, which utilised 'insights derived from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions'.¹⁰⁸ Here, Hooker argues the Protestant view that sacraments and 'penance in particular [do not] confer grace', and states that penance itself is not a sacrament. He nevertheless gives confession to a minister sacramental validity by arguing that penance's 'administration in the *internal forum* remains properly sacerdotal'.¹⁰⁹ Within the context of presenting penance as a (quasi) sacrament, Hooker addressed the issue of ministerial absolution. His interpretation of the power of the keys is similar to Luther's in that he diminishes the priestly role in absolution, which he argues is a declaration of absolution, not the power (which is

¹⁰² The *Admonition to the Parliament* was published anonymously, but is generally attributed to two London clergymen, Thomas Wilcox and John Field. Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 7.

¹⁰³ According to Collinson, 'the godly' was the name preferred by many whom others termed Puritan or Precisian with 'derogatory intent'. Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, pp. 7, 28.

¹⁰⁵ Gibbs, 'Richard Hooker', 59

¹⁰⁶ Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 279.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Gibbs, 'Richard Hooker', 60.

¹⁰⁹ Gibbs, 'Richard Hooker', 64.

God's) to absolve sin. However, in opposition to Luther, he insists that the power to 'bestow' and 'with-draw' God's forgiveness lies exclusively with the minister.¹¹⁰ Using the example of Lutheran – rather than Calvinist – confessional practices abroad to justify confession to a minister, he states that 'concerning confession in private Churches of Germany, as well the rest, as *Lutherans* agree, that all men should at certain times confesse their offences to God in the hearing of God's Ministers'.¹¹¹ Acknowledging that there are many sins that could torment a soul that individuals would not want to confess publicly, in a significant statement contained in the marginalia, Hooker states: 'as for private confession, abuses and errors set apart, we condemn it not, but leave it at liberty'.¹¹² The emphasis Hooker places on giving sacramental validity to confession and ministerial absolution, and his allowing for auricular confession, suggests that, in the late sixteenth century, lack of both discipline and consolation in Calvinist confessional practices were still seen as important issues.

Had Book VI of Hooker's *Laws* been published in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, evidently it would have appealed to anti-Calvinists. The fact that it was not published in England until 1648 – nearly fifty years after Hooker's death – is perhaps indicative of its controversial nature. Under the reign of James, who came to power in 1603, English anti-Calvinists became more vocal as they found theological justification for free will in the doctrine of Arminianism (named after the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius). During the early years of James's reign, he tolerated diversity of opinion, though 'he did not want open theological debate or dispute, and in order to avoid it he imposed silence on the anti-Calvinists, while at the same time distancing himself from the excess of hyper-Calvinism'.¹¹³ By 1617, the situation in England had come to an impasse which required either rejection of, or toleration for, Arminianism. There was, nevertheless, continued reluctance by the upper echelons of the English church about promoting predestination. At the Synod of Dort (1618-1619),

¹¹⁰ Richard Hooker, *Of the Lavves of Ecclesiasticall Politie the Sixth and Eighth Books* (London, 1648), p. 59, *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 17 June 2011]. In opposition to Catholic ideas, Hooker argues that ministerial absolution is a fundamental part of the sacrament. At Trent, Catholic theologians defined the 'matter' of the sacrament of penance as consisting of the 'acts of the penitent': contrition, confession and satisfaction. It was argued that 'the absolving words of the minister constitute the form' of the sacrament rather than the matter. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, p. 90. In Book VI, Hooker argues that contrition – which is internal – is a virtue, and that satisfaction 'occurs after the sacrament is administered' and thus 'can have no part in the sacrament'. Hooker defines the sacrament as consisting only of confession and absolution. Against Catholic opinion, he argues: 'to admit the matter as a part [of the sacrament], and not to admit the form, has small congruity with reason'. *Laws*, p. 21

¹¹¹ Hooker, *Laws*, p. 54.

¹¹² Hooker, *Laws*, p. 56

¹¹³ P. G. Lake, 'Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635', *Past and Present*, 114 (1987), 52.

convened to deal with the spread of Arminian ideas throughout Europe, ‘where it was stated that we are not saved by our own merits, virtues, or efforts but by God’s free mercy, the English wanted to omit the word “efforts”’.¹¹⁴ Arminianism was condemned at the Synod of Dort. However, anti-Calvinism was not silenced in England. By 1629 ‘leading ecclesiastical advisers to the government were being accused of Arminianism’, and auricular confession was once again an issue for debate.¹¹⁵ Tyacke argues that Arminianism in England had an ‘associated sacramentalism’.¹¹⁶ Echoing Hooker’s doctrine of repentance, seventeenth-century anti-Calvinists argued that the corruption of auricular confession by Catholics should not detract from the intrinsic value of the practice.¹¹⁷

The first English translation of Augustine’s *Confessions* appeared just a year after the Synod of Dort, when theological disputes about free will and predestination were hotly debated in England. The next section examines the introduction to this translation, written by a well known Catholic exile, as a text which, through Augustine, validates Catholic confession and the theological positions that underpin the practice. I also consider the response it provoked from a leading Calvinist polemicist, thus illuminating further Catholic and Protestant attitudes toward confession.

The *Confessions* and Seventeenth-Century Confession

As discussed above, Augustine was a major influence on the medieval Church. During the Reformation, he also became a source of authority for Protestants, placing him at the centre of polemical arguments.¹¹⁸ Vessey argues that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, translations of major theologians’ works in England were often self-justificatory: ‘the authority of the Fathers had been claimed by another party and must be wrestled back’.¹¹⁹ The first English translation of Augustine’s *Confessions* was published in France in 1620. The translator, Sir Toby Matthew, was an Englishman who

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 223.

¹¹⁷ Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, p. 110.

¹¹⁸ See for example, *Saint Austines Religion*, published in England in 1620. It was written by James Anderton, who, purporting to be a priest, and using the pseudonym John Breereley, attempted to show accord between Augustine’s thought and Catholicism. See Michael Mullett, ‘Anderton, James (1557–1613)’, *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/510>> [accessed 6 March 2012]. This provoked a response from a Calvinist, William Crompton, *St Austin’s Religion* (London, 1624).

¹¹⁹ Mark Vessey, ‘English Translations of the Latin Fathers 1517-1611’, in Irena Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 2, p. 832.

had converted to Catholicism in 1607, and in 1608 was ordered to leave the realm.¹²⁰ What is of interest here is not his translation in itself but the ninety nine-page introduction – titled the ‘Preface to the Pious and Covetous Reader’ – which precedes it.¹²¹ Matthew here attempts to appropriate Augustine’s authority for Catholicism, and uses him ‘to ratify the Catholike faith against the Calvinists’.¹²² It soon provoked a virulent response from the anti-Catholic, pro-Calvinist polemicist, Matthew Sutcliffe.¹²³ The controversy surrounding Matthew’s translation has been discussed elsewhere by critics exploring Catholic and Protestant interpretations of Augustine.¹²⁴ While my analysis also discusses the works as demonstrating the different ways in which Augustine was used as a source of authority for Catholics and Calvinists, and problems inherent in each faith’s attempt to appropriate the saint, the main focus is to demonstrate his use of Augustine to validate auricular confession. I then examine how Sutcliffe uses Augustine to attack Catholicism and auricular confession and validate Protestantism and its confessional modes.

Matthew’s translation of the *Confessions* appeared just one year after the conclusion of the Synod of Dort. The timing, and the fact that he was a well-known Catholic activist, suggests that he was taking advantage of anti-Calvinist sentiment in England to represent Roman Catholicism as the true religion.¹²⁵ Some of the doctrinal issues that Matthew discusses in his introduction do not have a direct bearing on confessional issues. For example – affirming the Catholic belief in transubstantiation – he argues for the ‘reall presence of our Lord, in the Blessed Sacrament’.¹²⁶ The central thrusts of his polemic, however, are to affirm practices and beliefs that support Catholic

¹²⁰ A. J. Loomie, ‘Matthew, Sir Toby (1577–1655)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 11 June 2011]. Matthew’s father (and namesake) was a leading Calvinist bishop who was active in uncovering recusants. See William Joseph Sheils, ‘Matthew, Tobie (1544?–1628)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18342>> [accessed 11 June 2011], and Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 18.

¹²¹ Sir Toby Matthew, ‘Preface to the Reader’, *The Confessions of the Incomparable Doctour S. Augustine, Translated into English* (Saint Omer, 1620), *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 3 May 2011], p. 1.

¹²² Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 44.

¹²³ Nicholas W. S. Cranfield, ‘Sutcliffe, Matthew (1549/50–1629)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26792>> [accessed 14 June 2011].

¹²⁴ Mary Arshagouni Papazian, ‘The Augustinian Donne: How a “second S. Augustine”?’ in Mary Arshagouni Papazian (ed.), *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation, New Perspectives* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), pp. 71–75. Arnoud S. Q. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: the Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500–1620* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 4, 106.

¹²⁵ See Zink, who argues that Matthew was ‘possibly the most visible Catholic figure of his generation’. Sharon Louisa Zink, ‘Translating Men: Humanism and Masculinity in Renaissance Renditions of Patristic Texts’ (unpublished PhD dissertation: University of London, 2001), 205.

¹²⁶ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 75.

attitudes to sin, confession and penance. Regarding his introduction, Matthew states: it ‘Will Much Import to Be Read Ouer First; That So the Book It Selfe May Both Profit, and Please, the Reader, More’.¹²⁷ I explore his introduction as a treatise in its own right, which uses Augustine to attack Calvinism and affirm free will, penance, good works and purgatory. I then argue that the introduction also operates as a polemical framing for the translation of the *Confessions*.

Addressing his introduction to the ‘piovs and covrteovs reader’ of either Catholic or Protestant persuasion, Matthew’s expressed hope is that some who are ‘dangerously infected by the leproseyes’ that had once afflicted Augustine’s soul will read the *Confessions*.¹²⁸ These leprosyies are named as heresy and lust. But it is heresy that preoccupies Matthew. While issues of sexual sin are mentioned in the text, they are not dwelt on. Matthew discusses Augustine’s attraction to Manichaeism in more detail, and some nine pages of the introduction (pp. 51-59) discuss his views on heresy. Augustine, Matthew claims, believed that ‘any heretic & schismatike . . . if he return not to the Catholike Church . . . can by no means be saved’.¹²⁹ Regarding any Calvinist sure of his/her election, Matthew states: ‘As careless I say & confident they are, as if an Angel were sent downe from heaven to let them know, that God could not be God, vnless they could vouchsafe to keep him company in: heaven’.¹³⁰ Here, and elsewhere, Matthew singles out Calvinist predestinarianism as an especially dangerous, prideful heresy.

Calvinist predestinarianism is termed double predestination. This denotes the idea that God actively decreed both the salvation of some and the damnation of the rest. Throughout his Christian life, Augustine held two contradictory positions on predestination. The first, expressed in some of his early works, is called single predestination. This means that some individuals have been saved by God, but that the damnation of the rest is not a divine decree; rather God passively allows the consequence of man’s sinfulness to unfold. Catholics espoused a modified version of single predestination. They argued that some exceptionally holy people (such as Augustine) were predestined for salvation. However, Catholic teaching ‘also took account of the Greek doctrine represented by St. John of Damascus’. He held that God ‘antedecently wills the universal salvation of everyone, but in consequence of their sins, He wills

¹²⁷ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 1.

¹²⁸ Matthew, ‘Preface’, pp. 1, 96.

¹²⁹ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 54. There was debate about the source of this quotation. Matthew acknowledges that it may not have been written by Augustine, but by a holy father who lived within forty years of him, St. Fulgentius.

¹³⁰ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 96.

eternal damnation for some'.¹³¹ Thus, in Catholic teaching, the damned are not predestined to damnation, but damned because of their sins. God, omniscient, sees their fall from grace, and wills their damnation. Catholic beliefs on predestination affirm that the majority of Christians – the non-predestined – can attain salvation.

Later in life, Augustine espoused a doctrine of double predestination. It was as a result of the Pelagian controversy that Augustine arrived at this belief. This controversy began when the English theologian, Pelagius (who taught in Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries), argued that the *Confessions*' emphasis on man's inability to act righteously without the intervention of God 'destroyed human responsibility'.¹³² Pelagius' umbrage sparked a long debate between Augustine and Pelagius's followers. Pelagians claimed that people can make the initial steps towards salvation, independent of God's grace. Ultimately, Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy by the Church. The controversy also caused Augustine to become increasingly dark and pessimistic in his theology. He came to believe that the 'overwhelming majority . . . are justly predestined to eternal punishment by an omnipotent God, intermingled with a small minority whom God, with unmerited mercy, had predestined to be saved'.¹³³ Despite Augustine's latter views, the Catholic hierarchy considered it heresy to interpret his thought (or any biblical passages) as indicating double predestination. Admitting that Augustine believed in double predestination would mean admitting that, at least in later life, he did not believe in the possibility of atoning for sin.

To appropriate Augustine as a Catholic church father, and to condemn Calvinist predestinarianism, Matthew refutes the idea that Augustine believed in double predestination. This occurs as he addresses the issue of predestination in Augustine's later works with reference to both Pelagianism and Augustine's other main adversaries, the Manicheans. Arguing for the circumstantial context of Augustine's latter predestinarianism, Matthew claims that Augustine often addressed the issue at hand, rather than always being faithful to the true complexities and subtleties of his theology. He states that:

Against the *Manichees*, who defended fate, he was necessarily to extol the powers of free will against them. And when he turneth himself against the *Pelagians*, (who made a kind of idol of free-will) as necessary

¹³¹ Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 473.

¹³² Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 447.

¹³³ Mendelson, 'Saint Augustine', 2.

it was for him to repress the same, & withall to extol the necessity & dignity of God's grace.¹³⁴

Backus argues that, when finding support for his configuration of predestinarianism from Augustine's later works, Calvin 'very carefully' chose references that showed 'Augustine at his most predestinarian and anti-Pelagian'.¹³⁵ Matthew condemns Protestants who, he argues, have wilfully misused Augustine 'to impugne . . . the Catholike doctrine of free-will'.¹³⁶ He also accuses Protestant translators of tampering with Augustine: they had 'stolen out those passages, which might declare to any man that were half blind, that the beliefe and practise of S. Augustine, and the Church of his tyme, were fully agreeable to the Catholike Roman Church of this day'.¹³⁷ Having dismissed as simplistic and biased the idea that Augustine endorsed double predestination, Matthew makes the exorbitant claim that Augustine's views on free will are 'precisely according to that which is declared by the council of Trent . . . as we have freewill to do euill . . . so also have we freewilles . . . to do good'.¹³⁸ He reduces Augustine's complex and evolving beliefs on free will and predestination to fit Catholic theology.

Matthew's attack on double predestination and affirmation of free will, via Augustine, serves his wider aim of validating Catholic confession. With reference to the *Confessions* and other works by Augustine, Matthew legitimises penance, good works, and purgatory.¹³⁹ Regarding the issuing of penances by priests after confession, Protestants argued that no penance could atone for man's sinful affront to God. Matthew argues that St. Paul had made it clear (and Augustine agreed) that penance allows the average Christian to make 'a small amends for our infinite offence'.¹⁴⁰ In the context of interpreting the saint's sinful youth and conversion, Matthew argues that Augustine himself made full satisfaction for his sins: he 'made a superabundant satisfaction . . . for what he had done amisse'.¹⁴¹ This statement is not in contradiction to the Catholic view that Christians must make 'small amends' for their sins; rather, it is a consequence of Matthew presenting Augustine, in accordance with the Catholic view of single

¹³⁴ Matthew, 'Preface', p. 80.

¹³⁵ Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 54. Referring to Calvin's references in Book VI of the *Institutes* to Augustine's *Homilies*, 45, 12.

¹³⁶ Matthew, 'Preface', pp. 80-81.

¹³⁷ Matthew, 'Preface', p. 7.

¹³⁸ Matthew, 'Preface', p. 72.

¹³⁹ Other works by Augustine that Matthew cites include *On the City of God* (p. 69) and *Of the Care which is to be taken for the Dead* (p. 90).

¹⁴⁰ Matthew, 'Preface', p. 32.

¹⁴¹ Matthew, 'Preface', p. 23.

predestination, as one of the exceptionally holy predestined to salvation. He asks who could dispute the ‘diuine Spirit of this most Holy doctor’, who was ‘preserued’ from the womb for the service of the Church? ¹⁴² Through his depiction of Augustine’s view of penance, Matthew configures the saint, being one of the elect, as an unusual penitent, but one who would have ascribed to early modern Catholic beliefs. ¹⁴³ Augustine’s penance is a model for all: ‘with flouds of teares [he] asketh pardon [and implores] the mercy of our Lord’ for his ‘soares’, ‘frailtyes’, ‘sinnes’, and ‘miseryes’. ¹⁴⁴ But his example post-conversion – his making full satisfaction – is not something that can be emulated by the average Christian.

Catholic theologians argued that good works were another means to atone for sin. Matthew states that Augustine held that ‘[o]nce men are iustified by the pure grace of God the good works that they do afterwards are meritorious’. ¹⁴⁵ According to Catholic teaching, purgatory was a third means of making satisfaction for sin. Because Augustine is presented as an unquestionable authority, Matthew is keen to argue that, after his conversion, he ‘never made relapse into his former . . . unchast desires’. Ignoring Augustine’s confession of his ongoing fight with sin after conversion in Book X of the *Confessions*, Matthew states that ‘after he had once fastened his sight Vpon the brightness of heaven, he never lent, so much as the cast off an eye, to the beholding of any transitory beauty’. ¹⁴⁶ Thus, Augustine himself will not have to atone for sin in purgatory. Rather, Matthew cites Augustine’s prayerful concern for his mother’s soul after her death to demonstrate that the saint believed in purgatory.

As discussed in Section One, Augustine not only confesses his sins in his spiritual autobiography, but also portrays Monica’s sinfulness. ¹⁴⁷ In the *Confessions*, he asks God to forgive his mother ‘any debts she had contracted . . . [to] let mercy triumph over judgement’. ¹⁴⁸ Matthew argues that Augustine’s concern for Monica’s soul ‘doth sufficiently shew’ that he believed in Purgatory. ¹⁴⁹ Calvinists, according to Matthew, are so ‘certaine of their salvation’ that, no matter how sinning, they feel ‘assured of entire

¹⁴² Matthew, ‘Preface’, pp. 16, 18.

¹⁴³ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 32.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 74.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 34.

¹⁴⁷ See Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, ‘Confessing Monica’, in *Feminist Interpretations*, pp. 119-146, and Dennis A. Forster, *Confession and Complicity in Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 234.

¹⁴⁹ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 62.

remission of their sinne . . . without either doing penance in this life, or as much as acknowledging any such place as Purgatory, wherin they might give some little satisfaction to the merciful justice of Almighty God'.¹⁵⁰ Here, Matthew's dual aims of refuting Calvinist predestinarianism and validating the Catholic view on the necessity of atonement for sin come together.

While auricular confession (which, at this point, for most of Matthew's Protestant readership would have been an emblem of Catholic corruption) is never mentioned, the advancement of arguments in support of this practice is one prime motive of Matthew's introduction. Arguments in support of Catholic confession in the introduction are also necessary to direct the reader in how to interpret aspects of Augustine's text that would seem to suggest that his confessional practices corresponded more to those advocated by Protestants than those advocated by Catholics. With reference to recurring images of the confessor as spiritual doctor and 'court-of-law imagery' in medieval confession manuals, Mahoney has shown that ideas of the Catholic confessor as healer and judge run through the history of auricular confession.¹⁵¹ In Augustine's *Confessions*, confession is made directly to God: it is He who is the healer of sin or who imposes vengeful judgement on the sinner. Thus, the *Confessions* could be seen as providing incontrovertible proof that the medieval Church had invented the practice of auricular confession.

Matthew's introduction can be seen as an attempt to condition the reader to interpret this anomaly as a consequence of Augustine's status as a predestined saint. Matthew's implication is that, because he was predestined for heaven and the service of the Church, Augustine was spiritually more advanced than the average Christian. Due to his close union with God, he did not require a mediator when confessing. The average Christian, however, would be prideful to try to emulate Augustine's confessional practices, and should use God's priests to facilitate confession and penance. The *Confessions* also has a public element, which would also seem to validate Protestant opinion that private confession to a priest was not practised in the early Church. Regarding the *Confessions*' public nature, Matthew suggests that Augustine is providing a service to Christians by demonstrating the value of repentance. He argues that Augustine's holy achievement in the *Confessions* is to place 'himself as the example or pattern of our great misery and God's mercy'. In demonstrating how he 'passed through the infirmities of a child, and the vntowardness of a boy, & the carnalityes and

¹⁵⁰ Matthew, 'Preface', pp. 95-96.

¹⁵¹ Mahoney, *Moral Theology*, pp. 7, 14.

Vncleaness of a young man’ until, with repentance, God ‘gave him light & strength wherewith to breake, both through his fetters and prisons’, Augustine gives hope to the average sinning Christian.¹⁵² Visser argues that in both Catholic and Protestant translations of Augustine, ‘selective reading and citing practices went hand in hand with a clear awareness of the manipulative effect of this approach’.¹⁵³ Thus, it is not unreasonable to impute such calculated motives to Matthew.

A second edition of Matthew’s translation, minus his introduction, appeared in 1638. Referring to Matthew Sutcliffe’s 1626 eighty-four page response to the first edition, Matthew states that he felt it wise to leave out the long ‘good’ discourse of his introduction to forestall an ‘ill discourse’ such as the one the earlier edition had provoked.¹⁵⁴ In his rebuttal, Sutcliffe (being far from the ‘covrteovs’ reader to whom Matthew addresses his work) attacked the style and substance of Matthew’s ‘absurd, tedious and malicious’ introduction, and validated, via Augustine, Calvinist doctrine and practices.¹⁵⁵

The title of his response – *The Unmasking of a Masse-monger who in the Counterfeit Habit of S. Augustine hath Cunningly Crept into the Closets of many English Ladies. Or, the Vindication of Saint Augustines Confessions, from the Calumniation of a late noted Apostate* – signals Sutcliffe’s awareness that one prime aim of Matthew’s is to validate auricular confession. The closet of Sutcliffe’s title suggests the private space where Protestants engaged in devotional practices, self-examination and confession before God. By stating that Matthew had ‘cunningly crept into . . . closets’ Sutcliffe announces that Matthew’s introduction is an attempt to interfere in the relationship between God and man by placing a false mediator (a priest) between them: to turn the closet into its ‘counterfeit’ opposite, the confessional box. Moreover, he is donning the mantle of St. Augustine to inveigle his way into the closet.

Sutcliffe’s title also suggests sexual motives for the Catholic insistence on auricular confession. In the seventeenth century there were fears in England of a ‘papal conspiracy’ to undo the English Reformation. Tyacke argues that the idea of a Catholic

¹⁵² Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 18.

¹⁵³ Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁴ Sir Toby Matthew, ‘To the Reader’, *The Confessions of S. Augustine Bishope of Hippon and D. of the Church* (Paris, 1638), sig. a4v, EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 18 May 2011].

¹⁵⁵ Matthew Sutcliffe, *The Unmasking of a Masse-monger, who in the Counterfeit Habit of S. Augustine hath Cunningly Crept into the Closets of many English Ladies. Or, the Vindication of Saint Augustines Confessions, from the Calumniation of a Late Noted Apostate* (London, 1626), EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 15 May 2011], p. 38.

conspiracy was ‘largely the product of an overheated Protestant imagination’, but was nevertheless fuelled by the ‘realities of Arminianism’.¹⁵⁶ One tactic used by Calvinists to confront the threat of Catholicism was to argue that sexual titillation was a motive for Catholic priest wanting to hear women confessing their private sins.¹⁵⁷ At best, female modesty was compromised by auricular confession; at worst, women could be seduced into copulating with the priest. Sutcliffe reflects this view when he references ‘ladies’ as those into whose closets Matthew has sought to cunningly creep.

As well as attaching a sexual element to auricular confession, Sutcliffe uses Augustine to attack Matthew’s – and by extension, Catholicism’s – ideas by associating them with sexual corruption. This is suggested when he locates them in the realm of the feminine. As I demonstrate further in my discussion of *The Changeling* in Chapter Two, Augustine’s fully developed views on creation and the Fall configured the lower, sensual body as feminine, and the higher, rational mind as masculine. He argued that individual men and women had an innate propensity to follow the traits associated with these gendered parts of humanity. When men were corrupt and sensual, it meant that they had succumbed to the temptations of the lower female body. In the *Confessions*, as Bowery notes, ‘Augustine’s portrait of [Monica] becomes increasingly positive because Monica’s character becomes increasingly admirable’.¹⁵⁸ Near the end of his introduction, Matthew venerates Monica as ‘the Root of that happy Tree [Augustine] which has replenisht, fresht, and enricht the world’.¹⁵⁹ Elevating Monica’s soul out of the feminine and sensual and into the masculine and rational, he claims that Monica had a ‘manley soule . . . with massie and solide vertues’.¹⁶⁰ In his reply to Matthew, Sutcliffe asks ‘if her soule were manly, why not the Apostate have a female soule, being so much addicted to the feminine gender? if her virtues were massie, why not his vanities be spongerous and light, like Tiffanie’.¹⁶¹ His claim that Matthew is ‘addicted to the female gender’ refers in part to Matthew dedicating his introduction to the Virgin

¹⁵⁶ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 228.

¹⁵⁷ The charge of potential sexual corruption by confessors was an old one. According to MacCulloch, as jurisdiction over confession was fought over by friars and priest before the Reformation, ‘[f]riars sneered at parish priests for being lazy and ignorant’, while parish priests ‘sneered at friars for being egotistical showmen who tried to seduce women’ in confession. MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 33. In Protestant England, these tactics continued into the nineteenth century. Bernstein quotes Richard Blakeney’s 1852 monograph, *Popery in its Social Aspects*, which states that: ‘[t]he great ornament of the female is modesty and purity’. This will ‘suffer’ if she is ‘required to tell her secret thoughts to a man in private’. Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p. 75.

¹⁵⁸ Anne-Marie Bowery, ‘Monica: The Feminised Face of Christ’, in *Feminist Interpretations*, p. 72.

¹⁵⁹ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 99.

¹⁶⁰ Matthew, ‘Preface’, p. 98.

¹⁶¹ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 57.

Mary. His long dedication displays the typical Catholic veneration of Christ's mother, causing Sutcliffe to complain that Matthew makes Mary divine: 'to flow from Divinitie, as if she was her sonnes image'.¹⁶² In attacking Matthew's masculinity via reference to his addiction to the female gender and his suggestion of his having a 'female soul', Sutcliffe presents him as having fallen into the lower, female order.¹⁶³ This aims to render Matthew's arguments both corrupt and irrational. It also demonstrates that the reformed church promulgated the idea of women as inferior to men and as being more susceptible to sexual corruption.

As his polemic proceeds, there emerges a clear picture of many issues of contention between Roman Catholics and Calvinists. For example, Sutcliffe states that Augustine knew only two sacraments: baptism and communion. Refuting transubstantiation, he argues that communion bread is merely a 'figure of Christs bodie'.¹⁶⁴ Insisting on the primacy of scripture, Protestant reformers argued that 'the man-made ceremonies and doctrines produced by centuries of popish ignorance and superstition needed to be stripped away and the unvarnished word of God presented to the people' through vernacular translations of the scriptures and via the pulpit.¹⁶⁵ Augustine, Sutcliffe argues, gave 'no credit to any particular translation'¹⁶⁶, whereas Roman Catholics 'forbid holy Scriptures to be read in vulgar Tongues . . . and all interpretations of scriptures, contrarie to the sence of the Pope . . . and might as well forbid all Scriptures'.¹⁶⁷ Referring to Augustine's conversion, Sutcliffe notes that '*S. Anthonie And S. Augustine were conuerted by reading holy Scriptures* [his italics]'. He then ponders: why are 'Christians denied liberties to reade holy Scriptures, in Tongues vnderstood by them?'¹⁶⁸ The suggestion is that Catholics are kept in ignorance of God's true word, blithely following the 'anti-Christ' Pope.

Regarding confession, Sutcliffe disputes the authority of the father-confessor, stating that: '[t]rue Catholikes confesse their Sinnes to God . . . to confesse in the Priests

¹⁶² Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 24.

¹⁶³ See Zink for more on Sutcliffe's attack on Matthew's masculinity, and her argument that Matthew's introduction and translation 'advertises and advances a passive/feminine form of manhood – which had been initially propagated by late sixteenth-century recusant ideology – in order to offer succour to its socially debilitated male readers'. 'Translating Men', 1.

¹⁶⁴ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 99.

¹⁶⁵ Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁷ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, pp. 3, 23.

¹⁶⁸ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 72.

care [is] contrary to the practice of true Catholikes'.¹⁶⁹ Sutcliffe often takes issue with 'papists' calling themselves Catholics. During the Reformation 'each faction was convinced that it represented the true apostolic, Catholic Church'.¹⁷⁰ Sutcliffe is relentless in his insistence that 'papists', far from comprising 'the Catholike and Apostolike church', are 'Heretikes' who hold 'the new creed of Trent, and Doctrine of Schooles'.¹⁷¹ Arguing against the Roman interpretation of the power of the keys, he states that: 'God onely doth forgive sinnes. Are they then Catholikes that teach, that Priests not onely interced for Sinne, and declare Sinnes forgiven, but also forgive Sinnes'.¹⁷² He also argues against 'Papist' beliefs in 'the iustice of works',¹⁷³ and other means of purging sin, stating that: 'only Christs blood purges sin' not 'Agnus dei, the blood of saint's, their own bloud' nor 'Satisfaction' nor 'holy water', nor are the 'paines of sinne . . . purged away in the fire of Purgatory'.¹⁷⁴ He also depicts as corrupt the practice of praying for intercession for sin to Christ's mother and the saints, stating that Roman Catholics 'confess to these false mediators . . . [while Augustine] confessed his sinnes to God alone'.¹⁷⁵

Although not the sole focus of his rebuttal of Matthew, confession is one of the issues to which Sutcliffe gives prominence in the text, and his title locates the work as a defence of Protestant confession. As Sutcliffe attempts to demonstrate, via Augustine, that the views and practices of the early Church accord with Protestant – rather than Roman Catholic – practices and beliefs, he tacitly acknowledges that Augustine and Calvin's theological positions did not always converge. For Calvin, Augustine was not an ultimate authority: he was 'a predecessor, a human model, subordinate to the Bible', if an especially illuminating one.¹⁷⁶ When addressing the nature of Augustine's authority for Calvinists, Sutcliffe states that while Augustine is valued 'above many others', he is not considered, nor would he have considered himself (as Matthew contends), to be an 'incomparable Doctor'.¹⁷⁷ Sutcliffe does not, however, draw attention to differences in Calvin's and Augustine's thought, as these differences also often reflect the compatibility between aspects of Augustine's thought and Catholic thought. Rather (and

¹⁶⁹ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁰ Backus, *Historical Method*, p. 39.

¹⁷¹ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 48.

¹⁷² Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 16.

¹⁷³ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁷⁴ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁵ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ Backus, *Historical Method*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁷ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, 'Preface to the Christian Reader', sig. A2r.

showing the extent to which friars exemplified Catholic corruption) he attributes the existence of textual moments seeming to support a ‘papist’ reading of Augustine’s works to having been ‘foysted in by some fryar’.¹⁷⁸ Thus, like Matthew, rather than explicitly admit discord between his faith and Augustine, he accuses his opponents of tampering with the saint’s work. Sutcliffe’s response to Matthew does not include an alternative translation of the *Confessions*. A Protestant translation, by William Watt, appeared in England 1631.¹⁷⁹ In the introduction to his second edition, printed in 1650, Watt describes Matthew’s translation as ‘Arrantly’ and ‘Partially Popish’.¹⁸⁰

This Chapter has explored the historical development of auricular confession and the theological positions that support the practice. I have examined Protestant attitudes to confession, described the consolatory and disciplinary functions of confession, and illustrated the influence of Augustine’s thought on Catholic and Protestant confessional practices. These issues are further examined in the following chapters. In Chapter Two, I demonstrate that the portrayal of confession in Jacobean plays problematises the idea that Calvinism was concerned with fully reforming confessional practices. Exploring the disciplinary function of confession, these plays demonstrate continuities between Calvinist religious discipline and Catholic confession. Webster and Middleton and Rowley highlight that Augustine’s placing of lust as central to the Fall and postlapsarian corruption influenced Catholic confession and its focus on sexual sin in marriage. This underscores that Calvin’s theology differed from Augustine in the emphasis he placed on the sins of lust and pride in the Fall. Davies argues that ‘while Augustine is aware of man’s desire to be as God he places the major emphases on man’s first concupiscence, whereas Calvin, also acknowledging the sexual appetite gives higher place to pride’.¹⁸¹ Calvin’s lesser emphasis on lust, combined with efforts to diminish the Catholic view of the spiritual pre-eminence entailed in celibacy – an idea also promoted by Augustine –

¹⁷⁸ Sutcliffe, *Unmasking of a Masse-monger*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁹ William Watt, *Saint Augustines Confessions Translated: and with some Marginal Notes Illustrated. Wherin Divers Antiquities are Explained; and the Marginall Notes of a Former Popish Translation Answered* (London, 1631), *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 28 May 2011].

¹⁸⁰ William Watt, *Saint Augustine's Confessions*, ‘To the Devout Reader’ (London, 1650), sig. A5v, *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 28 May 2011]. According to Vessey, Watt’s translation is the ‘only serious adventure in Latin Christian Literature by an Anglican translator in the quarter-century after 1611’. Vessey, *English Translations*, p. 830. According to Visser, Watt’s marginalia asserts ‘an aggressively Protestant perspective’. *Reading Augustine in the Reformation*, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ Davies, *Vigilant God*, p. 113. See pp. 110-113 for ‘Calvin’s dependence on and independence from Augustine’.

led him to configure sex in marriage as sanctioned by God. *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, I argue, portray English Protestantism as continuing to harbour ideas about the sinfulness of married sex. Placed in a confessional context, they relate the retention of these ideas to efforts to enforce control over women. All three plays demonstrate the relationship between confessional discipline and patriarchal control.

Chapter Two

Sex, Gender and Confession in Jacobean Tragedy

This chapter examines the portrayal of confession in three Jacobean tragedies. I argue that *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623), *The Changeling* (1622) and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633) critique Catholic confession as a socio-religious force that subjugates individuals. Demonstrating continuities between Catholic and Protestant confession, they extend this critique to Protestant religious discipline, presenting the prosecution of sinners in church courts and the persecution of religious non-conformists as practices that 'discipline and punish' when confession or self-examination fails. The term I use to denote these interrelated forms of religious discipline is confessional discipline. I begin by exploring how *The Duchess of Malfi* underscores the confessional significance of Protestant disciplinary methods. I argue that Webster draws on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* as he consistently equates religious disciplinary practices in England with Catholic confession, and explores the relationship between confessional discipline and wider socio-political authority. I then examine how these issues are revisited from different perspectives by Middleton and Rowley and Ford. Examining portrayals of confessional resistance and conformity, my analysis of all three plays reflects the particular focus given, in the context of wider critiques of confessional discipline, to conflicts between patriarchal authority and rebellious women.

Confessional Discipline in *The Duchess of Malfi*

The action in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) revolves around the imprisonment, torture and murder of the Duchess after her brothers, the Cardinal and Ferdinand, discover – via intelligence from Bosola, a spy placed in her household – that against warnings issued to her by them in Act I to remain a widow, she has secretly re-married. Kerrigan argues that Webster's play promotes Catholic attitudes to salvation: 'the Italian backdrop is . . . used as a testing ground for English ideas . . . specifically to assert (with impunity) the value of works and of human action in England where predestination was endorsed by the official religion'.¹ Focusing predominantly on the violent last act, Kerrigan's argument centres on demonstrating that, because the Duchess's persecutors are deprived of auricular confession ('a well-defined ritual

¹ Kerrigan, 'Action and Confession', 251.

which allowed individuals to clear their consciences and prepare for death') they are unable to 'alleviate their consciences', and this leads to despair and violence.² His argument that despair – a consequence of predestinarianism – is 'the agent of violence and destruction in the play' is, however, fundamentally weakened by the fact that the brothers and Bosola are themselves agents of violence and destruction in Act IV.³ The murder of the Duchess cannot be attributed to her persecutors' inability to relieve their guilty consciences by auricular confession.

Some critics have argued that there is a 'shapelessness' and incoherence to Webster's dramaturgy.⁴ Often seen as an unnecessary adjunct, thematically adrift from the rest of the drama, for some critics, Act V 'is most egregious of the structural deficiencies traditionally attributed to Webster'.⁵ While Kerrigan attempts to link the 'language of confession and confessional moments throughout the play' to his interpretation of the last act, his analysis is largely divorced from the play's main action, contributing to the idea of dramatic and thematic incoherence.⁶ My analysis posits that, in terms of confession, dramatic coherence emerges when the play is viewed as critiquing both Catholic and Protestant forms of confessional discipline.

In Act 1, I argue, the power relations of auricular confession are replicated as the Cardinal, presented as the main source of the plots against the Duchess, attempts to subjugate her will. When the Duchess resists confession and places a value on her own conscience, she is presented as Protestant. In Act I, and when dramatising the surveillance and persecution of the Duchess, Webster also alludes to religious disciplinary practices which traditionally supported confession, and which were also carried out by Protestants: the prosecution of public sinners in church courts and persecution for heresy. Through the Cardinal, I argue, Webster critiques Catholic confessional disciplinary practices. Through Ferdinand, who I see characterised as an extremist Puritan, he critiques the continued operation of confessional discipline in Reformation England. The close relationship of the brothers allows Webster to explore connections between Catholic confession and Protestant disciplinary methods.

² Ibid.

³ Kerrigan, 'Action and Confession', 256.

⁴ Charles R. Forker, *Skull Beneath the Skin: the Achievement of John Webster* (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. x.

⁵ David Gunby, 'The Critical Backstory', in Christina Luckyj (ed.), *The Duchess of Malfi: A Critical Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 37.

⁶ Kerrigan, 'Action and Confession', 250.

The importance of confession as a context for understanding the play is suggested first when Antonio – the Duchess’s future husband – reveals his attraction to his mistress in Act I. Here, Antonio presents the Duchess’s widowhood as one factor preventing their union. In the seventeenth century, two attitudes towards women remarrying dominated. The first was the medieval position of ‘perpetual widowhood’.⁷ This attitude developed out of Augustine’s opinion that marital sex was only sin-free if it was for the purpose of procreation; otherwise marital intercourse was a venial sin.⁸ Having married and, in most cases, borne children, widows were meant to remain celibate. Antonio perceives the Duchess as conforming to the Catholic idea of virgin widowhood. Preventing their union is her ‘divine . . . continence’.⁹ Continence refers to the exercising of self-restraint, especially with regard to sex.¹⁰ Webster foregrounds confession as an important context for understanding the Duchess’s rebellion when Antonio alludes to the confession of sexual sins committed in marriage. In medieval England, people were not encouraged to seek sexual fulfilment in marriage. Other than for reasons of procreation, sex was deemed by the Church as permissible only because married people owed a debt – the conjugal debt – to their spouse to protect them from adultery. In confession manuals – which included ‘a detailed analysis of the conjugal debt’¹¹ – ‘there were more rules for married people than for unmarried, thus bearing out Augustine’s dictum that chastity was easier for virgins than for married people’.¹² Those who succumbed to their own sexual desire were required to confess and repent. Antonio says of the Duchess: ‘Her nights, nay more, her very sleeps / Are more in heaven than other ladies’ shrifts’ (I. i. 197-198). Shrift, which derives from shrive, refers to confession (especially to a priest), absolution and penance.¹³ As a virgin widow, the Duchess, Antonio suggests, has nothing to confess. She is contrasted with ‘other ladies’: married women who do require confession.

Later in the scene, it is revealed that the Duchess does not, in fact, conform to the Catholic ideal of widowhood. The second dominant attitude towards widowhood in

⁷ Elizabeth Oakes, ‘“The Duchess of Malfi” as a Tragedy of Identity’, *Studies in Philology*, 96 (1999), 51.

⁸ Augustine, *The Excellence of Marriage*. Extracts in Conor McCarthy (ed.), *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 32.

⁹ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Brian Gibbons, New Mermaids (London: Black, 2006), I. i. 194-195. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://english.oxforddictionaries.com>> [accessed 19 March 2012].

¹¹ Dyan Elliot, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 71.

¹² Tambling, *Sexuality, Sin, the Subject*, p. 43.

¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://english.oxforddictionaries.com>> [accessed 17 March 2012].

the seventeenth century was the ‘more tolerant Protestant position, approving, even encouraging, a woman’s remarriage’.¹⁴ Calvin had argued against the Catholic idea that married sexual relations were a necessary evil. From his viewpoint, this idea rendered a God-given trait of humanity entirely corrupt. His argument that marriage sanctified sex led to the belief that widows should remarry.¹⁵ The Duchess’s attitude to marriage exemplifies this Protestant view of widowhood.¹⁶ Thus, she is harbouring thoughts of sex and marriage, and, from a Catholic viewpoint, does need to confess.

Further complicating matters, the Duchess wants to marry her servant, Antonio. As well as her status as widow, Antonio believes that the Duchess’s ‘noble virtue’ (suggesting her nobility) ‘cuts off’ his ‘lascivious and vain hope’ (I. i. 194-195). In the period, a woman was dishonoured by marrying below her station. Inter-class marriage stripped ‘away the signs of high status . . . [and made] a nonsense of the established rules of precedence, hierarchy and dress’. The shame of such marriages could affect the woman’s family, dislocating ‘relationships and hierarchies’.¹⁷ Later in the scene, both the idea of virgin widowhood and preservation of the Duchess’s nobility emerge as the reasons for her brothers’ attempt to deter her from marriage:

Ferdinand: You are a widow:

You know already what man is, and therefore

Let not youth, high promotion, eloquence –

Cardinal: No, nor any thing without the addition, honour,

Sway your high blood.

Ferdinand: Marry? They are most luxurious

Will wed twice (I. i. 286-291).

Later, when the Cardinal departs the scene, the Duchess remarks to Ferdinand: ‘I think this speech between you both was studied, / It came so roundly off’ (I. i. 321). She implies that the brothers’ discourse is rehearsed; that they seek to ‘roundly’ encompass her in a prison of chastity. In a wider sense, Webster suggests that religious authority, represented by the Cardinal, and secular authority, represented by the duke Ferdinand,

¹⁴ Oakes, ‘Tragedy of Identity’, 52. See also Margaret Lael Mikesell, ‘Catholic and Protestant Widows in *The Duchess of Malfi*’, *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 19 (1983), 265-269.

¹⁵ William E. Phipps, ‘The Plight of the Song of Songs’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 42 (1974), 96.

¹⁶ Wilks also argues that the Duchess represents Protestantism in the play. *Idea of Conscience*, pp. 211-212.

¹⁷ Laura Gowing, ‘Women, Status, and the Popular Culture of Dishonour’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996), 225. See also Deborah G. Burks, ‘“I’ll Want My Will Else”: *The Changeling* and Women’s Complicity with Their Rapists’, *English Literary History*, 62 (1995), 765.

support one another to ensure religious conformity and social control. In Act I he presents confession as a means through which conformity and control are enforced, and shows the Duchess's resistance to confessional discipline.

Confession is concerned with uncovering what is hidden. In Act I, as the Cardinal, with the aid of Ferdinand, seeks to ascertain whether the Duchess is thinking of marriage, he subtly utilises confessional discipline. Here, Webster presents confession as a means of inculcating submission to authority. Foucault argues that '[t]hroughout Christianity there is a correlation between disclosure of the self . . . and the renunciation of self'.¹⁸ According to this way of thinking, if the Duchess discloses her secret intention to marry Antonio to the Cardinal she will be forced to renounce it. Of auricular confession, Foucault argues that in 'permanently verbalising your thoughts and permanently obeying the master, you are renouncing your will and yourself'.¹⁹ Telling her brothers: 'Will you hear me? / I'll never marry', the Duchess refuses to confess, and thus, renounce her will (I. i. 293-294).

The issue of the Duchess's deception has provoked questions about how Webster's heroine should be perceived. Is her use of deception one indication that she is not to be viewed as wholly noble and virtuous in opposition to her corrupt brothers? Or is her deception justifiable in the context of her brothers' efforts to subjugate her?²⁰ As the above demonstrates, resistance to confession is one context for understanding her deception. The Duchess's rebellion against the Cardinal also alludes to the Reformation rebellion against Catholicism and auricular confession. This allusion to Confessional rebellion suggests that religious equivocation is another context for understanding her deception. Equivocation is the technique 'of giving riddling, evasive or even downright misleading answers to queries posed by investigating authorities'. Equivocation distinguished between the 'quality of the intention', which was visible to God, and 'the utterance in the world'.²¹ It was justified by casuistry: the application of general moral principles (such as not lying) to individual cases to 'determine the degree of one's moral culpability'.²² Through equivocation, half-truths or lies could be uttered and mentally qualified to God, making them truths. When the Duchess uses

¹⁸ Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', p. 249.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The Duchess's deception is referred to, for example, by Matha Ronk Lifson, 'Embodied Morality in *The Duchess of Malfi*', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 23 (1988).p. 51 and Gibbons, *Duchess of Malfi*, p. 23.

²¹ Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 20-21.

²² Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 103.

equivocation, Webster alludes to how, at certain times in England's recent history, those who resisted conforming to dominant religious beliefs were persecuted as heretics. Equivocation is generally associated with Catholics, who used the technique to disguise their faith in times of persecution. Demonstrating awareness that her rebellion against the Cardinal could lead to violent persecution, the Duchess uses equivocation to disguise her true intentions and religious beliefs.²³

The Duchess's suspicion of persecution, demonstrated by her equivocation, is validated when, before he departs in Act I, the Cardinal warns her that prison and death will be the consequences if she secretly marries. He first states that marriage will mean an 'entrance into some prison' (I. i. 316). His final words are: 'Wisdom begins at the end: remember it' (I. i. 320). With this remark, the Cardinal attempts to bring the Duchess's death to mind. On the one hand, this is an attempt to utilise confessional discipline on a level on which confession generally operates: prevention of sinning. Through regular confession, thoughts of sin, death and the afterlife are kept near to mind, and this helps prevent serious lapses in behaviour. The Cardinal intimates here that, while forgoing confession and rebelling against notions of sin may seem appealing, at the 'end' of life, too late, 'wisdom' returns. With damnation imminent, actions will be seen as sinful. The remark also operates as another warning. Through evoking death, the Cardinal intimates that the Duchess will pay with her life if she disobeys him. Thus, the remark encompasses both a general disciplinary function of confession – to prevent sin – and the threat of extreme punishment if she rebels.

When the brothers depart, rather than renouncing her will and desires and acquiescing to religious authority, the Duchess follows her own conscience. Rather than be curtailed by the Cardinal's warnings, she draws power from rebelling against them. She remarks:

As men in some great battles,

²³ In the first edition of the play a colon is present after the lines when the Duchess tells her brothers she will never marry. It reads: 'Will you heare me? / I'll neuer marry:'. John Webster, *The Tragedy of The Dutchesse of Malfy* (London, 1623), sig. C1v, *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 4 July 2011]. The first quarto, Gibbons argues, was 'almost certainly' transcribed by Ralph Crane, poet and professional scribe. See T. H. Howard-Hill, 'Crane, Ralph (fl. 1589–1632)', *ODNB*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6605>> [accessed 2 July 2011]. According to Gibbons, Crane's punctuation style included the abundant use of terminal colons, 'especially in short dialogue lines'. *Duchess of Malfy*, intro., pp. xlv-xlvi. In the New Mermaid edition, terminal colons are replaced with full stops. But in this instance, Gibbons suggests that a colon may have been used by Webster to denote interruption rather than deception: 'if the colon is interpreted as interruption . . . the duchess is not guilty of deliberate deception here'. Gibbons, *Duchess of Malfy*, p. 23, note on text. Presumably, if the Duchess is interrupted her intended statement would read: 'I'll never marry anyone but Antonio'. However, a colon would also more clearly indicate equivocation.

By apprehending danger have achieved
Almost impossible actions – I have heard soldiers say so –
So I, through frights and threat'nings will assay
This dangerous venture. Let old wives report
I winked and chose a husband (I: i. 336-341).

The 'frights' point to the attempts to curtail her with ideas of sin and damnation; the 'threat'nings' refer to the Cardinal's implicit threats that, if she disobeys him, she will be imprisoned and put to death. Refusing to succumb to threats, she marries Antonio, affirming her Protestant attitude towards remarriage. Satisfied that an inter-social marriage will not make her unchaste, she also rebels against social constraints on inter-class marriage.

As I later demonstrate, images of inquisitorial torture and heretical death emerge strongly when the Duchess is imprisoned and murdered for her rebellion in Act IV. Another mode of confessional discipline alluded to in Act I is the prosecution of sinners in church courts. As discussed in the previous chapter, ecclesiastical courts were generally the means of disciplining Catholic subjects whose behaviour had not been controlled by auricular confession. In Reformation England, public transgressors were prosecuted in Protestant church courts. The first act alludes to church courts, when, for example, as the Duchess and Antonio marry in secret, she remarks: 'I have heard lawyers say a contract in a chamber / . . . is absolute marriage' (I. i. 468-469). Church marriage is depicted by the Duchess as merely ceremonial: 'tis the Church / That must but echo this' (I. i. 480-481). In his analysis of English religious courts, Ingram argues that – reinforcing a 'pre-existing trend towards a decline of marriage contracts' – in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries church courts:

by stepping up disciplinary prosecutions for prenuptial fornication and bridal pregnancy, tried more firmly to insist that betrothed couples should remain chaste before they were married in church: that a properly solemnised marriage ceremony alone made sexual relations licit.²⁴

The reason for allusions to this form of confessional discipline becomes clear when Ferdinand's religious function in the play is distinguished from that of the Cardinal.

As discussed above, through the brothers' arguments against the Duchess remarrying, Webster portrays an alignment between secular and religious authority to

²⁴ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 219.

preserve the status quo. The brothers' arguments also reveal their individual motives for wanting the Duchess to remain a widow. The Cardinal is primarily concerned with issues of class, Ferdinand with chastity. As Oakes argues, Ferdinand kills the Duchess because: '[i]f not eternally chaste, she must be libidinous, and, if so, she must die. He cannot, or will not, envision a life for her outside these choices'.²⁵ Mikesell argues that 'the brothers' attitude toward the Duchess as widow derives from traditional Catholic doctrine; yet their actions, particularly their attempt to immobilize their sister, represent the perversion of that doctrine'.²⁶ While this is essentially true, Ferdinand is a figure who embodies the reality that a 'multitude of traces of the Catholic past remain in the [English Protestant] culture'.²⁷ The complexity of Ferdinand's religious attitudes is metaphorically suggested by the fact that he is the twin of the Duchess – a Protestant – yet, as Antonio remarks, he is the Cardinal's twin in 'quality' (I. ii. 167). Belsey argues of Webster's play that: 'the audience is repeatedly invited by the realist surface to expect the unfolding of a situation or the interplay of specific characters, only to find that the actual constantly resolves into abstraction, the characters to figures in a pattern'.²⁸ Applying Belsey's analysis to the religious pattern suggested by the Cardinal and Ferdinand, each brother is emblematic of a specific religious tradition, but these traditions are not clearly differentiated from one another. Through the Catholic setting, and the Cardinal's close association with Ferdinand, Webster suggests the lingering influence of Catholicism in Reformation England, which he depicts as perverting the type of English Protestantism represented by Ferdinand.

Essentially, Ferdinand represents a brand of Puritanism which retained Catholic ideas on sexual purity and demanded female obedience to patriarchal authority (see my discussion of Elizabeth Isham's confessional autobiography in Chapter Three for how female submission to patriarchal authority was enforced in Calvinism). The presence of two male authority figures in Act I highlights the play's concern with depicting confession as a means of instilling female obedience to patriarchal authority. Ferdinand's religious function in the play allows Webster to further explore the relationship between confessional power and patriarchal power, and to extend his critique of confessional discipline to Protestant religious disciplinary practices.

²⁵ Oakes, 'Tragedy of Identity', 59.

²⁶ Mikesell, 'Catholic and Protestant Widows', 272.

²⁷ Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 15.

²⁸ Catherine Belsey, 'Emblem and Antithesis in the Duchess of Malfi' (1980). Quoted in Gunby, 'Critical Backstory', pp. 35-36.

One way in which Ferdinand is distinguished from the Cardinal is through his role as judge. He is presented as a judge in Act I, when Antonio remarks to Delio that he: ‘will seem to sleep o’th’ bench / Only to entrap offenders in their answers’ (I. i. 169-170). Although it is not established whether Ferdinand is the judge of a secular or religious court, in Reformation England, the line between sin and crime was blurred.²⁹ For example, much of the focus in English church courts was on issues relating to sexual morality, and one suspected of sexual immorality could also be hauled up before secular justices. As Bawcutt argues, in England ‘Church and State provided an elaborate machinery for the punishment of various sexual’ crimes.³⁰ Webster suggests the endemic and intricate nature of the relationship between religious and secular authority when, in Act I, it is Ferdinand, a duke, who presents the religious view against remarriage, describing remarriage as a form of whoring (I. i. 295), while the Cardinal, the religious figure, warns the Duchess not to marry if it leads to a dishonourable inter-class marriage. The reference to Ferdinand as a judge both further suggests this alignment between secular and religious authority, and presents him as something of a religious authority in his own right.

Webster signals that he is exploring the historical and continued link between English morality courts – church or secular courts that dealt with issues of sexual immorality – and auricular confession, and clearly indicates that Ferdinand is a Puritan figure, by connecting his play to *Measure for Measure* – an early seventeenth-century play that explicitly explores confession.³¹ Character-wise, Ferdinand is similar to Angelo, the Puritan figure in *Measure for Measure*.³² In Shakespeare’s play, when Claudio’s bride-to-be’s pregnancy becomes evident, Angelo, a judge of a morality court, convicts him of fornication and orders his execution. As made apparent when he orders Bosola to murder the Duchess in Act IV, the judge Ferdinand shares Angelo’s impulse to kill sexual offenders. Both characters reflect the fact that, as morality courts grew in power in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, some ‘Puritan-minded’ Protestants ‘demanded that sexual offenders should be visited with severe

²⁹ And elsewhere in Europe: see Philip S. Gorski, ‘Historicizing the Secularization Debate’, 138-167.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 10.

³¹ See Ingram for use of the term ‘morality courts’. *Church Courts*.

³² It is generally accepted that Angelo is a Puritan figure. See, for example, Brian Gibbons (ed.), *Measure for Measure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 3, and Diehl, who argues that Shakespeare immortalises images of the Puritan as a ‘repressive, punitive authority’ in his characters Angelo and Malvolio. Diehl, ‘Puritans and Players’, 83.

physical sanctions; and a powerful body of writers urged that the sin of adultery, in particular, should carry the death penalty'.³³ At the other end of the scale, some commentators sought the abolition of morality courts: 'changing social and religious ideas were tending to produce a shift in emphasis from public control over morality to the operations of the private conscience'.³⁴ Through the Duchess's emphasis on private conscience and Ferdinand's Puritanical murder of her for sexual sin, Webster situates his play in this debate.³⁵

Webster develops further thematic links with Shakespeare's play by presenting Ferdinand, like the duke in *Measure for Measure*, as both duke and judge. In Shakespeare's play, the duke, entrusting his role of legal overseer to Angelo, pretends to leave the realm, and then disguises himself as a friar-confessor. Through the duke's roles as judge and confessor, Shakespeare portrays a link between Catholic confession and English morality courts: the judge's disguise as a confessor makes visible the hidden connections between both forms of religious discipline.³⁶ In *The Duchess of Malfi* also, a shady relationship between Catholic confession and English morality courts is suggested as tropes of concealment and spying come to dominate the action. A link between spying and auricular confession is suggested in Act I when Antonio remarks that the Cardinal uses 'intelligencers' (defined as one employed to obtain secret information, an informer, a spy, a secret agent³⁷) to protect his interests (I. i. 157). It is the Cardinal who instructs Ferdinand to place Bosola as a spy in the Duchess's household. To a Protestant audience, Catholic confession would have had many negative connotations regarding 'spying' on personal matters. When disguised as a friar, Shakespeare's duke not only hears willing confessions, but also spies on his subjects, overhearing information. Webster presents English church courts as intrinsically linked to Catholic confession when, through Ferdinand, he implies that officials of morality courts also spy on private matters. When Ferdinand installs Bosola as a spy in a domestic setting to gain intelligence on a potential sinner, it figuratively suggests the

³³ Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 151. For more on some 'extreme Puritans' advocating the death penalty for sexual transgressions, see Gibbons, *Measure for Measure*, p. 2.

³⁴ Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 8, referencing Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964).

³⁵ The ambiguity surrounding Ferdinand's judicial role suggests that Webster is critiquing both secular and church morality courts for interfering in personal morality. When the Duchess argues for the validity of legal rather than church marriages, Webster advocates the complete separation of law and religion.

³⁶ See Griffiths-Osborne for references to critics who explore Shakespeare's play's concern with Calvinist disciplinary courts. 'Confession, the Reformation', chapter 6.

³⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://english.oxforddictionaries.com>> [accessed 2 July 2011].

Protestant church's incursion on personal matters. Ferdinand's use of a spy also reflects real practices of church courts. Ingram states that, in certain instances, when:

some individual, or occasionally the community at large, had a particularly strong interest in convicting the couple concerned with sexual immorality churchwardens, or other local officers, neighbours or even fellow-servants actively spied on other people's sexual misdoings.³⁸

Thus, through allusions to confession, spying and morality courts in Act I, Webster presents Protestant courts as interfering in matters of private conscience, and replicating corrupt Catholic practices as they do so.

Confession also sheds light on Ferdinand's disturbing preoccupation with his sister's sexuality. While, through the close alignment of the Cardinal and Ferdinand, Webster depicts similarities between auricular confession and Protestant confessional discipline, he also presents differences between the two brothers. Act I suggests that the Cardinal's use of confessional discipline is merely expedient to ensure patriarchal and social control. His own lack of adherence to the moral standards enforced through auricular confession is portrayed in Act II, Scene iv, which opens on him in Rome – the seat of Catholic power – with Julia, his married lover. In Scene v of the second act, in contrast to the Cardinal, Ferdinand is presented as being deeply affected by the equations of sin with the self and sex with sin that was transmitted, historically, to the individual Christian via confession. Here, it becomes evident that Ferdinand's efforts to suppress sexual desire in the Duchess are intimately connected to his need to suppress desire in himself.

In this scene, an overtly comic element briefly emerges as it is revealed that Ferdinand's obsession with the Duchess's sexuality is motivated, in part, by an 'incestuous bent'.³⁹ Having learned, via Bosola, that the Duchess has given birth to a child, Ferdinand informs the Cardinal that their sister has '[g]rown a notorious strumpet!' (II. v. 4). Remarking: 'Shall our blood, / The royal blood of Aragon and Castile, / Be thus attainted?', the Cardinal's reaction to the news reflects his concern about his sister remarrying: the protection of his class and status (II. v. 22-23). Confused by this relatively cold reaction, Ferdinand seeks to establish the importance of sexual

³⁸ Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 244-245.

³⁹ Frank Whigham, 'Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*', *PMLA*, 100 (1985), 71. Wilks also argues that Ferdinand harbours sexual feelings for his sister. *Idea of Conscience*, p. 204.

'sin'. With comic effect, he juxtaposes sexual acts with the class issues that appear to be the Cardinal's principal concern:

Ferdinand: Talk to me quickly,
Or my imagination will carry me
To see her in the shameful act of sin.
Cardinal: With whom?
Ferdinand: Happily with some strong-thighed bargeman;
Or one o'th'woodyard that can quoit the sledge
Or toss the bar; or else some lovely squire
That carries coals up to her privy lodgings (II. v. 39-45).

His comical imaginings of the Duchess engaged in forbidden sexual acts, and the sheer excess of his innuendo, reveal his own sexual feelings for his sister.

Mulryne argues that in *The Duchess of Malfi* 'comedy and tragedy, the laughable and the appalling, are so composed that neither is predominant'.⁴⁰ The overt comic element in this scene, which is at odds with the rest of the play's black humour, further connects Ferdinand to English Puritanism. In response to Puritan attacks on the stage as frivolous, corrupt and licentious, Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights responded by satirising Puritans on the stage. In comedies such as Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), playwrights 'deny puritans any special claim to sexual purity, identifying them instead with lust and licentiousness, precisely the vices that the [Puritan] anti-theatricalists attribute to the stage'.⁴¹ Webster solidifies Ferdinand's characterisation as a Puritan through his correspondence here to the comical stage Puritan – a figure that would have been easily recognisable to his audience.

Arguably, Webster's model for his play's more darkly comedic elements is *Measure for Measure*. In characterising Angelo, Shakespeare also draws on the comic aspects of the stage Puritan, but, as the play is a tragicomedy, dark undertones offset the comedy. The 'laughable and the appalling' merge, for example, when Claudio's sister, Isabella, goes to Angelo and pleads for clemency for her brother. Angelo makes a bargain to revoke the death sentence if she surrenders her virginity to him. A false bargain, he intends to see Claudio dead after he has deflowered Isabella, who is a novice nun. Angelo's extreme punitive response to sexual transgressions in others is represented as stemming from repressive attitudes towards sex in the self. But, the play

⁴⁰ J. R. Mulryne, 'Webster and the Uses of Tragicomedy'. Quoted in Gunby, 'Critical Backstory', p. 34.

⁴¹ Diehl, 'Disciplining Puritans and Players', 89.

suggests, when sex is repressed, it finds an outlet in the forbidden. With Ferdinand, Webster also suggests that forbidden sexual impulses result from extreme efforts to suppress sexual desire in the self.

When Ferdinand is confronted with his forbidden desires, it leads to tragic results. As the above scene makes clear, Ferdinand's incestuous desire for his sister is a factor that motivates him to keep her from marrying. If she remains a chaste widow he can suppress his sexual feelings for her. The revelation that that his sister has 'grown a notorious strumpet' increases Ferdinand's sexual desire for her, and provokes the need to enact extreme punishment. Later, speaking of the Duchess's (perceived) sexual corruption, he says that she is 'filled with unquenchable wild fire' (III. ii.116). Indicating that he will quench his passion for his sister through her murder, this is an echo of a statement he makes at this point: 'Tis not your whore's milk that shall quench my wild-fire, / But your whore's blood!' (II. v. 47-48). The Cardinal – who used Ferdinand's zealousness regarding sexual purity to his advantage in Act I – is now concerned by his brother's 'intemperate anger' and the disturbing passion evident in it (II. v.58). Ferdinand wants to murder the Duchess as a punishment for whoring and for provoking his desire. For the Cardinal, her murder will negate the distasteful marriage, and allow them, rather than any children from the marriage, to lay claim to her land.⁴² As cold, manipulative thinking is required now if they are not to be implicated in the murder, he urges Ferdinand to put himself 'in tune' (II. v. 61). This means to be like him, a corrupt machiavel who hypocritically enforces standards to which he does not himself adhere.⁴³

⁴² According to Ingram, quite often 'the woman accused of incontinence [via a spy] was a widow holding lands by manorial custom which specified that her rights lasted only so long as she remained "chaste and sole"'. The accuser was 'usually someone who stood to benefit if the widow forfeited her holding'. *Church Courts*, p. 244.

⁴³ Maus argues that some critics have emphasised 'the indigenous theatrical origins' of the stage machiavel. They trace its descent 'from the allegorical vice-character of late-medieval morality plays'. *Inwardness and Theatre*, p. 35. The Cardinal resides somewhere between the vice-character of morality plays and a realistic political entity that emerges in *The Prince* in opposition to the successful ruler. Webster distinguishes the Cardinal from Machiavelli's ideal rule in Act I, when Antonio contrasts Amalfi negatively with France, from where he has recently returned. Chapter XXIII of *The Prince* is titled 'How Flatterers Should be Shunned'. Antonio states that he admires the French court because:

In seeking to reduce both state and people
To a fixed order, their judicious king
Begins at home, quits first his royal palace
Of flatt'ring sycophants (I. i. 6-9)

Later, describing the Cardinal's political methods, Antonio remarks that he: 'strews / In his way flatterers, panders, intelligencers, atheists, and a / Thousand such political monsters' (I. i. 156-158). Thus, the Cardinal is presented as a figure of authority who uses any means to obtain and hold onto power, but who

In Act III, Ferdinand confronts the Duchess about her marriage, and claims that he will ‘force confession’ from her so as to learn the identity of her co-sinner (III. i. 79). Echoing the brothers’ efforts to elicit information from the Duchess in Act I, here again Webster portrays confession as ‘a product of power . . . not simply the unmediated outpouring of sin from the sinner to the absolver’.⁴⁴ In this scene, Ferdinand tries to heed the Cardinal’s advice, to put himself ‘in tune’. Attempting a hands-off approach, rather than a personal quenching of ‘wildfire’, he presents his sister with a dagger that she is to use to kill herself after she confesses. But, when he cannot bear to hear the confession, this demonstrates that he is still subject to his own disturbing passions. Speaking directly to the Duchess’s husband, whom he (rightly) believes can hear him (Antonio and Cariola are playfully hiding from the Duchess and overhear Ferdinand), Ferdinand remarks: ‘I came hither prepared to work thy discovery, / Yet am now persuaded / It would beget such violent effects that it would damn us both’ (III. ii. 91-95). Hearing Antonio’s name would make his sexual visions of his sister resurface, increasing his rage, and cause him to murder her. Thus, Ferdinand does not ‘force confession’ from the Duchess. He departs, leaving the discovery of her husband’s identity to Bosola.

At this point, still unaware that Bosola is a spy, the Duchess places her trust in him; she tells him that Antonio is her husband, of their three children, and their plans to flee. Through Bosola’s intelligence, her husband’s identity is revealed, and the Duchess is captured. Confession is once again established as the prime contextual framework for the Duchess’s persecution when, before using his proxy, Bosola, to quench his ‘wild fire’, Ferdinand first seeks to make her repentant. She must renounce the self she has forged and affirm the self that was dictated to her at the beginning of the play. Presuming that the Duchess will repent because her imprisonment and imminent death will cause her to see a correlation between his and God’s authority, Ferdinand asks Bosola how the Duchess bears ‘herself / in her imprisonment?’ (IV. i. 1-2). Confounding his expectations, Bosola replies: ‘with a behaviour so noble / As gives a majesty to adversity’ (IV. i. 5-6). Earlier, her brothers’ persecution of her had briefly caused the Duchess to doubt the virtue of her marriage. Referring to the discovery of Antonio and her capture, she says: ‘oh heaven, thy heavy hand is in’t’ (III. v. 76). For a

does not share the ‘virtues’ that counterbalance this ruthlessness in an effective ruler, and which facilitate an effective ruling of the state.

⁴⁴ Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p. 2, summarising Foucault’s representation of confession.

brief moment, the Cardinal's warning that 'wisdom begins at the end' appears to have been prescient. Later, however, when she realises that it was Bosola who betrayed her, she remarks that he 'counterfeits heaven's thunder' (III. v. 98). She distinguishes once more between divine and earthly authority. When he hears of her lack of repentance, Ferdinand remarks: 'Curse upon her: I will no longer study into the book / of another's heart' (IV. ii. 15-17). Alluding to his appropriation of the role of the Duchess's confessor, this remark suggests his use of confession manuals, which instructed confessors how to 'read' the penitent's interior state to see if they were truly repentant.⁴⁵ Failing to see any signs of true contrition, despite his pledge never to see the Duchess again, Ferdinand now goes once more to see her. Foucault calls torture and confession 'the dark twins', arguing that torture has 'accompanied [confession] like a shadow, and supports it when it could go no further'.⁴⁶ Giving up on conventional confessional methods, Ferdinand's intention now is to bring the Duchess to 'despair' through psychological torture, and through despair to repentance.

To support his argument that Webster's play endorses auricular confession, Kerrigan contrasts the violence and despair of the Duchess's murderers in Act V with the serenity and assurance of what he sees as the penitent Duchess in Act IV. He admits that she does not make a traditional confession, but, citing the fact that when Ferdinand arrives, the Duchess asks for forgiveness, he argues that she is aware of the importance of repentance to unburden the conscience so as to achieve a good death.⁴⁷ However, when the Duchess asks forgiveness she is again using equivocation. She feigns repentance in the hope that, if she acts submissive and contrite, her life and the lives of her husband and children will be spared.⁴⁸ Ferdinand, knowing that her repentance is feigned, wanting more than this, and intent on killing her whether she repents or not, replies: 'I account it a most honourabl'st revenge / Where I may kill, to pardon' (IV. i. 32-33). He then gives the Duchess a dead man's hand, claiming it is Antonio's, and reveals wax figures of Antonio and their children, claiming that they are their dead bodies. I outlined in Chapter One how in Elizabethan England, before executing heretics, inquisitors sought to wring a confession of heresy by torture. Hanson argues

⁴⁵ Little, *Confession and Resistance*, p. 54. In an earlier episode, after it becomes clear that the marriage has been discovered, Antonio accuses Cariola of betraying them. Cariola says to Antonio: 'cleft my heart you shall read there / Mine Innocence' (III. ii. 144).

⁴⁶ Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', p. 59

⁴⁷ Kerrigan, 'Action and Confession', 252, 256.

⁴⁸ For other critics who argue that the Duchess remains entirely defiant about her marriage to Antonio, see Whigham, 'Social Mobility', 174, and Lifson, 'Embodied Morality'.

that it was through this use of inquisitorial torture that the ‘analogy between religious and judicial confession became meaningful in an English context’.⁴⁹ Here, psychological torture is used against a Protestant woman by her Puritan twin. From the judge Ferdinand’s viewpoint, his sister is a heretical other who has rebelled against his religious and patriarchal authority and embraced sexual corruption. At this point, the Duchess is brought to the point of despair, but this despair does not lead to repentance. Still confident that Ferdinand does not act with God’s authority, she says to Cariola: ‘I am not mad yet, to the source of my despair’ (IV. ii. 26). She also remarks: ‘let them like tyrants / Never be remembered but for the ill they have done’ (IV. i. 100-101). Knowing now that she has nothing to gain, she reveals her true attitude to her brothers.

Foucault argues that, beginning with the rise of Protestantism, the disciplinary procedures of confession ‘gradually lost [their] ritualistic and exclusive localization’ in religious discipline, migrating into secular disciplinary practices.⁵⁰ When Ferdinand surrounds the Duchess’s prison with madmen, Webster alludes to the invention of other methods of control. Through perverting a practice used by physicians to bring the mad to sanity, Ferdinand attempts to drive the Duchess mad and erase her self-fashioned identity, a ‘tyranny’, Cariola remarks, which was ‘never practiced till this hour’ (IV. ii. 4-5). Having accepted her death, and comforted by the thought that, acting from conscience, she has nothing to repent, the Duchess is impervious to the ‘sport’ of the madmen (IV. ii. 38). Antonio concludes his description of the Duchess in the opening act by stating: ‘She stains the time past, lights the time to come’ (I. i. 204). In the larger context of the play, the Duchess ‘stains the time past’ by rebelling against both the notion that female sexual agency is a sin, and social prohibitions against inter-class marriage; she ‘lights the time to come’ by embodying the increased resistance by individuals to confessional discipline. But, Webster suggests, such rebelliousness will not be readily tolerated. When he invents the new disciplinary method of inducing madness, Ferdinand also ‘lights the time to come’.

Ferdinand’s association with efforts by some extreme Puritans to punish sexual offenders by death and with the religious persecution of non-conformists is brought to fruition when the Duchess is murdered. She dies in part because Ferdinand configures her sexual relationship with Antonio as adultery, resulting in the breeding of ‘bastards’, in part because she is seen as a Confessional rebel who defies patriarchal and religious

⁴⁹ Hanson, *Discovering the Subject*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 63.

authority (IV. i. 35). In contrast to Kerrigan's analysis that in Act V guilt impinges on the consciences of the Duchess's murderers, and, as this guilt cannot be relieved through confession, they are brought to despair and violence, I will now demonstrate that the last act is thematically and dramatically integrated with Webster's negative portrayal of confession and positive portrayal of personal conscience.

The Duchess had lived in accordance with her conscience; in murdering her, her persecutors have violated theirs. Ironically, Ferdinand, who had sought to make the Duchess mad, himself goes mad. In Act IV, sanity is aligned with both a clear conscience and a clear sense of identity. After the episode with the madmen, the Duchess states: 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' (IV. ii. 134). This statement has divided critics. Some see it as indicating that she is making 'her destiny her choice' as she prepares for death. Others feel she is merely asserting her 'proud Aragon blood'.⁵¹ Overall, this statement is an affirmation of her identity and sanity. The madmen's speeches do not, for the most part, conform to their roles or professions.⁵² Lack of identity is, thus, presented as a feature of madness. Opposing the madmen's lack of identity with the Duchess's continued sense of identity – her claim that she is still the Duchess of Malfi – Webster then locates Ferdinand's madness in a violation of conscience and an ambiguous identity. As Antonio remarks in Act I, he: 'speaks with others' tongues / and hears men's suits with others' ears' (I. i. 168-169). He is a hybrid of the religious and secular figure, a Protestant who enforces Catholic confessional discipline.

The Cardinal's reaction to the Duchess's murder illustrates further that despair and violence in the last act stem from the violation of conscience rather than a lack of confessional outlets as a means to relieve guilt. Confident in his Machiavellian amorality, the Cardinal – a leading figure in the tradition that practised auricular confession – has not heeded his own advice to look to the 'end' before committing acts that may lead to fears about damnation. But, after the Duchess's death, he does feel guilt and is driven to confess. He unburdens himself to his lover, Julia, after she urges him to 'remove the lead from off your bosom' (V. ii. 225-226). When the Cardinal confesses, Webster implies that confession is necessary to unburden the conscience of guilt; but he suggests it is more important to live in accordance with conscience, which prevents

⁵¹ Gibbons, *The Duchess of Malfi*, p. xxxvii.

⁵² The eight madmen are a lawyer, a secular priest, a doctor, an astrologian, a tailor, a gentleman usher, a farmer, and a broker. Gibbons notes that only the doctor is characterised consistently. *The Duchess of Malfi*, p. 94, note on text.

sinning and guilt. After his confession, the Cardinal promptly murders Julia, and is once more afflicted with a 'tedious' guilty conscience (V. v. 4).

When the Cardinal's confession is overheard by Bosola, who hides in Julia's cabinet, the drama both reinforces and plays out Webster's aim of revealing hidden connections between Protestant discipline and Catholic confession. Julia had urged the Cardinal to confess after Bosola, suspecting the Cardinal's involvement in the Duchess's murder, asked her to 'demand the cause of the Cardinal's melancholi' (V. ii. 196).⁵³ When Bosola spies on the Cardinal as he confesses his guilt to Julia, the cabinet becomes associated with the confessional box. The cabinet, a synonym for closet, is also redolent of the Protestant closet – the Protestant space for private confession and self-examination. Thus again, through Bosola, Webster links spying with both Catholic and Protestant confessional practices. Before this point in the play, Bosola functions as the common man, largely unaware of these connections. In the opening act, the Cardinal ensures that Ferdinand is the one who approaches him, and instructs him in the surveillance and, later, murder of the Duchess. After the Duchess's death, the Cardinal is keen that Bosola remain in ignorance about his involvement; 'this fellow must not know / By any means I had intelligence / In our Duchess' death' (V. ii. 102-104). After overhearing the Cardinal's confession, Bosola emerges from the cabinet, in full knowledge that the Cardinal is the hidden puppet master behind the (confessional) surveillance and murder of the Duchess. Regarding her murder, the Cardinal remarked that, although he 'counselled it / The full of all th'engagement seemed to grow / From Ferdinand' (V. ii. 104-106). In inventing new methods of discipline at the end of Act IV, Ferdinand grows autonomous from the confessional system that the Cardinal represents. The play nevertheless locates Catholic confession as the foundation stone of his Puritan ethos of sexual purity, and his compulsion to punish affronts to religious and patriarchal authority.

As this analysis demonstrates, confessional discipline provides a critical framework through which to explore issues of religious division, social control, masculine domination and female rebellion in Webster's play. A focus on confessional discipline demonstrates thematic and dramatic integrity throughout. Arguing that *The Duchess of Malfi* is an important source for their work, I will now explore how

⁵³ Julia agrees to do so because she has taken a fancy to Bosola. She alludes to confession before agreeing to get the Cardinal to unburden himself when she jokingly remarks to Bosola: 'I will make you confess your treachery . . . Yes, confess to me which of my women 'twas you hired, to put / Love-powder into my drink?' (V. ii. 149-152).

Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) is also concerned with depicting parallels between Catholic and Calvinist confessional discipline, and with dramatising the mutual dependency and inherent compatibility of confessional authority and wider patriarchal authority.

Confession in the Closet in *The Changeling*

Displaying a debt to *The Duchess of Malfi*, in *The Changeling* (1622) Middleton and Rowley also explore the lingering influence of Catholic attitudes in Reformation England. The thematic importance of confession in the play is underscored in the key dramatic moments that revolve around Alsemero's closet. Critical explorations of the significance of the closet in the play have neglected the fact that early modern closets were the private space where Protestant confession was conducted.⁵⁴ Through Alsemero's closet – which, I argue, represents the Protestant confessional closet and additionally suggests the Catholic confession box – the playwrights dramatise the idea that medieval ideas of sexual corruption, which were traditionally inculcated through confession, remained in Protestant thought. They explore the difficulties of transcending entrenched ideas of the sinfulness of sex, which conflicted with emergent Protestant beliefs of the virtue of sexual relations in marriage. Engaging with criticism of the play which explores links drawn between Beatrice's fall and the Fall, I argue that ambiguous ideas about the sinfulness or otherwise of sexual desire in marriage and issues pertaining to patriarchal control of female desire – located in the play in relation to confession – contribute to Beatrice's fall into sin and crime.

While Middleton and Rowley depict the difficulty of transition from one religious ideology to another, like Webster, they also suggest that ideas on the sinfulness of sex are still fostered because they aid the regulation of social hierarchies and facilitate patriarchal control. In *The Changeling*, issues of patriarchal control are linked to confession through the closet. Alsemero's closet additionally represents the male study space: a patriarchal site of gaining knowledge from which women were excluded. The confessional significance of the closet in the play combines with its function as a site of patriarchal privilege and power. Through their treatment of the closet, Middleton and Rowley show that confession is obsessively concerned with controlling female desire.

⁵⁴ See for example, Bruce Boehrer, 'Alsemero's Closet: Privacy and Interiority in *The Changeling*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 96 (1997), 349-368.

Intrinsic to the medieval idea that sex was sinful was the idea that women were, by nature, more prone to sexual corruption. Calvinism portrayed marital sex as ordained by God, but, to facilitate the control of women, continued to maintain that female desire needed to be monitored and suppressed. I explore Beatrice's rebellion as a reaction against these ideas. I begin by examine how medieval attitudes to sexual morality impacted on beliefs about the sinfulness of sex and women, and how these beliefs lie deep in Alsemero's psyche.

In Reformation England, many books on negotiating private behaviour were published by Protestant theologians. In William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), although the emphasis remained on marital sex as protection from adultery, there is also a stress on the pleasure of sex. In the context of describing the sexual duties of marriage, Gouge argues that Catholics present celibacy as the only truly chaste state: 'note the dotage of our aduerseries, who thinke there is no chastitie, but of single persons . . . they oppose chastity and matrimonie one to another, as two contraries'.⁵⁵ Gouge then goes on to argue that sexual relationships in marriage should not be seen as a necessary evil, but should be undertaken with generosity of spirit and enjoyed. The 'husband and wife [who] mutually delight each in other . . . maintain a pure and feruent love betwixt themselves, yielding that due benevolence one to another which is warranted and sanctified by God's word'.⁵⁶ Mazo-Karras argues that the double emphasis in early modern England on marital sex as protection from sin and as a source of pleasure led to an ambiguity about the place of sexual relations in marriage.⁵⁷ This ambiguity is suggested in the opening scene of *The Changeling*.

The play opens with Alsemero sitting in a temple, contemplating the significance of the fact that he first met Beatrice in this place of worship: 'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her, / And now again the same – what omen yet'.⁵⁸ Positively configuring the portentous significance of their meeting place, he remarks: 'Why should my hopes of fate be timorous? / The place is holy, so is my intent; / I love her beauties to the holy purpose' (I. i. 4-6). His protestation that his love for Beatrice is 'holy' betrays a fear that

⁵⁵ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), p. 216, *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 July 2011].

⁵⁶ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp. 221-222.

⁵⁷ Ruth Mazo-Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 67.

⁵⁸ Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Michael Neill, New Mermaid edition (London: A&C Black, 2006), I. i. 1-2. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

his desire for her constitutes a sin.⁵⁹ Alsemero's previous attraction to religious life suggests the extent to which he is affected by the medieval attitude that 'the flesh must be controlled and subdued for the sake of salvation of the soul'.⁶⁰ Prior to his meeting Beatrice, he had resisted urgings by his friends and family to marry, to the extent that his family feared he would join a religious order. Regarding Alsemero's uncharacteristic attraction to Beatrice, Jasperino later comments: 'this will be stranger and better news at / Valencia than if he had ransomed half of Greece from the Turks' (I. i. 58-59). Here, Jasperino refers to the invasion of Christendom by Islam under the Ottoman Empire, and Turk rule over Greece since 1460. 'Ransomed' refers to the fact that two religious orders, the Trinitarians and Mencedarians, 'specialised in ransoming Christian slaves'.⁶¹ The place where Alsemero encounters Beatrice ominously plays into his belief that the spiritual and the sexual are incompatible. The pollution of the spiritual by the sexual was highlighted in the medieval period through stories about sexual acts in the church.⁶²

In the early modern period, for the higher and middling classes, marriage was often a means of social advancement. The Protestant idea that sex in marriage was godly ordained led to the notion that love should be the principal motive for marriage. Previously, Alsemero's mother and Jasperino had tempted him into marriage by arranging for him to meet women who were not only beautiful, but would allow a socially advantageous marriage: they had 'set snares of beauty – / Ay, and choice [rich] ones too' (I. i. 38-39). In the past, the prospect of social advancement with a beautiful bride had not tempted Alsemero away from his preferred life of celibacy – as Jasperino remarks, their efforts could 'never trap [him] that way' (I. i. 39). Only after falling in love with Beatrice does he consider marriage. Suppressing his fears about sex,

⁵⁹ For the ambiguity of Alsemero's perception of 'omens' see Mohammad Kowsar, 'Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling: the Besieged Temple*', *Criticism*, 28 (1986), 147, and Sara Eaton, 'Beatrice-Joanna and the Rhetoric of Love in *The Changeling*', *Theatre Journal*, 36 (1984), 374.

⁶⁰ Mazo-Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p. 28.

⁶¹ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 57.

⁶² One cautionary tale that was 'widely told' was that of 'a couple who had sex in a church and became stuck together "like dogs"'. Mazo-Karras states that this story may 'reflect a real issue for medieval people', with the church being the medieval equivalent of 'the back seat of a car'. However, she also argues that the tale 'may be more symbolic of the division between laity and clergy, between sacred and profane, than literal'. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p. 76. Ozment argues that the medieval Church tried to erode this division between the laity and the clergy through an emphasis in confession on obedience and sexual purity. Confession manuals demanded 'a monastically derived . . . piety with prominent clerical ideals of obedience and sexual purity'. Steven Ozment *Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, pp. 219-220. Quoted in Ronald K. Rittgers, 'Anxious Penitents and the Appeal of the Reformation: Ozment and the Historiography of Confession', in Marc R. Forster and Benjamin J. Kaplan (eds.), *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of Steven Ozment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 51.

Alsemero confidently declares that: ‘The Church has first begun our interview, / And that’s the place must join us into one, / So there’s beginning and perfection too’ (I. i. 10-12). Here, he displays the Protestant attitude that promotes harmony between love, sexual desire and spirituality.

But Alsemero’s fears about sex are not fully overcome. His continued confusion about the status of the sexual relationship in marriage leads to an ambiguous attitude toward the object of his desire, Beatrice.⁶³ On the one hand, he sees her as personifying the ideal of spiritual and sexual harmony; on the other, she is seen as a corrupt temptress who has led him away from spirituality and into a ‘trap’ of sensuality. As Mazo-Karras argues:

The idea that sex was a pollutant . . . had a great deal to do with gender. For men, it was not just the sex act that was polluting, but also the woman with whom they committed it . . . the general expectation was . . . that women were the temptresses who led men astray.⁶⁴

This idea was promoted by Augustine. In the *Confessions*, as he depicts mankind as corrupted by the Fall, Augustine emphasises his culpability in his sexual corruption. There is, nevertheless, a suggestion that women represent ‘the temptation of desire and hence of sin’.⁶⁵ As McDuffe argues, while ‘the figure of woman as mother [Monica] plays a significant and positive role in the work the shadowy figure of woman as “other” [his pre-conversion sexual partners] plays an equally significant but more ambiguous part’.⁶⁶ Later, in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine argued that ‘gender hierarchy is a part of the original design of creation’.⁶⁷ His gendered view of creation included a gendered depiction of the Fall – one which suggested a greater culpability of Eve/woman. It was Eve who was tempted by the serpent, and she who then tempted Adam. Augustine argued that Adam was created closer to the rational part of the soul, while Eve had ‘less rationality and self control’ and was closer to the lower, sexual part of the soul. Eve was easily tempted by the serpent because ‘the sensuous part of the soul may be tempted by desire’.⁶⁸ The ‘lower’ part of men’s souls, the female and sensual side, could also be tempted to sin through close association with women.

⁶³ See also Eaton ‘Rhetoric of Love in *The Changeling*’, 374.

⁶⁴ Mazo-Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁵ Ruether, ‘Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women’, p. 57.

⁶⁶ McDuffe, ‘Augustine’s Rhetoric of the Feminine’, p. 98.

⁶⁷ Ruether, ‘Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women’, p. 53.

⁶⁸ Ruether, ‘Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women’, p. 54. Summarising Augustine’s *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. 6.19.

As illustrated in my discussion of Sutcliffe's rebuttal of Matthew's introduction to the *Confessions* above, Calvinists also promulgated the idea that women were more prone to corruption. Richard Kilby's *The Burthen of a Loaden Conscience* (1608) further illustrates this point. I explore connections between Kilby's text and the *Confessions* in Chapter Three. For my purposes here, Kilby serves to demonstrate that Augustine's attitudes regarding female corruption endured in Calvinism. With reference to his past life as a sexual sinner, Kilby argues that only in a 'mariage . . . holy before God' is one 'freed from the flames of lust'.⁶⁹ In a passage where Kilby warns that Satan is ready to tempt man with 'many deuils to turn their hearts from God', he states that Satan 'specially' tempts him:

by showing [him] fine and beautiful women, who doe commonly come glittering into the Church after service is well begun, and then sit, or stand in the sight of men. When service is done, betake yourself vnto God, and depart out of Church: for it is no place to talk of worldly matters.⁷⁰

The opening scene of *The Changeling* resonates strongly with the example Kilby uses to warn men against being tempted by the Devil in the church, and his portrayal of women as snares of the Devil. In another passage, he again explicitly portrays women as temptresses. After stating that he 'specialy' intends his 'confession' to benefit men, he beseeches them to:

not muse of women, nor let your eyes be delighted in behoulding their beautie and finenesses; give no regard to their coie behaviour . . . take no pleasure in hearing their delicate talking, sweet singing and amourous playing, for the deuill is readie when you are any way touched with delight by women.⁷¹

Kilby calls himself a 'Precisian', a synonym for Puritan.⁷² Many of the Protestant commentators who argued that sex in marriage was an 'honourable, dignified and natural union between men and women: sanctioned by God' were Puritan.⁷³ However, this development was undermined by the idea that women were synonymous with

⁶⁹ Richard Kilby, *The Burthen of a Loaden Conscience* (Cambridge, 1608), p. 57. *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 July 2011].

⁷⁰ Kilby, *Loaden Conscience*, pp. 34-35.

⁷¹ Kilby, *Loaden Conscience*, p. 55.

⁷² Kilby, *Loaden Conscience* (Cambridge, p. 9. *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://english.oxforddictionaries.com>> [accessed 32 March, 2012].

⁷³ Elspeth Graham, 'Introduction', in *Her Own Life*, p. 8.

sexual corruption. In *The Changeling*, this idea also influences Alsemero's attitude to sex. He fears that the promise of a chaste, holy expression of sexuality – offered by Beatrice – in fact masks a fall into libidinous corruption. This is illustrated by the experiments in his closet. Through Alsemero's closet, and the experiments it contains, the playwrights forge links between the ideas of the ungodliness of desire, the projection of dangerous desire onto women, and the practice of confession.

In Act IV Beatrice discovers in Alsemero's closet two potions that he has developed from instructions in a physician's manuscript – *The Book of Experiment, / Called Secret in Nature* (IV. i. 24-25). The potions promise to reveal 'whether a woman be with child or no' (IV. i. 26), and 'whether a woman be a maid, or not' (IV. i. 40). These experiments relate to the two interconnected fears that impinge on Alsemero's attempt to sanctify the sexual. The first experiment suggests that sex in marriage is only sanctified for the purpose of procreation; the second, that women are not always what they appear, but often conceal promiscuity. The confessional overtones of Alsemero's closet signal that confession is highly relevant to *The Changeling's* depiction of the retention of Catholic ideas in England. The experiments in the closet are quasi-medicinal formulas, one of which elicits confessions of transgressive sexual acts from women's bodies. Here, alluding to the image of the Catholic confessor as a healing doctor who uncovers sins, the playwrights suggest that ideas about the sinfulness of sex (other than for procreation), and women concealing corruption were traditionally inculcated through auricular confession. Alsemero's private space suggests the Protestant confessional closet. The fact that these medieval ideas are latent in the Protestant closet demonstrates the deep-rooted influence of Catholic confessional discourses on the Protestant psyche.

Through references to the law in the scene, Middleton and Rowley also evoke the image of confessor as Protestant judge. These references occur when Beatrice instructs her waiting woman Diaphanta to take the chastity test. At this stage in the play, Beatrice is ensconced in a sexual relationship with Deflores. After hiring him to murder her fiancé, Alonzo, so that she can be free to marry Alsemero, Deflores has demanded sex as payment for the murder. With her marriage to Alsemero looming, Beatrice uses the chastity test on Diaphanta, whom, to maintain the pretence of virginity, she intends to use as her proxy on the wedding night. First, however, she must be sure that Diaphanta is a virgin. An allusion to legal practices occurs when she asks Diaphanta to take the chastity test: to put her 'honesty / Upon an easy trial' (IV. i. 98). Diaphanta

then remarks: ‘She [Beatrice] will not search me? Will she? / Like a forewoman of a female jury?’ (IV. i. 99-100). According to Taylor and Lavagnino, Diaphanta is referring here to an ‘examination – including a gynaecological search [for virginity] as might be performed by a female forewoman in a criminal case’.⁷⁴ These references to Protestant morality courts further reinforce the Protestant confessional significance of the closet.

Arguably, in their exploration of the closet, Middleton and Rowley signal that *The Duchess of Malfi* is an important source.⁷⁵ Webster implies similarities between the Protestant closet and the confessional box when Bosola overhears the Cardinal confess his sins while hiding in Julia’s cabinet. Through Ferdinand, Webster connects Catholic confession to confessional discipline in Protestant England. The fact that the experiments in Alsemero’s closet can, like legal gynaecological searches, elicit confessions from the body designates him as a confessor, a role supposedly removed from Protestantism. I have argued that, through Ferdinand’s subversion of medical practices when he attempts to make the Duchess repent, Webster depicts the migration of confession into non-religious practices. Through the quasi-medicinal nature of these experiments, Middleton and Rowley also suggest the migration of confessional discipline into medical practices.

Like Webster, Middleton and Rowley also examine a link between confession and the patriarchal control of women. Alsemero’s private space would allow an early modern audience to easily connect that space with Protestant confession, and to realise that it also encompasses the male study cabinet or closet, a place from which women were prohibited. The confessional significance of the space, the suggestion of the exclusivity of study to men, and the confessional nature of the experiments combine to imply that, with the demise of auricular confession and the removal of the father confessor, Protestant patriarchal authority is concerned with finding new methods to control women and uncover hidden female corruption.

The references to the closet as a confessional and study space also imply that chastity and lack of learning are encouraged in women to keep them passive and subservient. As Gowing argues, ‘chastity essentially meant passivity, the avoidance of sin. It was the absolute opposite of the activity, work and consequence that constituted

⁷⁴ Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (eds.), *Thomas Middleton, The Collected Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1662, note on text.

⁷⁵ A year after writing *The Changeling*, Middleton and Rowley contributed ‘admiring verses’ to a publication of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Neill, *The Changeling*, p. ix.

male honour'.⁷⁶ The idea of the unchastely significance of female action is alluded to when Beatrice transgresses Alsemero's closet. Stewart argues that, in this period, the male study closet fell outside the 'conversation of husband and wife' and that 'any curiosity about the male study by a woman' gave 'rise to doubts about her chastity'.⁷⁷

Beatrice seemingly personifies the link between action and sexual corruption.

Importantly, however, in being curious about the closet, in becoming like a man, active and desirous of knowledge, Beatrice gains power. When she elicits a confession from Diaphanta's body, Beatrice is able to share in male privilege by herself becoming a confessor. Later, when Jasperino informs Alsemero of a suspect closeness between Deflores and Beatrice, and Alsemero uses the chastity test to establish whether Beatrice is virginal or adulterous, Beatrice is able to prevent her sexual transgressions becoming known. She disrupts the male privilege of interpreting knowledge by merely acting the 'symptoms' of chastity. Through these developments, the playwrights imply that it is the male fear of loss of privilege and power which prompts the notions that female sexual agency, action and learning denote sexual corruption.

When Beatrice uncovers the secrets of Alsemero's cabinet, and she installs her substitute, Diaphanta, on her wedding night, it leads, ironically, to Alsemero overcoming his fears about sex and female corruption.⁷⁸ Unaware that it is Diaphanta with whom he sleeps, Alsemero fully overcomes the Catholic attitude that celibacy or sex for procreation are the only forms of chastity. The pleasures of the night see him move fully to the Protestant attitude that sees 'good sexual relations [as] . . . a central part of married life'.⁷⁹ Diaphanta, depicted as eager to experience sexual pleasure, 'lies' for Beatrice (IV. i. 82) and 'loves the burden' (IV. i. 122) to the extent that in satisfying her 'greedy appetite' she almost reveals the deception (V. i. 2-4). She only leaves the marriage bed after Deflores has roused her by setting fire to the castle and raising the alarm (he then kills Diaphanta so that the deception can never be revealed by her). Alsemero, however, is unfazed by his bride's 'greedy appetite'. He remarks to Beatrice the next day: 'Th'art all sweetness' (V. i. 83). He follows this remark by saying: 'The fire is not so dangerous' (V. i. 84). Referring to the fire in the castle, which disturbed his

⁷⁶ Gowing, 'Women, Status, and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', 226.

⁷⁷ Alan Stewart, 'The Early Modern Closet Discovered', *Representations*, 50 (1995), 78.

⁷⁸ The ruse of using Diaphanta as a proxy also suggests a link, via *Measure for Measure*, to *The Duchess of Malfi*. In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella, under the Duke's instructions, arranges for a woman who is in love with Angelo to take her place on the night that she is supposed to surrender her virginity to him.

⁷⁹ Mazo-Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p. 28.

wedding night, he is also dismissing his fear that the fire of sexual pleasure will engulf spiritual purity.

In the last act, Alsemero learns that his bride is not, in fact, 'all sweetness'. Having witnessed her in an intimate encounter with Deflores, Alsemero confronts Beatrice and pronounces her 'a whore' (V. iii. 32). Although initially refusing to confess to any sexual transgression, Beatrice does confess to the murder of Alonzo. When she confesses to a hidden corruption, Alsemero's fears about the dangers of the sexual resurface. He quickly thinks of his and Beatrice's first meeting in the temple, stating that he feared then that divine 'vengeance' would ensue, because when 'blood and beauty first unlawfully / Fired their devotion' it 'quenched the right one' (V. iii. 74-76). He sees his attempt to harmonise the spiritual and the sexual as quenching the spiritual, leading to divine vengeance and the fire of damnation. He remarks: 'The bed itself's a charnel, the sheets shrouds / For murdered carcasses' (V. III. 84-85). As Adam fell through Eve, Alsemero fears that he has fallen through Beatrice.

In Augustine's gendered view of the Fall he taught that 'Adam's particular sin lay in losing male rank by obeying his wife [his lower self], rather than making his wife obey him as "head"'. Applying this view to Alsemero, we can see that he feels that, in obeying his lower self – desire – he turned 'away from higher things' and became 'like a woman, bound to the body'.⁸⁰ In giving into temptations of the flesh he has become weak and unchaste. To overcome his fear that his fall will lead to damnation, Alsemero now reasserts the primacy of the spiritual over the carnal. He locks Beatrice, the symbol of sexual corruption, into his closet, saying 'I'll be your keeper yet' (V. ii. 88). Here, reverting fully to a medieval position, he locks sexual desire back where it belongs in the confessional, where it is to be renounced. In prioritising the spiritual over the sexual, Alsemero is also asserting male control over woman. As in Act IV, the last act draws links between confession, a gendered interpretation of the Fall, and masculine domination. Before exploring these links further, I will first examine the main dramatic impetus of the play: Beatrice's fall.

Some critical debate centres on whether, in presenting such a corrupt female character as Beatrice – who lies, schemes, murders and commits adultery – the playwrights themselves advocate the control of women and of sexual desire. Seeing Middleton and Rowley as perpetuating the idea of woman as innately corrupt, Stockton,

⁸⁰ Ruether, 'Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women', p.54. Quoting from *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

for example, suggests that a feminist appraisal of Beatrice is only possible from a revisionist position. When she argues that Beatrice ‘as a woman, cannot help but fall because she is already by her constitution and definition fallen, corrupt’, she implies that the playwrights themselves typify the endemic misogyny of their time in their depiction of the dangerous female.⁸¹

This opinion is apparently strengthened by the fact that Middleton and Rowley employ a ‘persistent Fall motif’ not only in regard to the temptation of Alsemero, but also in regard to Beatrice’s fall.⁸² As the devil easily tempted Eve, Deflores easily tempts Beatrice. The representation of the closet in Act IV presents a critique of confession on the grounds that it promotes a gendered interpretation of the Fall, which, in turn, facilitates male privilege and power. Yet Beatrice’s immorality could also seem to imply that the playwrights are validating the idea that women are by nature prone to corruption. The combination in the play of an excessively corrupt female protagonist and an evident critique of patriarchal control of female desire provokes the question: are the playwrights themselves, like Alsemero, torn between old and new ideas? Is the proto-feminism in the play undermined by deep-seated ideas of female corruption and weakness? This, I will argue, is not the case. In the following pages I demonstrate that, far from reinforcing the view of corrupt Eve, Middleton and Rowley are concerned with uncovering the conditions that cause their female protagonist to fulfil the role of ‘archetype of woman-driven-by-desire’.⁸³ Through Beatrice, I argue, the playwrights explore two potential consequences of patriarchal control of female desire: the repression of sexual agency in women and the rebellious expression of sexual agency. Complicating the idea of unchaste femininity, the play shows that it is not desire, but desire trapped in the dual impulses of repression and expression, that causes Beatrice’s fall.

Beatrice, like Alsemero, is caught in the crossfire of lingering medieval attitudes to sexual desire as corrupt and emergent Protestant attitudes. Her own conflict regarding the status of sexual desire is complicated by her impending marriage to Alonzo at the play’s opening. This marriage, arranged by her father, Vermandero, demonstrates that

⁸¹ Sharon Stockton, “‘The Broken Rib of Mankind’”: The Sociopolitical Function of the Scapegoat in *The Changeling*, *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 26 (1990), 463-464. See also Im Chung-in, ‘Politics of Desire and Revenge in *The Changeling*: Alsemero’s Case’, *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies*, 17 (2009), 293-315.

⁸² Neill, *The Changeling*, note on text, p. 5. See also Stockton, who remarks that ‘De Flores is clearly a Satanic figure, slithering into Eden to “tempt” Beatrice. ‘The Broken Rib’, 472.

⁸³ Stockton, ‘The Broken Rib’, 463.

patriarchal authority is resistant to allowing women freedom of choice when it comes to who they should love and desire because this would disrupt the tradition of arranged marriages, which both advance and protect the interests of the upper classes and facilitate patriarchal control. While previously accepting the marriage, by the time the play opens, Beatrice has realised that she does not love Alonzo. Seeing that the marriage takes no account of her desires, she is driven to rebel against her father's authority to suppress her will. But Beatrice also holds deep-seated ideas about sexual corruption and female obedience. Her struggle between these contradictory impulses produces a radically divided self.

At the play's opening Beatrice is outwardly obedient, but her desire finds rebellious expression. Rebelling against the socially desirable match that takes no account of her desires, Beatrice comes to desire a man who is socially detestable. Deflores, her father's servant, is the forbidden fruit. The largely unconscious nature of Beatrice's rebellion is emphasised in her attitudes toward Deflores: she exhibits signs of an attraction to him, yet continually professes a hatred for him. These conflicting attitudes are evident when she drops her glove in Act I, Scene i. As Neill notes, Beatrice drops her glove following an aside expressing her 'pathological aversion to Deflores'. This, he argues, suggests that the 'invitation' denoted by the dropping of the glove 'may be unconsciously aimed at him'.⁸⁴ That Beatrice is, nonetheless, on some level aware of her secret desire for Deflores is evident in her protestations of hatred themselves. She remarks later: 'this ominous, ill-faced fellow more disturbs / Than all my other passions' (II. i. 53-54); and declares: 'I never see this fellow, but I think / Of some harm towards me, danger's in my mind still, / I scarce leave trembling of an hour after' (II. i. 89-91). More than foreshadowing future events in the play, these statements reveal that Beatrice's rebellious desire for Deflores threatens her identity as a dutiful and chaste woman.⁸⁵

The contradictory attitude Beatrice displays towards Deflores mirrors her attitude to desire in general. She 'stands in relation to her passions as she does to their symbol . . . Deflores'.⁸⁶ Driven by opposing forces to repress and express her sexual

⁸⁴ Neill, *The Changeling*, p. 17, note on text.

⁸⁵ Duncan Douglas argues that Beatrice's enmity towards Deflores shows 'her subconscious dread of him as the polluter of her (sexual) innocence, the destroyer of her (virginal) paradise'. 'Virginality in *The Changeling*', *English Studies in Canada*, 9 (1983), 31. Quoted in Stockton, 'The Broken Rib of Mankind', p. 472.

⁸⁶ A. L. Kistner and M. K. Kistner, 'The Five Structures of *The Changeling*', *Modern Language Studies*, 2 (1981), 48. Stockton outlines critical views that see 'Deflores as the embodiment of Beatrice's sexual desires and fantasies'. However, conflating the views of playwrights with the views they are critiquing in

agency, to conform and to rebel, when she meets Alsemero, Beatrice lights on a way to resolve her conflict. Alsemero is a man to whom she is attracted, and in a marriage to Alsemero she would not be forced to submit to the passions of someone she does not desire: Alonzo.⁸⁷ Beatrice also seeks to marry Alsemero for the 'virtuous' reasons of maintenance of honour and protection from sin. Alsemero reconciles the ideas that sexual passion is sanctified by marriage and that marriage is protection from adultery and fornication. In a marriage to Alsemero, she could channel her own sexual passion, which has become focused on Deflores. Thus, with Alsemero Beatrice can 'see the way to merit, clearly see it' (II. i. 14). However, there is no acceptable way to stop her impending marriage. Alsemero declares he will duel with Alonzo (II. ii. 28). He is, however, dissuaded from doing so by Beatrice because she fears that he will either be killed or 'the law will claim you from me' (II. ii. 34). Because, as she later states, she had no 'better means than the worst, to assure / Yourself and me', Beatrice decides to have Deflores murder Alonzo (V. iii. 72-73).

The conflicting forces of conformity and rebellion converge in Beatrice when she decides to murder Alonzo and employ Deflores as her agent.⁸⁸ In murdering Alonzo, part of her is operating in conformity with the ideal of chastity. She would rather kill than be caught in the grip of her own dangerous passions. As we have seen, Deflores is both a symbol of these dangerous passions and a focus for them. When she employs him to act as her agent and murder Alonzo, it is to rid herself of 'two inveterate loathings at one time: / Piracquo [Alonzo] and his [Deflores'] dog-face' (II. ii. 145-146). However, Beatrice's employment of Deflores is itself prompted by her rebellious desire, which emerges more strongly as Beatrice seeks to repress it. Despite her apparent shock when Deflores reveals that his 'reward' for murdering Alonzo will not be money but her 'honour's prize', part of her has sought this dishonour (III. iii. 126). This is intimated, for example, when Deflores claims a 'whoredom' in Beatrice's 'heart' has led to the murder of Alonzo (V. iii. 167), and when he states 'look but into your conscience, read me there – / 'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal' (III. iii.

the play, she argues that Beatrice 'cannot *have* desire because she is desire'. 'The Broken Rib of Mankind', 471.

⁸⁷ See Findlay, who, with reference to the play, explores early modern attitudes to forced arranged marriages as a form of rape. Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 143.

⁸⁸ See also Eaton, who argue that, not 'autonomous in her actions, Beatrice-Joanna internalizes and reflects the inherent contradictions in male perceptions of women'. 'Rhetoric of Love in *The Changeling*', 371.

132-133). As Neill argues, with Deflores: 'social resentment and ambition on the one hand, and sexual desire on the other, do not constitute discrete motives (as moderns might easily suppose), but are simply different aspects of the same nexus of emotions'.⁸⁹ For Vermandero, 'Beatrice-Joanna is merely an object of exchange'.⁹⁰ Deflores is excluded from this exchange. When (living up to his name) he deflowers Beatrice, he rebels against and dishonours the privileged class which excludes him.⁹¹ His claim that Beatrice can 'read' him in her 'conscience' underscores that part of her is equally as sexually and socially rebellious as he is.

As Beatrice becomes 'an alternate Eve, the Lilith who leaves her Eden to copulate with the serpent', she feigns that she is still a chaste virgin.⁹² This is as much to protect the part of herself that wishes to conform to notions of chastity as to keep her transgressions hidden. Underneath this facade, however, she rebelliously re-enacts the Fall narrative that seeks to suppress women and desire. As part of Beatrice revels in her fall, Middleton and Rowley demonstrate that the sexual is complex and mysterious rather than inherently corrupt.

In the last act, when Alsemero confronts Beatrice and accuses her of adultery, she is not yet ready to confront herself (V. iii. 32). While she tacitly admits she has coupled with Deflores – stating: 'I have kissed poison for't, stroked a serpent' – she still attempts to maintain a facade of chastity. She confesses only to hiring Deflores to murder Alonzo (V. iii. 67-68). However, while she has yet to confess adultery, the murder of Alonzo alone denotes that she is unchaste. It means that Beatrice has become 'the libidinous woman out of control of male authority and acting on her own', which, according to Ruether, Augustine depicted as 'the prime social expression of this disordered state [postlapsarian], mirroring the domination of desire over reason within the male'.⁹³ When Alsemero asserts control over Beatrice by throwing her into his closet, it demonstrates that confession is his means of controlling sexual desire, personified by Beatrice, and a means through which patriarchy controls woman: he becomes her 'keeper' (V. iii. 88).

⁸⁹ Neill, *The Changeling*, p. xxx.

⁹⁰ Findlay, *Feminist Perspective*, p. 142.

⁹¹ Gowing argues that 'the language of dishonour was a powerful language for servants of middling status men and women; focusing ostensibly on sexual sin, it actually dismantled the trappings of higher status women's rank'. 'Popular Culture of Dishonour', 234.

⁹² J. L. Simmons, 'Diabolical Realism in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*', *Renaissance Drama*, 11 (1980), 135-70. Quoted in Stockton, 'The Broken Rib', 472.

⁹³ Ruether, 'Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women', p. 57.

As Belsey argues of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the characters in *The Changeling* straddle both the realistic and the abstract. In the last act, the associations of Alsemero with Adam, Beatrice with Eve, and Deflores with the serpent are most pronounced. However, the playwrights undermine this representation as they continue to critique early modern attitudes towards the Fall, confession, women and desire. When he arrives on the scene, Deflores's first remark to Alsemero is: 'Has she confessed it?' (V. iii. 106). Alsemero replies: 'As sure as death to both of you / And much more than that', to which Deflores retorts: 'It could not be much more – / 'Twas one thing, and that is she's a whore' (V. iii. 107-110). Deflores's assertion that Beatrice has only 'one thing' to confess – that she is 'a whore' – refers to the gendered interpretation of the Fall narrative that has come to dominate Alsemero's thinking. When Alsemero throws Deflores into the closet with Beatrice to 'rehearse again [their] scene of lust', he iterates the view that the Fall is endlessly re-enacted by women (V. iii. 115-116). When they emerge from the closet, no longer shielded with the pretence of honour, forced to face the full extent of her actions, Beatrice confesses that she is indeed the root of human corruption:

O come not near me, sir, I shall defile you:
 I am that of your blood was taken from you
 For your better health; look no more upon't,
 But cast it to the ground regardlessly (V. iii. 149-153).

Here, as Stockton argues, Beatrice sees herself as 'what has been physically removed from Adam/man – the thing, Eve/woman, that will always "fall"'.⁹⁴ The play, however, suggests that the view that woman is innately corrupt – a view that dominates because knowledge, interpretation, and confessional power all lie within the realm of male privilege – has contributed to Beatrice's fall.

Recalling Ferdinand's attempts to get the Duchess to kill herself, Beatrice now kills herself. Before doing so, she declares 'tis time to die when tis a shame to live' (V. iii. 159). Through this remark, the playwrights comment on the fact that, in a society where there is no positive outlet for female action or sexual agency, her rebellion has merely seen her conform to the dangerous female depicted in Augustine's gendered interpretation of the Fall. Beatrice's transgressive actions are the result of being devoid of the capacity to act in a meaningful sense. She had become merely a cipher for

⁹⁴ Stockton, 'Broken Rib', 663.

repressed desire which seeks to subvert, but which merely acts out, the narrative that seeks to repress it. In the end her conflicted identity is made whole by a defeated conformity to confessional discipline.

When he emerges from the cabinet, Deflores continues to be unrepentant. Still revelling in lust, he embodies the serpent. While earlier he had seemed to promote a gendered interpretation of the Fall, he now claims that his actions (the serpent's) sees them all, not just Beatrice, 'left in hell' (V. iii. 163). Here the playwrights imply that it is a devilish temptation to view Beatrice and Deflores as solely responsible for events in the play. Such thinking, they suggest, obscures the real issues that contributed to their rebellion. Vermandero replies to Deflores: 'We are all there, it circumscribes us here' (V. iii. 164). Alsemero, however, continuing to configure the actions of 'the twins of / mischief' solely in terms of sexual corruption, restores himself (Adam/man) to spiritual grace by placing the blame solely on Deflores and Beatrice: the serpent and Eve (V. iii. 142).

When Deflores is killed, order is restored. However, suggesting that he feels personal guilt about the events that led to the transgressors' deaths, and the deaths of Alonzo and Diaphanta, Vermandero states that his 'name is entered now in that record, / Where till this fatal hour 'twas never read' (V. iii. 180-181). Neill argues that this comment refers to "the heavenly record that lists criminal actions" – or some imagined role of dishonour'.⁹⁵ Vermandero's crime is participating in extreme patriarchal control over his daughter. Again removing guilt from man, Alsemero replies:

Let it be blotted out, let your heart lose it,
And it can never look you in the face,
Nor tell a tale behind the back of life
To your dishonour; Justice hath so right
The guilty hit, that innocence is quit (V. iii. 182-186).

Stockton argues that at the end of the play Beatrice is 'scapegoated' by both its figures of patriarchy – her father Vermandero and her husband Alsemero – and the playwrights.⁹⁶ However, rather than being complicit in her scapegoating, Middleton and

⁹⁵ Neill, *The Changeling*, p. 124, note on text.

⁹⁶ Stockton argues that Beatrice's role in the play 'in effect, is to have the "moral degeneration" of an entire social system displaced onto her in order to purify, strengthen, and unify that community – a valuable service to the patriarchal order embodied in Vermandero and Alsemero'. Stockton conceded that Beatrice 'has been so powerful a source of mysterious danger throughout the play that she cannot be forgotten or dismissed'. But, she argues, through her 'function as scapegoat, Beatrice-Joanna makes it

Rowley demonstrate that Augustine's gendered interpretation of the Fall narrative – perpetuated historically through Catholic confessional discourses and methods – is still alive in Reformation England, where it serves larger, socio-political agendas. I will now explore how, drawing on both *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633) also dramatises connections between Catholic and Protestant confessional discipline and confessional and patriarchal authority and social control.

Confession and Revenge in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

There is nothing contentious about stating that confession is important to the drama in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). Throughout the play Friar Bonaventura attempts to get the incestuous siblings, Giovanni and Annabella, to repent their desires and confess their sinfulness. This analysis demonstrates that Ford's concern with confession is not limited to his depiction of the friar; rather, confession is central to the work, connecting themes of religious identity, revenge and patriarchal control.

The issue of confessional practices signifying Confession of faith is given prominence in this play. I argue that the fluctuating identities of the errant siblings – their rejection of Christianity and forging of a personal moral system based on fate, Giovanni's later atheism and Beatrice's reversion to Christianity – are depicted in relation to confession. I also examine how Ford connects themes of confession and Confessional identity to the theme of revenge, and, in so doing, draws parallels between Calvinist religious discipline and Catholic confession.

The play dramatises what is configured as a conflict in Catholicism regarding the doctrinal position of forgiveness and vengeance inherent in confessional discipline. Kerrigan argues that:

Biblical accounts of divine wrath have an affinity with revenge tragedy. They show wrongdoers being smitten by that heavenly punishment announced in Deuteronomy which, in post-classical literature, avengers often claim to be exacting (on God's behalf) against individuals.⁹⁷

The argument that avengers of revenge tragedy assume God's authority – particularly apt for many of Ford's avengers – does not suggest the idea promoted in Catholic confession of universal forgiveness. Catholicism, seeing the New Testament as

possible for Middleton and Rowley to re-establish the moral purity and ideological necessity of patrilineal succession'. 'Broken Rib', 460.

⁹⁷ John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 118.

superseding the Old Testament, based its teaching on confession on the belief that the Gospel proclaimed that all repentant sinners, after doing due penance, are forgiven. In the play, vengeance, enacted against religious and social non-conformists, is depicted by the friar as hindering his godly task of bringing sinners to repentance. These acts of revenge are at times sanctioned by figures of authority in the play, including (as I will later demonstrate) the friar's superior, the Cardinal. Ford's focus on vengeance in a Catholic setting allows him to demonstrate that, as well as assuming in confession the right of God to forgive sins, Catholics also, at times, assume the right to enact God's vengeance.

Ford then extends his critique of revenge to Protestant confessional discipline. In contrast to Catholics, Calvinists believed that the Gospel proclaimed that God forgave the sins only of the elect. The rest of mankind would ultimately face God's wrathful vengeance, as announced in the Old Testament. As discussed with reference to *The Duchess of Malfi*, in Reformation England some of 'the godly' advocated that those who had demonstrated their reprobate status by committing serious sexual sins should be put to death. Ford's portrayal of acts of vengeance, in tandem with the theme of incest – one sexual sin that was seen by some as being deserving of the death penalty – suggests that his critique of confessional discipline extends to those extremist Calvinists who seek to assume God's authority and punish sexual offenders.⁹⁸ Through the ambiguous character of Vasques, I argue, Ford portrays convergences between Catholic anti-forgiveness, vengeful attitudes and characteristics of extremist Calvinist thought.

Confession and vengeance, linked in the play, also define the play's exploration of masculine authority. Through exploring Annabella's interactions with patriarchal and religious authority figures, I demonstrate that Ford depicts a close relationship between patriarchal and confessional authority, and presents issues of masculine control as underpinning the idea of confessional forgiveness and the idea of confessional vengeance. While gender is important to the depiction of confessional disciplinary practices in the play, Ford begins his exploration of confession by demonstrating it to be a disciplinary method through which all Catholic subjects reject 'sins' and conform their thoughts and behaviour to Christian doctrine.

The play opens with Giovanni having confessed his love for Annabella to the friar. He states:

⁹⁸ In 1650, 'the death penalty for incest and adultery was for a short period actually introduced. It was a concession to a century of pressure from Puritan extremists'. Gibbons, *Measure for Measure*, p. 2.

Gentle father
To you I have unclasped my burdened soul,
Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart,
Made myself poor of secrets, have not left
Another word untold, which hath not spoke
All that I ever durst to think, or know.⁹⁹

Here, Giovanni is torn between conformity to and rebellion against the Catholic faith and its confessional practices. His emptying of his ‘thoughts and heart’ to the friar is in effect a half-confession in that, while he has confessed his transgressive desire, he does not display repentance. Rather, he confesses that he is tortured by a conflict between desire and conscience.

Giovanni initially attempts to overcome this conflict by realigning Christianity to his desires. In *The City of God* Augustine argued that, while incest was a ‘necessity’ in the early history of the world in order for the human race to ‘multiply itself’ (in the Bible the off-spring of Adam and Eve had married their siblings), when it became no longer necessary for relatives to marry ‘it became unlawful for them to do so’.¹⁰⁰ Here, Giovanni declares that prohibition against incest is merely a ‘customary form, from man to man’ (I. i. 25). His attempt to find religious validation for sinful desire recalls Alsemero in the temple scene in *The Changeling*. Like Alsemero, Giovanni contradicts Catholic church teaching by conflating sexual and religious love. Giovanni’s individualistic interpretation of Christian doctrine in the opening scene alludes to how the ‘Reformation had opened up rival interpretations of the Bible’.¹⁰¹ This suggests that his questioning of the right of the Catholic church to present one definitive interpretation of Scripture is influenced by Protestant thought. However, while Alsemero’s beliefs about the sanctity of his desire for Beatrice find some validation in Protestant attitudes to the place of sex in marriage, the nature of Giovanni’s desire prevents him finding validation in Protestantism. In the early modern period, both the Catholic church and the major reformed churches were united in their condemnation of

⁹⁹ John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, New Mermaid edition, ed. Martin Wiggins (London: A&C Black, 2003), I. i. 12-17. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 665-667.

¹⁰¹ Findlay, *Feminist Perspective*, p. 11. Here she refers to the Reformation as a general context for exploring Jacobean tragedy.

incest.¹⁰² Calvin especially depicted incest as a particularly detestable sin. As McCabe notes, ‘it perfectly suits the dark Calvinist view of human nature that the entire race of fallen man should owe its existence to a practice later declared monstrous’.¹⁰³

In the opening scene, Giovanni – fearful that if he surrenders to his desires he will be damned, but unable to renounce them – is desperate for outside validation. Having found no support in Protestant thinking, he attempts to convince the friar that Christianity sanctions incest. When his argument fails, Giovanni adopts a pre-Christian, pagan position. This position both facilitates his need to spiritually validate his desires, and allows him to dilute the spiritual authority of the Christian church. Referring to Annabella’s beauty, he remarks: ‘the gods / Would make a god of it if they had it there, / And kneel to it, as I do kneel to them’ (I. i. 21-23). Significantly, Giovanni refers to a multitude of gods rather than one supreme spiritual authority.

Giovanni’s attraction to paganism simultaneously decreases and increases his fear of damnation. On the one hand, it allows him to reduce this fear by lessening the Christian God’s authority. However, his embracing of paganism also results in a compounding of his sinfulness in Christian terms: he adds idolatry to lust. Disturbed by the irresolution of his conflict, he asks the friar ‘What cure shall give me ease in these extremes?’ (I. i. 42). When the friar states that Giovanni must repent because he ‘hast moved a majesty above / With . . . unranged almost blasphemy’, Giovanni’s initial reaction is both dismissive and fearful (I. i. 44-45). He responds: ‘O, do not speak of that, dear confessor’ (I. i. 46). Giovanni does not want to hear of repentance for two interrelated reasons. First, quite simply, he does not want to renounce his desire for Annabella. Secondly, however, the friar’s words bring to the surface his fears that if he acts on his desires he will suffer eternal damnation.

The friar continues to instruct Giovanni to repent his sins, to ‘Beg heaven to cleanse the leprosy of lust / That rots thy soul; acknowledge what thou art, / A wretch, a worm, a nothing; weep, sigh, pray’ (I. i. 74-76). His efforts to prevent Giovanni from sexual sin by playing on fears of damnation recalls the Cardinal’s attempts to prevent the Duchess from remarrying in Act I of *The Duchess of Malfi*. In contrast to the Cardinal, the friar is characterised as being motivated by a genuine fear for Giovanni’s

¹⁰² In the medieval period incest extended to a wide circle of extended family. In Reformation England the scope of the sin was narrowed to a small circle of ‘close blood-kin and in-laws’, which included brother and sister. Richard McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature’s Law 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 11.

¹⁰³ McCabe, *Incest, Drama*, p. 58.

soul. In a further contrast to Webster's play, Giovanni's ambivalence about his desire is markedly different from the Duchess's assurance about the righteousness of her desire to remarry.¹⁰⁴ As Giovanni's fear of damnation is almost as strong as his desire for Annabella, to free himself from the prospect of damnation, he agrees to do as the friar counsels.

In Act I Scene ii, it is revealed that, despite all efforts to repent and renounce his desire for Annabella, Giovanni is 'still the same' (I. ii. 58). Earlier, he told the friar that if repentance failed he would embrace paganism: 'swear my fate's my god' (I. i. 84). He now states: 'my fates have doomed my death' (I. ii. 140). His inability to repent means he is damned in the eyes of the Catholic church. Further – reinforcing the notion that Protestantism as much as Catholicism impinges on his attempt to locate his desires within a spiritual framework – this statement reveals that Giovanni's embracing of fate is complicated by the correlation between pagan fate and Calvinist predestinarianism. Drawing similarities between Calvin's view of incest and predestination, and the link between incest and pagan fate depicted in classical plays, most notably *Oedipus*, McCabe argues that Calvin locates 'the crime of incest . . . where the ancient dramatists would have it, squarely within the framework of predestined corruption'.¹⁰⁵ In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, as the scene develops, first – recalling the Duchess's dismissal of the 'frights' of confession – Giovanni rejects Catholic confession, remarking: 'I find all these but dreams and old men's tales / To fright unsteady youth' (I. ii. 157-158). Then, motivated to transcend the Calvinist connotations of fate that have implications for his soul, he states: 'tis not, I know, / My lust, but 'tis my fate that leads me on' (I. ii. 159-160). McCabe states that the plague in *Oedipus*, which underscores divine displeasure at the fated 'sin' of incest in Sophocles' version, was 'not in the original work that Sophocles used as a source'.¹⁰⁶ In the opening act, Giovanni is presented as a humanist scholar.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that he is aware of the relationship between classical thought and Christianity, and that here, when he removes fate and incest from ideas of sin and predestined corruption, he is moving to a pre-Classical paganism untouched by pre-Christian morality. Removing fate from any association with sin – rather, seeing it as sanctioning his desire – Giovanni configures fate as marking him out from the rest of

¹⁰⁴ Critics have acknowledged the influence of *The Duchess of Malfi* on Ford's play. See *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Derek Roper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ McCabe, *Incest, Drama*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ McCabe, *Incest, Drama*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ See Wiggins, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 8.

humanity. He is fated to reject deep-seated ideas of shame and fear that come from pre-Christian morality and Christian doctrine: 'Keep fear and low faint-hearted shame for slaves!' (I. i. 61).

Giovanni's spiritual crisis is only fully resolved when he later moves to a position of atheism, demonstrated in Act V when he remarks to the friar: 'the hell you oft have prompted is nought else / But fond superstitious fear' (V. iii. 20-21). His removal of fate from ideas of predestined damnation in Act I contains nascent elements of his future atheistic position. He sees arbitrary social mores and religious doctrine as conditioning his conscience, and confession as controlling his actions by instilling shame and fear. However, because Giovanni's fear of damnation runs deep, initially, he places his incestuous desire in relation to an ethos that has spiritual overtones.

This spiritualisation of incest is also necessary to convince Annabella to become his lover. Referring to the holy church of fate, but allowing Annabella to draw the inference that he is referring to the Christian church, he tells her that he has asked 'counsel of the holy Church', and their love has been sanctioned (I. ii. 236). Giovanni makes his meaning ambiguous because he fears that, if Annabella were to confront the conflict between desire and conscience, she would succumb to conscience. For her part, Annabella is also desirous of her sibling. Significantly, their father is arranging a marriage for her. This suggests that, like Beatrice in *The Changeling*, Annabella is rebelling against patriarchal authority which takes little account of her desires. Like Beatrice, Annabella's desires have become focused on forbidden fruit. Unlike Beatrice, however, Annabella is fully conscious of and seeks to fulfil her forbidden desire. The spiritualisation of the relationship allows Annabella to render her desire for Giovanni as sacred rather than sinful. She unquestioningly accepts Giovanni's statement that the church has sanctioned their love. However, she is aware of his obfuscation. This is suggested when, after she consents to the relationship, she does not question Giovanni's mention of 'gods' when he remarks: 'Let not this music be a dream, ye gods, / For pity sake I beg 'ee' (I. ii. 247-248). Annabella seizes on the ambiguity in Giovanni's initial statement to avoid facing the conflict between desire and conscience and to facilitate her transition from Catholicism to spiritualised fate.

In becoming Giovanni's lover, Annabella rebels against the right of patriarchal authority to control her desires. Yet, as Roper argues, 'Giovanni is himself the patriarch

of their new secret world'.¹⁰⁸ This is because it is he who dictates the spiritual direction of the relationship. The connection between Giovanni's patriarchal position in the relationship and his status as 'high priest' is underscored by the friar.¹⁰⁹ Following the consummation of his desires, Giovanni tells the friar 'a tale whose every word / Threatens eternal slaughter to the soul' (II. v. 1-2). At this point the friar gives up on trying to save Giovanni, and focuses his efforts on Annabella. However, he does not go directly to her. Rather, highlighting Giovanni's spiritual and patriarchal authority, he asks Giovanni's 'leave / To shrive her [bring her to repentance and hear her confession], lest she die unabsolved' (II. v. 43-44). This incident, as well as demonstrating the unifying link between patriarchal and religious authority, also demonstrates that confession is at the centre of conflicts between their competing religious theologies. Giovanni has rejected confession. When he gives the friar 'leave to shrive' Annabella, it demonstrates that his 'convert' must also reject the sacrament.

Now that they have consummated the relationship, Giovanni sees Annabella's rejection of confession as something of a formality. He tells the friar: 'She is like me, and I like her resolved' (II. v. 67). The apparent formality of her rejection of confession is, however, complicated when she becomes pregnant. Learning of the pregnancy, Putana, Annabella's waiting woman, states: "'Tis / too late to repent, now heaven help us!' (III. Iv. 7-8). Here, Putana intimates that, while in Catholic thought it is supposedly never too late to confess until death, in the Catholic social world of the play, confession does not always have the same currency. Ford now depicts how Catholic attitudes towards sinners do not always accord with the restorative function of confession that the friar promotes. Rather than seeking sinners' repentance, which would lead to God's forgiveness, some Catholics inflict vengeance, which is equated with divine wrath.

The idea that earthly vengeance aligns with divine vengeance leads to a resurfacing of Annabella's fears about divine retribution. The element of bad faith on her part, regarding the pretence that the Catholic church sanctions incest, means that Annabella has not fully rejected Catholic teaching, and, thus, has not fully confronted the spiritual implications of the relationship. Now, the prospect of suffering vengeance weakens her resolve. Annabella is presented in the opening of Act III, scene ii, kneeling and confessing to the friar. But she is not truly repentant, as demonstrated by the fact

¹⁰⁸ Roper, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ McCabe argues that, when Annabella consents to become Giovanni's lover, she satisfies 'eroticism and spirituality simultaneously by sleeping with her own high priest'. *Incest, Drama*, p. 230.

that she continues her relationship with Giovanni (as Giovanni reveals in Act V). Knowing that she is not truly repentant, the friar delivers a spine-chilling sermon on damnation to intensify her fear. He speaks of a ‘thousand thousand sundry sorts / of never-dying deaths’ (III. vii. 14-15). As in the opening scene with Giovanni, in his role of confessor here the friar utilises ideas of godly vengeance to control transgressive behaviour. He is opposed to the idea of earthly vengeance. Providing counsel to prevent her pregnancy – an overt sign of her social dishonour and sinfulness – from being discovered, he remarks: ‘First, for your honour’s safety that you marry / The Lord Soranzo; next, to save your soul, / Leave of this life [of incest], and henceforth live to him’ (III. vii. 36-38). Knowing that the revelation of incest would provoke extreme social censure, and that the killing of Annabella would hinder his godly task of bringing her to repentance, he attempts to ‘buy time for her to achieve true penitence’.¹¹⁰

The friar’s language in the above scene also suggests that in marriage (as in Annabella’s relationship with Giovanni) Soranzo is the high priest; that both a woman’s husband and God are her ‘Lord’; and that in obeying ‘him’, her husband, Annabella is also obeying God (III. vii. 36-38). When the friar asked Giovanni’s leave to shrive Annabella, Ford, like his predecessors Webster and Middleton and Rowley, forges a link between patriarchal and religious authority in the context of depicting confession. Thus, Ford suggests that confession is a fundamental means of inculcating female submission to masculine authority. In Act IV he suggests that this conflation of patriarchal and divine authority leads to the state of affairs where earthly revenge is depicted as a godly means of punishing and deterring affronts to patriarchal authority.

In Act IV, the correlation between damnation and vengeance further impinges on Annabella, when, at her wedding feast, a woman is killed, and the killing is hailed as righteous justice. Previous to the unfolding drama in the play, Soranzo had an affair with Hippolita, a married woman. When the affair became public knowledge, Hippolita became a figure of ridicule and scorn. She is known as ‘the lusty widow in her husband’s lifetime’ (I. ii. 96). In contrast – demonstrating the gendered double standards that operate around sexual misdoings – the sin of adultery has not tainted Soranzo with any dishonour. In Act II, he makes it clear to Hippolita that he too despises her, and blames her for ‘bringing of a gentleman to death’ (II. ii. 89). Hippolita’s husband,

¹¹⁰ Roper, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 12. For a comparable religious figure in Defoe’s work, see my discussion of *Moll Flanders*, Chapter Four.

Richardetto, has disappeared and is presumed to have died from shame and grief about the affair. He is, in fact, alive and well. He is in Parma, disguised as a doctor, hatching a revenge plot against Hippolita and Soranzo. Rejecting Hippolita, Soranzo states: ‘I hate thee and thy lust. You have been too foul’ (II. ii. 100). Scorned by Soranzo, Hippolita attempts to poison him at the wedding feast. However, she has made the mistake of confiding in his servant, Vasques. When Vasques reveals Hippolita’s revenge plot and kills her, her death – hailed with cries of ‘Wonderful justice!’ and ‘Heaven, thou art righteous’ – is configured as divine punishment (IV. i. 87-88).

In the case of Hippolita, it is significant that she, in contrast to most male avengers in the play, does not attach any religious significance to her vengeance. Richardetto, for example, sees himself as God’s avenger. While Hippolita’s own ‘sinfulness’ and Richardetto’s innocence are factors that influence their ability to assign godly significance to their impulse to avenge their dishonour, gender is equally significant. Findlay notes that ‘revenge protagonists are usually male and female characters appear to play more passive roles’.¹¹¹ The prevalence of male revenge protagonists in Jacobean drama is linked to the fact that avengers often align their desire for revenge – triggered by an insult to masculine honour – with God’s vengeance. Women’s subordinate position in the Christian church prevents them from assuming the idea of acting on God’s authority, while men’s privileged position leads to a conflation of divine and patriarchal authority.

As demonstrated in my discussion of *The Changeling*, action denoted a woman as unchaste in early modern England. Hippolita’s assumption of the active role of avenger demonstrates to the wedding party that she is an unchaste woman. Thus, her killing is hailed as righteous because it punishes an unchaste woman who has presumed to ‘act’ like a man. Godly vengeance, enacted by Vasques, is the ‘the end of [female] lust and pride’ (IV. i. 101-102). As in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, the Hippolita episode suggests that violence emerges when confession – the principle means of instilling conformity and submission – has failed.

When Richardetto renounces his claim to be acting on God’s authority, it is revealed that not all masculine revenge acts are sanctioned as just. The fact that Richardetto is merely a gentleman, while Soranzo is a lord, implies that masculine revenge against another man is regulated by issues of class. Fearful that he too would be

¹¹¹ Findlay, *Feminist Perspective*, p. 49.

killed if he avenges himself against Soranzo, and that his killing would be hailed as righteous, Richardetto renounces his claims to godly authority – nevertheless, remaining content that God will find a way to avenge himself on Soranzo. Thus, Vasques’s vengeance is validated for two reasons: it acts as a deterrent against female rebelliousness, and proclaims that the vengeful murder of an aristocrat will not be tolerated.

When renouncing his desire for vengeance, Richardetto remarks: ‘I need not – now my heart persuades me so – / To further his [Soranzo’s] confusion’ (IV. ii. 7-8). The word ‘confusion’ is used at least seven times in Ford’s play. It encompasses various meanings relating to specific themes and plot developments. According to Roper, in the above instance it denotes damnation or destruction.¹¹² The use of the word here (rather than damnation) demonstrates that Richardetto no longer confuses earthly with godly vengeance. Another connotation that becomes associated with the word in the context of the play is the confusion between patriarchal and spiritual authority. The term also suggests the discord between the Catholic church’s theological positions on repentance and forgiveness and the vengeful attitudes that some Catholics in the play exhibit. While opposed to vengeance by earthly authority, the friar is nevertheless presented as facilitating the confusion surrounding earthly and divine vengeance by his focus on the patriarchal God’s vengeful nature, and by his reinforcing the correlation between patriarchal and divine authority.

When Hippolita’s death is hailed as ‘the end of lust and pride’, for Annabella it is a ‘a fearful sight’ (IV. i. 101-102). The killing of Hippolita brings to prominence in Annabella’s mind the friar’s fearful sermon on damnation, and the ‘many thousand, thousand’ deaths he claimed she would suffer because of her sins, unless she repents. Here, again, she conflates vengeance by patriarchal authority with God’s vengeance. However, Annabella’s rebelliousness prevents her from becoming fully repentant. Rather, mirroring Giovanni’s mind-state at the opening of the play, she is in a liminal state between conformity and rebellion, between fear of ‘confusion’ – earthly and spiritual – and continued allegiance to Giovanni. She becomes fully repentant in Scene iii of Act IV.

At the beginning of this scene, because of his new bride’s disdainful attitude towards him, Soranzo suspects adultery. He and Vasques attempt to coerce Annabella,

¹¹² Roper, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 16, note on text.

through violence and manipulation, to confess the name of her co-sinner. Although here it is secular patriarchal authority that attempts to coerce a confession, Ford imbues the dialogue of the three protagonists with connotations that relate to issues of religious confession. In so doing, he further establishes the conflation of patriarchal and religious authority, and that confession is a source for instilling this 'confusion'. In my discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi*, when examining how Ferdinand tries and fails to discern repentance in the Duchess, I referred to how confession manuals taught confessors to read the heart of the penitents. Demonstrating again that when women refuse to submit to masculine authority through confession violent revenge can ensue, when Annabella refuses to confess her lover's name, Soranzo states: 'not know it, strumpet? I'll rip up thy heart / And find it there' (IV. iii. 52-53). Refuting Soranzo's masculine authority over her (which she sees as rightly belonging to Giovanni) Annabella does not reveal her lover's name. She does, however, admit her pregnancy and thus confesses adultery. While this confession by Annabella is depicted as a further insult to Soranzo's masculine (and religious) authority over her, it also (like her confession to the friar) mirrors Giovanni's half-confession in the opening of the play. The suggestion is that she now has an ambivalent attitude towards her 'sin' – brought about by the friar's sermon on damnation, and the correlation between patriarchal vengeance and divine vengeance underscored by the killing of Hippolita. She is compelled, almost against her will, to conform and confess.

Yet she remains defiant. As the scene develops, Ford imbues the dialogue with confessional overtones. When Soranzo's threats of violence are seen to be largely ineffectual, Vasques says to him, for the purpose of tricking Annabella into believing that if she confesses all will be forgiven, 'Tis as manlike to bear extremes as it is godlike to forgive' (IV. iii. 105). Roper argues that, when he appropriates the language of forgiveness, Vasques merely 'prostitutes the language of honesty and friendship to purposes of treachery'.¹¹³ He also prostitutes the language of confessional forgiveness as he attempts to get Annabella to confess so that revenge can be enacted against her co-sinner.

Soranzo has no intention of enduring Annabella's betrayal, or forgive her and her co-sinner. When, prompted by Vasques, he appropriates the language of forgiveness (as Roper notes) his 'forgiving words [as opposed to threats of vengeance] . . . induce

¹¹³ Roper, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 16.

penitence'; Annabella becomes 'a model of sorrowful submission'.¹¹⁴ When Soranzo claims that, while her lover merely lusted after her, he 'loved' her, her 'heart' and 'virtues', Annabella is confronted with the deceit and hardness of heart that have resulted from her relationship with Giovanni (IV. iii. 121-127). She sees in Soranzo's attitude a reflection of God's attitude to her transgression: a diminishing of his love because of a diminishing of her virtues. She cries: 'Oh my lord! / These words wound deeper than your sword could' (IV. iii. 128-129). With this remark, Ford again draws attention to the conflation of patriarch and God (through the word lord) and the conflation of earthly and heavenly vengeance (the sword of vengeance). However, as it is evident to Annabella that Soranzo's own claims of forgiveness are a lie, this incident allows her to differentiate between patriarchal and divine authority. She does not confess Giovanni's name to Soranzo.

Before exploring further how Soranzo's feigned forgiveness induces Annabella's repentance, yet allows her to fully distinguish between earthly and godly authority, I will first examine how, at this point in the play, through Vasques, Ford portrays how Calvinists also assume to enact God's vengeance. The idea of confusion is embodied in the character of Vasques. Significantly, he is a Spaniard. To Ford's Protestant audience, Vasques's nationality would clearly indicate that he is to be viewed as Catholic figure. England was at war with Spain from 1625 to 1630. Notwithstanding the declaration of peace in 1630, Spain remained a religious and political enemy of the English state. Spain's persecution of Protestants and other 'heretics' at home and abroad (see my discussion of *Robinson Crusoe* in Chapter Four) saw the country become a symbol of Catholic cruelty. Through Vasques's nationality, Ford depicts vengeance against the siblings as a form of confessional discipline: the religious persecution of non-conformists. Through Vasques's association with Calvinism, he develops a critique of those extremist Puritans who sought to punish the reprobate on God's behalf.

While Catholicism is suggested through Vasques's nationality, when he extracts the name of Annabella's co-sinner from Putana, he reveals distinct anti-confession, pro-revenge attitudes which align him with extremist Calvinism. To get Putana to reveal details of Annabella's affair, he states: 'I durst be sworn, all his madness is for that she / Not confess whose 'tis, which he will know, and when he / Doth know it, I am so well acquainted with his humour / That he will forget all straight' (IV. iii. 184-189). Vasques

¹¹⁴ Roper, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 13.

is referring to Soranzo. However, in the context of the link made in the play between patriarchal and religious authority, and revenge and godly authority, Vasques's dialogue is located in wider issues relating to spiritual confession. As he attempts to manipulate Putana into believing that confession will result in Soranzo's forgiveness, his real beliefs, that both Soranzo and God, regardless of whether an adulterous sinner repents or not, are unforgiving, become evident. Vasques's attempt to deceive Putana into thinking that Soranzo will forgive her alludes to the Protestant opinion that Catholics lie when they argue that God forgives sins merely if they are confessed. When viewed in the context of his previous prostitution of confessional forgiveness, his words sarcastically refer to how Catholic theologians assume they are 'so well acquainted' with God's 'humour' that they can declare that he will forget 'sins' once they are absolved.

The accusation that it was prideful to assume to know God's judgement on sin was also a charge made against Calvinists by Catholics. For example, Matthew's pro-confession reading of the *Confession* argues that Calvinists are so 'certaine of their salvation' that, no matter how sinning, they feel 'assured of entire remission of their sinne . . . without either doing penance in this life, or as much as acknowledging any such place as Purgatory, wherin they might give some little satisfaction to the merciful justice of Almighty God'.¹¹⁵ The tone of Vasques's dialogue echoes the rhetoric of such anti-confession/pro-confession polemics, placing him on the side of Calvinists. When Putana tells him that Annabella's lover is her brother and confesses her crime of concealing the sin of incest, Vasques affirms his anti-forgiveness stance by punishing her by plucking out her eyes. With this reference to *Oedipus*, the text again suggests the similarity between Calvinist predestination and pagan fate, and the association of Vasques with Calvinist extremism is reinforced.

The placing of Vasques in relation to Calvinism, while seemingly in contradiction to his association with Catholicism, is nevertheless in tune with the emphasis on 'confusion' in the play. Ford suggests that, like Catholic inquisitors, extremist Calvinists assume to know God's judgement on 'sins'. Vasques also allows Ford to critique Calvinist attitudes to female subjugation. Regarding Annabella's punishment, when he later fears that Soranzo's anger has abated, Vasques urges him on to vengeance by saying 'Let not your pity betray you . . . / Think upon incest and

¹¹⁵ Matthew, *Preface*, p. 58.

cuckoldry' (V. ii. 23-24). Here, as in the killing of Hippolita, affronts to religious authority by women are depicted as being intimately linked to affronts to patriarchal authority and masculine honour.

While Vasques goes about securing the name of Annabella's co-sinner by manipulating a confession from Putana with promises of forgiveness, like the Duchess of Malfi, Annabella is imprisoned and awaits her death. At this point, Annabella comes to believe that in rebelling against patriarchal authority she had also rebelled against God. She remarks: 'they who sleep in lethargies of lust, / Hug their confusion, making heaven unjust' (V. i. 37-38). Here, confusion refers to divine retribution and the conflation of patriarchal and religious authority. The remark expresses her awareness that a seemingly righteous rebellion against patriarchal authority can obscure a rebellion against God. In failing to distinguish between dictates by patriarchal authority which correspond to God's law and those which merely facilitate patriarchal power, Annabella has violated her conscience. She now embraces the idea that by repenting and confessing she will be returned to virtue. God will forgive her and reinstate his love, and she will avoid eternal damnation.

As opposed to the confession that Soranzo and Vasques sought to wring from her, and as opposed to the confession that she earlier made to him which was motivated by fear of vengeance, the friar, who overhears Annabella, calls this a 'free confession' (V. i. 42). This suggests that the confession is dictated solely by conscience. Notably, the friar does not act as Annabella's confessor; rather, she confesses to God. Here, Ford affirms the Protestant model of individual conscience rather than Catholic confession. However, the fact that Annabella is imprisoned and under the fear of death when she makes this 'free confession' ironically underscores that in there is no neat division between a fear of godly vengeance and a sense of contrition (see also *Moll Flanders*, Chapter Four). In addition, the presence of the friar implies that when an action is universally depicted as sinful, it will always impact on personal conscience.

While not unproblematic, Annabella's free confession does not entail submission to patriarchal authority. Similar to the Duchess's attitude towards Ferdinand and the Cardinal regarding the punishment she endures for her 'sin', Annabella does not see Soranzo's revenge as correlating with the divine. She gives the friar a letter for Giovanni, which tells him that Soranzo knows that she is pregnant and warns him that Soranzo is seeking revenge. In fear for his soul, she also urges him to repent. When

Annabella's confession sees her become the focus of Giovanni's ire, the play again demonstrates that masculine revenge is inextricably tied up with religious authority.

When the focus of the drama shifted from Giovanni to Annabella, we left him in anguish over the thought of her being forced to marry Soranzo: 'Ere I'd endure this sight, to see my love / Clipped by another, I would dare confusion, / And stand the horror of ten thousand deaths' (IV. i. 16-18). In Act V, Giovanni reveals that, contrary to his fears, Annabella's marriage to Soranzo has not affected him as he thought it would. He had believed before that when his 'precious sister was married . . . all taste of love would die (V:iii.4-5). He is now surprised to find 'no change / Of pleasure' (V. iii. 7); and he dismisses the idea that a woman's value is lessened through sexual activity as 'busy opinion' (V. iii. 1). By this point, Giovanni has moved to an atheistic position. Refuting the idea of damnation and the promise of eternal happiness, he declares: 'My world and all my happiness is here' (V. iii. 14). Ford suggests that, as early modern spirituality is tied up with the notion of the patriarchal God, atheism allows the possibility of greater gender equality.

But in Giovanni atheism is a fleeting position. The opening scenes demonstrated the difficulty he experienced in moving from Christianity to pagan spirituality. The transition from spiritualised paganism to secular atheism is equally difficult. When the friar arrives on the scene, Giovanni attempts to use him as an interlocutor. But, before he can engage the friar in debate, he is given the letter from Annabella. What disturbs Giovanni most about this is that it reveals her 'revolt' of confessing to the friar (V. v. 8). In Giovanni, Ford presents a complex character who negotiates and develops various religious and philosophical positions. His efforts to overcome ideas of sin and damnation were dependent on Annabella's support. When he learns here that she has confessed – repented and renounced their relationship – he is thrown into mental confusion, causing his atheism to become undermined by a reversion to paganism. When he confronts Annabella, Giovanni, presents himself as a god, declaiming: 'I hold fate / Clasped in my fist, and could command the course / Of time's eternal motion hadst thou been / One thought more steady than an ebbing sea' (V. v. 11-14). As well as demonstrating the mental instability that has resulted from losing Annabella's support, Giovanni's configuring of himself as a god also implies that the return of religion sees the return of notions of masculine domination. This idea is graphically illustrated when Giovanni kills his sister.

For Giovanni, Annabella, now once again a Christian, has become a detestable 'low faint-hearted' slave (I. ii. 61). When they had resolved to become lovers each had stated: 'do not betray me to your mirth or hate / Love me or kill me' (Giovanni, I. ii. 250-251, Annabella, I. ii. 253-254). Affirming their first vows, rather than hate her he kills her. When he brings her heart to the feast at the end of the play he brings not the repentant, but the rebellious heart, 'Triumphing over infamy and hate' (V. v. 104). Thus, the 'strange riddle' of the murder of Annabella stems in large part from Giovanni's refutation of Christianity (V. vi. 29). But, since he has himself reverted to a religious position, it is simultaneously in tune with the masculine overtones evident in the Christian ethos of vengeance. Annabella has insulted Giovanni's honour. Her penitence, her confession, signifies a betrayal akin to cuckoldry. To overcome the idea (articulated by Vasques in his Iago-like promptings to get Soranzo to embrace revenge) that 'a cuckold is a goodly tame beast', Giovanni asserts his masculinity through revenge (V. ii. 7). He urges himself to 'Be all a man' (V. iv. 74-76). Like Soranzo, in order to assert patriarchal power, he must not let 'pity betray' him. When he kills Annabella he also prevents his love-rival, Soranzo, from avenging his masculine honour. Then, 'proud in the spoil / Of love and vengeance', Giovanni kills Soranzo (his social superior) before being fatally wounded by Vasques (V. vi. 11-12).

Roper argues that Giovanni's 'revenge ethos' in Act V, clashes with 'God's command' that 'vengeance is mine'.¹¹⁶ This argument is true of all the acts of revenge in the play. In the last act, Vasques kills the incestuous pagan Giovanni, and the Cardinal orders that Putana is to be taken 'Out of the city, for example's sake, / There to be burned to ashes' (V. vi. 134-135). Corresponding to confessional disciplinary practices which are enforced to punish sexual sinners and religious dissenters, these acts of vengeance are also associated with masculine honour. Ford also suggests that ideas of masculinity underpin conceptions of national identity. After killing Giovanni, Vasques triumphantly declares: 'This conquest is mine, and I rejoice that a / Spaniard outwent an Italian in revenge' (V. vi. 145-146). When the Cardinal then outdoes Vasques's punishment of merely blinding Putana by burning her, it shows that whichever country is the most vengeful is the most masculine, and whichever is the most masculine has the godliest authority. Summing up the violent events in the last act where 'incest and murder . . . so strangely met', the Cardinal, placing blame firmly onto

¹¹⁶ Roper, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, p. 13. The quotation is from *Romans* xii.19.

Annabella, remarks: 'Who could not say *'Tis pity she's a whore?*' (V. vi. 158). The Cardinal's final words echo strongly with Deflores in the last scene of *The Changeling*, when he says that Beatrice only has one thing to confess: that she is a whore. Thus, Ford concludes his drama by again locating his themes of religious discipline, masculine honour, patriarchal control and vengeance in relation to confession.

The plays discussed in this chapter reflect complex impulses in the psychological makeup of early modern subjects. They depict protagonists who are compelled to rebel against traditional socio-religious authority figures, and portray the violent responses of authority to rebellion. Viewing the plays under the purview of the demise of auricular confession and rise of Protestant disciplinary practices allows us to further understand their depictions of tensions between authority figures and individuals and illuminates issues relating to the religious identities of the protagonists.

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess's religious identity is defined by the value she places on personal conscience. This remains stable in the face of Ferdinand's efforts to render her first sinful, and then mad. Ferdinand's ambiguous religious identity leads to a violation of his conscience and madness. Through the Duchess's antagonists, Webster presents aspects of Calvinist thought as being equally destructive of the idea of personal conscience as Catholic confession; depicts the lingering influence of Catholic attitudes to sex in Reformation England; portrays hidden connections between Catholic confessional discipline and Calvinist confessional discipline; and highlights that, while priestly superiority is removed in Calvinism, ideas of masculine supremacy remain.

Middleton and Rowley portray the impact on religious identity when emergent Protestant ideas that value sex in marriage are undermined by lingering medieval attitudes about the dangers of sex – promoted, historically, in Catholic confession. Problematising notions of personal conscience and heroic action, they depict Beatrice's rebellion as being inexorably driven by mixed messages of freedom and control surrounding will and desire in Reformation England. Intrinsic to the idea of sex as corrupt, they demonstrate, is the idea of female corruption. Through Alsemero and Beatrice, they present these ideas as being entrenched in the early modern mind; through Alsemero and Vermandero they show that these ideas are still fostered in confessional rhetoric because they serve patriarchal authority and social control. As these ideas impact on Beatrice, it leads to a divided self: on the one hand, conformist, on the other, amoral and rebellious.

Developing this theme of confusion, through Giovanni's rebellion against the friar, Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* suggests that will and desire are liberated by the demise of auricular confession. Through Giovanni's inability to find validation in Protestantism, he shows the continued constraints placed on will and desire. Annabella recalls both Beatrice and the Duchess. Like Beatrice, in the face of efforts by patriarchal authority to control her, Annabella's sexual desire becomes rebellious. When Annabella reverts to Christianity at the end of the play and repents the sin of incest, Ford suggests the significant role that conscience plays in achieving an authentic sense of identity. Through Giovanni, Ford depicts the difficulty of defining beliefs outside of ideas of Christian morality. Annabella's clear sense of identity is contrasted with his destructive madness at the end of the play. The attitudes toward female transgressors by male figures in the play, including Giovanni, allow Ford to dramatise the endemic connections between religious and patriarchal authority, between confessional discipline and notions of masculine honour.

While the focus in these works is predominantly on public disciplinary practices, through the impact of Protestantism on Giovanni's initial inability to accept his desire, and through the cabinet in *The Duchess of Malfi* and the closet in *The Changeling*, the plays suggest that English socio-religious authority seeks to govern self-examination. This issue is explored further in Chapter Three, which, focusing on personal confessional methods, analyses two works of seventeenth-century spiritual autobiography: the 'confessions' of Elizabeth Isham and Richard Norwood.

Chapter Three

Spiritual Autobiography: Discipline, Resistance and ‘Truth’

The first section of this chapter explores how, in the seventeenth century, spiritual self-examination came to be a popular practice and an emphasis came to be placed on Calvinists undergoing a conversion experience. It traces the evolution of Calvinist confession into written forms, and outlines some key features of the genre of spiritual autobiography. I then analyse two works of spiritual autobiography, Elizabeth Isham’s *My Booke of Remembrance*, written between 1638 and 1639, and Richard Norwood’s *Confessions*, written between 1639 and 1640. Rediscovered at Princeton University Library by Isaac Stephens and Erica Longfellow, Elizabeth Isham’s manuscript is a relatively recent addition to the pantheon of spiritual autobiographies.¹ Consisting of seventy-five folios, the narrative depicts the first thirty years of Isham’s life. It is roughly structured into three parts, which correspond to her childhood and early adolescence, her young womanhood, and the beginnings of her life as a mature woman. Its identification has led to a variety of research projects, articles and two transcriptions of the work.² This analysis assesses Isham’s attitude towards confessional authority. Thus, rather than presenting a broad survey of the way she confesses her general sinfulness and specific transgressions and temptations in the text, I focus on her defence of her singlehood.³ In this context, I explore hints in the text which suggest that, rather than merely being a consequence of her not marrying, celibacy motivated Isham to remain single. Isham’s text is explored in contrast to Richard Norwood’s conversion narrative, which, I argue, demonstrates conformity to Calvinist confession. However, I

¹ The Princeton manuscript, as it is generally called (MS RTC 01 no. 62), ‘was sold away from a private collection in England in 1952 for £10. Karl Josef Höltingen, a German scholar working on John Donne, posted a request for help in *Notes and Queries* in 1972 requesting information about where it might have gone, but it was not until over twenty years later that the connection between the Northamptonshire mass sheet and the Princeton volume was made’. Margaret Ezell, ‘Elizabeth Isham’s Books of Remembrance and Forgetting’. Paper delivered at Princeton University as part of a workshop organised by the Constructing Elizabeth Isham Project. The paper is available at <<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/isham/>> [accessed 15 Sept 2011]. See also Ezell’s article, ‘Elizabeth Isham’s Books of Remembrance and Forgetting’, *Modern Philology*, 109 (2011), 71-84.

² The ‘Constructing Elizabeth Isham Project’ has published a transcript, and Isaac Stephens transcribed the text as part of his doctoral thesis: ‘In the Shadow of the Patriarch: Elizabeth Isham and her World in Seventeenth-Century Northamptonshire’ (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 2008).

³ See Stephens for an in-depth discussion of the confessional content of Isham’s manuscript. Isaac Stephens, ‘Confessional Identity in Early Stuart England: The “Prayer Book Puritanism” of Elizabeth Isham’, *Journal of British Studies*, 50 (2011), 34-44.

argue, the confessional form of the narrative also affords possibilities for resisting confessional discipline.

Self-Examination, Conversion, and Confessional Writing

In the seventeenth century, there was a concerted effort by Calvinist theologians to encourage self-examination. It was ‘described and prescribed’ through ‘scores of guides’ devoted specifically to the practice, and significant space was committed to ‘urging and analyzing the performance of this duty’ in more general spiritual guides.⁴ The development of Protestant moral casuistry was significant in achieving the Protestant aim of turning individual Christians into self-confessors. In Catholic confession, casuistry guided the confessor in judging the severity of sins.⁵ Referring to the estimated 600 works on conscience that were published in England in the latter decades of the sixteenth century, Griffiths-Osborne argues that the ‘moral casuistry manifest in cases of conscience was a purposeful attempt at replacing that of the Catholic Church used in the ministration of confession’.⁶ William Perkins’s *The Whole Cases of Conscience* – published posthumously in 1606 – was a standard work on casuistry. As discussed above, in Protestantism, the absence in confessional practices of a priest who pronounced absolution prevented the achievement of clear consciences. Perkins argued for the need for a Protestant system of casuistry on the grounds that it was a means of preventing despair about sin: ‘There must needs therefore be a certain and infallible doctrine, propounded and taught in the Scriptures, whereby the consciences of men distressed, may be quieted and releued’.⁷ In providing the means whereby an individual could judge her moral responsibility, casuistry addressed the need for closure provided by Catholic priestly confession.

The remittal of sins by the Catholic confessor also provided assurance of salvation. A further factor hindering the popularisation of Protestant self-examination was that it lacked such a tangible reward. In *A Golden Chaine* (1592) Perkins proposed another incentive for engaging in self-examination: he presented it as a means to find assurance of election. Perkins argued that the individual Calvinist needed to overcome various stages, which, apprehended and negotiated through self-examination, saw one

⁴ Botonaki, ‘Englishwomen’s Spiritual Diaries’, 4.

⁵ Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 103.

⁶ Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation’, 162-163.

⁷ Griffiths-Osborne, ‘Confession, the Reformation’, 162. Quoting William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience Distinguished into Three Bookes* (London, 1612). This argument was first forwarded by Perkins in a series of lectures given at Cambridge University in the 1580s. *Ibid.*

advance in assurance of spiritual salvation.⁸ In the 1692 edition of *A Golden Chaine*, the translator, Robert Hill, demonstrates his concern with the potential negative consequences of depriving Christians hope about salvation. His dedication addresses the two prime spiritual ills associated with Calvinism, spiritual despair and neglect of Christian duty. Hill contends that an individual concern with election is that ‘which will arm them against despaire, and make them to be careful of the commandments of God’. He further argued that it was a spiritual duty for the individual to seek proof of salvation; this ‘will make them to loue God; and for this God loueth them again’.⁹

At the heart of *A Golden Chaine* was Perkins’ conversion theory. During the seventeenth century, various morphologies of conversion were published by ‘Puritans, Pietists, and evangelicals of various sorts’.¹⁰ Although there were variations, most theories conceived of conversion as dominated by five key stages, paralleling broadly the conversion experience described by St. Paul. These were a *conviction* of deep sinfulness; *vocation*, or *effectual calling*: ‘an acute sense of personal summons’ to God; *justification*, where the individual ‘gratefully seizes the free gift of God’s grace’ won by Christ’s sacrifice; *sanctification*: ‘the righteousness of Christ, imputed by God to the penitent sinner . . . making him or her the saint ultimately fit for heaven’; and finally, the after-death experience of *glorification*, ‘of which there could be visionary anticipations’.¹¹ Interpreting acts of providence was seen as another way to evaluate one’s spiritual status. As Hunter remarks, in the seventeenth century, it was ‘widely held that those who examined their lives carefully would be able to discover, in patterns of outcome, God’s pleasure and displeasure with their acts’.¹² Guides to self-examination encouraged the believer to uncover and read providential signs.

The idea that self-examination was a means to discern election and gauge spiritual progress aided the popularisation of the practice. Some critics have argued that the increased emphasis on self-examination facilitated church governance over the behaviour and thinking of the populace. Mullen, for example, states that Protestant preaching on self-examination and repentance amounted to ‘a Protestant confessional’.¹³

⁸ As discussed in Chapter One, Calvin argued that to feel and overcome despair about sin was a sign of election.

⁹ Robert Hill, in William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (London, 1592), *Dedication*, sig. q4v.

¹⁰ Hunter, *Before Novels*, p. 287.

¹¹ Stachniewski with Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, pp. xii-xiv, xix-xx.

¹² Hunter, *Before Novels*, p. 287.

¹³ David George Mullan, ‘Introduction’, in David George Mullan (ed.), *Women’s Life Writings in Early Modern Scotland: Writing the Evangelical Self, c.1670-1730* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 2. Mullan is referring to Scotland and England.

Botonaki argues that, while Calvinists were ostensibly to lead a full Christian life without intermediaries, through the vast amount of literature which served as guides to self-examination, ‘the established church sought to intervene and regulate the believer’s personal intercourse with God, authoritatively prescribing its stages and terms’. According to Botonaki, the underlying belief was that ‘believers had to be kept under supervision and control and not live their lives according to their own understanding of God’s word’.¹⁴ Thus, guides to self-examination can be seen as regulating Calvinist devotional habits and beliefs.

A consequence of seventeenth-century introspective piety was that it led to a swelling of the ranks of the self-professed godly. This provided a bulwark against attempts to suppress Puritanism in the seventeenth century. In the early decades of the century, there was a continued ‘battle for religious orthodoxy’ by Puritans and those Protestants who valued continuity with pre-Reformation religious traditions, institutions and beliefs.¹⁵ As anti-Puritans secured powerful positions within the church and court, both factions censored the publication of rival theological texts. According to Milton, under the stewardship of William Laud, anti-Puritan censors were ‘aggressive and effective combatants’.¹⁶ Many Puritan manuscripts were suppressed or modified. Later, a proclamation (1626) and declaration (1628) issued by Charles I saw bans imposed on the publication of doctrinal material which promoted predestinarianism.¹⁷ On becoming Archbishop of Canterbury under Charles, Laud enforced what were considered by many Puritans to be Catholic or Arminian church practices which undermined efforts to reform the church. In the 1620s and 1630s, Puritan non-conformists who rebelled against Laud’s ‘ceremonializing and hierarchizing’¹⁸ of worship were prosecuted in ecclesiastical courts.¹⁹ The censorship of Puritan doctrine was presented by Charles – also accused by Puritans of crypto-Catholicism – as necessary to ease mounting tensions. But, as Milton argues, restraints on the publication of predestinarian doctrine ‘inevitably restricted Calvinist opinion’ more than anti-Calvinist ideas.²⁰ Religious division in England during the 1620s and 1630s was a major factor in the outbreak of

¹⁴ Botonaki, ‘Englishwomen’s Spiritual Diaries’, 8.

¹⁵ Anthony Milton, ‘Licensing, Censorship, and Religious Orthodoxy in Early Stuart England’, *The Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), 627.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Milton, ‘Licensing, Censorship’, 634.

¹⁸ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 115.

¹⁹ Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 7. Laud’s execution in 1645 was hailed as a victory by Puritans.

²⁰ Milton, ‘Licensing, Censorship’, 637.

civil war in 1642. Before the war, the practise of examining life and self for signs of election (what Stephens calls ‘experimental predestinarianism’), ‘widespread by the 1630s’, strengthened Calvinist orthodoxy in England at a time when it was under growing attack.²¹

Initially conceived as an oral or a silent duty, some people ‘turned self-scrutiny into a written task’.²² The first literary expression of Calvinist self-examination was the spiritual diary. While individual diaries differed, many took the form of an account book of sins and spiritual advancements, recording instances of God’s providence. Initially conceived as review documents that allowed individuals to discern where they stood in terms of conversion, spiritual diaries came to provide ‘the means by which a sense of self was constructed’.²³ According to Hindmarsh, Perkins’s writings were key to this development. He provided ‘the detailed religious terms for an individual to describe his or her own sense of spiritual inwardness, and to understand how this interiority changed through time and in the midst of crisis’.²⁴ Perkins’s writings also encouraged the believer to locate herself teleologically in a linear progression of the soul. As Hindmarsh notes, in *A Golden Chaine* he:

proposed and outlined a distinctive and lucid Puritan form of “narrative identity”: if a believer could discern these stages in her life, correlating outward and inward experience, then she would possess a well-ordered and integrated sense of herself – who she was, where she had come from, where she was going.²⁵

Through the self-constructing possibilities of written self-examination, the spiritual diary facilitated the formation of Calvinist identity.

Augustine’s *Confessions* was another influence on the spiritual diary. It is likely that before its translation into English the text was read in Latin by some of the Calvinist theologians who wrote on self-examination, providence and conversion. From 1620, Matthew’s Catholic translation (and the controversy surrounding it) spread awareness of the existence of an autobiographical work that described the saint’s pre-conversion sinfulness, and recorded how he was led to conversion by God’s ‘hidden,

²¹ Stephens, ‘Confessional Identity’, 28.

²² Bottonaki, ‘Englishwomen’s Spiritual Diaries’, 4.

²³ Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. xxviii.

²⁴ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p. 37.

²⁵ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, pp. 37-38.

secret providence'.²⁶ Thus, while it was not available in English in an acceptable Protestant version until 1631, its influence on the newly emerging genre of the diary before then was, as Webster remarks, 'pervasive even when unacknowledged'.²⁷ With the publication of Watt's Protestant translation, the *Confessions* had a 'vast impact' on the evolution of the Calvinist spiritual autobiography from the spiritual diary.²⁸ When undertaken under fear of reprobation or hope of election, and recorded in writing, self-examination provided the conditions for an exploration of 'states of mind with an introspective rigour and historical tenacity which, with the lone exception of Augustine's *Confessions*, was unprecedented in literature'.²⁹ The *Confessions* itself provided a model for retrospective self-examination, allowing this 'introspective rigour' full expression as autobiographers sought to impose religious significance on lives in their entirety.

While neither predominantly introspective nor fully developed life-narratives, Richard Kilby's *The Burthen of a Loaden Conscience* (1608) and its sequel, *The Vnburthening of a Loaden Conscience* (1616), are early prototypes of Calvinist spiritual autobiography. These works can be seen as providing examples of how the influences of Puritan conversion schemas and Augustine's *Confessions* converged to produce retrospective life-narratives that charted conversion. Both of Kilby's autobiographical works were written before the appearance of the first English translation of the *Confessions* (by Matthew). However, there is much that suggests Augustine's influence on Kilby's first work. Firstly, there is Kilby's confession that in his youth he was 'given to stealing apples'.³⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, in the *Confessions* Augustine connects his own adolescent 'fall' into lust and pride with the Fall of man through his account of the sin of stealing fruit. Referencing a childhood or adolescent sin of fruit-stealing was the principal way that many seventeenth-century autobiographers signalled their reading of Augustine, even if he was not directly mentioned in the text. Sisson argues that the selection and interpretation of experiences in early modern life-narratives 'are largely dependent on knowledge of accounts of Christian forerunners' –

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 121.

²⁷ Tom Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality', *The Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 44-45.

²⁸ Larry Sisson, 'The Art and Illusion of Spiritual Autobiography', in G. Thomas Couser and Joseph Fichtelburg (eds.), *True Relations: Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 102.

²⁹ Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. xxviii.

³⁰ Kilby, *Burthen of a Loaden Conscience*, p. 59.

principally, St. Paul and St. Augustine.³¹ Further suggesting the *Confessions*' influence on his autobiography, Kilby's discussion of stealing fruit follows an account of his spiritual decline through lust. And, as he reviews his life from the perspective of repentance, like Augustine, he gives particular emphasis to his enslavement in sexual sin: 'I grewe to be of so beastly an imagination; that I could hardly see, or heare anie thing, but presently I turned it into some meaning of lust'.³² Another shared focus of both writers is the temptation to heretical beliefs. Augustine records how he was led away from the true Catholic faith into Manichaeism; Kilby records his temptation away from the Reformed church into Roman Catholicism. Like Augustine, Kilby describes a humble return, with renewed conviction, to the true faith – he was 'first a Protestant, then a Roman Catholike, afterwards a Precisian'.³³ Thus, Kilby's confession (as he refers to his autobiographical work) strongly suggests the influence of Augustine's *Confessions*.³⁴

Unlike the *Confessions*, however, Kilby's book is not narrated from the standpoint of spiritual regeneration. He presents his life of sin as a cautionary tale. Describing how a close encounter with death caused him to see the grotesqueness of his life, he warns: '[w]hat it is to be at the doore of death, and the gate of hell; terrified with the sight of God's wrathful judgement'.³⁵ Despite his conversion and repentance, rather than declaring assurance of his salvation, the text demonstrates continued fear of divine judgement. Watkins concisely sums up the process of Calvinist conversion thus: '[i]ndividuals first experienced a conviction of sin, it would be followed sometimes sooner, sometimes later, by an experience of forgiveness'.³⁶ The movement from *conviction* to *justification* was often an overwhelmingly oppressive experience. A concern with election – with or without an emphasis on conversion – could lead in some cases to suicidal thoughts, ideas of demonic possession, or religious melancholia stemming from despair about sin. Central to the Protestant 'non-sacramental personal regeneration' of conversion, and 'especially among the English Puritans', was a personal confrontation with, and understanding of, the relation between the law laid

³¹ Sisson, 'Art and Illusion', p. 100.

³² Kilby, *Burthen of a Loaden Conscience*, p. 52.

³³ Kilby, *Burthen of a Loaden Conscience*, pp. 8-9. 'Precisian' for Kilby meant full adherence to Calvinist theology and devotional practices.

³⁴ Kilby, *Burthen of a Loaden Conscience*, preface, 'To All Christian People', sig. q2v.

³⁵ Kilby, *Burthen of a Loaden Conscience*, p. 3.

³⁶ Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, p. 9.

down in the Old Testament and the promise of the Gospel.³⁷ As Hindmarsh argues, ‘Puritan pastoral theology taught that the first use of the law was to intensify the pangs of introspective conscience on the part of the unregenerate, in fact to lead them to despair’.³⁸ Overcoming despair and apprehending the import of Christ’s sacrifice (*justification*) was a sign of election. Kilby’s spiritual struggles illustrate this idea. In his first book, Kilby’s conversion experience had not progressed to *justification*. However, as Hindmarsh remarks, he ‘was led gradually, as Perkins suggests was the norm, from legal fear to evangelical faith’.³⁹ In the opening pages of his second work, Kilby states:

my poore soule doth vehemently desire to giue glorie vnto God, in the reuengefull abasing of my selfe, for the greiuious displeasure & great dishonour which I haue all my life long caused, and done vnto his most holy maiestie.⁴⁰

He argues for the value of public confession for making amends for sin and unburdening the conscience. In the text, largely in diary form, Kilby confesses his struggles with sin and doubt after repentance. The work describes how he eventually overcame despair and achieved a sense of justification.

The evident similarities between Kilby’s first text and the *Confessions* reinforce the idea that the influence of Augustine’s spiritual autobiography on Calvinist life-narratives was not wholly reliant on a Protestant, or even an English, translation. Watt’s 1631 translation did, nonetheless, see the *Confessions* reach a wider audience. While the conditions that ultimately led to the more widespread writing of Calvinist spiritual autobiography were all in place by the early 1630s, few were written in England until after the civil war; and, of those that were written before then, fewer still were published. The charge of vanity was one issue that limited the publication of spiritual autobiographies. Even into the eighteenth century ‘a special motive to publish spiritual autobiography was required’.⁴¹ Hindmarsh contends that the harassment of Puritans by Laud also significantly restricted publication, arguing that it became ‘hazardous . . . to expose oneself in print as a Puritan during this period’.⁴² Following the collapse of censorship after the civil war, spiritual autobiographies began to appear among the vast

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p. 60.

³⁹ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Richard Kilby, *The Vnburthening of a Loaden Conscience* (London: 1616), *EEBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 30 Sept 2011], p. 22.

⁴¹ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p. 60.

⁴² Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p. 43.

amount of texts expressing the ascendancy of Calvinist conformity. Some autobiographers were motivated to defend the theological validity of predestinarianism. Others found a special motive from a sense that the times were epochal – the day of judgement close to hand.⁴³ As Coolahan argues, '[t]he intensification of millenarian beliefs – that the Second Coming, or Fifth Monarchy, was imminent – afforded particular interest in establishing oneself as a member of the elect'.⁴⁴

Another reason for the increase in the writing of spiritual autobiographies after the civil war was that, during this period, as evidence of election, oral testimony of conversion or written conversion narratives became a requirement for membership of independent or congregational churches. These churches believed that the state should have 'no power in ecclesiastical matters, and each congregation should be separate'.⁴⁵ Augustine's influence is rarely evident in these narratives. Rather, from John Bunyan's classic of the genre *Grace Abounding* (1666) to the most formulaic conversion tale, the Bible is the predominant reference-point. Other autobiographical narratives written in the decades after the civil war expressed and defended the beliefs of non-conformist sects.⁴⁶ As discussed above, the literature on self-examination can be seen as providing an apparatus for regulating the beliefs of Protestants: not letting them develop their 'own understanding of God's word'. However, the importance placed in Protestantism on the primacy of the individual's relationship with God, on individual conscience, and on biblical exegesis, allowed, as Botonaki suggests, 'space for modification and reinterpretation of the rules' which the governing authorities sought to enforce.⁴⁷ A confident independence from rigidly prescribed orthodoxy is often apparent in the writing and preaching of radical Protestants of the post-civil war era.

However, while there was initially greater freedom of worship following the war, both the movement for gathered churches and the emergence of radical sects were problematical for Calvinist and state authority: religious diversity posed problems for a country whose efforts to define a Confession of faith had led to civil war.⁴⁸ Later, with the restoration of the monarchy, independent churches and radical sects were seen as a threat to 'national religious unity that emphasised cohesion with the past and traditional

⁴³ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 231.

⁴⁵ Graham, *Her Own Life*, p.13.

⁴⁶ Hindmarsh, *Conversion Narrative*, p.60.

⁴⁷ Botonaki, 'Englishwomen's Spiritual Diaries', 8.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 116.

order'.⁴⁹ At the Restoration, the crown reinstated press censorship; there was 'increased intolerance of dissenting sects',⁵⁰ and, before the toleration act of 1688, Dissenters were subject to punishment by political and religious authorities.⁵¹

Spiritual autobiography could also provide a forum to refute allegations of social impropriety or criminality. In her spiritual autobiographies (which she began writing in 1668), Alice Thornton addressed 'a series of slanders' suggesting serious financial and sexual misconduct.⁵² Thornton argues that these allegations are merely 'slanders' of her 'virtue' spread by a maid who was 'full of malice' against her and the man who was implicated along with her.⁵³ Agnes Beaumont's *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont* is a mixture of both personal and religious self-defence.⁵⁴ Beaumont, a member of Bunyan's congregation, was put on trial for murdering her father, who died soon after a fraught conflict with his daughter over her initial refusal to obey his demand to desist from attending the independent church. As Beaumont's short narrative describes these traumatic events, she defends her right to define her beliefs and proclaims her innocence.

Calvinist spiritual autobiography provided an arena for individuals to confess sin. However, as the above discussion illustrates, the confession of sin in early modern life-narratives is intricately bound up with other concerns – demonstrating election, warning other Christians of the dangers of sin, expressing non-conformist beliefs, justifying rebellion, or defending oneself against damaging allegations. In the case of the two works at the centre of this chapter, overlapping motivations result in complex and sophisticated autobiographical works.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 117.

⁵⁰ Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 219.

⁵¹ See Hindmarsh, 'Chapter One', *Conversion Narrative*.

⁵² Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 244. See also Raymond A. Anselment, "'My first booke of my life": The Apology of a Seventeenth-Century Gentry Woman', *Prose Studies*, 24 (2001), 1-14, and Graham, *Her Own Life*, 'Alice Thornton', pp.147-164. Thornton wrote four spiritual autobiographies, see Raymond A. Anselment, 'Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Sources of Alice Thornton's Life', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 45 (2005), 135-155.

⁵³ Alice Thornton, *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton, etc.*, ed. C. Jackson (Durham: Surtees Society, 1875), pp. 236, 226. The most serious allegations centred on Thornton's fourteen-year-old daughter's marriage to a local clergyman, Mr Comber, after the death of Thornton's husband. 'Although the precise allegations are never spelled out', it was apparently alleged to Thornton, and rumours circulated, that she herself 'was engaged in a relationship with Comber, that she herself intended to marry him following her husband's death, and that Comber sought to settle the Thornton estate in his own favour'. Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 244.

⁵⁴ *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont*, in Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, pp 193-224. The events described in the narrative occurred in 1674. The work was first published in 1760.

Both texts were written at roughly the same time: Isham's between 1638 and 1639, Norwood's between 1639 and 1640. Both these early innovators of the form were unpublished during the seventeenth century; and both clearly show the influence of the *Confessions*. The latter work is referenced by both authors; they both record an instance of fruit-stealing; and they both refer to their works as their confessions.⁵⁵

While the two works share some common ground, the lives they depict are vastly different. Elizabeth Isham was the eldest child of a prominent, wealthy Northamptonshire family. She lived a life of comfort and privilege, yet relative seclusion, in the family home, Lamport Hall. In later life Norwood was to achieve success as a mathematician, and is known for his mapping of Bermuda. When he was a child, his father, a gentleman farmer, became 'much decayed in his estate', resulting in Norwood being taken out of school at the age of twelve: his 'greatest grief'.⁵⁶ In contrast to Isham, in his youth, his gender and lowly status afforded avenues for freedom. He was a seaman and traveller who journeyed around Europe and to Bermuda. Distinctions relating to gender and class in these texts facilitate an exploration of a range of socio-religious issues which defined what was considered sinful. The principal focus of my analyses is to explore the degree to which the narratives display resistance against or conformity to confessional discipline.

Isham's text allows a further discussion of how the Protestant emphasis on personal conscience could override the dictates of religious authority. She had two primary motives for writing her spiritual autobiography. Firstly, it provided her with a means of undertaking a comprehensive 'examination' of herself as she sought to

⁵⁵ Isham recorded her personal history in two life-narratives: a diary and a spiritual autobiography. The diary is not an introspective work of self-examination, nor a record of providence. It comprises just one folio, which is divided into squares, each square representing a year of Isham's life. In it, Isham sketches details of her life from her early childhood up to her fortieth year in 1648. The diary is housed at Northamptonshire Record Office (MS IL 3365). It has been transcribed by Jill Millman and is available at the Elizabeth Isham Project website, which provides a transcription of both life-narratives with the aim 'that the comparison will offer an insight into the process of Isham's self-construction in her spiritual autobiography'. Clarke and Longfellow "[E]xamine my life": Writing the Self in the Early Seventeenth Century'. <<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/isham/>>. In the diary, when Isham notes that she began work on her much more substantial life-narrative in 1638, she refers to her spiritual autobiography as her 'confessions'. Norwood's manuscript, owned by the Bermuda National Trust, is currently housed in the Bermuda Government Archives (microfilm number 537). The title *Confessions*, written in the same handwriting as the rest of the manuscript, appears on the first folio. An inscription on the vellum front cover can no longer be made out. See *The Journal of Richard Norwood: Surveyor of Bermuda*, eds. Wesley Frank Craven and Walter B. Hayward (Ann Arbor: The Scholars Press, 1945), p. v.

⁵⁶ Richard Norwood, *Journal of Richard Norwood*, p. 10. The transcript for this edition was made by Louise S. Friedman. The text was owned at the time by Mrs. Charles I. Andrus and her daughter, Miss Mary Browne Andrus, of New York City. Craven and Hayward, *Journal of Richard Norwood*, pp. vi-vii. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

overcome the spiritual despair she experienced after the death of her sister.⁵⁷ Isham had two younger siblings, Judith and Justinian.⁵⁸ Sickly as a child, Judith's ill health continued into adulthood, and she died at the age of 27. Secondly, Isham used her spiritual autobiography as a forum to justify her singlehood. Although she desired at a young age to give her 'affections' to God rather than marry, at the age of eighteen Isham acceded to the will of her father, Sir John Isham, and agreed to become engaged to John Dryden (uncle of the poet) (fol. 20.v) . When the marriage arrangements ultimately foundered (Dryden's father was unable to match the substantial dowry provided for Isham) this was configured by Isham as a providential sign that she would remain single.⁵⁹ Against her father's wishes, she refused to consider marriage again. Her narrative justifies her filial rebellion and challenges Calvinist attitudes on female submission to patriarchal authority.

To demonstrate the degree to which Isham resisted confessional authority also entails uncovering hidden rebellion in the text. Buried in the text, I argue, and suggesting Catholic attitudes towards marriage and sex rather than Protestant ones, is an admission that her decision to remain single was motivated by a desire for celibacy. When exploring her justification for her filial rebellion, I argue that Isham uses Augustine's authority as she defends her right to dispute with socio-religious authority. I also argue that there is a more concealed use of the saint's authority as Isham obliquely validates her unconventional religious beliefs regarding celibacy and sex.

At the outset of his narrative, which is a conversion narrative, Norwood states he will describe his 'sins' and 'the mercies of God towards' him 'through the whole course' of his life (3). But the work portrays his life only up until 1617, which marks his permanent return England after ten years travelling and seafaring, including a three-year period spent in Bermuda, where he underwent a conversion to Calvinism. After twenty years in England he returned to Bermuda 'as a refugee from Laud's persecution'.⁶⁰ The text was composed there – over twenty years after the end-date of the narrative.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Isham, *My Booke of Remembrances*

<<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/isham/>>, transcript, Alice Eardley, eds. Erica Longfellow and Elizabeth Clarke, fol. 33r. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁸ Justinian was a founding member of the Royal Society and is known for his wide correspondence. See *The Correspondence of Bishop Brian Duppa and Sir Justinian Isham, 1650-1660*, eds. Brian Duppa and Gyles Isham (Northampton: Northamptonshire Record Society, 1955).

⁵⁹ Isaac Stephens details the marriage negotiations in 'The Courtship and Singlehood of Elizabeth Isham, 1630-1634', *The Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), 1-25.

⁶⁰ Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, p. 70. The exact nature of Norwood's problem with Laud is unknown. See Charles Whitney, 'Out of Service and in the Playhouse: Richard Norwood, Youth in

Norwood also reveals an attraction to Catholicism. Like Kilby, he converted, briefly, to the faith. However, the impact of predestinarian theology ultimately prevented him from adopting Catholicism, or any moderate Protestant position. The text highlights the contrast between the views Norwood held as converted narrator and those of the sinful self depicted in the narrative, renounced at conversion. He demonstrates compatibilities between Augustine's beliefs, expressed in the *Confessions*, and Calvinist beliefs. His work is an example of how conversion narratives effectively facilitate the construction of Calvinist identity, and illustrates that conversion is a powerful confessional 'technology of the self'. However, while the text is orthodox in professing Calvinist doctrine in tandem with confessing past sinfulness, it also, I demonstrate, provides an extremely individualist and honest account of Norwood's struggles to embrace the Calvinist faith. This text demonstrates the potential of spiritual autobiography to contain hidden or tacit confessions. Gilmore argues that 'the innocence of autobiography as a naive attempt to tell a universal truth is radically particularized by a specific culture's notion of what truth is, who may tell it, and who is authorised to judge it'.⁶¹ I argue that the confessional imperative of the form sees Norwood's narrative, as a whole, resist easy assimilation to the dominating 'truth' of Calvinist conversion.

Confession and Defence in Elizabeth Isham's *My Booke of Remembrance*

Isham describes in her narrative how she first felt a compulsion to write when Judith lay dying. Here, evidently anticipating the despair she would feel after her sister's death, she thought to use writing as an aid to overcome melancholy.⁶² Another reason, she states, why she felt motivated to write was 'to defende' her 'cause' regarding 'speeches of divers' about why she did not marry (fol. 30v). Previously, her

Transition, and Early Response to Dr. Faustus', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 12 (1999), 167.

⁶¹ Gilmore, 'Policing Truth', p. 55.

⁶² In the first section of the work Isham describes the illnesses and bouts of spiritual despair that her mother, Lady Judith Isham, experienced before her untimely death when Elizabeth was 16. Judith senior left behind writings that functioned as 'rememberances and instructions to her selfe' in her fight against crippling spiritual despondency (fol. 11r). Clarke and Longfellow argue that these writings later 'provided the adult Elizabeth with an example of how to use writing to document and interpret an experience of religious melancholy'. Clarke and Longfellow, '[E]xamine My life'. When her sister was gravely ill, Isham states that it came into her mind then 'not to let thy [God's] goodnesse and mercie towards my mother die in oblivion' (fol. 30r). She intimates here that she thought to use her mother's example of recording and assessing her spiritual struggles to resolve her trouble in mind and spirit.

sister had informed her of various opinions – which had been relayed to Judith – about her refusal to marry:

some thought I was perswaded by some about me, others that I was proud or mallancolly, or for dislike of it refused, which I did not. knowing that it was Gods ordinance & therefore good. neither was it that I disdained to be in subjection. nor was it mallancolly which doth come of discontent. for if it had bine so I might have changed thinking to have bettered my selfe (fol. 29r).

Apparently referring to the speculations of her father and some close family friends, Isham states that she will give them ‘satisfaction’ by writing her true motives for desiring a single life (which they can avail of after her death) (fol. 30r).⁶³

More than a refutation of gossip, Isham’s defence of her singlehood amounts to a defence of her godliness. In refusing to marry she transgressed dominant socio-religious codes. For a Calvinist man in the seventeenth century, a sense of vocation was configured as a sign of predestined election. God-given talents were channelled through a career path that reflected one’s innate interests and abilities, and a specific calling to a vocation, including the ministry, was indicative of a general calling to God.⁶⁴ With regard to women, Calvinist theologians encouraged the idea that the godly role was that of wife and mother. Marriage for men and women and career for men (unless they had received a calling for a vocation) were two areas in which parental authority was to be obeyed. By remaining single against her father’s wishes, Isham left herself open to the charge of filial rebellion, synonymous in Calvinism with rebellion against God. Stating that she desired ‘to doe more then my calling forced me to’ (i.e. marry and reproduce), her narrative justifies her desire for singlehood and her refusal to honour her father’s wishes as stemming from spiritual concerns and sanctioned by God (fol. 20v).

The influence of Augustine’s spiritual autobiography on the confessional content of Isham’s narrative is clearly indicated when, a year after her sister’s death, she states that she was ‘imboldden’ to write by the sight of the *Confessions* and two Protestant

⁶³ This is the audience Isham had in mind when she first conceived of writing her work. While she was writing it her sister-in-law, Jane, died. On completion of the manuscript, Isham bequeathed it to her recently widowed brother and his four daughters – whom Isham helped to care for after Jane’s death – for their religious education (marginal note (fol. 2r). Evidently, Isham came to conceive of her work in part as a mother’s legacy. A popular genre in the seventeenth century, mother’s legacies were advice book to be read after the mother’s death. See, for example, Susan C. Staub (ed.), *Mother’s Advice Books* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

⁶⁴ Robert S. Michaelson, ‘Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocations’, *The New England Quarterly*, 26 (1953), 316-317.

works on overcoming doubt and despair (fol. 33v, marginal note).⁶⁵ Critics have demonstrated that Augustine's influence on the text extends beyond that of providing a model which demonstrates the value of written, retrospective confession of sins to achieve renewed spiritual equilibrium. Arguing that Isham 'assimilated much of [the *Confessions*'] contents into her own mind',⁶⁶ Eardley notes that Isham turns to Augustine's work to 'resolve certain, often theological issues', and that passages come into her mind 'at moments when she requires guidance'.⁶⁷ Clarke argues that, like Augustine, Isham 'does not automatically concur with the opinions of authority figures'.⁶⁸ I examine how Augustine provided Isham with a spiritual defence for her filial rebellion, and demonstrate that he also provided her with spiritual justification for celibacy.

Celibacy, I demonstrate, complicates definition of Isham's Confession of faith. Even apart from the issue of celibacy, it is apparent that Isham's religious identity defies easy categorisation. Her parents had strong ties with the Puritan population of Northamptonshire, and in her youth she was introduced to a Puritan strain of Calvinism by local clergy and laity. According to Longfellow, the influence of local Puritans, along with Isham's own reading of Puritan literature, led her to develop a Puritan 'intellectual style' (defined by 'wide, careful and questioning reading, explicitly reasoned decision making about matter of both faith and politics, and the practice of self-examination and experimentation with self-examination in writing').⁶⁹ However, Isham also had 'regular contact with the conformist ministers of the parish'.⁷⁰ Longfellow notes that, 'in subtle details', Isham distinguished herself from 'the "presiser sort" and defended a more moderate protestant piety'.⁷¹ Similarly, Stephens argues that Isham practised an 'intense internal form of internal piety common among Puritans'; yet, he notes, Isham 'revered the Prayer Book and found the ceremonies and

⁶⁵ According to Clarke and Longfellow, these two works, John King's *Lectures upon Jonas* (1597) and Henry Mason's *The Cure of Cares*, 'offered advice to Christians about how to cope in times of suffering and distress, although neither focussed on self-examination or advocated autobiographical writing as a solution'. Clarke and Longfellow, 'Examine My Life'.

⁶⁶ Alice Eardley, "'like hewen stone": Augustine, Audience and Revision in Elizabeth Isham's "Booke of Remembrance" (c.1639)', in Phillipa Hardman and Anne Laurence-Mathers (eds.), *Women as Scribes and the Domestication of Print Culture* (York: Medieval Press, 2011), p. 19.

⁶⁷ Eardley, 'Like Hewen Stone', p. 10.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 163.

⁶⁹ Erica Longfellow, "'Take unto ye words": Elizabeth Isham's "Booke of Remembrance" and Puritan Cultural Forms', in Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (eds.), *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women, 1558-1680* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 123.

⁷⁰ Stephens, 'Confessional Identity', 32.

⁷¹ Longfellow 'Take Unto Ye Words', p. 129.

set prayers associated with its essential elements in her religious practices'.⁷² According to Stephens, this devotion to the Prayer Book alone might suggest conformity to *via media* Protestantism and opposition to Puritanism. However, taking account of Isham's Puritan piety, he defines her as a 'Prayer Book Puritan': an 'amalgam of both Prayer Book and Puritan devotion'.⁷³ Complicating Stephens' definition of Isham as a 'Prayer Book Puritan', I argue, is her desire for celibacy, which demonstrates that aspects of Augustine's teaching which accorded with Catholic teaching were accommodated by her faith.

Before demonstrating that Isham's religious identity was heterodox and eludes neat categorisation, I will first examine her defence of her singlehood and filial rebellion. Isham iterates part of her spiritual reasoning for not marrying when she records her first spiritual crisis. She experienced two spiritual crises in the years portrayed in her spiritual autobiography: the first at the time of her engagement, the second after Judith's death. The first spiritual crisis engendered many of the sinful thoughts and feelings to which Isham confesses in her work. She states: 'I was tempted against thee my God with vile thoughts' (fol. 22r); and admits that 'for a space of time [I] felt no difference betwext my selfe and a reprobate' (fol. 22v). Her engagement was not the initial cause of her melancholy. Isham states that she did not remember that it was about 'Marriage it being in the time of wooing' (fol. 22r). It appears, rather, to have been provoked by her sister's decline in health at this time. Judith continued for some time in severe pain and sickness, and became afflicted with a spiritual malaise. As Isham helped her sister recover, she fought her own spiritual melancholy.⁷⁴ Once Judith

⁷² Stephens, 'Confessional Identity', 29.

⁷³ Stephens, 'Confessional Identity', 44. Stephens takes issue with the idea that there was an innate incompatibility between Prayer Book devotees and Puritans. 'Confessional Identity', 26.

⁷⁴ Isham doesn't explicitly state the reason for the onset of her first spiritual crisis. However, she begins discussing it immediately after describing how her sister 'fell into a swownd she being so long in it wee thought she would have died' (fols. 21r-22v). This revealing detail, and the fact that Judith's later death would provoke Isham's second crisis, implies that it was fear for Judith's life that provoked the first crisis. The reason, one can surmise, why Isham does not explicitly confess that Judith's illness provoked her first spiritual crisis is that she sought to prevent suspicion that Judith had persuaded her not to marry. One of the opinions held about her singlehood was that she was 'perswaded by some about' her. It was apparently Judith who was suspected of persuading Isham. She had earlier informed Isham that she thought their 'father was offended with her because he thought she perswaded [Isham] not to marry' (fol. 28r). It was soon after her return from a trip to London in her late teens – a trip undertaken to develop the attributes of a gentlewoman and attract suitors – that Isham first began to voice her desire for singlehood. Later, Judith told her 'how ill she was when I was from her at London and how she desired my father that I might come home' (fol. 30r). The coincidence that Judith desired her elder sister home, and that when Elizabeth returned she voiced reservations about marriage, no doubt prompted their father's suspicion. Vindicating Judith in her text, Isham declares that her decision was arrived at independently (fol. 28r). At the time Isham experienced her first episode of spiritual melancholy, Judith's ill health and her conflict

began to recover, this aspect of Isham's crisis resolved itself. However, the engagement, which produced a conflict between her own desire to remain single and her desire to honour her father's wish, added to 'afflictions like inundations of waters' entering Isham's 'soul, like to drowne' (fol. 21v). Her melancholia was only fully resolved when, after the engagement failed, she decided not to think of marriage again.

Earlier in the narrative, Isham states that as she grew into young womanhood she became 'so pleased with the divine truth that to injoy it with the more freenesse I desired not to marry' (fol. 18v). As she describes her conflict over her engagement, she again states that she feared that the emotional commitment inherent in marriage would interfere with her desire to give her 'affections to God': 'I thought how well I should chance to breake off that I might thinke of Marriage no more but that I might with the more freenes serve thee without \those/ thoughts of humon /(love\' (fol. 23r). Adding to her sense of conflict, during the course of the engagement, she grew to love Dryden. But, she declares:

I was jelous of my selfe lest I should offend God in my affections. which I thought was too strong for man. therefore I desired of \thee/ my Lord God that I might never have him to offende \[thee]/ (ether in withd\r/awing my love and service from \there/ thee or) in loving him too much (fol. 23r).

Here she reveals that she feared that marriage would see her place her love for a fellow sinner above God.

Isham felt a sense of sin for abandoning her true desires. When the engagement was called off, she states that she resisted any more efforts by her father to speak to her of marriage because she feared that she had 'offended [God] in yeelding too soone afore'. After arriving at this decision, her spiritual crisis 'began to mend a pace' (fol. 26v). She validates her decision by arguing that it was now providentially ordained that she would remain single. She states that her 'desire or wish' to remain single 'was more then a vow'; she had asked 'that it may be performed wether I will or not'. Despite her desire to please her father, she states, she 'could not safely alter' her mind (fol. 29r).

over marriage coincide. Thus, Isham's reticence about going into detail about the initial reason for her spiritual crisis appears to stem from a concern with not fuelling the suspicion that she was persuaded by Judith to remain single.

In remaining single, Isham's placed the authority of her 'heavenly father' over her worldly father: it is ultimately to him that she should be an 'obedient child' (fol. 16v). She also records how difficult it was to overcome the guilty feelings engendered by her refusal to obey Sir John's wishes. In marriage 'the man's first duty . . . was to God, the woman's to God's will as transmitted through the husband'.⁷⁵ Patriarchal order was enforced over children by the fifth commandment to honour thy father and mother. Isham was often far from assured that she did not offend God when, transgressing the fifth commandment, she refused to submit to her father's will (fol. 29r, marginal note). Her willingness to rebel against her father and the intense anxiety this rebellion produced can be seen as resulting from Puritan attitudes to authority. Mullan argues that Puritanism 'generated a form of Protestantism which was adamant in repudiating all forms of absolute rule, whether the personal absolutism of king in state, bishop in church, husband in marriage, or parents in family'.⁷⁶ However, repudiating traditional authority was not straightforward. Ruether argues that Puritans 'recognised the legitimacy' of rebellion against authority only 'with regard to Catholic or Anglican' authority figures.⁷⁷ For example, if a Calvinist woman was deterred from following her beliefs by a Laudian father or husband, she could claim any rebellion against his authority as righteous. Otherwise 'to rebel against [patriarchal] authority was to rebel against God'.⁷⁸ Thus, while in certain circumstances Puritans thought that it was valid to transgress the fifth commandment, for a woman to fully justify her rebellion she would have had to depict her father as ungodly.

Mary Rich's later spiritual autobiography (written between 1671-1673) demonstrates that it was possible to defend filial rebellion without having to denounce the father as ungodly. She presents her father not as heretical, but as holding some ungodly attitudes. Rich describes how she rebelled against her father's authority – Richard Boyle, first earl of Cork – when she refused to marry a man for whom she had an 'exstrordnary' aversion, James Hamilton.⁷⁹ As discussed in Chapter Two, the idea

⁷⁵ Graham, *Her Own Life*, p. 8

⁷⁶ Mullan, *Women's Life Writing*, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Church and Family II: Church and Family in the Medieval and Reformation Periods', *New Blackfriars*, 65 (1984), p. 85.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Mary Rich, *Some Specialties in the Life of M. Warwicke*, British Library, Additional MS 27,357, fol. 3v. See also Sara H. Mendelson, 'Rich, Mary, countess of Warwick (1624–1678)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23487>> [accessed Sept 2011]. As well as her short autobiography, Rich also wrote volumes of diaries between 1666-1678, which were 'posthumously hailed as evidence of her exemplary piety'. Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 238.

that sex in marriage was godly ordained led to the idea that love should be the principal motive for marriage. Richard Boyle arranged wealthy marriages for all of his children and, in Rich's case at least, regardless of whether his child was in love with the proposed suitor.⁸⁰ Later, although she was 'much prest' by her father 'to settell' herself, she refused to consider marriage.⁸¹ Unlike Isham, Rich's 'auersion to maridge' did not stem from spiritual concerns; rather, it was, she confesses, a result of 'liueing so much at my ease that I was uery unwilling to Change my Condition'.⁸² However, she partially justifies her rebellion by suggesting that, when arranging marriages for his children, her father was acting in an ungodly manner by placing the material over the spiritual. Mary also emphasises that she was enticed into her vain lifestyle by her sister-in-law, Elizabeth (Killigrew) Boyle.⁸³ Through this indictment of her sister-in-law's vanity and frivolous concerns, she suggests the ungodliness of unions based on money rather than love. She confesses to a personal sinfulness – transgressing the fifth commandment to honour thy father and mother – when she later married Charles Rich (younger son of the earl of Warwick) against her father's wishes. Her marriage to Rich – undertaken due to love – introduced Mary to the godly influence of a 'pious family', and under this influence she renounced her former 'uain' and 'Idell' lifestyle.⁸⁴ Thus, Rich justifies her filial rebellion through the idea that she was being providentially guided to conversion.

Admitting her own sinfulness, employing ideas of providence and the sanctity of marriage, Rich's narrative demonstrates Gilmore's argument that if one could 'convince the confessor in *his* language' one could always bring 'a competing agenda to confession'.⁸⁵ As Isham uses her 'confessions' to work through a theological justification for her transgression of the fifth commandment, like Rich, she presents her father as acting, rather than being, ungodly. Unlike Rich, she does not attach any sinfulness to her filial rebellion. Rather – appealing to the confessor in '*his* language' – she employs the spiritual authority of St. Augustine as she argues against the prevailing idea that to dispute with paternal authority was a radical and ungodly act.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ For Boyle and his practice of arranging wealthy marriages or influential connections for his children, see Nicholas Canny, *The Upstart Earl: A Study of the Social and Mental world of Richard Boyle, First Earl of Cork, 1566-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 46-59.

⁸¹ Rich, *Life of M. Warwicke*, fol. 4v.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Rich, *Life of M. Warwicke*, fol. 5r.

⁸⁴ Rich, *Life of M. Warwicke*, fol. 23r.

⁸⁵ Gilmore, 'Policing Truth', p. 56.

⁸⁶ See Graham, *Her Own Life*, p. 16 for a discussion of Calvin's anti-rebellious position regarding government and family.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine demonstrates that it is not just the ungodly, such as his pagan father, who could hold erroneous beliefs. Individual members of the true Church, and the Church as a whole, could hold sinful beliefs and be guilty of sinful persuasion. This is illustrated when he discusses his mother's encouragement regarding his career as a teacher of rhetoric, and her sanctioning of his non-marital sexual relationship. As protagonist, Augustine presents himself as sinful because he allows himself to be dissuaded from the path of righteousness. As narrator, he implies that it is valid not to honour a parent's wishes, or prevailing ideas of the Church, if it leads to spiritual corruption. Through subtle parallels between issues surrounding parental and Church authority explored in the *Confessions* and the depiction of her own conflict, we can see that Augustine's notion of sinful persuasion is utilised by Isham.

An interesting feature of Isham's manuscript is the way various incidents echo or reverberate back on other incidents or issues in the narrative. When discussing her spiritual turmoil and suicidal thoughts after Judith's death, rendering her excess of affection for Judith as spiritually destructive, Isham states that 'too strict [a] bond of . . . naturall affection' is 'preiddicall to the soul' (fol. 33r). Isham here confesses that it is not just a husband that can cause one to withdraw affection from God. She confesses that, while Dryden embodied a fear that she would place her love for a human sinner above her love for God, this fear was actualised in her relationships with her sister Judith.⁸⁷ When suggesting that she was persuaded by her father into the engagement, the issue of human attachment as a potential source for sin emerges once more. Isham states that she was 'moved to give way' and agreed to marry because her father's 'affection appeared rather than his authority to command' (fol. 21v). She renders her sinful renunciation of her true desires in a human propensity to be emotionally manipulated – to which she feels she is particularly susceptible because, as she later states when discussing her second spiritual crisis, her own nature 'exceede[d] . . . to much in naturall affection' (fol. 33r). In rendering herself sinful in being persuaded away from her true desires, she also presents her father as being guilty of persuading her to sin.

⁸⁷ When Judith's health deteriorates this second time, Isham states that it came into her mind that when her sister died she could 'With more freenes & fullness enjoy thine owne [God's] selfe' (fol. 30v). Revealingly, these words echo with the wording that Isham chose when first presenting her spiritual motives against marriage – that to enjoy divine truth 'with the more freenesse' she desired not to marry – and with the statement she later made about why she desired not to marry Dryden – 'that I might with the more freenes serve thee without \those/ thoughts of humon /(love\' (fol. 23v). Thus, Isham confesses that she was not as 'free' as she hoped to be in her single life because Judith claimed the same place in her affections that she feared a husband would.

Here, she suggests he is guilty of emotional manipulation. She also records how he later ‘sought to persuade’ her by not giving her ‘that much portion [yearly dowry] if I / lived single as he intended to give me if I married’ (fol. 27r).⁸⁸ The parallels with the *Confessions* serve to imply that Isham saw her father as misguided rather than essentially corrupt.

A woman of Isham’s class would have been expected to marry and produce an heir. Her text critiques the enforcement of prevailing class and gender norms at the expense of an individual’s conscience. Ultimately, this critique extends beyond her father to the many in the Calvinist church who shared the views that a woman’s godly role was as wife and childbearer. Coming solely from a woman, Isham’s suggestion of sinful persuasion by the Calvinist community would have been viewed as bordering on the sacrilegious.⁸⁹ Her use of God’s ‘servant’ Augustine lends patriarchal and religious authority to her position (fol. 15v).⁹⁰

I will now argue that celibacy also motivated Isham to remain single. This is suggested both in her narrative and in a draft-letter that she wrote to an unnamed suitor. In this letter, Isham declared that: ‘The Sun of Devine truth will appeare more Cleare not being interposed by any earthly object’. This statement is a revision of a more direct assertion made to her suitor on the back of the letter, which states: ‘if their remain in you any tho[ughts] of carnall affection[n] I wish you may suppress them’. Juxtaposed, the two statements suggest that sexual desire is configured by Isham as preventing a

⁸⁸ Her father’s withdrawal of money is both a punishment and an incentive. Perhaps due to his suspicion that Judith persuaded Isham not to marry, Judith’s ‘portion’ is also reduced.

⁸⁹ One of those who expounded to Isham on points of Puritan doctrine when she was a child was the ‘elder statesman of the puritan movement’ John Dod. Longfellow, ‘Take Unto Ye Words’, p. 128. Dod was later to act as mediator between the two families during Isham and Dryden’s engagement. When discussing the fifth commandment in his treatise on the Ten Commandments, Dod states that a child should bow to the parent’s wishes, particularly when it came to marriage: ‘as in other matters the parents are obeyed, so especially in marriage’. John Dod, ‘Fifthe Commandement’, *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandements with a Methodicall Short Catechisme* (1604), p. 5, EEBO <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 2 Sep 2011]. Isham owned Dod’s book on the Ten Commandments. She mentions it twice in her autobiography (fol. 10v, fol. 24r) (Jill Millman has transcribed Isham’s booklist and Erica Longfellow has edited it into a list of Isham’s books, cross-referenced with what she mentions in her manuscript writings). She is, however, also keen to note that she was ‘not of there opinion who extole Mr Dod about all others’ (fol. 15v). Rather, Augustine is the spiritual guide whom she extolled above all others.

⁹⁰ In the context of discussing how male authority sometimes authorised women’s writing in the medieval and early modern periods, Longfellow argues that a ‘woman writers’ reliance on male authorisation [was not always] a sign of her powerlessness’. Rather, some women ‘gained independence in a seeming act of submission’. Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, pp. 15-16.

direct relationship with God.⁹¹ For Isham, admitting the spiritual validity of celibacy is part of her Confession of faith. But, from the viewpoint of Calvinist confessional authority, a declaration of this position would be seen as a confession of sin. In her narrative, reflecting the controversial nature of a Protestant, especially a Protestant woman, adopting celibacy, Isham does not try to convince Calvinist confessional authority of the validity of her position in ‘*his language*’. Rather, the truth imperative of her confessional text sees Isham obliquely admit her desire for celibacy. In a similarly obscure manner, she records that she found spiritual validation for celibacy in the *Confessions*.

As argued in Chapters One and Two, Augustine’s views on marital sex as a source of sin and on celibacy as the only true state of chastity see him aligned more with earlier Catholic theology than Protestantism. In Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, ‘procreative marriage makes good use’ of the corrupt sexual instinct, but the ‘flaw of egotism’ remains.⁹² Thus, while he saw both marriage and celibacy as ‘matters of divine calling’, he thought that sexual abstinence was ‘a higher calling’.⁹³ The first hint in her narrative that Isham concurred with Augustine’s views on celibacy – that celibacy was central to her desire ‘to doe more then my calling forced me to’ (fol. 20v) – occurs when she states that, as a youth, she wished ‘allwayes to be prepared like those wise vergines to meet my celestial bridegroom’. This remark is made in the context of recording childhood fears that the second coming was imminent – that the ‘day of Christ was at hand’ (fol. 9v). Isham here cites a passage from *Matthew*, which depicts five wise virgins who prepare for the arrival of Christ, as opposed to five unwise virgins, who were unprepared.⁹⁴ This referencing of *Matthew* may seem to suggest that the above remark has nothing to do with virginity *per se*: Isham is merely iterating a desire to be prepared for the second coming. However, her very configuring of Christ as her bridegroom places the remark in relation to early modern debate about celibacy.

In this period, the idea of Christ as bridegroom would have been readily associated with the debate over the meaning of the Song of Songs in the book of

⁹¹ The letter is held at Northamptonshire Record Office, IC 4336. Citing the contrast in language between these two statements, Eardley argues that Isham had a propensity for self-censorship. Eardley, ‘Like Hewen Stone’, p. 26.

⁹² Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 46. Phipps, ‘Plight of the Song of Songs’, 89.

⁹³ Thomas L. Humphries ‘Augustine of Hippo (c. 354-430)’ in Ian S. Markham (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Theologians*, vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 47.

⁹⁴ *Matthew* 25.6. ‘And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him’. *King James Bible* <<http://www.online-literature.com/bible/bible.php>> [accessed 3 Aug 2012].

Psalms. This ‘passionate paean’ depicts in sexually explicit imagery the wedding night of a King and his bride.⁹⁵ According to Phipps, the text confronted the early Church ‘with an embarrassing dilemma’:

If, on the one hand, the book’s *prima facie* meaning was acknowledged, then the established assumption about the superiority of those persons in the church devoted to lifelong sexual abstinence is called into question. On the other hand, if the book was renounced, what would prohibit Christians from calling into question other biblical books which had been appealed to as authoritative.⁹⁶

According to Phipps, to accommodate the Song of Songs, churchmen of late antiquity and the medieval period ‘converted’ the sensual bodily pleasures of the wedding night that the poem depicts into ‘harmless mysticism’.⁹⁷ Allegorising the content, ‘the caressing king connote[d] Jesus, and his bride represent[ed] either the corporate church or the individual Christian’.⁹⁸ According to Longfellow, in early modern England, Protestant commentaries were ‘fundamentally similar to their medieval counterparts in their conservative use of allegory’.⁹⁹ Marriage in the Song of Songs had various spiritual meanings, including the ideas that the marriage referred to the individual Christian and Christ or the church and Christ. However, Clarke argues, in ‘many ways the conflict over the identity of the Church of England in the seventeenth century is a conflict over the meaning of Song of Songs’.¹⁰⁰ There was one clear respect in which Catholic and Protestant interpretations differed. In the Catholic tradition, from the fifth century the text ‘came to be reckoned as one of the most important books by sexually ascetic Christians . . . allegorical sermons on it showed how the dishonourable libidinous drives could be pommelled and sublimated’.¹⁰¹ While Catholic theologians used the text to promote the idea that sex, even in marriage, was sinful, in the

⁹⁵ Phipps, ‘Plight of the Song of Songs’, 96.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Phipps, ‘Plight of the Song of Songs’, 88.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, p. 15. Longfellow argues that ‘Male theologians, particularly Puritan male theologians, most often focused on the relationship between Christ and the Church’. In this manner, ‘mystical marriage provided them with a way to promote their particular ecclesiology as the true bride of Christ, all the while damning other systems, Roman, Laudian or radical Protestant, as merely whorish imposters’. *Women and Religious Writing*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Phipps, ‘Plight of the Song of Songs’, 86-87.

Reformation, Calvin had validated the sexual side of marriage with reference to the Song of Songs.¹⁰²

The idea that Isham is alluding to the Song of Songs, and in so doing, is literally expressing a desire for virginity, is further suggested when, two folios later, she records her sin of fruit-stealing. The incident depicts how, as a young adolescent, Isham sneaked into her mother's cupboard and stole some pears. Isham denied the offence when confronted by her parents. Furthermore, she continued to steal pears when, soon after, she was given a closet of her own and the responsibility of storing fruit for distribution to her family. Again, on the surface this depiction of a childhood transgression has little to do with celibacy. However, the incident of fruit-stealing and her remark about being a bride of Christ are connected in the text. Before her statement on mystical marriage, Isham remarks that she had 'observed that euill in inclination our childhood [original sin in childhood] that coming to ripper years breakes forth into many inconuiniences' (fol. 9r). This remark gains significance when, after her statement on mystical marriage, Isham, recalling Augustine, uses the sin of fruit-stealing to chart the transition from innately corrupt child dependent on parents for moral guidance, to an independent spiritual being more inclined towards wilful sinning who must take responsibility for her/his own salvation. While Isham does not refer to sex directly in her depiction of her fruit-stealing sin, her location of particularly resonant phrases and references in this section of the narrative evokes a more sexual context. Her allusion to the Fall via the sin of stealing fruit; the fact that her discussion of her sin follows her desire to be like 'one of those wise Virgins'; and the fact that, in turn, this statement follows a remark suggesting her awareness that adulthood offered more sinful temptations than childhood, combine to imply that she saw sex as a site of potential sinfulness. Taken together, they suggest that her statement about being a bride of Christ is in fact an admission that she believed that those who 'withstood sexual defilement until death . . . would be rewarded by Jesus their bridegroom'.¹⁰³

A sexual context is further evoked through the places where Isham's transgressions occur. Male autobiographers generally link their works to the *Confessions* by recording how they stole fruit from orchards. A parallel with Isham's

¹⁰² Phipps, 'Plight of the Song of Songs', 96. According to Longfellow, early modern Catholic women 'approached mystical marriage as key to their cloistered virginity in a way that would have seemed foreign and superstitious' to many Protestant women. *Women and Religious Writing*, pp. 14-15. For attitudes to Protestant women configuring Christ as their bridegroom, see Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs*, p. 158.

¹⁰³ Phipps, 'Plight of the Song of Songs', 99.

domestic locations for her sins can be found in the writings of Elizabeth Walker (1623-1690). Selections from Walker's autobiographical writings were published posthumously by her husband, Anthony Walker, in his memoir, *The Holy Life of Mrs Elizabeth Walker* (1694). The narrative records that, as a child, Elizabeth Walker was sent by her mother to the locked cupboard where apples were stored. Walker took one for herself, but thinking she had stolen it, with 'some regret', put the apple back.¹⁰⁴ Through the fact that her transgressions occurred in her mother's cupboard and her closet, Isham suggests the difficulty she faced in overcoming the guilty feelings engendered by the Calvinist alignment of female godliness with marriage and children. Early modern closets were 'used for every activity that required a locked door, from storing precious foodstuffs or the family jewels to study or prayer'.¹⁰⁵ Isham's closet functioned as a devotional space – a place for prayer, religious study, self-examination and confession – and, like her mother's cupboard, a place to store fruit for the family, which the woman is responsible for distributing (fol. 10r). This suggests that, through the female closet, Calvinist piety fused with the idea that a woman's role was as wife and mother: the fruit stored in both closets strongly implies childbearing.

In Isham's text, sins of stealing fruit and the locations of closets – which facilitated the intermingling of female piety and confession with domesticity – are closely aligned.¹⁰⁶ This alignment suggests that her belief that sex was spiritually corrupting overcame Calvinist dictates on marriage, and that she found validation for this controversial position in the *Confessions*. In her life, Isham achieved a balance between her own deeply held convictions and the prescriptions of her faith. Her single life spent in the company of her family allowed her to conform to the dictates of domesticity and motherhood, but to remain celibate. She embraced the domestic role deemed suitable for a woman of her class: she directed the running of her father's household, ran the 'domestic economy' of Lamport hall and 'supervised the religious instruction of younger female relatives and servants'.¹⁰⁷ While she did not herself have

¹⁰⁴ Foregrounding the incident, Anthony Walker asks: 'If St Augustin's confessing of his robbing an orchard be so approved, why may not I touch so small a thing as I meet with here, which shews the tenderness of her Spirit'. *The Holy Life of Mrs Elizabeth Walker* (London, 1690), p. 13, *EBBO* <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [accessed 21 Aug 2011].

¹⁰⁵ Clarke and Longfellow, 'Examine My Life'.

¹⁰⁶ While Isham's female closet suggests domesticity, the male closet suggests privilege and authority. See *The Changeling* above for a discussion of Middleton and Rowley's depiction of the male closet as a site of confessional activity which intersects with learning and power.

¹⁰⁷ Sara H. Mendelson, 'Women and Work', in Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 70.

any children, when their mother died, she filled the role of surrogate mother for her siblings, especially Judith: a ‘beloved object’ (fol. 30v) whom Isham loved ‘as if she had bene my child’ (fol. 31r).¹⁰⁸ As Longfellow and Stephen’s analyses demonstrate, Isham was not afraid to distinguish her religious beliefs from strict Calvinist orthodoxy in her narrative. Her reluctance to explicitly admit her desire for celibacy in her text stems from a reluctance to express beliefs that would be deemed unacceptable by Puritans or more moderate Calvinists.

Early modern debates about celibacy were tied in with the issue of priestly superiority over the laity.¹⁰⁹ Celibacy had been ‘rejected categorically by the various Reformation Churches’.¹¹⁰ Associated with Catholicism, a strictly Puritan view would have been offended by Isham ‘upholding a feature of Roman Catholicism’ by placing a spiritual value on celibacy.¹¹¹ While many moderate Calvinist theologians had some sympathy for ministers who vowed celibacy, ‘few proponents of priestly celibacy’ praised ‘female virginity as well’.¹¹² Cho argues that Protestant theologians:

were reluctant to believe that women could remain chaste because female sexuality was, according to them, unstable, freakish, and capricious.

Thus, Protestant women were expected to marry, and “those who did not

¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Moore (1613–1664) (Moore married twice. She is also known by her first married name, Durie. See M. Greengrass, ‘Durie [nee King], Dorothy (c. 1613–1664)’, ODNB <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55437> [accessed 21 Sept 2011]) provides a contrast to Isham. Although she was eventually to remarry, as a young widow Moore felt a deep sense of calling to religious public service, and she thought this calling would be best accomplished as a single woman. In letters Moore wrote to the eminent Dutch divine, André Rivet, in 1643, she persistently asked him to state how a woman who felt a calling for public service could fulfil her duty. In these letters, Moore ‘argues the case for a religious vocation for women – if not for the priesthood, then for a role equally important’. Lynette Hunter, ‘Introduction’, in Lynette Hunter (ed.), *The Letters of Dorothy Moore, 1612-64* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. xv. Rivet continually maintained that women had no public role in the church beyond charitable work and looking after the sick. Other than that, domestic duty and prayerful piety were the means for a woman to fulfil her godly calling. In his letter of 29 September 1643, using as exemplar the mother of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-89) (whom Gregory praised in his writings), Rivet argues that women who effectively combined these two duties were the most virtuous. There are ‘those who are praised for their diligence and industrious nature in domestic matters others who excel in piety’. For Gregory’s mother, he argues, one duty ‘did not even slightly hinder the other, indeed she used them to fortify and help one another, joining in this way housework with piety and piety with housework’. *The Letters of Dorothy Moore*, pp. 25-26. Unlike Moore, Isham did not see woman’s calling as necessitating a public role, and, her conformity to the dictates of piety and domesticity advocated by divines such as Rivet offsets the rebellion of her singlehood.

¹⁰⁹ See Crawford, *Sexual Knowledge in England*, p. 88, MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p.128, and Ruether, ‘Church and Family’, pp. 83-84.

¹¹⁰ Ruether, ‘Church and Family’, p. 83.

¹¹¹ B. W. Young, ‘The Anglican Origins of Newman’s Celibacy’, *Church History*, 65 (1996), 19.

¹¹² *Ibid.* Young is here discussing Newman’s advocacy of female celibacy with reference to Reformation debates.

were denied the respect of their communities”. Only by chaste marriage could their sexuality be stabilized, controlled and disciplined.¹¹³

For Puritans and many moderate Calvinist theologians, celibacy in women could suggest Roman whorishness rather than a means to achieve a higher state of spirituality. In addition, if Isham had explicitly expressed her desire for celibacy, it would have suggested that she was pridefully elevating herself above married people, especially married men.

As the above discussion demonstrates, with regard to her filial rebellion, Isham displays a determined independence from prevailing socio-religious opinions when they conflict with her conscience. This supports Botonaki’s argument that Calvinist preaching and writing on self-examination – which, intersecting with other Protestant devotional writings and conduct books, sought to condition conformity to social hierarchies – did not always prohibit Protestant individuals from developing their ‘own understanding of God’s word’. Guides to self-examination also sought to define religious beliefs. Confessional authority had the power to designate certain religious attitudes as heretical. As celibacy constituted a radical break with Calvinist orthodoxy, Isham’s admission that celibacy motivated her singlehood, and her textual validation of celibacy via Augustine, are made with a distinct lack of transparency. Stephens argues that in the early seventeenth century there were ‘many different ways to be a conformist member of the national church’. Referring to Prayer Book Protestantism and Puritanism, he argues that religious diversity in England before the civil war meant that ‘individuals [could] . . . combine a range of religious opinions and styles of piety into a variety of different syntheses’; and that Isham, a ‘Prayer Book Puritan’, ‘provides us with an example of just such a synthesis’.¹¹⁴ However, celibacy and Isham’s use of Augustine as a validating authority demonstrates a third distinct strand of influence on her religious opinions, showing that she was not in every way a conformist member of the Calvinist church.

In the following I will argue that Norwood’s text demonstrates that conversion served to more effectively control the religious beliefs of individuals than self-examination alone, and facilitated a more thorough renunciation of the sinful self than was achieved through confession. However, his work nevertheless reveals that the

¹¹³ Sung-Won Cho, ‘Renaissance Nun Vs. Korean *Gisaeng*: Chastity and Female Celibacy in *Measure for Measure* and “Chun-Hyang Jeon”’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41 (2004), 573-574.

¹¹⁴ Stephens, ‘Confessional Identity’, p.24.

writing of spiritual autobiography – the self-discovery it entails and the imperative to confess truth – also facilitates confessional resistance.

The Struggle for Identity in Richard Norwood's *Confessions*

Norwood's more orthodox use of Augustine presents a contrast to Isham. The *Confessions* provided him with an interpretive scheme for exploring his sinful past in line with the Calvinist emphasis on sin, providence and conversion. The influence of the *Confessions* on the text offers a useful focus for the exploration of the confession of sin in the work. I also explore Norwood's aversion to Calvinism and the way the idea of reprobation dominated his psyche, and examine how his complex attitudes towards Calvinism were resolved at conversion. At the conclusion, I argue that his depiction of his experience of conversion demonstrates that it entailed a more thorough renunciation of sin and the self than was traditionally accomplished by confession. I also explore how his text illustrates that written confession can produce a critique of such brutal self-renunciation.

Speaking of conversion narratives composed to gain membership of independent churches, Coolahan argues that 'the genre engages in a complex tension between conformity (the pattern of the regenerate life) and individuality (personal experience of that path)'.¹¹⁵ Norwood's conversion narrative displays typical features of Calvinist conversion schemas, illustrates the Calvinist concern with providence guiding the elect, and, recalling Kilby, loosely parallels Augustine's *Confessions*. It is, however, extremely individualistic in its depiction of Norwood's 'personal experience' of his journey towards conversion. The most striking features of the text are its portrayal of the depth of Norwood's aversion to Calvinism before conversion, and the length and intensity of his struggle to embrace the faith. There is a swinging dynamic to his spiritual journey: Norwood is driven repeatedly to alternately reject and embrace Calvinism.

In the opening pages Norwood recounts that as a boy he had 'an evil conceit' of Puritans (10). He confesses that: 'when upon the death of Queen Elizabeth and coming in of King James we heard by common rumor that he would be more severe against Puritans . . . than against Papists, I was glad of it'. His initial dislike of Puritanism, he states, was brought about by listening to 'the gross slanders of the foul-mouthed

¹¹⁵ Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 232.

multitude'. He also, however, had a sense that he was deeply sinful. Recalling the good hopes that some of 'the godly' had for him, he remarks: 'I thought they were deceived, whatsoever my countenance did promise; I [k]new the dispositions of my heart . . . and my carriage when I was out of [their] presence . . . amongst my consorts' (13).

Statements such as this suggest that his dislike of Puritanism stemmed in large part from a fear of being one of the reprobate. They demonstrate that, for some, the idea of reprobation made Calvinism unappealing.

The roots of Norwood's sense of unworthiness about election, Stachniewski and Pacheco argue, lay in his childhood. They argue that his father's decline in wealth and status when he was a boy; his failure to attain a scholarship that would have allowed him to stay at school; and, what they term the 'severe punitive treatment' that his father doled out to him as a child, 'merge into the Calvinist idea of pre-assigned identities'.¹¹⁶ Later, Norwood was also to develop what he as narrator depicts as an ill-conceived idea that the God of Calvinist piety 'allowed of no joy nor pleasure' but prescribed 'a kind of melancholy demeanour and austerity' (64). However, despite his aversion to Calvinism, Norwood found it impossible to transcend deeply entrenched ideas of reprobation and election.

His vacillating attitudes to Calvinism are structured in the narrative in relation to his wanderings from and returns to (Calvinist) England, which began when he was seventeen. At the age of fifteen Norwood became an apprentice to a fishmonger in London. Two years later, dissatisfied with the mean position in which his parents had placed him, he decided on a sea-faring life after hearing 'mariners . . . discourse of their sea-affairs and the art of navigation, wherewith I was so much affected' (14). When he rebelled against paternal authority by leaving his career as fishmonger, Norwood became, as Stachniewski and Pacheco argue, 'further enmeshed in a guilty sense of himself'.¹¹⁷ As discussed with reference to Isham, career and marriage were the two areas in the seventeenth century in which parental choice was to be respected. While it was deemed acceptable for a Calvinist man to value his own desires in terms of career if he had received a calling for a vocation, Norwood left his position as a fishmonger 'without any due calling or encouragement from God or men' (16). The guilt he experienced over his filial rebellion was heightened later when, journeying to Rome, he

¹¹⁶ Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. xxix.

¹¹⁷ Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. xxx.

converted to Catholicism.¹¹⁸ The narrative depicts his love of literature and theatre as breeding his dissatisfaction with Calvinism, fuelling his wanderings, and leading him to heresy.

Both the *Confessions* and Norwood's *Confessions* share a textual denunciation of secular literature and theatrical practices. Norwood was an avid reader of poetry, especially – like Augustine – Virgil.¹¹⁹ He also read romances (his text mentions two popular works *Polmerin De Oliva* and *The Seaven Champions* (17)) and playbooks.¹²⁰ At the age of fifteen he acted the part of a woman in a play. Norwood states that he was so taken with acting that 'had the lord not prevented it' he would have chosen it 'above any other course in life' (6). During one period of his adult life, he made frequent visits to the theatre and attempted to become a playwright. Sisson notes that, like Augustine, Norwood's spiritual decline is shaped by his succumbing 'to stories that impede his religious progress'.¹²¹ Expanding on Sisson's observation, I will demonstrate that, drawing on Augustine, Norwood presents both his reading of secular literature and his attraction to theatre as reflecting his sinfulness and hindering his conversion.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine states that as a result of reading the 'dignified prose' of Cicero he found the Bible 'unworthy'; 'My swollen pride recoiled from its

¹¹⁸ After a couple of stints as a sailor, Norwood was persuaded by another sailor to enrol as a soldier in the war between Spain and the Netherlands. By the time he arrived in the Low Countries, however, 'the protracted struggle between Spain and the rebellious Dutch was rapidly reaching its close'. Craven and Hayward, *Journal of Richard Norwood*, p. xiv. On the way back to England, after separating from his companions, Norwood decided to travel to Rome.

¹¹⁹ With reference to Virgil's *Aeneid* (Augustine's favourite poem), Ramage argues that Augustine 'did not turn his back on pagan literature, but opposes it by diverting its resources to Christianity.' Ramage argues that in contrast to sophisticated rhetoric, Augustine believed that it was possible to 'get real food for the mind out of verses and poems'. Carol L. Ramage 'The *Confessions* of St. Augustine: *The Aeneid* Revisited', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 5 (1970), 50-51. In her narrative, when recording how her brother lent her 'Sir phillips sidnes Booke (and after Spencer)', Isham argues 'that the vertuous may suck hunny \as/ out of the same flower. better then /about as well as\ the vicious suck poison; according to there owne braine' (fol. 26r). Her appreciation of secular writings did not extend to plays, which her father forbade her and Judith from reading. Later, Justinian was to insist on equal education for the daughters and sons of his second marriage. See Duppa and Isham, *Correspondence of Bishop Brian Duppa and Sir Justinian Isham*, p. xiii.

¹²⁰ *The Palmerins*, attributed to the sixteenth-century writer Francisco de Moraes, 'consist of eight books dealing with the exploits and loves of Palmerin d'Oliva, emperor of Constantinople, and his various descendants'. They were translated into English between 1581-95, and were popular with the middle classes. 'Palmerin of England', *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, eds. Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer, *Oxford Reference Online* <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t54.e4633>> [Accessed 22 Sept 2011]. Richard Johnson's *The Most Famous History of the Seaven Champions of Christendome* (1596–7) 'was a widely read romance of chivalric legend'. 'Johnson, Richard,' *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, *Oxford Reference Online* <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t54.e3274>> [Accessed 22 Sept 2011].

¹²¹ Sisson, 'Art and Illusion', p. 100.

style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning'.¹²² Echoing Augustine, Norwood remarks that 'the vain conceits' that worldly literature 'begat' in him were 'the principal thing that alienated me from the word of God which afterwards grew to that height that scarce any book seemed more contemptible to me than the word of God' (17). While his reading of worldly literature finally bred distaste for scripture, initially it distorted his biblical reading and encouraged erroneous thinking about the world. He remarks that 'in my youth and childhood I had many childish conceits and fancies', one being 'whether the heavens did not touch the earth in some places, as at the horizon?' He states: 'the poets which I had read seemed to be of that mind', and that he was 'so void in faith and understanding . . . in the word of God' that 'even the Scriptures in sundry phrases seemed to intimate as much' (38). His narrative implies that he journeyed to Rome and converted to Catholicism because his early reading of the scriptures, corrupted by his reading of worldly literature, fostered a belief that the world offered an alternative to Calvinism that was more acceptable to his sensibilities.

Norwood does not overtly suggest that his desire to journey to Rome was a signifier of an underlying attraction to Catholicism; rather, he represents himself as merely wanting to see Rome, and from there to travel to Jerusalem. However, this surface explanation is complicated by his admissions that as a child he felt more sympathetic towards Catholicism than Puritanism, and that he had a notion there was a place where the heavens and the world met. Watkins states that 'the severity of Calvin's theology . . . sprang from his refusal to allow the Roman distinction between the life of religion and the life of the world'.¹²³ Norwood's own view of Calvinism saw him configure it as opposed to worldly pleasure. Consequently, he could not embrace purely 'heavenly things': Calvinism and the joyless life it seemed to offer (45, 64). His journey to Rome could thus suggest that he conceived of Catholicism as a religious theology which allowed a distinction between worldly things and heavenly things, one that could therefore provide him with an avenue to heavenly things which would not mean a renunciation of the worldly.

The idea that Norwood implicitly suggests that, in journeying to Rome, he was searching for an alternative to the austerity of Calvinism is reinforced by the fact that he decided to go to Rome soon after he stole fruit from an orchard on the grounds of a nunnery (20). Similarly to Isham, Norwood's depiction of fruit-stealing does not, as

¹²² Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 80.

¹²³ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 42.

Sisson suggests, demonstrate a slavish re-enactment of Augustine's sin.¹²⁴ Rather, he uses the trope to show that he was tempted by Catholicism. There are evident parallels between this first, sinful conversion and Augustine's temptation into Manichaeism. Like Augustine, Norwood identifies heresy as a manifestation of prideful and corporeal ungodliness before conversion.

While Norwood was attracted to Catholicism, he evidently believed that to embrace it would be a sign of reprobation. Consequently, at first he only pretended to be a true convert. In order to journey to Rome, Norwood needed a letter from a papal nuncio. To attain such a letter he required an additional letter from an English priest in Louvain stating that he had demonstrated two signifiers of the Catholic faith: made confession and received the sacrament of communion (21). Initially, Norwood made a confession and received communion to further the pretence that he was a Catholic. When he bid 'adieu to parentage, Education, friends, country, Religion, etc,' he 'thought and purposed it should be for a little time, and then to return to all again' (22). More than just facilitating his trip to Rome, this dissembling allows Norwood to explore Catholicism, while protecting himself from the adverse consequences of seeing himself as a heretic and reprobate.

Norwood's caution about fully converting to Catholicism was well-grounded. When, ultimately, he did convert, as Stachniewski and Pacheco note, 'the psychic cost . . . [was] enormous'.¹²⁵ As he portrays the process whereby he went from dissembling as a Catholic to becoming a Catholic, Norwood depicts acting as an insidious practice. His love of acting in his youth, and his assumption of the role of a woman, suggests that he enjoyed exploring alternative identities. Such abandonment of identity was perhaps construed by the young Norwood as harmless: one of the joys and pleasures of youth which, he notes, 'some stern and austere [Calvinist] men [would] not endure' (64). Writing from the perspective of his conversion back to Calvinism, Norwood aims to demonstrate that, while acting on the stage allowed a seemingly safe escape from identity, it led him to sinful acting in the world.

Initially, acting the part of a Catholic causes Norwood's conscience to become afflicted: he feels like a fraud. On his journey to Rome, he develops an aversion to

¹²⁴ With reference to Norwood, Sisson argues that 'due to its reliance on conversion experiences of Christian forerunners' – St. Paul and Augustine – spiritual autobiography 'typically sets the self off centre and unsettles notions of individual, independent or freely determined authorship'. 'Art and Illusion', p. 101.

¹²⁵ Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. xxx.

being looked at. The people that he encounters become unwelcome spectators of his performance. He finds that people ‘gazed more upon me then, then ever they were wont to do before’ (22). This leads to ‘horror of conscience’ and ‘perplexity and grief’ (22). Through fear that his fraud would be uncovered, Norwood hides in the shadows and moves at night. Here, he appears to be affected by the ‘well-established [puritan] anti-theatrical stereotype of the player as a protean figure with no moral centre, that is a shape shifter and conartist’.¹²⁶ Thus, it is not just as narrator but also as protagonist that Norwood exhibits Puritan anti-theatricality. Sisson remarks of spiritual autobiographies that the past is ‘apprehended and understood in a particular way even as it was first experienced’. In the narrative, it is then ‘sifted, reviewed, and reshaped in the service of present interests and future concerns’.¹²⁷ Norwood’s attraction to the theatre would have been ‘apprehended and understood’ as he experienced it in competing ways. It attracted him as a means of liberation from the oppressive identity offered by Calvinism, yet his Puritan sensibilities prohibited the full embracing of theatre. At this point, his assimilation of Puritan antipathy towards acting leads to intense anxiety.

Indicative of the depths of his aversion to Calvinism, however, and suggesting again an underlying attraction to Catholicism, Norwood ultimately resolves the mental discord brought about by his acting by converting to Catholicism. Norwood is persuaded to convert by another dissembler, or actor. He meets an Englishman named Thomas, who (dressed for his role) ‘travelled in a pilgrim’s habit’ but ‘seemed not to be certainly persuaded himself’ (23). Like Norwood, Thomas is a borderline heretic. The narrative suggests that Thomas’s temptation away from the true faith and into Catholicism, and his engaging in the sinful practice of acting, make him an ideal vessel for Satan to further tempt Norwood into heresy. The blame, nonetheless, Norwood declares, is solely his: it was with ‘witting and willing blindness’ that he stops acting the part of a Catholic and becomes a Catholic (24).

Following his conversion to Catholicism – when he stopped acting and ‘did voluntarily make confession to a priest and receive their sacrament’ – Norwood initially felt that his ‘mind and conscience seemed to be better settled and more quieted than

¹²⁶ Diehl, ‘Disciplining Puritans and Players’, 90. The stereotype of the Puritan as anti-theatrical has in recent times been challenged. According to Diehl, many Puritans ‘were frequent playgoers, and some were playwrights, players and patrons of the stage’. In addition ‘although many puritan preachers did indeed attack the stage, so, too, did writers with ties to the Anglican bishops and Roman Catholicism’. Nevertheless, Puritan ‘anti-theatrical tracts were common’, as was ‘the depiction of puritans as anti-theatrical’ in seventeenth-century London comedies. ‘Disciplining Puritans and Players’, 81-82.

¹²⁷ Sisson, ‘Art and Illusion’, p. 105.

before' (24-25). However, about the time he entered Italy, Norwood became afflicted by 'the nightly disease they call the mare', and began to suffer terrifying night visions where he felt that he had 'descended into Hell' (26). The negative psychological impact of his conversion to Catholicism demonstrates how difficult it was for Norwood to renounce his entrenched Calvinist identity.¹²⁸ He feared that his conversion was a sign of his reprobate status; and that 'the mare' was God's righteous punishment. Yet, the idea of providence could allow for the interpretation of distressing occurrences as either a just chastisement of the reprobate, or a divine reprimand which served to guide the elect back onto the path of righteousness.¹²⁹ Norwood's depiction of his journey towards conversion is presented as being guided by providence. His Calvinist identity, achieved at conversion, is reinforced in the text through the contrast between the narrator and the sinful protagonist. Deciding to return to England, Norwood records that when he 'departed out of Italy to go for England', the disease of the mare 'began to abate and afterwards more when I came into England' (27). In light of these events, his affliction of the mare is configured by the narrator as a punishment from his heavenly father to impress on him the righteousness of the Calvinist faith and the corruption of Catholicism.

As protagonist at this point, Norwood was able to retain some hope that he was not beyond redemption. Once back in England, he was divinely rescued from Satan's grasp when a Protestant minister counselled him with marvellous 'diligence, constancy, patience, gentleness, meekness, love' (35). After this, he became once more 'settled in the Protestant faith' (35). However, it would still be many years before Norwood attained a 'true conversion' to Calvinism (6). At this point, he states that he 'was not the man my father takes me to be' (32). Only superficially reconciled to the Protestant faith, once again, Norwood is fundamentally an actor, a 'dissembler'. Aware from his experience in Rome that acting is a particularly nefarious sin that 'bring[s] on another to utter ruin', he is once more mentally conflicted (24). He desires to commit himself to a godly life, and had 'sundry thoughts and motions of a full conversion', but is still unable, or unwilling, to commit to Calvinism (35). With his aversion to Calvinism winning out, Norwood once more leaves England.

¹²⁸ For further discussion of what the 'mare' reveals about Norwood's attitudes to Calvinism and his fragile psychological state at this point, see Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, pp. xxvii-xxxii, and Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 59.

¹²⁹ See Stephens for sinful states as both divine punishment and providential guidance in Isham's text. 'Confessional Identity', pp. 39-40.

As discussed above, place is extremely important to Norwood's narration. From the perspective of the converted Calvinist, Italy is a place of devilish temptation, where, because of his weakness and rebelliousness before conversion he is 'infected with popery' (33). However, because of his aversion to Calvinism, for the protagonist at this point England is an ambiguous safe-haven. To escape once more from Calvinist England, Norwood resumed his life as a seaman. By this point he had grown to dislike seafaring. He used it merely as a means to travel, and to further his knowledge of navigation. This love of navigation led him to its scholarly pursuit, which in turn led him to mathematics. When, some three years later, he attained 'good success' in his study of mathematics, he began to feel that 'the Lord' had ordained that the 'good things that belonged unto others belonged also to me' (45). Norwood began to feel that he had attained to a vocation: what Perkins called 'a certain kind of life ordained and imposed on man by God for the common Good'.¹³⁰ When Norwood disobeys his father, it initially betrays his rebellious spirit: it leads to guilt, and heightens his fears of reprobation. With the sense now that leaving fishmongering had led to a godly vocation, his filial rebellion becomes partially justified. His guilt resolved, he comes to believe that he may be one of the elect. Similarly to Rich, and like Augustine in the *Confessions*, he suggests that God's providence was acting through his sins.¹³¹

When he received a calling in mathematics, Norwood began to feel that he was worthy of God's grace. According to Stachniewski and Pacheco, this relatively prestigious vocation also allowed him to overcome the inherent sense of unworthiness brought about because of his lowly status.¹³² Earlier in the text, Norwood rebukes a minister for promulgating the idea that poverty implied reprobation, and that wealth was somehow indicative of election. Before meeting the minister who brought him back to the Protestant faith after his conversion to Catholicism, Norwood was first brought to a minister who had little sympathy for his plight. 'Pressing upon' Norwood's 'disobedience to his parents', he told Norwood that 'God had laid several afflictions' on him. Norwood remarks: 'His words though true did touch me very neatly'. He then interpreted his poverty as the reason for the minister's reproof: 'Yet withal I apprehended myself to be contemned [sic] of him because I was poor and as it were in a

¹³⁰ William Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations or Callings of Men*, 1, 727. Quoted by Michaelson, 'Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocations', 319.

¹³¹ Like Norwood, before conversion Rich also had a love of secular literature and theatre and was 'stedfastly sett against being a Puritan'. Rich, *Life of M. Warwicke*, fols. 22v-23v.

¹³² Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. xxxi.

forlorn condition' (33). At this point, the narrative implies that it is a sign of election to be lifted by God out of lowly position in life.

With the aim of furthering his studies, Norwood decided to give up sea-faring, and return once more to England. However, once back in England, rather than using his time to commit to his studies, he spent it going to the theatre: 'I did not prosecute my laudable exercise but went often to stage plays wherewith I was as it were bewitched in affection and never satiated (42). As in many conversion narratives, Norwood's text demonstrates that the 'path to conversion is riddled with false starts and "backslidings"' .¹³³ In Norwood's case, it is evident that his sense of being worthy of divine grace was profoundly complicated by his aversion to Calvinism. Norwood's reading of worldly literature and his enjoyment of theatre encouraged his desire for liberation from his oppressive Calvinist identity. It is highly revealing that, at this point, when he is poised to begin accepting his Calvinist identity through his godly vocation, he reverts once more to theatrical practices. Norwood states he was so much affected by these 'lying vanities' that he wrote a 'good part of a play' (42). Rather than committing to a godly vocation and continue his journey to salvation, he attempts to embrace a vocation which alienates him from Calvinism. As with his temptation into heresy, he depicts the Lord as visiting punishment on him for his sinfulness. He records that, at the time of his frequenting the Fortune theatre, he 'fell into that so foul sin' (42). Here Norwood is likely referring to his 'master sin', an ambiguous, habitual transgression that he makes repeated reference to in the text. Although he does not elaborate on the nature of this sin he appears to be referring to masturbation.¹³⁴ Norwood represents his addiction to masturbation, which began when he veered from his divinely ordained vocation in mathematics, as both a sign of his sinfulness and as a just punishment from God. In the *Confessions*, Augustine rebukes himself for engaging in non-marital sex; Norwood castigates himself for indulging in masturbation. Thus, in contrast to Isham, who through Augustine presents the spiritual value of celibacy, Norwood suggests compatibilities between the saint's beliefs and Calvinism by focusing on sexual acts which occur outside of the sanctity of marriage.

¹³³ Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 232.

¹³⁴ See Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, p. 145, and Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, p. 76. One can see the similarity between the term 'master sin' and masturbation. The word masturbation was in use at the time. See <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 1 Aug, 2012]. Sections of the manuscript are blacked out with heavy black crosses, suggesting the deletion of material deemed unsuitable to be read. It is not known whether Norwood or someone else deleted these sections. In some of these blacked out sections, he may have been more forthcoming on the nature of his 'master sin'.

As in the *Confessions*, there is also a focus on sexual sin in Norwood's narrative; and, like Augustine, Norwood links theatricality with corrupt sexuality. When discussing his attacks of 'the mare' at the time of his heresy, Norwood remarks that they 'seldom . . . left me without nocturnal pollutions' (26). Both the 'nocturnal pollutions' that result from 'the mare', and the onset of his temptation into masturbation occur in the context of his indulging in theatrical practices. Norwood's hopes for a career as a dramatist came to a halt when he 'fell out' with the 'players of the Fortune . . . about a seat that they would not permit me to have' (42). Through the prism of the orthodox Puritan response to theatre that informs Norwood's narration, he thanks God's 'mercy' for giving him 'this rub' (falling out with the company) which prevented him from taking up a theatrical career (42). Despite his 'backslidings', providence was guiding him. However, at this point Norwood's reading of secular literature brings further dissolution of the godly self. After reading *De Occulta Philosophia* and other works by the German magician, theologian and alchemist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, he is once more tempted into heretical beliefs, experimenting with the 'black arts' (43).¹³⁵

In addition, his aversion to Calvinism once more hinders his spiritual journey. He obtained a position to teach mathematics and further his studies in London, but was only able to settle for a few months. As narrator, Norwood notes that London during this period – the early decades of the seventeenth century – was 'one of the most happy and flourishing places of the world, especially for the light of the Gospel and life of true religion then flourishing there (though that was a thing then slighted and condemned by me)' (51). Still with 'no affection' for 'heaven and heavenly things' (45), he was unable to settle 'effectually' in mathematics or in England (51). After several months teaching, Norwood was offered employment by a company going to the Summer Islands (Bermuda) to dive for pearls and he once again leaves England (52). Norwood was ultimately only able to stay permanently in England, and find true contentment in his vocation, when he fully embraced his Calvinist identity. This occurred in Bermuda.

¹³⁵ Norwood later attempted 'conjuring' (60). Intriguingly, Whitney argues for the possibility that Norwood may have seen a production of *Dr Faustus* at The Fortune, or possibly read the work. He notes that Norwood read Agrippa, 'the magician whom Faustus emulated', in the 'several months immediately following his playgoing period'. 'Out of Service and in the Playhouse', 179. Whitney contends that Norwood wrestled with two early modern responses to Marlowe's play. One – what Whitney terms the "Promethean," "humanist," "heterodox," or, most recently, "Ovidian" response to the play – interprets Faustus' tragedy as a struggle 'to fulfil himself, and, by implication, humanity, against the prohibitions of an oppressive cosmic order'. This accounts for Norwood's attraction to the black arts. The other – the "orthodox" response – interprets Faustus' tragedy as isolating him 'from the divine grace without which life is meaningless'. Hence, the latter accounts for Norwood's continued search for spiritual fulfilment in God. 'Out of Service and in the Playhouse', 174.

While, typically, his journey there was prompted by a need to escape from Calvinism, as narrator he suggests that the lord was once again acting through his sinfulness. He brought him face to face with the fate of the reprobate, which ultimately caused him to embrace his destiny as one of the elect.

As discussed earlier, in his wanderings Norwood sought a place where the 'heavens touched the earth'. Although his experience had somewhat dented these romantic notions (39), in his journey to the Summer Islands, Norwood appears to be still seeking a 'Garden of Paradise' (38). What he finds in Bermuda, however, is a worldly vision of hell, not heaven. When he set off alone in a small boat to explore Long Bird Island, he was stranded there alone for several days. The isolation he experienced on the island is represented as an intimation of spiritual hell: 'I thought it one of the greatest punishments in the world, yea, I thought it was one of the greatest punishments in hell, and the sense and apprehension of it made me to think of hell as of hell indeed, a condition most miserable' (54). This vision alone is not enough to make Norwood embrace Calvinism – though he 'desired to shun the torments of hell' he was still 'not much affected by the joys of heaven' (64). Nevertheless, following his return from the isolated island, Norwood began to address his procrastinating mindset.

To avoid the torments of hell, Norwood attempts to live in a 'middle state', a 'happy' condition, but one 'inferior to the condition of true Christians' (65). He defines this middle condition as not to embrace a full Christian life but to 'be careful to avoid sin, particularly all gross sin'. He believes that living in a middle condition in life would lead to a corollary middle estate after death; that if he lived in the middle state, when he died, God 'will not cast me to hell but rather admit me to such a middle condition' (65). This middle place is between the unappealing heaven of Calvinism and the reprobate hell to which he feels he is otherwise destined. Norwood shows how he arrived at this belief through the example of pious pre-Christians, such as philosophers: 'To adjudge these all to hell seemed to be a harsh judgement' (65). Here, he again displays an attraction to Catholic theology. There are evident similarities between the middle position he sought to live in, and his earlier search for a place that merged the earthly and the spiritual; the 'garden of paradise' which informed his earlier conversion to Catholicism. In addition, the middle place after death is similar to limbo, where the Catholic church placed virtuous pre-Christian philosophers. Isham's text, I have argued, shows that she successfully merged aspects of Catholic teaching with her Calvinist beliefs: she affected a personal *via media*. For Norwood, no such synthesis is possible.

His idea of a happy middle condition is proven erroneous when he cannot, in fact, avoid committing gross sin (particularly his ‘master sin’) and he is once more entrenched in the paradigms of election / reprobation, heaven / hell.

Norwood likens his continued aversion to a full Calvinist life to an unloving marriage; he casts himself as a woman who must submit herself to the unwelcome sexual attention of a husband:

But even as a woman that is much in debt and continual danger, hearing some possibility of a husband that would soon pay her debts, and free her from danger would diligently listen after him, but if withal she found not in her self a conjugal affection to this person, would forbear marriage much after that manner it was with me (65).

Norwood draws on the discourse of the love-match to demonstrate that he felt no love for the God of Calvinist piety. It is Augustine who brings Norwood to love God’s word and thus attain ‘the wedding garment of love’ (65). It was en route to Bermuda that Norwood first decided to read Augustine. Confused on points of religion (‘the papists [say] one way, and Protestants another, those they call puritan another, etc’), Norwood decided to ‘be regulated by Augustine’, as ‘there was honourable mention of him’ in ‘almost all’ the reading Norwood had done ‘whether divine or human’ (61). Although he had ‘read little or nothing’ of Augustine’s writings at this time, Norwood had in his possession several of his works: *De Civitate Dei*, *Tractates upon the Gospel of St. John*, *De Doctrina Christiana* and the *Confessions* (61).¹³⁶ When Norwood read the *Tractates*, as in many conversion narratives, he experiences ‘a specific defining moment . . . an epiphany of sorts’.¹³⁷ He states that, after reading Augustine, ‘He that made all things by his word was graciously pleased to open my heart’ (71).

As discussed above, literature was ‘the principal thing that alienated’ Norwood from the word of God. His reading of the *Tractates* brings him to love God’s word and the Calvinist faith. After reading Augustine, Norwood’s ‘heart is affected with the Holy Scriptures and with every part thereof and with other good books treating of divine things’ (73). Apparently no longer ‘confused’ about religion, Norwood also studied

¹³⁶ As this was before 1620, Norwood’s copy of the *Confessions* would not have been an English translation. It may have been a Latin version. Again suggesting God’s providence acting through his sins, Norwood states that his reading of Agrippa allowed him to reconnect with the Latin he had learned at school (43).

¹³⁷ Maria Magro, ‘Spiritual Autobiography and Radical Sectarian Women’s Discourse: Anna Trapnel and the Bad Girls of the English Revolution’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34 (2004), 412-13.

Calvinist divines such as Perkins. Thus, Augustine's *Tractates* provided him with an antidote to the nefarious influence of worldly literature, which Augustine had depicted in the *Confessions* as corrupting his own spiritual path, and opened his heart to the Calvinist faith.

Apart from his aversion to Calvinism, a factor that had prevented Norwood from opening his heart to God was his fear that he would be unable to renounce his sinful ways; that his failure to do so would confirm to himself, once and for all, that he was one of the reprobate. Through reading Perkins, Norwood grew in assurance that a true desire to repent was a sign of election and would eventually lead to a defeat of sinfulness (74). When Norwood depicts how Augustine's spiritual autobiography played a concrete part in his conversion, it suggests that he had also read the *Confessions* at this point. After a period of trial and error, doubt and assurance, Norwood comes to a point where he is 'so abundantly replenished with heavenly joys' that he says he had to 'restrain myself from the action of leaping' (84-85). At this point, he came upon someone reading of the *Confessions*, the very place 'touching [Augustine's] conversion, etc. Which ministered fresh matter of comfort and rejoicing', and he began to feel secure in his conversion (84-85). Evidently, when he alighted on this person reading Augustine's *Confessions*, Norwood attributed it as a sign that, like the saint, he had undergone a true conversion.

Soon after, Norwood returned to England, where he would live for the next twenty years. However, his return was initially marred by a resurgence of spiritual turmoil. This affliction undermines his assertion that he had come to love of God's word as interpreted by Calvinism. Rather it implies that, as the threat of hell and converse promise of salvation served to impel Catholic confession, a fear of reprobation and the converse promise of election could compel Calvinist conversion. Although the attacks of 'the mare' had abated when he returned to England after his conversion to Catholicism, Norwood still experienced nocturnal disturbances intermittently. As proof of the transforming effect of his true conversion, Norwood notes that the nocturnal pollutions of 'the mare' ceased after his conversion to Calvinism: 'it pleased the Lord of his free grace and mercy to deliver me from the bonds of my corruption into the glorious liberty of his saints and children' (26-27). However, on his return to England from Bermuda, he would for some time suffer attacks of 'the mare' with frightening intensity. During these fits he 'was most suddenly and vehemently assaulted with a number of blasphemous and horrible thoughts and temptations or persuasions' (95-96).

He is also haunted by apparitions of the devil. To Norwood's dismay, he is 'suddenly changed from so much peace and comfort' to extreme 'perturbations and terrors' (100). I have argued that Norwood's initial affliction of 'the mare' was symptomatic of an identity crisis that resulted from his conversion to Catholicism. That it now resurfaces with a vengeance on his return to England, when he is finally committed to embracing his Calvinist identity, suggests how deep Norwood's aversion to Calvinism ran. In the context of the struggle he felt as protagonist between his aversion to Calvinism and the insurmountable power of the ideas of election and reprobation, it is probable that Norwood here suffers a mental breakdown as these conflicting forces fight for dominance. His fear of reprobation ultimately wins out. As Stachniewski and Pacheco argue, Norwood's mind invokes 'hallucinations' of the devil in order to rid himself of 'the states of mind which belong to the reprobate'.¹³⁸ These mindsets are at root the vestiges of his aversion to Calvinism/England, his love of the world and worldly things, and his desire for a middle condition.

Both his text and his afflictions in England demonstrate that Calvinist conversion entails a more thorough and more permanent renunciation of the sinful self than Catholic confession does. As Norwood records his struggle in England, the text graphically illustrates the notion of the 'divided self', which, according to Coolahan, is an 'acknowledged and established sign of experimental Calvinist identity'.¹³⁹ For Norwood to finally overcome his aversion to Calvinism and embrace the faith entailed a psychological bifurcation. He depicts the aftermath of this frightening period of terror and doubt as a loss of self. He likens his fight with the 'temptation' of the devil to a man being beaten by his 'enemies. . . from top to toe', where he is afflicted with 'many deep and dangerous wounds', and where he loses 'a large effusion of his blood'. He remarks 'Surely a man though he might recover and live, yet it's like it would be but a feeble life, and (as they use to say) would never be his own man again; and such has my condition seemed to be through this temptation' (105). Acknowledging here that a part of him had to be killed off in order for him to embrace Calvinism, he also confesses that after this frightening period of doubt he lost the 'youthful heat and vigour' and joy that marked his conversion in Bermuda (95-96). He finds that he is 'more feeble in both body and mind' and 'prone to doubting, distrustfulness, and qualms of despair' (106). He configures this trial as a blessing from the Lord: he 'hath humbled the heart and

¹³⁸ Stachniewski and Pacheco, *Grace Abounding*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

¹³⁹ Coolahan, *Women, Writing and Language*, p. 242.

made it meet to enjoy' his blessings 'with sobriety and moderation' (106-107). After his 'recovery' the more sober and moderate Norwood was able to settle in England, faith and vocation. He lived there for twenty years as a dedicated Calvinist. Diligently applying himself to his vocation, he acquired a reputation as a teacher of mathematics and as the author of several books on navigation.¹⁴⁰

In orthodox Calvinist fashion, Norwood's text reproduces and solidifies the Calvinist religious identity that was initiated at his conversion and fully realised after his recovery from 'the mare' and visitations by the devil after his return to England. The idea, presented in the narrative, of God's providential guidance through his sins and trials reinforces the identity of the converted as one of the elect. However, Norwood's depiction in his narrative of his evident inability, despite all efforts, to transcend ideas of reprobation, and his ultimate embrace of Calvinism despite the loss of self that resulted, arguably amount to a confession that Calvinism was the religious identity he had to adopt if he was to achieve relief from his mental and spiritual conflicts. In addition, his emphasis on acting in the text invites the suggestion that this Puritan identity was merely a role, albeit one that Norwood, unable to find a middle condition, ultimately found inescapable and had to adopt. Norwood's text also reveals the limitations of conversion. Reflecting the interests of modern readers, Norwood's editors Craven and Hayward, 'read' Norwood's spiritual autobiography not 'so much as an example of devotional literature', but as a text providing information on a man whose pre-conversion life was defined, they argue, by a 'simple restlessness of the spirit [that] determined the earliest pioneers of American settlement to try the great adventure'. Despite all efforts to depict his past in 'the darkest of hues', this essence of Norwood's life emerges from the pages.¹⁴¹ It shows that, just as Calvinism had haunted him before his conversion, the ghost of youthful freedom haunts his identity after conversion. His spiritual autobiography allows vicarious re-enactment of the time when he was 'his own man'.

Isham's text reveals that the Protestant emphasis on personal conscience could provoke resistance to confessional discipline. She uses Augustine's authority to argue against submission to patriarchal authority, and – revealing the lingering appeal of Catholicism in England from the viewpoint of the individual – to validate celibacy.

¹⁴⁰ Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, p. 70.

¹⁴¹ Craven and Hayward, *Journal of Richard Norwood*, pp. xi-xiii.

Norwood's text, which similarly portrays the lingering appeal of aspects of Catholic theology, demonstrates that conversion was an effective means of aligning conscience with Calvinist orthodoxy. His work demonstrates that conversion was in some ways a more brutal, thoroughgoing confessional 'technology of the self' than Catholic confession. However, it also illustrates the 'truth' injunction of spiritual autobiography promotes admissions or confessions which conflict with the dominant 'truth' that the narrative expresses.

As it was dependent on achieving assurance of salvation, the consolation offered by Calvinist self-examination and conversion was limited in scope. In the next chapter, the focus changes from issues of confessional discipline and resistance to the impact on the individual of inadequate consolation in Calvinist confessional modes. Returning to fictional portrayals of confession, I examine Defoe's depiction of early modern confession, arguing that he presents the predestinarian doctrine and Calvinist attitudes to conversion and confession as promoting spiritual corruption. Referring to how modern autobiography often presents conflicting accounts of 'truth', Gilmore argues that readers 'become detectives or confessors'; as they seek to 'verify the facts . . . they [are] dubious of an eye witness account, yet look to an eyewitness for truth'.¹⁴² In the following chapter, in the context of exploring confession in Defoe's novels *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, I argue that he places the reader in the complex position of being detectives and confessors who must assess his narrators' presentation of truth, while simultaneously assessing his critique of Calvinism, its confessional modes and emphasis on conversion.

¹⁴² Gilmore, 'Policing Truth', p. 57.

Chapter Four

Defoe's Fiction: Hidden Sins and the Consolation of Confession

This chapter explores Daniel Defoe's adaptation of spiritual autobiography as a confessional mode in three of his novels: *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724). Defoe's utilisation of the tropes and frameworks of spiritual autobiography is well established. This analysis examines the degree to which he exploits the idea of the unreliability of the confessional narrator. *Moll Flanders*'s (lack of) truthfulness has always been up for debate. I argue that Defoe first complicates the idea that confessional autobiography presents truth in *Robinson Crusoe*; and that, by the time of *Roxana*, he subverts the confessional form entirely by presenting a narrator who deliberately lies. The issue of narrative dishonesty is examined by uncovering hidden sins in the texts: acts which are construed by the narrators as sinful, but which are not explicitly acknowledged or confessed. I argue that through the device of depicting hidden sins, Defoe critiques Calvinism's failure to provide confessional modes to expiate sin and, with increasing forthrightness in each successive novel, valorises Catholic confession.

It was acknowledged in Calvinism that 'the godly' required continual self-examination. Most theologians agreed that this occurred to monitor and confess only sins originating in postlapsarian corruption, such as pride, and qualms of doubt about God, providence and election. They argued that the sinfulness of the elect could be distinguished from the sinfulness of the unconverted and the reprobate. The latter were guilty of a double sinfulness: not only inevitably sinning because of their original corruption, but also wilfully committing major sins against the doctrines of Calvinism and against the light of conscience.¹ I argue that post-conversion sins remain unconfessed by *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* because to confess them would demonstrate reprobation. These novels portray negative effects – on the individual and society – that can result from the Calvinist view that the commission of major sin demonstrated reprobation. This critique continues in *Roxana*, where, because of guilt from sin and spiritual defeatism resulting from the doctrine of reprobation, the protagonist is led to madness and criminality.

¹ For a brief discussion of debates about conscious, wilful sinning see Maximilian E. Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 65 (1966), 448-449, n.16, n.17.

As well as demonstrating Defoe's negative depiction of Calvinism and its confessional practices, the revelation of hidden sins in the narratives allows new perspectives on the individual texts. Uncovering post-conversion sin in *Moll Flanders*, I argue, explains how she secured her release from Newgate, and opens up new ways at looking at the old question of whether or not she sincerely repents. Revealing hidden sins in *Roxana* provides the means to take up the novel's challenge to explain the disappearance, presumed murder, of Susan, and provokes a reappraisal of the novel's portrayal of madness. I begin by exploring Crusoe's post-conversion sins, and the spiritual corruption that ensues when these sins are not confessed. Examining the text from this viewpoint facilitates a reassessment of how the religious content of the novel connects with its economic focus and Defoe's negative (I argue) portrayal of colonialism.

Conversion, Confession and Colonialism in *Robinson Crusoe*

Norton argues that, in true Calvinist fashion, Defoe's narrators confess their sins to God and to the Christian community, rather than secretly to a priest, and that *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* also 'record anti-Catholic sentiments by criticising Catholic uses of confession'. He further argues that the narrators' criticisms reflect Defoe's own attitude towards Catholic confession.² In addition to Norton, I will argue that, via allusions to Augustine's *Confessions* and exomologesis, Crusoe's narrative also implicitly criticises Catholic confession. But in contrast, I will then demonstrate that Crusoe's attitude to Catholic confession does not reflect Defoe's attitude. Rather, Defoe critiques Calvinist attitudes to sin, and argues for the value of Catholic-style repeatable confession.

Defoe's concern with confession is demonstrated when Crusoe fails to confess and repent post-conversion sins, and this failure leads to a corruption of his spiritual identity and further sinning. Crusoe initially sins, I argue, when he forces Friday to convert to Christianity, and kills natives for this end. These acts are undertaken to protect his faith in God, but constitute sins against conscience and the Calvinist faith. Exploring connections between religion, economics and colonialism in the text, I then examine how in Crusoe's dealings with the natives he replicates the violent missionary methods employed by colonial Spaniards. Because it would undermine his sense of

² Norton, 'Confession in Protestant Literature', p. 194.

conversion, Crusoe does not fully acknowledge that these acts are sinful. His failure to confess and repent then leads to greater sinning and a corruption of his spiritual identity when, on leaving the island, he fully adopts the colonial ideology of Catholic Spaniards.

I will begin by exploring Crusoe's critique of Catholic confession, which is located in his portrayal of his conversion. In many spiritual autobiographies, the individual's spiritual journey is given validation by its correspondence with the historical development of Christianity. The starting point of this allegorical history is an analogy drawn between the individual fall of the writer and the original Fall. I have demonstrated that many seventeenth-century authors of spiritual autobiographies, following Augustine's precedent, locate their fall from a more innocent childhood state into the more corrupt state of adulthood through a temptation to steal fruit. A personal instance of fruit-stealing sees the individual fall become analogous to the original Fall. When Crusoe makes a connection between 'his life-story and the myth of the fall', rather than a temptation of fruit, he recalls Norwood in placing the emphasis on filial rebellion.³ Early in the narrative, the young Crusoe is driven to rebel against his father's wishes: to live a settled life in England and take up a profession as a lawyer. Compelled to wander abroad, like Norwood, he becomes a sailor. At his conversion, he comes to see his isolation on the island as chastisement for his filial rebellion: 'a just punishment for my sin; my rebellious behaviour against my father'.⁴ As I have argued with regard to Norwood and Isham – and as Faber argues concerning *Robinson Crusoe* – in the seventeenth century, when the novel is set, filial rebellion was perceived as a 'rebellion against God'.⁵ In the context of his conversion, Crusoe's filial rebellion becomes analogous to Adam's disobedience to God.⁶

Further consistent with the conversion experience described in many spiritual autobiographies, Crusoe's conversion experience comes to encompass a history of the

³ Didier Bertrand, 'Order and Chaos in Paradise: Colonial and "Postcolonial" Constructions of Religious Identity through the Robinson Crusoe Story', *Religion & Literature*, 3 (1995), 33. While Norwood's text records an episode of fruit-stealing, the allegorical connection to the 'historical' Fall is primarily made with regard to his filial rebellion.

⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Michael Shinagel (London: Norton, 1994), p. 66. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Ben Faber, 'Calvin and Hobbes: Providence and Politics in *Robinson Crusoe*', in Natasha Duquette (ed.), *Sublimar Aspects: Interfaces between Literature, Aesthetics, and Theology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), p. 12.

⁶ See Maximilian E. Novak, 'Robinson Crusoe's "Original Sin"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 1 (1961), 19-29. Novak demonstrates that Crusoe's filial rebellion is central to the guilt and repentance he experiences on the island. He also highlights that Crusoe's spiritual journey has many curious resonances with Richard Norwood's. I say curious because it is highly unlikely that Defoe could have read Norwood's *Confessions*, which wasn't published until the twentieth century.

development of Christianity from Old Testament judgement for transgressing the commandments to the promise of redemption offered in the Gospel. As I illustrated in Chapter Three, in Calvinist morphologies of conversion, succumbing to fear of the law laid down in the Old Testament was the first step towards conversion. The individual first becomes overcome with a sense of sinfulness, then moves to a sense of repentance, and finally arrives at an understanding that, because of Christ's sacrifice, the sins (of the elect) have been forgiven. It is when sick with an 'ague' on the island that Crusoe calls on God (64). Afterwards he has a 'terrible dream', where a dark heavenly being singles him out to kill him (65). This angel of destruction, symbolising Old Testament judgement (appropriate for Crusoe because his sins are not truly repented of), says: 'seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die' (64-65). The vision provokes Crusoe to brood on all the signs, which he has failed to acknowledge, of God's promptings to reform his life since his 'original sin' of disobeying his father. After being 'Struck dumb' by reflections of his conscience, he then calls on God to aid him in repentance: 'Lord be my help, for I am in great distress' (68). Crusoe apprehends the significance of Christ's sacrifice when he reads the New Testament. Coming upon the words 'He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give Repentance, and to give Remission', he implores Jesus to give him repentance (71).⁷ Like Kilby and Bunyan, Crusoe's conversion links with the movement in Christianity from conviction under the law to remission of sins through Christ.

Another essential feature of Calvinist spiritual autobiography is the configuration of the faith of the narrator as doctrinally aligned to Protestantism, as opposed to Catholicism. Further relating the individual conversion story allegorically to Christian history, the spiritual journey is here linked to the Reformation. The form of Calvinist spiritual autobiography – as it underscores Protestant in opposition to Catholic confessional practices – implicitly locates the individual spiritual journey as that of a reformed Protestant. While some spiritual autobiographies encompassed a critique of the established English church, the form itself tacitly affirms Protestantism, and rejects Catholicism, as the individual's confession is expressed directly to God and the community, rather than to a priest. This affirmation of the Reformation is also often expressed textually through a rejection of a temptation towards Catholicism. Even Isham's text – which echoes Catholic attitudes towards celibacy – rejects Catholic

⁷ The quotation is from *Acts* 5:3.

attitudes toward sin. For example, recalling the blasphemous thoughts she experienced in the depths of her first spiritual crisis, she states that she was tempted to believe ‘that there was no evill in thought \or/ as the papil term, it a venial sin which are very littel’.⁸ Rejecting this temptation, Isham continued to battle to fully subdue these sinful thoughts.

In Crusoe’s case, like Kilby and Norwood, a rejection of Catholicism is necessary because he was previously attracted to that faith. On the island, desires that defined Crusoe’s pre-island life are rendered sinful; his isolation is interpreted as both a punishment for these sins and as preventing further corruption. His attraction to Catholicism is depicted as one such sin. This attraction links with what he depicts as his other principal sins: wandering and his capitalist inclinations. In an earlier adventure before he was shipwrecked, Crusoe had escaped from a Moor slave owner in Africa. After a Portuguese ship found him adrift in the ocean, the captain left him in Brazil, where he subsequently stayed because of economic opportunities, and prospered. It is suggested that ‘the generous treatment the [Portuguese] Captain gave [him]’ in part diluted Crusoe’s Protestant antipathy towards Catholicism (26). Spain was the colonising force in Brazil, and to protect himself from being exposed as a Protestant and hauled before Catholic church authorities, as he developed commercial interests, he ‘proffes’d [himself] a papist’ (207). As Norwood’s text shows, there is a fine line between dissembling and being. Crusoe’s narrative suggests that this borderline heresy, linked to his wandering and capitalism, is one of the sins, stemming from his ‘original sin’ of filial disobedience, for which he is punished. He is protected from further corruption on the island.

Crusoe’s isolation compels him to configure his repentance and conversion as specifically Protestant. On the island, he has no recourse to the trappings of Catholicism, specifically, a father confessor. The importance of confessional modes to Crusoe’s understanding of conversion is demonstrated by a textual link to the *Confessions*. As Marshall argues, Crusoe alludes to the *Confessions* at his conversion: ‘Augustine hears a chanting that instructs him to “Take up [the Bible] and read; take up and read,” . . . Crusoe also describes how he “took up the Bible and began to read,” thus inscribing himself in a chain of conversion experiences’.⁹ The allusion to the

⁸ Isham, *Booke of Remembrances*, fol. 22 v.

⁹ David Marshall, ‘Autobiographical Acts in *Robinson Crusoe*’, *English Literary History*, 71 (2004), 905.

Confessions, a text which Protestants argued demonstrated that auricular confession was not practised by the early Church, also allows Crusoe to condemn auricular confession.

This critique of Catholic confession is developed when, a year after his arrival on the island, Crusoe recalls how he marked the anniversary with fasting, 'Religious Exercise' and self-castigating practices. Although not public, these acts of penance are reminiscent of exomologesis: 'I prostrated my self on the Ground with the most serious Humiliation, confessing my Sins to God, acknowledging his Righteous Judgement upon me, and praying to him to have Mercy upon me, through Jesus Christ' (76). In addition, Crusoe's island existence itself suggests exomologesis. Recalling early Church penitential practices, he is isolated from other believers as a penance. From a Protestant perspective, in church history, the demise of exomologesis led to the slow corruption of penance, which found its nadir in the practice of auricular confession.

Thus (consistent with many seventeenth-century Calvinist spiritual autobiographies), Crusoe's narrative of his conversion is situated within a larger allegorical context, allowing him to describe his own reformation, and validate the Reformation.¹⁰ In this context, he critiques auricular confession, which on the uninhabited island has no possibility of developing. As discussed in Chapter One, in the early Church, baptism was undertaken voluntarily in adulthood, and thus essentially functioned as conversion. Exomologesis, and, later, canonical penance (practised by Augustine as bishop of Hippo) reconciled major and wilful sinners to the Church after baptism. As *Robinson Crusoe* progresses, the issue of the absence in Calvinism of a confessional outlet to deal with wilful and major sins after conversion comes to the fore.

¹⁰ At its publication *Robinson Crusoe* was presented in the preface as a 'History of Fact . . . [without] any Appearance of Fiction in it', narrated by a real man who had spent twenty-eight years castaway on an island. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 3. When it became widely known that the narrative was fiction, and that Defoe was the author, it prompted the view that Crusoe was merely another pseudonym for Defoe. Addressing the controversy surrounding the revelation that the work was fiction, in the preface to *Serious Reflections* (the second sequel to the novel) Defoe has his narrator insist that *Robinson Crusoe* is a true history. Attacking the claims that 'the Story is feign'd', Crusoe asserts that the narrative is 'Allegorical, as well as Historical'. *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London, 1720): extracts in *Robinson Crusoe: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 240. Crusoe's statement in *Serious Reflections* was later interpreted by many readers to be an admission from Defoe that he 'had written his own spiritual autobiography under the metaphor of the shipwrecked and isolated Crusoe'. Homer O. Brown, 'The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe', *English Literary History*, 38 (1971), 564. The idea that Crusoe's statement refers to Defoe's life is complicated, however, by the fact that other critics have uncovered an allegory of colonialism in the text. See Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London; New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 202. Thus, Defoe's use of allegorical history extends far beyond any personal context. What I want to suggest here is that Defoe's use of Crusoe (rather than a fictional editor who wrote the introductions to parts one and two) as the vehicle for presenting the notion that the work is defined by allegorical history can be interpreted as Defoe suggesting that Crusoe (as narrator) also utilises allegory to connect his life and surprising adventures to wider historical events.

For many years, isolated from corruption on the island, Crusoe does not have to confront any temptation into major sin. As discussed above, after his conversion, Crusoe renders desires that defined his pre-island existence – wandering and capitalism – as sinful. On the island, driven by need, not want, he comes to see money as ‘nasty, sorry, useless’ stuff (94). Yet he cannot fully renounce his past life. Watt refers to ‘the famous episode when Crusoe comes across a hoard of gold on the Island and, after declaiming on its uselessness, “upon second thoughts” takes it away’.¹¹ Crusoe also retains a colonial eye as he cultivates the island. He maps out its terrain and resources, and conceives his dwellings in colonialist terms, saying he has two ‘plantations on the island’, his main home and a more pleasant ‘country estate’ (110). However, while attributes that he has rendered sinful are not fully stifled, before he leaves the island, they have no occasion to develop. The most serious sins that Crusoe has to contend with are doubts about his conversion.¹²

Crusoe’s conversion had given meaning to his isolation: he is ‘more happy in [his] solitary condition’ (83). However, he cannot always fully accept the providential significance he has given to his existence: that ‘God has appointed all this to befall’ him (68). Despair often ‘break[s] out upon [him] like a Storm’ (83). This is dramatised when he is startled by a voice that seems to mock his belief that his faith has overcome the despair of his isolation: ‘*Poor Robin Crusoe. Where are you, Where have you been? How come you here?*’ (104). It turns out to be his pet parrot, Poll, who repeats back expressions Crusoe uttered after his conversion but which seem to express the initial torment of his isolation. Poll’s parroting back of Crusoe’s own words signals that his isolation from others contributes to despair and doubt. Damrosch argues that the novel ‘allegorizes the solitude of soul needed for repentance and conversion’.¹³ Crusoe’s extreme solitude, a magnified version of Protestant isolationism, means that he has ‘no assistance, no help, no comfort, and no advice’ as he confronts residual doubt after conversion (67). Thus, Crusoe longs for the presence of another, not only because of an understandable desire for company, but to provide an interlocutor to validate his conversion. Another person could give him guidance regarding his faith. The presence of another person would also break his isolation, meaning that he has fulfilled his

¹¹ Ian Watt, ‘Robinson Crusoe as a Myth’, in *Robinson Crusoe: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 304. Slightly revised for the Norton edition, the essay first appeared in *Essays in Criticism: a Journal of Literary Criticism*, 1 (1951), 95-119.

¹² See Brown, ‘Displaced Self’, 576.

¹³ Leopold Damrosch, Jr., ‘Myth and Fiction in *Robinson Crusoe*’, in *Robinson Crusoe: A Norton Critical Edition*, p. 376.

penance for his filial rebellion. Ironically, it is the presence of others on the island, the ‘savage’ cannibal natives, that ultimately causes Crusoe to commit major sins.

Critics have explored Crusoe’s attitude towards the natives – his portrayal of them as devilish savages – and his capture, conversion and domination of Friday in relation to colonialism. After capturing Friday, Crusoe removes his religious identity when he converts him and his cultural identity when he (re)names him; he sees Friday, as Hulme argues, as little more than a slave.¹⁴ These attitudes and actions, it has been argued, parallel actual colonial methods, which facilitate exploitation of the colonised land and people. In the following exploration of the colonial dimensions of Crusoe’s conversion of Friday, I will argue that it is the impact of the presence of the natives on Crusoe’s religious experience – a doubt they instil about God’s providence – that first compels him to capture and convert Friday, causing him to kill some natives in the process. I demonstrate the parallels between Friday’s forced conversion and the methods of colonial Spaniards, which are presented in the novel as inhumane and dehumanising.

Defoe is sometimes seen as promulgating a colonial agenda in the text. Referring to Crusoe’s colonial designs on the island, Watt’s influential analysis argues that Defoe values Crusoe’s economic sensibilities over his religious ones.¹⁵ Colonialism is supported by a racist ideology which validates the superiority of the culture and religion of the colonising force, and which apprehends natives as sub-human savages whose subjugation is justified.¹⁶ Bertrand argues that Defoe promotes this ideology. He concedes that ‘Friday’s (faint) voice pierces through the cracks of dominant discursive practices’; but he also argues that ‘[c]learly, Defoe thought that the two [native and civilised man] cannot co-exist in one world; Robinson must either dominate and civilise, or be dominated and rendered savage’.¹⁷ In contrast, I will argue that Defoe presents a sustained, negative evaluation of colonialism. Initially, he critiques Spanish colonial methods. He then portrays how, on leaving the island, Crusoe’s attitudes to

¹⁴ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, p. 202. See also Brian C. Cooney, ‘Considering Robinson Crusoe’s “Liberty of Conscience” in an Age of Terror’, *College English*, 69 (2007), 197-215, and Bertrand, ‘Order and Chaos’, 29-51.

¹⁵ In opposition to Starr, who argued that Crusoe’s narrative demonstrates repentance, Watt argued that Defoe invented a figure ‘on whom [the bourgeois class could] project a quasi-religious mystique’ as they ‘retained from the ebbing fervours of Calvinism its essential social and economic teaching’. ‘Robinson Crusoe as a Myth’, p. 296. See also Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel*.

¹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 39.

¹⁷ Bertrand, ‘Order and Chaos’, 37, 30.

colonialism evolve fully in line with Spanish attitudes. This development is presented as a consequence of Crusoe's failure to acknowledge and confess his post-conversion sins – the killing of natives and forced conversion of Friday. Rather, he justifies them, and this causes him then to enact them on a greater scale. Through this corruption of Crusoe's spiritual identity, Defoe extends his negative evaluation of colonialism to English methods.

Many years after his conversion, Crusoe encounters a man's footprint in the sand. He first believes it to be that of the Devil. He then 'presently conclude[s]. . . [t]hat it must be some of the Savages of the main Land over-against' him. The threat of the 'savages' prompts not simply a fear for his safety, but also a fear for the religious significance he has given to his isolation: 'Fear banish'd all my religious Hope; all that former Confidence in God which was founded upon such wonderful experience as I had of his Goodness, now vanished' (113). The foundation stone of Crusoe's religious experience is a belief in God's providence. Here Defoe suggests that a serious doubt in providence is provoked when Christians encounter other, particularly primitive, cultures. For Crusoe, the 'savages' are 'nature entirely abandon'd of Heaven' (124). If they have abandoned themselves from heaven, why has God not punished them? Thus, the arrival of Caribbean natives sees an increase in Crusoe's doubt. As the haunting footprint comes to threaten his intricately constructed, but nevertheless fragile, belief in providence, Crusoe construes this doubt as sinful. Before his conversion, when afflicted with fever, he records how he picked up the Bible and read: 'Call on me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shall glorify me' (69).¹⁸ Attaching the phrase to his predicament, he first hoped that God would deliver him off the island. Later, however, he reinterprets the meaning of deliverance to mean deliverance from 'sin' and 'guilt': 'Deliverance from Sin [is] a much greater blessing than Deliverance from Affliction' (71). When the 'day of trouble' truly begins, when the presence of 'savages' threatens to fully overmaster his belief in a providential design, he again 'took up the Bible' and read this phrase (114). Here, he seeks deliverance from the sin of scepticism provoked by the presence of the natives.

It is Crusoe's failure in this struggle with doubt that causes him to commit major sins. His attitude to the natives vacillates between a reactionary compulsion to act on his feelings of anger and disgust at the existence of 'savages', and a more considered non-

¹⁸ From *Psalms*, 50:15.

interventionist attitude. Initially consumed with a violent impulse to destroy them, he then finds that his conscience does not counsel murder. Attempting to overcome his impulse to murder, he notes that in their dealings with native peoples the ‘Spaniard’ – whom he sees as the most corrupt and merciless type of Catholic – ‘is reckon’d to be frightful and terrible to all people of humanity or of Christian Compassion’ (125). The Spaniard assumes to punish ‘savages’ on God’s behalf, ‘rooting them out’ of colonised lands. This practice is seen even by some Spaniards as ‘a bloody and unnatural Piece of Cruelty, unjustifiable to either God or Man’ (124-125). Distinguishing himself from violent Spanish colonialists, Crusoe makes a leap of faith. He decides that the way to glorify God is to ‘submit’ himself to God’s unknowable wisdom; he asks himself ‘What Authority or call’ had he when ‘heaven had left them unpunished’ (124). He perceives the wisdom of providence as unknowable to a mere human.

Having rejected the Spaniards’ right to assume God’s authority, Crusoe nevertheless feels himself put into a ‘murdering humour’ again when he later comes across the remains of a cannibal ritual (133). Soon afterwards, he dreams of rescuing a savage so that he can have ‘one companion, one fellow-creature’ to speak to (136). When rescuing Friday, he kills some of the natives. While he depicts these killings as collateral damage in his rescue of Friday, he nevertheless, as McKeon argues, violates the dictates of his conscience not to interfere with the natives.¹⁹ Crusoe then replicates the missionary practices of Spaniards when he forces Friday to convert to Christianity.

Critics have argued that there were ‘two different styles of [Catholic] missionary effort’. One, from which Spanish missionary colonialism in America evolved, was a ‘militant, dogmatic faith stemming from armed Crusades’. This form of missionary activity demanded that colonised people convert or die. The other was ‘a more gentle, flexible creed which was exemplified in the work of missionary Orders of friars’.²⁰ Crusoe presents his conversion of Friday as gentle, and based on freedom and equality. He claims that he ‘lay a foundation of religious knowledge in [Friday’s] mind’, and that Friday ‘reciev’d with pleasure the notion of Jesus Christ being sent to redeem us’ (156). However, the narrative suggests a bad faith on Crusoe’s part here. After saving him, thinking that Friday would offer him the flesh of the natives he had killed, Crusoe, armed with a rifle, let him know by his demeanour that ‘I would kill him if he offer’d it’ (150). In the novel, cannibalism is presented as part of the natives’ religious

¹⁹ McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, p. 33.

²⁰ MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 68.

identity. His removal Friday's religious identity by the threat of violence, and later, his cultural identity when he re-names him, leaves a vacuum where the only alternative for Friday is Christianity. Figuratively speaking, like the Spaniard, Crusoe has a Bible in one hand and a gun in the other.

As illustrated, the presence of the natives has provoked a doubt in providence. It is in an effort to reaffirm his belief in providence, and, in a wider sense, the godly ordained superiority of his cultural and religious heritage, that Crusoe forces Friday to convert. This idea is reinforced in the text when Crusoe says he is 'comforted' by Friday's contrition as it 'restored' his 'penitence' (159). Crusoe says that Poll's was 'the first word' he heard on the island 'by any Mouth but my own' (87). But it is, in essence, his own mouth. Friday's conversion sees him become a positive version of Poll. He repeats back Crusoe's words in a positive sense. The alignment of Poll and Friday suggests that Friday is dehumanised by the forced conversion. With 'no will of his own', he affirms the truth of conversion rather than the doubt in providence, a doubt heightened tenfold by the presence of the pagan, cannibal natives.²¹

After converting Friday, Crusoe comes to believe he has been singled out for a special purpose – to be an 'instrument of Providence, to save life' and perhaps the 'soul' of one 'poor savage' (159). His naming of Friday, however, suggests that, rather than being God's instrument, he appropriates a godlike status. Crusoe names Friday after the day he found him. In *Genesis*, God named the beasts of the world on Friday. Later in the narrative Crusoe admits that he lost a day in his reckoning of his time on the island; an error in the calendar, Marshall argues, that 'must lead to the conclusion that Friday has been misnamed'.²² It is through this error on Crusoe's part that Defoe explicitly undermines his protagonist's actions. He highlights the godlike status that is assumed by the converter when the threat of violence is used to achieve conversion, and underscores that such coercion dehumanises the convert.

The act of converting Friday ensures Crusoe's survival. It prevents the doubt in providence provoked by the presence of the 'savages' from festering. Taking into account the fact that his conversion has provided a meaning for his otherwise unendurable isolation, it is evident that a progression of this doubt would have been extremely psychologically threatening. Nevertheless, the act of killing the natives violates his conscience; and the conversion of Friday violates his Protestant conviction

²¹ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, p. 202.

²² Marshall, 'Autobiographical Acts', 916.

that it is God who providentially guides the elect towards conversion.²³ On the island, Crusoe displays some awareness that his actions are sinful. Ambivalent about assuming a missionary role, he does not attach a larger significance to his saving of Friday: he has been singled out to save only ‘one’ soul, not the souls of many. Later, when he and Friday rescue another native (Friday’s father), he feels no urge to glorify God by converting this cannibal. In part, this is because Friday has somewhat redressed his vision of the Caribbean natives as devilish savages.²⁴ As well as Friday’s father, they also rescue a Spaniard. Further underscoring the anomaly of his forced conversion of Friday, after making the Spaniard vow to submit to his authority (stating that he would ‘rather be deliver’d up to the Savages, and be devour’d alive, than fall into the Merciless Claws of the priests, and be carry’d into the Inquisition’) Crusoe allows ‘liberty of conscience throughout [his] dominions’ (176).²⁵ In doing so, he seeks once again to distinguish himself from Spaniards, who enforce their creed on their ‘subjects’ (as Crusoe refers to his three companions) or kill them (219).

Another motive for Crusoe making his ‘subjects’ submit to his authority is that he is now sure that the day of deliverance is at hand, and he wants to establish himself, in a commercial sense, as the one with ‘undoubted right of domination’ over the island (219). Similarly to Watt, Faber argues that, on leaving, Crusoe ‘simply considers the island among his other commercial successes’.²⁶ This, however, is only true up to a point. It is to further distinguish himself from Spaniards that Crusoe attempts to separate his economic interests on the island from his religious experience there. But, as McKeon argues, Crusoe is ultimately able to reconcile his economic desires with his religious experience.²⁷ I will now argue that he is able to do so because he ultimately justifies, rather than confessing as sinful, his killing of natives and conversion of Friday.

²³ McKeon argues that Crusoe captures a native because a passion, wandering, has succeeded ‘through the sheer force of its persistence, in redefining itself as nothing other than the dictate of providence’. *Origins of the English Novel*, p. 33. Crusoe does renew his efforts to leave the island after he rescues Friday, and Friday does play an important part in his eventual escape. However, Crusoe’s primary motive to rescue (and convert) a ‘savage’ is a less literal escape from the ‘island of despair’: he seeks to reaffirm the providential significance he has given his island existence (52).

²⁴ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, p. 195.

²⁵ The Toleration Act of 1688 did not extend to Catholics. But in North American English settlements experiments in ‘practical toleration’ did take place. Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 593-594.

²⁶ Faber, ‘Providence and Politics in *Robinson Crusoe*’, p 17

²⁷ McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, pp. 319, 331. McKeon was the first to argue that it is not necessary to see the novel (or, by extension, Crusoe’s identity) as defined by either religion or economics. Of the religious (Starr’s) and economic (Watt’s) readings, he argues that ‘[b]oth arguments are made with great skill, but both may appear extreme insofar as they seem unnecessarily to imply a mutual exclusion’. *Origins of the English Novel*, p. 319.

This justification sees him develop attitudes towards native cultures and colonial expansion that fully replicate Spanish attitudes.

Crusoe leaves the island following his rescue of a ship's captain from mutineers. On his return to England, he finds himself a wealthy man because of his pre-island economic activities in Brazil, and learns that two-thirds of his income in Brazil has been given to 'the Monastery of St. Augustine, to be expended for the Benefit of the Poor, and for the Conversion of the Indians to the Catholic Faith' (204). The fact that St Augustine's influence has a long history in Catholicism suggests to him that Catholics too have a providential purpose. The fact that his money which aided Augustinian missionaries was made in Brazil – a country under Spanish rule – sees him become open to Spanish-style missionary/colonial activities. Seeing this as a providential guidance of his finances, he reassesses his negative opinion of the Spaniards, and his desire to separate his economic interest in the island from his religious experience there. In what follows, Defoe posits that Protestants will use similar methods to Catholic Spaniards abroad because these methods both satisfy a desire in providence and facilitate material and political gain. He suggests that whatever the difficulties posed to native cultures by the realities of western expansion, they are compounded tenfold when economic colonialism and violent religious missionary activities converge.

Crusoe's growing regard for Spaniards is evident when he revisits his island colony. Before he rescued the captain, the Spaniard and Friday's father had left the island, returning to the mainland. On leaving, Crusoe populated his island with the mutineers. Like Crusoe, the English men might attain a conversion on the island, and renounce their former crimes, but they cannot yet be called Christian men. When he returns, he finds that the Spaniard has returned with other Spaniards. Crusoe names them his successors. Now, seeing the mutiny against the captain as symbolic of the overturning of traditional order by men devoid of religion, he imposes godly order on the island by appointing the Spaniards as rulers. This installation of Spaniards as his overseers also has implications for the local native population. While Crusoe's spiritual autobiography records various attitudes to Caribbean natives – from believing that they are 'meer savages' to allowing them liberty of conscience (95) – his establishment of the Spaniards reflect his final considered attitude: regardless of whether Protestant or Catholic, it is Christian man's 'manifest destiny' to dominate, civilise, and Christianise

the new world, and to subjugate the ‘savage’ by either conversion or destruction.²⁸ It sounds an ominous note that is further developed in *Serious Reflections*. As Novak notes, now seeing ‘the hand of providence [in the] Spaniards’ destruction of the Indians’, it is ‘precisely the full scheme of a crusade against the infidel world that Crusoe advocates in *Serious Reflections* written at about the same time’.²⁹ Spaniards provide a model of missionary colonialism that offers a permanent solution to the doubt in providence provoked by the existence of ‘savages’. On a more expedient level, Crusoe’s alignment with Catholicism alludes to the limited numbers of English Protestant colonists. The narrative suggests that, while Protestants and Catholics compete on the world stage, Protestants will at times pragmatically align with Catholics to sustain foreign interests. Christian men in the wider world share a bond against a common enemy: the non-Christian over whom they have ‘Undoubted right of domination’ (219).

In *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe renders the degree of spiritual purity suggested by Calvinist conversion as unrealistic. Through Crusoe, he shows how the survival instinct can lead to sin. He presents Crusoe’s suppression of festering guilt over his sins as a major factor in his acceptance of Spanish colonial and missionary methods. Thus, Defoe suggests that the absence of a more flexible mode of confession within Calvinism leads to further sinning. Linking his critique of Calvinist conversion and confession with his critique of violent and dehumanising colonial methods, Defoe posits that, while a beneficial aspect of Catholic practices – repeatable confession – has been vanquished, Protestants are not averse to aligning with Catholics when it comes to colonial matters, even though this might entail such major transgressions as assuming God’s authority and murder.

The next section explores how in *Moll Flanders* Defoe again suggests the need for recurrent confession for major transgressions, and illustrates how, with no such confessional outlet available, corruption of religious identity ensues.

²⁸ Cooney argues that much of the first section ‘is marked by Crusoe’s efforts to reconstruct [on the island] an idealized England from scratch, an effort that takes him through the “stages” of civilisation’. “‘Liberty of Conscience” in an Age of Terror’, 202. Arguably, Crusoe uses allegorical history not only to locate his conversion and the Protestant Reformation in relation to church history, but also to locate his experience on the island in relation to (newly emerging) histories of western civilisation and colonialism.

²⁹ Maximillian E. Novak, ‘Novel or Fictional Memoir: The Scandalous Publication of *Robinson Crusoe*’, *Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*, 18 (2007), 219.

Confession and Identity in *Moll Flanders*

Moll Flanders is a retrospective examination and confession of the eponymous narrator's sinful and criminal life, and a description of the 'true' repentance she achieved while awaiting execution at Newgate prison. Soon after repenting, Moll's sentence is reduced to transportation to Virginia. Thus, she is able to write her autobiography, which also gives an account of her post-Newgate life. Historically, the novel has provoked much debate about whether or not Moll's repentance is sincere. Starr argued that, like Crusoe, Moll does sincerely repent and undergo a true conversion.³⁰ Some critics have argued that Moll is deluded in her belief that she has sincerely repented; others, that her narrative emphasises a survival ethos rather than a penitent one.³¹

As they are important for illuminating debates about confession in the text, my analysis re-explores these persistent questions relating to repentance versus survival. I argue that they are illuminated by focusing on the issue of how the reduction in Moll's sentence is achieved. Moll, I argue, does achieve repentance at Newgate. However, a lingering fear of damnation and concern for her life causes her to commit an act that violates her conscience. This is an act of confession. Moll makes two confessions at Newgate. Firstly – as explicitly described in the text – as the day of her execution looms, she makes a repentant confession to a minister who is not associated with the prison. She also, I argue, indirectly confesses that she subsequently made a second confession, this time to the Newgate minister. In this latter confession Moll supplies information to the authorities on other criminals. The payment is a reduction in her sentence from execution to transportation.

In the context of exploring textual hints which suggest that Moll informs on her former comrades, I will first examine Defoe's critique of the doctrine of reprobation and early modern attitudes toward criminal confession and repentance. I will then examine how the text reveals that Moll construes the act of informing – which leads to the

³⁰ Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, Chapter Four. See also Sallie Minter Strange, 'Moll Flanders: A Good Calvinist', *The South Central Bulletin*, 36 (1976), 152-154.

³¹ For critics who argue that her repentance is merely a gallows-repentance, see Steven C. Michael, 'Thinking Parables: What Moll Flanders Does Not Say', *English Literary History*, 63 (1996), 386, and Michael F. Suarez, 'The Shortest Way to Heaven? Moll Flanders' Repentance Reconsidered', *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, 3 (1997), 3-28. For arguments pertaining to survival versus virtue see Srividhya Swaminathan, 'Defoe's Alternative Conduct Manual: Survival Strategies and Female Networks in *Moll Flanders*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 15 (2003), 185-206, and Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 446.

execution of other criminals – as a sin; and how her failure to confess this sin disrupts her penitent identity.

When she is caught, Moll is known to be the infamous Moll Flanders. Having ‘the name of [an] old offender’, she has no hope of being sentenced to transportation, and at her trial she is sentenced to execution.³² How or why her punishment is subsequently reduced is not explicitly explained in the novel. Nevertheless, one reason why Defoe goes to such lengths to emphasise Moll’s cunning in securing her survival prior to Newgate is to prepare the reader to question what lies behind her escape from execution. Michael is one of the few critics to address this issue. He states that the reduction in sentence is presented by Moll in the narrative as occurring miraculously: that is, God mysteriously intervenes in her life after she repents. But he argues that her release, far from miraculous, is ‘secured by financial aid from her criminal governess’.³³ Michael’s reading is influenced by the fact that after she leaves the prison, Moll, with the help of her governess, uses her ill-gotten gains to avoid having to serve out her sentence in Virginia. However, the interpretation that Moll has bought her way out of her sentence at Newgate is specifically closed down in the narrative. Moll states that her governess was ‘dangerously Sick’ at the time when her sentence was reduced (372). In addition, while in terms of prison life itself there is ‘nothing to be done’ without money, the narrative also clearly demonstrates that money is not an effective currency for influencing the legal system (367). Before Moll was sentenced to death, her governess had offered bribes to stop the trial and, when that failed, to influence the result, but she had very little success (352, 358).

In discussions about transportation and execution that occur in the narrative before she is captured, Moll describes two ways of avoiding execution, neither of which involves bribery. The first is specific to women. Early in the narrative, with regard to her mother, Moll describes how, if a condemned woman demonstrated pregnancy, the authorities would allow a reprieve until the child was born. Sometimes – as was the case with her mother – after the period of reprieve, the woman’s sentence was reduced to transportation (44). Later, she recounts how one female inmate attempted to fool the authorities into believing that she was pregnant (351). Moll herself (a prolific bearer of children in her pre-criminal sinful life, when she was ‘Twelve Years a Whore, five

³² Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 355. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically in the text.

³³ Michael, ‘Thinking Parables’, 372.

times a wife') is well past her childbearing years when she is caught as a thief.³⁴ The option to plead her 'belly' is not available to her (44).

The second way that criminals could avoid execution was to inform on more serious offenders. One of Moll's partners-in-crime had tried, and failed, to save himself from execution by providing information to aid the capture of Moll. During this period, Moll, scared and fretful, had retired to the country. She returned to London only after hearing the 'joyful news' that he had been hanged (287). Other criminals in the novel also operate in a culture of fear of being informed on. Moll relates how she once – while disguised as an old woman – fell in with a gang of 'Coiners of Money' (327). Her dalliance with the counterfeiters is brief. Fearing the horrific punishment she would receive if she was caught for this offence, Moll ultimately decides against aligning herself with this 'parcel of Folks' (327). In early modern England, as money began to replace bartering as the means of commodity exchange, and as the state sought control over metal currency, counterfeiting was considered a most serious crime. Counterfeiters did not receive the common execution: hanging. In the seventeenth century 'an act of Parliament declared that counterfeiting was high treason. Male offenders were to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, while female offenders were to be burned at the stake'.³⁵ Seeing the dangers as outweighing any economic gain, Moll nevertheless had to pretend for a while to be willing to work for the gang because, even if she had 'declined it with the greatest assurances of Secrecy in the world, they would have gone near to have murder'd' her if they suspected her real plan was to split up with them (327-328). This incident reinforces the point that being informed on – whether directly, or through loose talk – was a constant fear for the criminal.

Importantly, it also illustrates that in the early modern period 'the distinction between disobedience to royal and divine authority, between crime and sin, was less clear cut than at present'.³⁶ Sharpe argues that in the seventeenth century, when the novel is set, the spectacle of execution conveyed to the masses the idea that crime was an affront to both God and civil authority; 'public execution was used to demonstrate the inadvisability of transgressing God's laws as well as those of the secular power'.³⁷ He argues that when:

³⁴ From the original title page of *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders & co.*

³⁵ Michael, 'Thinking Parables', 376.

³⁶ J. A. Sharpe, 'Last Dying Speeches: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, 107 (1985), 159.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

felons stood on the gallows and confessed their guilt not only for the offence for which they suffered death, but for a whole catalogue of wrongdoing, and expressed their true repentance for the same, they were helping to assert the legitimacy of the power which had brought them to their sad end.

According to Sharpe, the prevailing view was that ‘the condemned . . . was actually rehabilitated by [both] his suffering and repentance’.³⁸ A prisoner’s willing acceptance that death was the price of crime was proof of his/her repentance.

In *Moll Flanders*, Defoe depicts a transformation of this seventeenth-century ethos regarding crime and repentance. The idea that death was the honest and authentic outcome for the criminal persisting into the eighteenth century.³⁹ However, by then governing authorities placed less importance on the criminal demonstrating repentance. Sharpe argues of this later period that, while a minister was still present at the gallows, a ‘concern for the defence of property had replaced concern that the world would be overwhelmed by a deluge of sinfulness’.⁴⁰ Consequently, the message sent out at the gallows regarding criminal repentance was not so strong. Defoe suggests that the development of a concern for property over a concern with the repentance of the criminal led to a correlation of the criminal with the reprobate.

Of Moll’s fear of being burned, Michael argues that it is ‘tempting to surmise that she fears not only the horror of such an execution but the legal (and, by extension, the moral) implication of it’.⁴¹ When Moll says: ‘the very Thoughts of being burnt at a Stake struck terror into my very Soul’, it is directly implied that she fears that the spiritual consequence of crime is damnation (327). It is not just the unusual fate of counterfeiters, whose punishment encompasses that usually reserved for the religious heretic (to be burned at the stake) and those suspected of treason (to be hanged, drawn and quartered), that instils a fear of damnation. Moll experienced a similar fear for her soul when she first became a thief. In her sexual escapades she committed crimes – bigamy and, unwittingly, incest – but these were hidden, secretive crimes which never

³⁸ Sharpe, ‘Last Dying Speeches’, 156, 166.

³⁹ McKenzie argues that this view was shared among the more socially rebellious criminals. She refers to the ‘game criminal’, who attempted to ‘differentiate themselves from the dissipated aristocrat or courtier’ by their ‘willingness to discharge their debts’. Andrea McKenzie, ‘The Real Macheath: Social Satire, Appropriation, and Eighteenth-Century Criminal Biography’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 69 (2006), 595. For more on the game criminal, see McKenzie’s ‘Martyrs in Low Life? Dying “Game” in Augustan England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 42 (2003), 167-205.

⁴⁰ Sharpe, ‘Last Dying Speeches’, 166.

⁴¹ Michael, ‘Thinking Parables’, 376.

brought her into the ambit of the law. When she first steals, her conscience is impinged on in a different way. She states that it 'is impossible to express the Horror of my Soul all the while I did it' (255). She feels spiritual 'horror' largely because stealing puts her into direct conflict with the law, making her envisage the ultimate consequences of crime: not just execution but damnation.

Defoe presents the correlation of crime and reprobation as leading to criminality rather than preventing crime. Moll first stole from necessity. After necessity was met, she confesses, avarice and pride impelled her to keep stealing. Yet, with the emphasis in the narrative on the link between crime and damnation, it is also implied that stealing causes a fear that she is reprobate and, because she feels that she is damned anyway, she may as well keep stealing. This idea is mirrored earlier in the narrative, when Moll depicts her initiation into sin after she was manipulated by her first lover; a gentleman whom she believed loved her and would marry her. When she learns that he did not in fact intend to marry her, she represents herself as his 'whore'. She states that 'from this Day, being forsaken of my Virtue and my Modesty, I had nothing left of Value to recommend me . . . to God's Blessings' (68). Although, regarding her later sexual 'sins', she is still, at times, afflicted by her conscience, it is suggested that on some level Moll felt that her first affair was a sin that she could not atone for. At this earlier stage, a rebellious element of this spiritual defeatism manifests in revenge. She remarks at one point: 'a Woman's ne'er so ruin'd that she can Revenge herself on her undoer, Man' (118).⁴² Her criminal career likewise has an element of revenge, against what she feels is an uncharitable, greed-driven society which ensured that she was forced to become a criminal and ensured her damnation. Thus, Defoe suggested that the doctrine of reprobation, in general and as applied to the criminal, prevents repentance and contributes to greater sinning.

Through the novel's depiction of Newgate, Defoe again critiques the correlation of execution with damnation as negatively impacting on criminals' ability to achieve repentance. After many years as a successful career criminal, Moll's luck eventually runs out when she is caught for a petty offense, and sent to Newgate to await trial. The

⁴² Here she quotes the poet Rochester, who in the early modern period was 'a byword for irreligion and vice'. See Frank H. Ellis, 'Wilmot, John, second earl of Rochester (1647–1680).' *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29623>> [accessed 5 Dec 2011].

prison is represented as embodying the link between sin and crime, and as reinforcing the idea that criminals are damned. Moll describes the place as an ‘Emblem of Hell itself, and a kind of an Entrance into it’ (349). At Newgate, Moll desires to become repentant, but all that she can feel is a gallows fear: the fear that her ‘Creator’ was ‘suddenly to be’ her ‘judge’ (353). Subsequently, the hellish conditions at the prison militate against her fear of God’s judgement progressing to the promise of forgiveness offered by the Gospel. True repentance is the means to forgiveness, yet with the prison reinforcing the link between damnation and execution, repentance is seen to be impossible for criminals.

In seventeenth-century prisons, a minister would have been on hand to aid Moll in achieving repentance. These ministers were employed by the legal system to underscore the link between sin and crime. However, they also worked for the benefit of condemned prisoners, striving to bring them to repentance. For these ministers, no effort was spared in ‘bringing the lost sheep back to the flock, even if they were shortly to be transformed into mutton’.⁴³ The minister who engages with criminals at the prison is not concerned for their spiritual wellbeing; as demonstrated, for example, when the second minister – sent to Moll by her governess, who has herself grown penitent – differentiates himself from the Newgate minister. Assuring Moll that whatever she said to him ‘should remain with him’, he says that he ‘did not come as Ordinary of the Place, whose business it is to extort Confession from Prisoners, for private Ends, or for the further detecting of other Offenders’ (365). Concerned for Moll’s soul, this minister offers a stark contrast to the Newgate minister, whose concern, like that of the authorities that employ him, is with uncovering criminality to protect property.⁴⁴

The second minister’s explicit condemnation of the Newgate minister reinforces what Moll already knows. Soon after her imprisonment, the Newgate minister came to her and asked her to confess: ‘the Ordinary of Newgate came to me, and talk’d a little in his way, but all his Divinity ran upon Confessing my crime’ (353). Here, promising God’s forgiveness if she confesses/informs, the minister utilises the fear for the soul that Newgate induces in order to get her to cooperate with the authorities. As demonstrated, the issue of criminals informing is prominent in the novel before Moll’s imprisonment.

⁴³ Sharpe, ‘Last Dying Speeches’, 160.

⁴⁴ During the seventeenth century, when the emphasis was on criminals achieving repentance, sometimes the clergy had other ulterior motives for seeking confession. Sharpe cites the example of how a ‘man awaiting execution in Stafford gaol was worked on by a clergyman who was in hopes of discovering more about crime in the locality from him’. However, this was the exception rather than the rule. Sharpe, ‘Last Dying Speeches’, 152.

One reason why critics have neglected to explore the possibility that her reduction in sentence is achieved by informing is because this effort to get information – to detect ‘other offenders’ – is not presented as a means for Moll to negotiate her sentence. The ordinary merely states that unless Moll makes a ‘full Discovery’ to him ‘God would never forgive her’ (353). It is also evident that Moll rejects the minister, who ‘uses deceit to extract information [under the guise of confession] while he pretends to care for her soul’.⁴⁵ However, as I will demonstrate, there are two approaches made to Moll to inform to the prison minister. At the second approach, Moll is offered a much better deal for her confession: her life.

At this first stage, with no offer of commuting her sentence, and with the Newgate minister saying ‘so little to the purpose’ of spiritual forgiveness, Moll rejects him (353). After this point, Moll, first despairing of truly repenting, soon finds that she has grown accustomed to the conditions at Newgate. Since Newgate is an emblem of hell, this suggests to Moll that a sinner could also acclimatise to hell itself. Consequently, her sense of attrition is eroded; ‘I had at first remorse indeed [gallows fear], but no Repentance; I had now neither Remorse nor Repentance’ (354-355). Here again the narrative critiques the ethos and conditions at Newgate for militating against repentance.

Nevertheless, Moll does move some way toward contrition when she learns that one of her husbands, the highwayman Jemmy, is also imprisoned at Newgate. This marriage was revealed to be a mutual con (each, believing they would gain prosperity through the match, faked wealth to lure the other into marriage). Later, much to Moll’s distress, Jemmy – who, other than her first lover, was the only man that Moll ‘really lov’d’ – turned to a life of crime (213). At Newgate, when Moll sees where her manipulations have ultimately led Jemmy, she is overcome with guilt. She asks ‘[h]ow many desperate Wretches had I sent to the Devil’ (356). The encounter with Jemmy is the catalyst that cures Moll’s spiritual and mental lethargy, induced by the prison and its anti-repentance ethos. After seeing him, Moll’s own case ‘gave [her] no disturbance compar’d to this’ (357). However, when she hears that her trial has been set, she is again thrown into despair. The feelings of guilt, provoked by Jemmy, are presented as crucial to restoring a concern for life and soul – a concern which had been sedated by Newgate. She declares that: ‘All that Hellish, harden’d state and temper of soul . .

⁴⁵ Norton, ‘Confession in Protestant Literature’, 194.

. is but a deprivation of Thought; he that is restor'd to his power of thinking, is restor'd to himself' (358). Here Moll suggests that at Newgate, under threat of damnation, she has been deprived of thoughts about repentance. Now, with a renewed sense of its urgency, she remarks that: 'the harden'd, wretch'd boldness of Spirit, which I had acquier'd abated and conscious Guilt began to flow in upon my mind . . . [and] I began to think, and to think is one real advance from hell to heaven' (358). Asking God to 'have mercy', she admits that this plea was nothing but 'fright at what was to come; there was not a word of sincere repentance in it' (358). She fears death, literal and spiritual: 'I shall be cast, to be sure, and there is nothing beyond that but Death' (358). While her increased sense of guilt merely leads to a renewed sense of the magnitude of the punishment she could receive in the afterlife, it is nonetheless suggested that this return of gallows fear is far better than the spiritual and mental stupor that had been induced by the prison.

Moll's prayers for mercy are apparently answered when, soon after, she is approached by a prison guard. He initially tells her that she will certainly be sentenced to execution at her trial and that she should 'prepare for Death' (359). But, after she asks him 'What must I do?', he offers her a lifeline, telling her to 'send for the Ordinary . . . unless you have very good friends, you are no Woman for this World' (359). This is the second overture to inform that is made to Moll. With this subtle remark, the prison officer implies that the prison ordinary is now willing to negotiate a reduction in her sentence for information that would lead to the conviction, and execution, of more serious offenders. If she does not send for the ordinary, she is not a woman for this world. Although subtly expressed, his meaning is crystal clear to Moll. She says: 'This was plain dealing indeed, but it was very harsh to me' (358). It is harsh because informing – substituting her life for the lives of others – goes against her conscience.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Defoe had firsthand experience of efforts by authorities to get criminals to confess against others. Defoe's *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1701) – a satirical attack on Church extremists' persecution of religious dissenters – 'saw him in the stocks and imprisoned at Newgate for sedition'. Paula R. Backscheider, 'Defoe, Daniel (1660?–1731)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7421>> [accessed 17 Sept 2011]. Backscheider argues that 'Defoe's contemporaries believed and modern scholars have thought that [the authorities] suspected Defoe of being a "tool" of a party, faction, or powerful individual and hoped to identify the "accomplices" who helped Defoe write *The Shortest Way*'. Paula R. Backscheider, 'No Defence: Defoe in 1703', *PMLA*, 103 (1988), 278. Backscheider cites a letter in which the authorities were informed, by a mediator, that Defoe was ready to make an oath 'of all that he knew, & to give an Account of all his Accomplices in whatsoever he has been Concerned . . . provided . . . he may be excused from the punishment of the pillory, & not produced as an Evidence against any person whatsoever'. 'No Defence', 280. Backscheider is quoting from George Healey, *Letters of Daniel Defoe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 7. Defoe did in fact stand at the pillory. Later, the issue of informing preoccupied him in the non-fictional

She is left 'in the greatest Confusion imaginable' by this offer (359). The Newgate minister will secure her earthly freedom, but will he ensure her spiritual salvation?

When Moll doesn't immediately take up the offer, this demonstrates how harsh it is to her. When she spends this night begging God to save her from being hanged (rather than 'confessing my sins to God, and begging pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ'), it suggests that she doubts that, through this offer to inform, God has answered her prayers for mercy (360). After she is sentenced to execution, Moll is still not ready to send for the ordinary. It is at this point that her governess sends the second minister, who endeavours to prepare her for death. In sending this minister, there is a suggestion that the governess is herself keen that Moll prepare for death. The governess became penitent when Moll was captured. While – similar to Moll's contrition after seeing Jemmy – one motive for the governess's repentance is guilt about her responsibility for Moll's predicament, there is also an element of gallows fear, provoked by the idea that Moll will save herself by informing on her. This is suggested when she becomes ill after all her efforts at bribery fail. Her illness echoes the earlier episode when Moll left London for the country to avoid being caught in the event of being informed on. Spending time in the country was a common practice for people convalescing from illness or nervous complaints. Thus, her removal to the country also implies illness, which, like her governess's, is brought about by being stricken with fear about execution and damnation.

It is suggested, then, that Moll's governess is anxious for Moll to accept that she will die so that she will not think of her earthly survival and inform. This minister himself, however, is true to his office. His efforts to prepare Moll for death stem from purely Christian motives. The true function of the church to aid salvation is suggested through the second minister. His concern for Moll's soul is presented positively in the novel – contrasting with the concern for property of the Newgate minister. Norton argues that it is through the Newgate minister that Defoe criticises Catholic

criminal biographies (a sub-genre of spiritual autobiography) he wrote. According to Norton, in *The History of John Sheppard* (1724), Defoe shows that it is 'typical of criminal mentality for one criminal to confess against another'. Norton, 'Confession in Protestant Literature', 188. Defoe also wrote a biography of Jonathan Wild (1725), who famously confessed 'against his friends with the promise that he could avoid prosecution'. Norton, 'Confession in Protestant Literature', 245. See also Hal Gladfelder, 'Defoe and Criminal Fiction', in John J. Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 64-83. See Robert R. Singleton for a list of criminal biographies that could have influenced Defoe's fiction. 'English Criminal Biography, 1651-1722', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 19 (1970), 63-83.

confession.⁴⁷ Certainly, in his portrayal of this minister, Defoe presents many of the negative attributes that Protestants attached to Catholic confession. Initially, the Newgate minister demands a confession that he says will lead to God's forgiveness, but which will actually be used as a means of gathering information. But, rather than criticising Catholic confession *per se*, he criticises the corrupt and hypocritical use of confession by the Protestant state in the eighteenth century. Through the portrayal of the Newgate minister, the novel suggests that, at an institutional level, religion is in the service of the state, rather than the people. Principally, the Newgate minister embodies the negative ethos regarding repentance at the prison, which parallels the doctrine of reprobation.

Norton sees the second minister as a validation of Protestantism by Defoe: he 'does not demand Moll's confession. Rather, she voluntarily delivers it'.⁴⁸ More precisely, this minister's attitude towards confession and repentance suggests the value of a *via media* Protestantism rather than a strict Calvinist one. Demonstrating a liberal attitude toward achieving salvation, he tells Moll that being 'sincerely desirous' of divine mercy transformed one fit to be an 'Object of divine Vengeance' into an object fit for forgiveness. Although he doesn't pronounce absolution, under his guidance, after he 'drew out the scheme of infinite mercy, proclaimed from heaven to sinners of the greatest magnitude', Moll makes a full confession of her sins and crimes. She states: 'I unravelled all the wickedness of my life to him'. This confession leads to feelings of true repentance and hope in salvation: the 'comfort of the Penitent'. Moll demonstrates her conviction that she too would receive mercy when she records how she thought she would 'freely have gone out that Minute to Execution, without any uneasiness at all, casting my Soul entirely into the Arms of infinite Mercy as a Penitent' (366).

But, although persuasive, the minister's efforts to prepare Moll for death are not wholly successful. When Moll receives news of her execution date, it is a 'terrible blow . . . to [her] new Resolution' (367). In order to allow time for her to fortify her feelings of repentance, the minister successfully petitions for a reprieve. Importantly, this reprieve 'is not a Pardon': that is, it is not a reduction in her sentence to transportation (370). The most this minister will petition for is an indefinite reprieve that will allow Moll to live out her sentence – her life – at Newgate. When he hears the news that she is to be transported, he 'mourn'd sincerely', lamenting the prospect of her consorting with

⁴⁷ Norton, 'Confession in Protestant Literature', 194.

⁴⁸ Norton, 'Confession in Protestant Literature', 271.

‘a wretched a Crew as they generally are who are thus sent abroad’ (371). He then actively petitions against her transportation (386). Evidently, then, it is not he who secures the reduction in her sentence to transportation.

Moll’s own description of how this reduction was achieved is vague, but, nevertheless, highly revealing. She says ‘it was not without great difficulty and at last a humble Petition for Transportation that I avoided it’ (371). The line ‘not without great difficulty’ echoes her earlier remark when the prison officer told her to call the ordinary: that his offer was ‘very harsh to me’. Other than this, Moll declares that she ‘shall make no Comments upon the sentence, nor upon the Choice I was put to; we shall all choose anything rather than Death, especially when ’tis attended with an uncomfortable prospect beyond it, which was my Case’ (371). Here, she confesses that she no longer felt assured of ‘infinite mercy’ after execution – rather of an ‘uncomfortable prospect beyond it’. Moll’s ‘choice’ refers, ostensibly, to the choice between execution and transportation. Firstly, since most would ‘choose anything rather than death’, this is not much of a choice. In addition, considering the second approach to inform, the resurgence of her belief that she is damned because of her crimes, and her reluctance to go into detail about how the sentence reduction was achieved, the strong suggestion is that the choice she made was to secure her life by informing.

This idea is further reinforced when, after her co-prisoners learn that she is to be transported instead of executed, a rumour goes around the prison that Moll Flanders has informed (374). This suspicion again demonstrates that, with regard to sentencing, information, not money, is the currency that holds sway at Newgate. It also focuses attention on the question of who Moll informs on? The prisoners believe that she has informed on one of the highwaymen – whom the state has little evidence to convict (374). Since Jemmy is transported along with her, and she only learns the history of his gang’s crimes after she has secured transportation, it is not he nor one of his comrades. Evidently, it is not her governess – partly because of Moll’s affection for her, partly because she has possession of all Moll’s goods, and partly because although ‘she deserv’d it as much as [Moll] . . . she had not done anything herself for many Years, other than receiving what [she] and others stole’ (360). A mere receiver would not compensate the authorities for the life of the notorious Moll Flanders. The people that she most likely informs on – whose lives would sufficiently compensate the state – are the counterfeiters. Having seen ‘a little into their ways’, she has information on them at

her disposal (327). As evidenced by their unique punishment, it is they who are perceived by the legal system to be the most dangerous of criminals.

Through the act of informing, Defoe shows again that survival may lead to acts that violate the conscience. Moll's portrayal of how difficult it was to make the 'choice' to inform suggests that she considers it a sinful act. This idea is reinforced by the oblique way she records how she informed in the narrative. She does not explicitly confess that she informed because to do so would demonstrate herself as not truly a penitent. This failure to confess, I will now argue, leads to guilt and fear of reprobation, undermining Moll's religious identity.

A contrast to Moll's attitude to informing can be seen in her attitude towards what some consider the sinful acts that she commits in America. As evidence that Moll's repentance is insincere, Michael notes that, once her death sentence is changed to transportation, almost immediately Moll turns her thoughts to 'material scheming'.⁴⁹ In America, she uses the wages of sin to avoid her sentence and build a new life. She also soon goes about securing money from her son, lying to Jemmy in the process. These acts, construed as sinful by others, are not presented by Moll as such. Rather, she suggests that in avoiding her sentence she pragmatically avoided consorting with the 'desperate crew' that the second minister warned her about. She then continued to secure her material wellbeing, her narrative suggests, so as to ensure her spiritual wellbeing, and it was necessary to lie to Jemmy as she achieved this. As her past has shown, poverty can lead to sin. Thus, her actions are justified as serving as protection from sinning. Self-justifying by other's standards, the fact that she does not confess but rather freely admits to her actions in America suggests Moll does not view them as sins.

The central difference between her sinful past and her actions in America is that before conversion, through fear of reprobation and damnation, she had let actions brought about by necessity, such as her first theft, undermine Christian feelings. Regarding her first theft, Moll remarks that the 'Soul is made Desperate by Distress', and asks 'what can be done?' (254). In her past life, distress about acts provoked by necessity led to her becoming more sinful. In America, after conversion, she does not let acts of necessity impact on her repentance. She does not succumb to the spiritual defeatism that can lead to irreconcilable sinning. But, the narrative reveals, Moll does let the act of informing – which is not justifiable to her conscience, and therefore, not

⁴⁹ Michael, 'Thinking Parables', 386.

freely admitted – lead to spiritual defeatism. Through the corruption of Moll’s spiritual identity that results Defoe again demonstrates that sins can lead to spiritual corruption when they are not confessed.

Moll remarks, censoriously, at one point: ‘So certainly does Interest banish all manner of Affection and so naturally do Men give up Honour and Justice, Humanity and even Christianity, to secure themselves’ (101). This sums up her latent fears about the act of informing. Despite her eagerness to affirm her sincere repentance, on some level she believes that she gave up honour and justice, humanity and even Christianity when she capitulated to the authorities and informed. In consequence, she fears that her repentance was not sincere, and that being unable to sincerely repent means that she is reprobate. This leads to a conflict in the narrative regarding the portrayal of past sins – another issue that has caused critics to question the sincerity of her repentance. On the one hand, Moll castigates herself for her past sinfulness; on the other, she is far from sober in the portrayal of her sins, emphasising the arts of manipulation, deceit and cunning.⁵⁰ This conflict is a result of Moll presenting a survivor code in an attempt to transcend feelings of reprobation.⁵¹ She suggests that honour, justice, humanity and Christianity are illusory ideas that need to be overcome to ensure survival. She seeks to foil her own conviction that her true identity is that of a Christian penitent. Rather, she is a realist who knows that the true game of life is survival at any cost. In this way she attempts to justify the act of informing.

However, impinging on her anti-Christian configuration of survival, Defoe illustrates, are entrenched Christian ideas of sin. Her desire for repentance at Newgate

⁵⁰ The influence of the picaresque is also prominent in *Moll Flanders*. See Lou Caton, ‘Doing the Right Thing with Moll Flanders: A “Reasonable” Difference between the Picara and the Penitent’, *College Language Association*, 40 (1997), 508-16, and Tina Kuhlisch, ‘The Ambivalent Rogue: Moll Flanders as Modern Picara’, in Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz (eds.), *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004). One aspect of the repentance/survivalist debate is whether the picaro identity that Moll displays as protagonist is retained in the narrative. Discussing affinities between picaresque narratives and spiritual autobiography, Wicks (referring to Matheo Aleman’s *Guzman de Alfarache*, which first appeared in England in 1622 under the title *The Rogue*) states that the defining difference is that in picaresque tales ‘the conceptual intent [of repentance] is soon partly negated by the obvious relish with which the picaro-narrator launches into the hurly-burly of his life’s experiences, and he is thus working against his ostensible purpose by dwelling on the very things that his narrative is intended to prove worthless’. Ulrich Wicks, ‘The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach’, *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 246.

⁵¹ See also Novak, who argues that Moll presents Christian virtue as compatible with survival, and that Defoe would, to some degree, have shared Moll’s belief that survival is an essential human drive that is compatible with Christian virtue. However, regarding what he argues are Moll’s appeals to arguments of necessity, Novak also states that ‘much of the irony’ of the novel depends on the ‘self-deceptions and self-justifications [in her] conviction that although she has repented for her sins, she has merely followed the laws of nature which dictate self-preservation’. Novak, ‘Crime and Punishment in Defoe’s *Roxana*’, 446.

was genuine. And because of the profound effect that her conversion experience had on her, religion is the dominant way that Moll now interprets her life. Consequently, she is ultimately locked into the paradigms of salvation or damnation. In placing an emphasis on survival over virtue, she does not transcend ideas of damnation, but merely demonstrates to herself that she is reprobate.

This continued fear of damnation finds expression in the narrative as her portrayal of her past sins turns into an induction to the reader into vice and crime. As discussed above, throughout the text, Defoe presents revenge as a response to a sense of damnation. As narrator, through her emphasis on the arts of manipulation, Moll offers good instruction to the whore and the criminal. She avenges herself on the justice system that, with its harsh punishments and through tempting her to inform, undid her true repentance and ensured her damnation.

The negative correlation of sin and crime with reprobation are the focal points for Defoe's treatment of early modern attitudes to repentance in *Moll Flanders*. The novel as a whole can be seen as critiquing the idea that post-repentance sin demonstrated reprobation, and as demonstrating the value of ongoing confession. Through portraying how a sin which is not confessed undermines Moll's Christian identity, and leads to the attempted sinful persuasion of others into sin, Defoe renders the idea that you can only truly repent/confess once, at conversion, as destructive to both the individual and society. I will now explore how in *Roxana*, Defoe expresses his most confident avowal of Catholic confession. In this novel, he depicts murder and madness as the consequences of festering guilt and feelings of reprobation, and develops a critique of the death penalty.

Hidden Confessions in *Roxana*

Roxana is Defoe's most sophisticated novel. Thus, it is expedient to begin by giving a brief summary of the complex plot, and an outline of the approaches I will use in exploring issues relating to confession and sin in the text. The opening pages of the novel describe the harsh circumstances that compelled the narrator to give up her children and prostitute herself when she was a young woman. After her husband deserted her and their five children, the family was brought to the brink of starvation. Afraid to watch her children 'starve before [her] face', Roxana abandoned them to her

husband's relatives' (reluctant) charity.⁵² She subsequently prostituted herself for bread, becoming the mistress of her landlord, a wealthy jeweller. This initial 'sin', arising out of necessity, leads to more extravagant sinfulness. When she moves with the jeweller to France, he is murdered while robbed by highwaymen. After his death, Roxana is left financially secure. But, recalling Moll, who continued as a thief after necessity was met, she does not use her return to financial security as a platform to rehabilitate her life. Rather, despite being rich, she spends years as 'whore' to a Prince. If anything, she is more embracing of her subsequent sinfulness than Moll. In her relationship with the Prince, Roxana enjoys the 'pleasures' of the whore: greed, vanity and pride. After the Prince breaks off their liaison, despite having amassed a 'vast fortune', Roxana continues to satisfy these pleasures (146).

Roxana's unjustifiable whoring is the apparent focus of her confessional text. In the last section of the narrative, she recounts the disappearance and presumed murder of one of the children that she abandoned years earlier, Susan. Having decided to gain respectability by remarrying, Roxana's plans were jeopardised when Susan demanded to be acknowledged as her daughter. Acknowledging Susan would have exposed Roxana's past life. She evades discovery when Susan disappears. Her narrative implicates her faithful maid Amy as the murderer. But it also expresses her own feelings of guilt about the crime. She refers to the 'injury done' to her child by both herself and Amy (267). Roxana is seemingly tormented by the belief that, in refusing to acknowledge Susan as her daughter, she gave Amy motivation to murder her. Critics have argued that – as evidenced by the degree of guilt she feels – Roxana is more complicit in Susan's death than she admits. Westfall argues that Roxana 'allows Amy to murder' Susan.⁵³ Similarly, Novak argues that she does 'nothing very definite to prevent Amy from carrying through her murderous plans'.⁵⁴ However, while Roxana's apparent complicity may go some way to explain her excessive guilt, it does not explain why Amy herself feels no guilt about the crime. In contrast to Roxana, following Susan's disappearance, Amy is as 'wild, gay and loose' as she always was (218). This analysis posits an interpretation that explains Amy's lack of guilt. I will argue that Roxana first attempts to manipulate Amy into murdering Susan. Amy, however, affirms

⁵² Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunate Mistress*. Hereafter, references to this work are cited parenthetically in the text. *The Fortunate Mistress* was Defoe's original title. However, subsequent editions took the title *Roxana*, and the work is generally referred to by critics by this title.

⁵³ Marilyn Westfall, 'A Sermon by the "Queen of Whores"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 41 (2001), 489.

⁵⁴ Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 456.

her own will and refuses. Consequently, Roxana is forced to commit the deed herself. I argue that she had also earlier arranged for the jeweller to be murdered.

While there are thematic similarities with *Moll Flanders*, in *Roxana* Defoe is not merely rereading old ground. Issues of ‘sin’ are complicated in this novel through his depiction of Roxana as mentally ill. The argument that Roxana suffers from mental illness has been advanced by several critics.⁵⁵ I employ two approaches when exploring madness in the text. The first is the idea that a fear of reprobation could lead to deep-rooted mental and spiritual anxiety. I examine how Roxana’s already fragile mental state – provoked by the emotional impact of being forced to abandon her children – is further disturbed by the violation of her conscience when she is forced to prostitute herself. Sleeping with the jeweller is a sin irreconcilable to her Calvinist sensibilities. It leads to religious melancholy, which is insurmountable because she feels that she is reprobate. Gowland has demonstrated that the – now commonplace – view that Calvin’s ‘terrifying overemphasis on the predestinarian decree’ led to mental anxiety was current in the early modern period; ‘direct association [was] repeatedly made between predestination and melancholy’.⁵⁶ Arguing against the idea, first forwarded by Starr, that Defoe presents Roxana as reprobate (that he ‘consigns Roxana to the devil’), I present Roxana’s fear of reprobation, rather than her seeming reprobate status, as provoking irresolvable melancholia, which then develops into full-blown madness.⁵⁷

Stephanson has also argued that Roxana initially suffers from melancholy, and this melancholy develops into madness. He argues that Defoe dramatises ‘consistently and, in terms of the period, realistically contemporaneous medical theory about mental

⁵⁵ Raymond Stephanson, ‘Defoe’s “Malade Imaginaire”’: The Historical Foundation of Mental Illness in *Roxana*, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 45 (1982), 99-118. Terry J. Castle, “‘Amy, Who Knew My Disease’”: A Psychosexual Pattern in Defoe’s *Roxana*, *English Literary History*, 46 (1979), 81-96. Novak, ‘Crime and Punishment in Defoe’s *Roxana*’, 456.

⁵⁶ Gowland states that Luther ‘had warned explicitly that meditation upon one’s future election was sinful, spiritually dangerous, and productive only of anxiety’, and, that ‘in Germany from the 1560s onwards, this warning was developed into a charge specifically against Calvinism’ ‘Early Modern Melancholy’, 106. Gowland distinguishes Luther’s views on melancholy from Calvin’s. Unlike Calvin, Luther did not view despair as spiritually positive. Rather, this potential lay in the less anxiety-ridden state of sadness, the experience of which could ‘be a precondition for the believer’s salvation, by prompting the acknowledgement that justification would come *sola fide*’. Sadness could lead to either spiritual advancement or deterioration: ‘Sadness . . . was simultaneously a salutary means of comprehending one’s own weakness and a pathology of the soul. It was both to be fought as a devilish temptation and to be welcomed as provoking a turning to God for help’. Its potential as a ‘devilish temptation’ lay in the fact that it could turn into melancholy, which in Luther’s view was a sinful state: ‘if the individual chose to struggle using his or her own means, then such presumption and inadequate comprehension of divine omnipotence would herald the onset of sinful despair, true spiritual *tristitia* or melancholy’. ‘Early Modern Melancholy’, 104.

⁵⁷ Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, p. 164.

illness'.⁵⁸ Yet, despite the fact that Defoe explicitly locates Roxana's melancholy following her sleeping with her landlord in relation to a breach of her Calvinist ideals – she says, for example, that she feels she has delivered herself into 'the jaws of hell' (48) – he does not examine Roxana's melancholy with reference to her faith. He sees matters of conscience as merely a springboard for Defoe to explore mental and behavioural issues:

It may be the effects of a violated moral spirit which provide the impetus for the novel, but once Roxana has acted against her own conscience what interests Defoe are the mental and behavioural results rather than the spiritual results.⁵⁹

Stephanson's analysis provides a contrast to the idea that Roxana is reprobate. It is, nevertheless, undermined by his suggestion of a neat division in the novel, and in early modern medical theories about melancholy, between 'mind and psychology' and 'soul and morality'.⁶⁰

In contrast to Stephanson, I argue that it is because she sees herself as reprobate, and is unable to relieve guilt about her sin through casuistic justification or confession, which leads to greater mental instability, that Roxana is propelled on her sinful path. Further, I argue that Defoe's portrayal of the manifestations of Roxana's malaise is closer to modern than early modern medical accounts of mental illness. When examining this later, more sophisticated portrayal of madness in the text, I employ a Freudian psychoanalytical approach: a modern medical approach which is nevertheless rooted in ideas of guilt and conscience. In relation to a Freudian description of moral masochism, I first argue that, in an effort to relieve guilt, Roxana is compelled to change her identity from chaste wife and mother to whore. This radical change of identity leads to a full descent into madness. This stage of Roxana's illness largely accords, I demonstrate, with Freud's account of psychosis. At one point in her narrative Roxana admits that, after 'the effect of a violent fermentation in [her] blood', she 'scarce knew what [she] did' (196). I will argue that by the time Roxana arranges the murder of the jeweller, she is in the grip of a psychosis. Psychosis both provokes the crime, and leaves her unaware, on a conscious level, that she has committed it. She is

⁵⁸ Stephanson, 'Defoe's "Malade Imaginaire"', 99.

⁵⁹ Stephanson, 'Defoe's "Malade Imaginaire"', 105.

⁶⁰ Stephanson, 'Defoe's "Malade Imaginaire"', 99, 114.

again in the grip of a psychotic episode when she murders Susan – although, as I will demonstrate, Roxana’s repression of knowledge of this crime is less successful.

It is because she is haunted by suspicions about herself concerning Susan, I argue, that she writes her life-history. Her exploration of her life leads her to awareness of her involvement in the jeweller’s murder and confirms her suspicions about the murder of Susan. However, any hope of her confessional autobiography becoming a vehicle for repentance and health is stunted because Roxana also becomes more keenly aware of the legal repercussions of her actions. In consequence, her confessional text becomes not a vehicle for confessing truth, which would allow her to achieve repentance, transcend feelings of damnation, and restore mental and spiritual health, but a vehicle for disseminating lies.⁶¹

While Calvinist attitudes to salvation and sin, lack of confessional outlets, and the death penalty are presented as the prime reasons for Roxana’s mental decline and spiritual corruption, at the outset of the novel Defoe also implicates a general lack of virtue in wider society. Roxana’s mental decline begins when her husband abandons her and she suffers ‘inexpressible distress’ (31). After pleas to his relatives for help are ignored, she must not only watch her children starve, but become so hungry herself that she was afraid she would ‘eat up my very Children’ (33). Her identity as nurturer is severely undermined by these brutal conditions. This blow to her identity as mother is consolidated when, hardening her ‘heart against’ her own ‘flesh and Blood’, she is forced to abandon her children to save them from starvation (34). Cruelly, the best option seems to be to deliver them to the very ones who denied her charity: her husband’s relatives. After parting with her ‘poor children’ Roxana faints. When she comes to herself, she says that she was ‘like one Mad’ (36).

Her nascent madness is then fuelled by her own harsh circumstances and, in her eyes, the sinful way she extracts herself from them. Roxana is characterised as a woman of Puritan sensibilities. She is the daughter of Huguenots, who fled from France when she was a child for their ‘conscience’ (24). She has had a ‘Virtuous education’ and a strong ‘Sense of Religion’ (170). Since, unlike her parents, when she suffers persecution (by lack of charity) she cannot flee to a safe haven, her hard-line Calvinist sensibilities

⁶¹ For an alternative Freudian analysis of the novel, see Castle, ‘A Psychosexual Pattern in Defoe’s *Roxana*’.

dictate that her choices are simple: she must become a martyr or prostitute herself and her beliefs. Roxana initially says to Amy, who offers to take her place with the jeweller, 'I'd die before I would consent or before you should consent for my sake' (41). When she eventually does capitulate, she sees her prostitution as defining her as damned. She secures her physical wellbeing at 'the dear expense of body and soul' (48).

Some critics have argued that, in the context of her subsequent decline, Roxana's fears that she is reprobate are well grounded. Similarly to Starr, Novak argues that Roxana possesses the "stupidity" and "sullen silent kind of grief" which Defoe associated with damnation and despair.⁶² Bell argues that 'in psychological terms, [the novel] is a paradoxical analysis of conscience – paradoxical in that Defoe's most wicked narrator is also the most prone to conscience'.⁶³ From a Calvinist viewpoint, Roxana is more prone to conscience because she is more wicked, a tormented conscience being the punishment of the reprobate. In Calvinist thought, postlapsarian wo/man is constantly in 'terror under the dominion of the Law, and moreover, tortured by a passion for harmony with God'. The damned are constantly confronted with the consequence of sin, gnawed at by 'the worm of conscience'. Only for the elect, in the instance of regeneration, is the conscience made 'whole and entire'.⁶⁴ However, while Defoe seemingly crafts Roxana's decline in accordance with Calvinist theories on damnation, the novel more strongly presents a competing interpretation. Rather than depicting Roxana as a reprobate, Defoe suggests that her Calvinist attitudes to sin are a form of lunacy that feeds into pre-existing psychological despair.⁶⁵

The root of Roxana's lunacy is her inability to justify her sin on the grounds of survival. Offering casuistic guidance, Amy argues that 'nobody can starve', but Roxana believes that there is never a justification for prostitution (42). Her intransigence emerges again when she refuses to sanction her union with the jeweller as a marriage, as both are already married. Amy (reminiscent of Moll's casual attitude to bigamy) argues that they are free in principle to be man and wife, as Roxana has been abandoned and the jeweller's wife has left him. Roxana claims that Amy argues 'for the Devil, as if [she] were one of his privy-councillors' (47). She insists: 'I am a whore, Amy, neither better nor worse, I assure you' (49). Defoe suggests that real virtue (and mental health)

⁶² Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 456.

⁶³ Ian A. Bell, 'Narrators and Narrative in Defoe', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 18 (1985), 171.

⁶⁴ Wilks, *Idea of Conscience*, p. 31.

⁶⁵ For a positive analysis of Calvinism in the novel, see Westfall, who argues that '*Roxana* incorporates Calvinistic tropes decrying against luxury and promoting charity'. 'A Sermon by the "Queen of Whores"', 488.

entails negotiating sins provoked by necessity with some flexibility. Roxana's mental instability prevents her from navigating her Puritan sensibilities. Rather, these sensibilities compound her despair.

Under the above conditions, the insidious hold that the predestinarian decree has on Roxana's psyche leads to further mental decline.⁶⁶ Because her 'sin' was committed with 'open Eyes', she 'believ[es] herself damned' (52)⁶⁷; because she believes herself damned, she becomes mired in irresolvable despair. Melancholy becomes not a punishment 'preceding redemption' but a punishment in itself. In consequence, subsequent to her sleeping with the landlord, her behaviour becomes increasingly disturbing.

The first sign of increased mental disturbance is the masochism evident in her demand to be recognised as a whore. This refusal to allow herself even the semblance of respectability or virtue is not an honourable rejection of bad faith. Rather, initially at least, it stems from a desire to castigate herself. A hint at the masochistic foundation of Roxana's desire to be a whore is provided by the Dutch merchant. Later her husband, at this earlier point she has rejected his proposals of marriage, but is willing to continue as his mistress. He tells her that there is 'something very unkind to yourself' in this preference to be his whore rather than his wife (136). For Roxana, masochistic self-punishment offsets a darker psychological pain. Roxana is what Freud termed a moral masochist. As opposed to the sexual masochist, who gains pleasure from sexual humiliation and pain, the 'moral masochist suffers from an overly sensitive conscience, that is, a punitive superego'. For the moral masochist, '[p]unishment or sacrifice is much easier to accept than unrelieved guilt'.⁶⁸ Roxana punishes herself by designating herself a whore.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Novak argues that 'it is this very sense of guilt' following her sleeping with the landlord 'which drives Roxana to commit further sins'. 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 449. However, he sees her intransigent beliefs, and her mental illness, as consequences of (rather than as frameworks for understanding) her sinfulness. 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 456.

⁶⁷ Malinda Snow, 'Arguments to the Self in Defoe's *Roxana*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 34 (1994), 532-533.

⁶⁸ Stuart L. Charme, 'Religion and the Theory of Masochism', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 22 (1983), 231. Regarding sexual masochism, Roxana says of her liaison with the jeweller that 'my blood had no fire in it' (50). Subsequently, she never overtly expresses sexual pleasure in any of her affairs. Nevertheless, the fact that her masochism is strongly connected to sexual activity suggests that it is not entirely divorced from sexual masochism.

⁶⁹ As my analysis makes clear, Roxana often describes herself as a whore. As it is important to the issues of identity that I seek to describe, reproducing her emphasis, I use this word when describing her non-marital affairs.

Initially, Roxana's guilt is relieved through this masochistic self-castigation. But because she feels she is reprobate, there are limitations to the capacity of self-castigation to relieve guilt. In response to guilt, the moral masochist exhibits not only a persistent need for punishment, but also for expiation and absolution.⁷⁰ In feeling that she is reprobate, Roxana's self-castigations remain locked into an unending cycle of guilt and punishment. To relieve her guilt, Roxana attempts to fully transform her identity. Her violation of the roles of wife and mother has led to her guilt; she attempts to stop these feelings by becoming the opposite of wife and mother: a whore.

Roxana's attempt to transform her identity begins in the scene where she forces Amy to sleep with the jeweller. There are many dark overtones to this episode. For example, Roxana's domination of Amy's will here has implications for her later attempted manipulation of her maid to murder Susan. Roxana's primary motivation is, however, to solidify her belief that she is a 'whore not wife' (53). In this context, she seeks to neutralise feelings of love for the jeweller. Before she sleeps with him, she says to Amy: 'if I cou'd take him fairly, you may be sure I'd take him above all the Men in the World (47). Later when she capitulates, it is partly because of gratitude for his kindness: from 'gratitude to a man . . . all sense of religion, Duty was given over at once' (52). When viewed from the perspective of transformation, continued gratitude to him would be an aid to give up all sense of religion and duty. But the part of her that seeks full transformation is resistant to the feelings of love this gratitude engenders, as love belongs to the realm of marriage. In loving him she may come to see herself as other than whore. Here, to counteract these feelings of love, Roxana vicariously re-enacts her fall. Through Amy, her proxy, Roxana watches her humiliation.⁷¹ Like those who denied her charity, Roxana forces her maid into a violation of conscience: 'I fairly stripped her, and then I threw open the bed, and thrust her in' (54). She then confirms to herself that the jeweller, instead of offering her unconditional charity, took advantage of her distress; she affirms that his part in her fall – as in Amy's – was merely a rarefied act of rape.⁷²

⁷⁰ Charne, 'Religion and the Theory of Masochism', 231.

⁷¹ She earlier depicts him as a violent man when she cannot pay the rent. This violence abated when she fell into obvious poverty. Before the children left he let her live rent free: 'my distress had mollified his temper' (39). There is a satirical sting to this remark, however, because only after the children are gone does he provide food. His 'mollified' temper now allows him to take advantage of her distress. Despite obviously desiring her, he claims that he would not ask her to do anything she didn't want to do. Roxana, however, feels that she must show her gratitude or she would once again be left destitute.

⁷² This episode shows a certain sexual masochistic pleasure which, like her hatred, can be experienced as it is objectified. Her domination of Amy also shows a certain sexual sadism, which, Freud argued, was the

This episode also demonstrates that stifling her conscience is the means by which Roxana's self-transformation develops beyond an embryonic stage. When she forces Amy to sleep with the jeweller, Roxana also affirms to herself 'that I did not think him my Husband' (53). If she is not his wife then she is his whore. In this insistence that she is a whore, Roxana removes herself from any connections to social norms, virtue or respectability. The act itself – making her maid a whore, and tempting the jeweller – serves to do this; 'This is enough to convince anyone . . . I had cast off all principle, and all modesty, and had effectually stifled conscience' (54). The one she seeks to convince that she has stifled conscience is herself. Here Roxana follows through the negative logic of her hard line-beliefs. She is reprobate. Thus, she is 'fit for any wickedness' (53). In forcing Amy to sleep with the jeweller, she actively seeks to demonstrate that she is fit for any wickedness, and can – to alleviate the pain of guilt – transform herself fully into a whore. The episode also demonstrates that the reproach of others could hinder her transformation. She says that she will make Amy 'a Whore too' so that she 'should not reproach me with it' (55).

However, there is an obstacle hindering her transformation. Although she refuses to accept their union as anything but adultery, the jeweller insists they are 'marry'd' (53). His insistence brings the pain of guilt all too near. This explains why, in her relationship with the jeweller, Roxana continues to experience a 'heaviness of heart' (56). She also says that she had many 'dark reflections' (56). Importantly, neither this 'heaviness of heart' nor the 'dark reflections' are referred to after the jeweller's death. This is because Roxana's dark reflections lead her to commit an act that violates her conscience to such an extent that she can no longer hearken back to her old identity. She arranges the murder of the man whose insistence on being called husband makes her grieve for her past life and holds the potential to hinder transformation.

Textual evidence that could offset any suspicion that Roxana murdered the jeweller lies in her professed love for him. But by the time the jeweller is murdered, she has – in the episode where she forces Amy to sleep with him – counteracted her feelings of love. The prime textual evidence that implicates Roxana in his murder is the fact that, on the day he was murdered, the jeweller did not have in his possession the jewel case he always carried. He left this with Roxana, and gave her other valuable possessions he usually carried on his person. When he is murdered, people assume that he was carrying

flip side of sexual masochism. David A. Statt, *The Concise Dictionary of Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1993).

the jewels; and Roxana says: 'I confirm'd this' (61). In the context of her relationship with the Prince, which begins very shortly after the murder, it could be argued that Roxana confirmed her 'husband' was robbed of the jewels because she did not want to appear too wealthy – she wants to appear a damsel in distress whose virtue is open to corruption. However, she falsely confirms that the jeweller was robbed of the jewel case before she meets the Prince. Roxana hints at her true motives when she says 'I sorely repented this part afterward' (62). Here she refers to the suspicion that is aroused later when, after the Prince breaks off their relationship (reformed, becoming 'quite another man'), she attempts to sell the jewels (102). She employs the Dutchman as her agent. He calls a jeweller to dispose of the jewels. When this man recognises them as the property of the murdered jeweller, it causes Roxana great unease: 'As soon as the jew saw the jewels, I saw my Folly . . . I had been ruin'd, and perhaps put to death in as cruel a manner as possible' (104). When he demands that Roxana ought to be 'charg'd with the robbery and murder', and forced to name her accomplices, she flees to England (105). Hence, it is clear that at least one character suspects Roxana of involvement in the jeweller's murder, and this suspicion rests on her lie about the jewel case.

Thus, Roxana's true motive for letting it be believed that the jewels were robbed is that to admit otherwise would have aroused suspicion that she was involved in the murder. The reader's suspicion is counterbalanced by Roxana's own earlier explanation. It was the jeweller, she insists, who suggested that the journey he was making was dangerous, and gave her his jewels (58). However, in the preface Defoe cautions the reader against accepting Roxana's version uncritically. The (fictional) editor states that, as he was acquainted with the family of Roxana's husband (the man who abandoned her), he can verify the events presented in the first section of her narrative. But he states that he cannot verify the truth of the later sections, much of which happened 'abroad'; it 'cou'd not be so well vouch'd as the First' (21). While he asserts that the fact that he 'knows that first Part of the Story to be Truth' is perhaps 'a Pledge for the Credit of the rest', his remarks nevertheless open the possibility of falsehood in the narration (21).

In conjunction with Roxana's false claim that the jeweller was robbed of his jewel case and her fear for her life when the Jewish jeweller recognises the jewels, this suggestion of falsehood prompts an interpretation of events that differs from her account. The novel takes on elements of a murder mystery, where the reader must piece together what has really occurred. The highwaymen targeted the jeweller, as the coach driver reports, for the 'casket of diamonds . . . they knew he carried about him' (59).

This suggests that Roxana let slip to an opportunistic ear that the jeweller was making a journey with the jewels. She then expresses a fear for his safety in an effort to get him to leave the jewels (rather than, as she claims, only becoming concerned for his wellbeing after he, rather unusually, and extremely coincidentally, first expressed fears to her about his safety). The coach driver's account also suggests that her desire to have the jewels is not solely based on greed; rather, it is insurance that the jeweller will be murdered. The coach driver reports that the highwaymen, finding the jeweller without his valuables, 'killed him from disappointment' and then searched his clothes 'more narrowly, than they cou'd do when he was alive' (59).

The apparent sincerity felt in some of her entreaties for the jeweller not to go on the journey might be presented as evidence of Roxana's innocence and her sincerity when she claims, after the murder, that she 'lov'd him' (60). Before the murder, she states: 'my Mind was very uneasie about him, and I told him so, and entreated him not to go' (59). She then had a vision of his dying, saying his 'face look'd like a death-head', his 'head' all bloody, and 'then his Cloaths all bloody too'. After experiencing this premonition she warns him: 'depend upon it, some Mischief will befall you' (59). However, rather than evidence proving her innocence, these warnings and premonition suggest that the murder of the jeweller is symptomatic of the development of psychosis. Freud argued that, in psychosis the ego 'creates, autocratically, a new external and internal world'.⁷³ Roxana begs the jeweller not to go because, while committing unacceptable acts entails repression, which is facilitated through fantasy, she knows on some level that he is about to die. The vision of the jeweller's murder, presented as a premonition, comes to her consciousness because 'conscience will, and does, often break in upon them at particular times, let them do what they can to prevent it' (56). In Freudian terms, while psychosis provides a fantasy world which facilitates dissociation from reality, the 'rejected piece of reality constantly forces itself upon the mind'.⁷⁴

The jeweller's death enables a leap in Roxana's development into whore. Freud argues that, at root, a psychosis is 'the expression of a rebellion on the part of the id against the external world': 'the ego is in the service of the id'.⁷⁵ Roxana's attempt to eliminate guilt has led to a dominant id. The jeweller is murdered because his insistence

⁷³ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego, the Id and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Co., 1970), vol. 19, p. 151.

⁷⁴ Freud, *The Ego, the Id and Other Works*, p. 186.

⁷⁵ Freud, *The Ego, the Id and Other Works*, pp. 185, 183.

that they are married causes guilt. The guilt that would have arisen from his murder is then prevented by dissociation from reality: Roxana's dissociation prevents a 'very serious frustration by reality of a wish – a frustration that seems intolerable'.⁷⁶ His death, having the desired effect of removing her 'heaviness of heart', also fully subdues the ego – leading to an unfettered, flourishing id that becomes intent on satisfying itself. After the murder, Roxana very soon agrees, with no apparent resistance from her conscience, to become the Prince's whore. To prevent any further relapse into guilt – as she later states, to 'fortifie [her] Mind against all Reflection' (170) – she now justifies her inexcusable whoring on the grounds of necessity. As a rationalisation for prostituting herself not for bread, but for riches and succour for her vanity and pride, she says 'no Virtue was proof against him [the Prince], except such, as was able . . . to suffer Martyrdom' (69). Here, as Roxana depicts pleasure curtailment of any sort as a form of martyrdom, it is evidently that her psyche is dominated by an unrestrained id.

Despite her conviction that it was 'all lawful', Roxana is, however, soon drawn to confess to a Catholic priest (71). Ostensibly desiring to confess her whoring, here Roxana is actually motivated to uncover the dark secret of her involvement in the jeweller's murder. While her machinations were committed in a delusory state, subconsciously, Roxana is aware of her actions. There are two instances where she is drawn to a Catholic confessor. The first is this moment; the second is after Susan's disappearance. Novak argues that this later urge to confess stems from Roxana's guilt about 'a partial complicity in the murder of her child'.⁷⁷ In positing this view, he cites Defoe's depictions of the murderer's conscience, as explored in two of his non-fictional works.⁷⁸ In these works, Defoe portrays the murderer as persecuted by conscience 'until he either commits suicide or relieves his conscience by confessing'.⁷⁹ Immediately prior to her account of Susan's disappearance, Roxana describes how she felt she would die from the grief, and how she desired to confess to a Catholic priest (218-219). Novak argues that Roxana describes how she is torn between suicide and confession because of her guilt about the murder of Susan. Although Roxana is guilty of murder to a greater

⁷⁶ Freud, *The Ego, the Id and Other Works*, p. 151.

⁷⁷ Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 445.

⁷⁸ Novak discusses a section of Defoe's *Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (London, 1722), pp. 104-11, and an issue of *Applebee's Journal*, where Defoe describes a man who 'confessed' to murder 'by a slip of the tongue' (10 June, 1720). 'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's *Roxana*', 458.

⁷⁹ A process, Novak argues, that Dostoyevsky has made familiar to modern readers. *Ibid.*

degree than Novak suggests, he is correct when he argues that murder is the impetus for her desire to confess.

Roxana's first urge towards verbal confession is also an urge towards a confession of murder. Aware on some level that her attempt to stifle her conscience has fuelled her madness, she hopes that, under the confessor's probing, she would confess her involvement in the jeweller's murder. In confessing, she seeks to restore both consciousness and conscience. The explicit reason that Roxana gives (in both instances) for why she cannot bring herself to confess to a priest is that her Protestantism prevents it. Conway suggests that her Protestantism both attracts her to and repels her from Catholic confession. She argues that Roxana's sexual transgressions (the ostensible reason for her desire to confess) amount to habitual sin, 'a pattern of sinfulness more readily forgiven within a Catholic than a Protestant register'. But, Conway argues, Roxana's Protestantism causes her to believe Catholic absolution mounts to a 'licensing' of 'everything'.⁸⁰ Roxana states that a confessor would see her whoring as 'no sin at all, or absolve me upon the easiest Penance' (71). Conway argues that at this point in the novel there is a critique of both the brutal confrontation of sin urged in Calvinist self-examination, and the lax attitude toward some sins in Catholicism. However, Roxana's admonition against Catholic confession here does not reflect Defoe's views; it does not, as Norton argues, constitute Defoe's 'heaviest criticism of Catholic confession'.⁸¹ Rather, Roxana's prejudice against Catholic confession should be viewed in the same way as her refusal to justify her first sin. It is a consequence of, and gives further fuel to, her madness. Again linking her madness to wider religious attitudes, Defoe suggests that her attitude toward confession is a madness that stifles an opportunity for mental health and repentance.

Extending his social critique to the death penalty, Defoe suggests that Roxana's faith's prohibition of confession could have been overridden were it not for fear of execution. While under the belief that she could 'not act' Popish and confess to whoring, as argued, on some level Roxana is aware of her crime of arranging murder (71). Like Protestant England, Catholic France had the death penalty. What ultimately prevents her from confessing is a fear that once she had confessed to murder she would be executed (71). It was established at Trent that 'the sacrament of Penance . . . remits

⁸⁰ Alison Conway, 'Defoe's Protestant Whore', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35 (2002), 223.

⁸¹ Norton, 'Confession in Protestant Literature', 169.

eternal, but not temporal, punishment'.⁸² Roxana suspects that the priest would urge her to confess her crime to the law. While the seal of confession would have prevented the priest from revealing her crime, Roxana believes that, once aware of herself as a murderer, and having confessed to him, she would be unable to resist both her own conscience and his reproach.

Defoe again demonstrates that execution is an impediment to Roxana becoming truly repentant when she has an encounter with death. This occurs in the context of her fleeing France for England when the Jewish jeweller betrays his suspicions about her involvement in the murder of her jeweller. Here, as well as the legal repercussions, she flees a confrontation with the truth. On the way to England the ship Roxana and Amy are travelling on hits a storm. In fear of death, both review their sinful lives. But unlike Amy, who vocalises all her guilty secrets and begs forgiveness, Roxana remains mute: 'I had a mind full of Horror in the time of the Storm, and saw Death before me . . . but my thoughts got no vent' (116). It is suggested here that fear of death shocks her mind to the extent that she briefly perceives her involvement in the jeweller's murder: hence, she had a mind full of horror. But this awareness does not lead to cathartic vocalisation. She cannot give vent to her thoughts because, firstly, there is no point in confessing because she feels she is damned, and secondly, there is the possibility that the storm will abate and, if she confesses to murder, she would expose herself to the prospect of execution. In revealing wording which reinforces the suggestion that during the storm she has glimpsed her crime, Roxana states that she has 'no thorough effectual penance', but only a gallows fear: 'such a Repentance as a Criminal has at the Place of Execution, who is sorry not that he committed the Crime, as it is a Crime, but sorry *that he is to be hanged for it*' (116). Hence, yet again, Defoe causes us to query the value of both the doctrine of reprobation, and a death penalty that militates against confession and repentance. For her part, Roxana notes: 'Death-bed repentance, or Storm repentance, is seldom true' (116). However, it can lead to feelings of true repentance. In Roxana's case, convinced of damnation and under fear of death, any possibility of true repentance, or return to mental health, is forestalled.

During the storm, reality has imposed itself at a weak moment. After the storm, knowledge of her involvement in the murder of the jeweller is once again repressed, and she continues to satisfy her desires. After a trip to Holland, where she settles her

⁸² MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 188.

accounts with the Dutchman and rejects his marriage proposal, she moves permanently to London. On the London social scene, she puts herself on display, dancing in a Turkish habit, and eventually snaring a rich and powerful man. When this relationship ends, and she returns to her London home, she finds that the fascination she provoked with her dance has led to gossip, and this gossip has exposed her as a whore.⁸³ In addition her physical appeal is starting to fade; she 'looked like a cast-off mistress' (156). Combined, these events lead to something of a reformation. Roxana decides to 'transform' herself 'into a new shape', to become once again a respectable and virtuous mother (174).

On her return to England, she had made provision for the children that she had earlier abandoned. Desiring secrecy, she entrusted Amy to act as her agent. She now thinks of her children. So that they 'should not be ashamed to own' her, she decides to 'put a new face on' (173, 175). To fully distance herself from gossip as she plans her reconciliation with them, she leaves her expensive apartment and lodges with a Quaker woman, herself dressing as a Quaker. Engaging in elaborate fantasies to explain her absence, ultimately the threat of exposure – of others' reproach – is too dangerous for Roxana. In addition, her reformation is only a surface one. She is concerned with the appearance of virtue, rather than virtue itself (as suggested by the fact that she sometimes still wears the Turkish habit under her Quaker dress). She is still unable to give up satisfying her pleasures, facilitated in the past through men's devotion to her. So, rather than being reunited with her children, she decides to gain respectability by marrying the Dutchman. This marriage is not a full renunciation of her need to be a whore. Rather than being motivated by love, the marriage allows her the pretence of respectability as she continues to satisfy her vanity, greed and pride.

With the marriage, Roxana attempts to put an end to 'the intriguing part' of her life (202). But no such easy transition is possible. Soon after relating her account of her marriage to the Dutchman, in language that recalls her 'horrors' in the storm, Roxana refers to a crime she has committed. She says: 'I repented of the Crime, but it was of

⁸³ After performing her dance for the first time, she gained the name Roxana (her real name is also Susan), a reference, Baine argues, to a famous seventeenth-century actress. Subsequent to playing the role of 'Roxilana, or Roxana in the Second Part of Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* in 1661', the name Roxana was 'frequently given' to Hester Davenport. Rodney M. Baine, 'Roxana's Georgian Setting', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 15 (1975), 465. Demonstrating the negative association of actress with whore in the period, Defoe's heroine later becomes known as 'a meer Roxana' (156).

another and lower kind of Repentance, and rather mov'd by my Fears of Vengeance, than from a Sense of being spar'd from being punish'd, and landed safe after a Storm' (215). While the reader does not yet know the story of Susan, which is hinted at but largely omitted from Roxana's tale of her marriage, she is referring to her murder. Here again, she contemplates Catholic confession, but again she states that her Protestantism prevents her from making a confession: 'as I had none of the recourses so I had none of the absolution by which the Criminal confessing, goes away comforted' (218). Her use of the word criminal, rather than sinner, suggests that she has no recourses to confession, and is denied absolution, because she fears both the heavenly and worldly consequences of her crime (215).

The reason why she first omits the story of Susan's disappearance is that she is fearful of confirming her suspicion that she murdered her daughter. As opposed to when she sought confession after the jeweller's murder, Roxana harbours suspicions about herself on a conscious level regarding Susan's murder. Rather than an arranged murder, it was a hands-on murder; thus, her psychosis has been less successful in 'procuring for itself perceptions of a kind which . . . correspond to the new reality'.⁸⁴ In addition, as narrator, after exploring her brief awareness of the jeweller's murder during the storm, her suspicions regarding Susan's murder have been heightened. Up to the point of her exploration of the storm, despite suspicions about herself regarding Susan's murder, Roxana has retained hope that she is 'merely a whore'. From this point on, she is desperate to avoid confirming that she is worse. Thus, the story of Susan is initially avoided in the narrative.

Compelled, nevertheless, to confront these suspicions, after recounting her marriage and describing her despair because of her 'crime', she now looks back once more on her attempt to reinvent herself through marriage. Aware of the legal repercussion of her crimes – that 'some secrets should not be opened without due utility' – she is now conscious in her efforts to conceal from the reader any awareness that she gains about involvement in the crime of Susan's murder (264). Rather, her account becomes a pre-emptive criminal defence as well as a confession: she uncovers her involvement in the murder and implicates Amy as Susan's murderer. To reveal these opposing impulses of discovery and concealment, truth and lies, requires a detailed explication of Roxana's account of Susan's disappearance.

⁸⁴ Freud, *The Ego, the Id and Other Works*, p. 186.

Revisiting her past, Roxana now recalls how her plans for reinvention through marriage became threatened when Susan, through a series of fateful events, came to suspect that Roxana was her mother. We learn that Susan knew of the lady, Roxana, because she worked in her household as a maid, under the supervision of Amy. After Susan encountered Amy in her role as her mother's agent, she soon arrived at the belief that Roxana was her mother. With relentless persistence, Susan demanded of Amy that she should be acknowledged as Roxana's daughter. Roxana is desperate to avoid a confrontation with Susan. Then Susan disappears.

Throughout her account, Roxana implicates Amy. She informs us that Amy, who had a 'violent affection for her mistress' (43), claimed she would murder Susan, so that she should 'never challenge [Roxana] for her Mother in this World' (224). She is presented as murdering Susan against Roxana's own expressed wishes: 'you shan't hurt a hair on her head' (224). However, Roxana's response when Amy first voices a desire to murder Susan suggests that she harbours a secret desire to see Susan dead. She says: 'I was scarce myself, anymore than *Amy*, so dreadful a thing is a Load of Guilt upon a persons mind' (224). Roxana's account is also open to the interpretation that she attempted to manipulate Amy to perform the murder. There is, for example, a strong suggestion that Roxana played on Amy's 'Excess of Affection' for her (41). What initially leads Susan to believe that Roxana is her mother is the discovery that Amy, Roxana's maid, is her mother's agent. Roxana 'often' tells Amy that she is in this predicament – being haunted by Susan – because of this one 'false step' by Amy (223). Roxana also attempts to override any religious or moral fears that Amy has. She suggests to her that there is no moral distinction between thought and action, saying, after Amy expresses a desire to kill Susan: 'You are a murtherer already as much as if you had done it already' (224). The above suggests Roxana's involvement in Susan's murder goes beyond a passive facilitation of Amy as murderess. At the very least, she more actively encouraged Amy to kill Susan.⁸⁵

After sex with the landlord, Roxana knows that Amy is fiercely loyal to her, and that she can channel this loyalty to her own ends. But Amy is not willing to commit murder. While after the storm, like Roxana, Amy's 'wicked taste of life return'd', the encounter with death and fear of damnation is, nevertheless, key to Amy's refusal to be

⁸⁵ The idea that Roxana is active rather than passive with regard to the murder is also suggested by Crane when she calls Roxana Amy's 'accomplice'. Julia Crane, 'Defoe's *Roxana*: The Making and Unmaking of a Heroine', *The Modern Language Review*, 102 (2007), 24.

manipulated by Roxana into committing murder (116). Amy knows she is a wicked girl in part because Roxana made her a whore; she will not allow Roxana to ensure her damnation by making her a murderer. When Amy states that she will kill Susan she verbalises what she knows to be Roxana's secret will. This is a defence mechanism against Roxana's subtle manipulations: telling Amy 'what one false step' of hers had done. Not enough to stop Roxana, Amy then makes another 'false step'. In another self-protective act, she reveals to Susan that her life is in danger.

The row that Roxana and Amy have about this incident shows Amy's resistance to murder and the rage this instils in Roxana. Roxana recounts how Amy informed her that that she had met with Susan to see if she could be dissuaded from pursuing Roxana. When Susan stubbornly refused to be deterred from her purpose, Amy felt an urge to murder her, but couldn't because there were people present: 'had there been no Watermen in the Boat, and no-body in sight, *she swore to me*, she would have thrown her into the River'. At the time of the incident, the urge to murder shocked Amy to her senses. She warns Susan that her life is in danger. After they left the boat, Amy brought Susan to a secluded spot. But the girl, Amy tells Roxana, and Roxana tells us, sensed her intention: 'She did not know that she might murder her; and that, *in short*, She wou'd not trust herself with her; and never wou'd come into her company again, alone' (255). Roxana says that she fell into a rage when Amy told her that she would kill Susan in the boat, that she 'bade her get out of her sight and out of her house', and that Amy 'packed up her Alls and march'd off' (254, 255). However, indicative of Roxana's dual motive to uncover the truth and conceal it, there are contradictions in her account of her row with Amy, and these contradictions suggest the truth of what actually happened. If she had erupted in rage at the point when Amy confessed her urge to murder Susan, how was Amy able to relate the end of the story, where she took Susan to a secluded spot? This contradiction suggests that Roxana's rage erupted not when Amy spoke of murdering Susan, but when she made her second false step. When Amy let Susan know that her life was in danger she precluded herself from murdering Susan, who apparently had vowed never to be alone with her again. Thus, Roxana's rage erupts in reaction to Amy's implied message: I cannot now kill Susan. Roxana takes this to mean that she should murder Susan: it was the 'impudentest Thing that was ever known, to make such a Proposal to me' (254).

As narrator, Roxana presents Amy's admission that she felt an urge to kill as evidence that she is Susan's murderer. But it is at root contradictory. There are two

other substantial pieces of evidence of Amy's guilt presented by Roxana. The first is a conversation that Amy had with the Quaker woman with whom Roxana lodges (Roxana has at this point removed herself from London to avoid Susan). The Quaker woman knows that Susan is pursuing Roxana, and is helping her evade her. But Roxana has not admitted that Susan is her daughter: 'only Amy could be trusted . . . to lie for [her]' (264). When Amy goes to the Quaker woman after Roxana has dismissed her and says she will remove Susan 'out-of-the-way', Roxana sees the extent to which Amy will lie for her (262). On the surface, her conversation with the Quaker suggests that Amy has now decided she will murder Susan, and is telling the Quaker woman, knowing that she will tell Roxana.⁸⁶ However, another reading is that Amy wants the Quaker to tell Roxana not that she will kill Susan, but that she knows that Roxana has already killed Susan; that she kept close to Roxana after she left her employment and witnessed her killing Susan; and that she (Amy) will dispose of the body. This is all implied in a coded message to Roxana. As Roxana reports it, Amy told the Quaker that she saw the 'Necessity of Securing her [Susan], and removing her out-of-the-way; and that, *in short*, without asking my Leave [Roxana's], or any-body's Leave, she would take care she [Susan] would trouble her [Amy's] . . . Mistress no more' (262). Adding to the sense of mystery surrounding Susan's murder is the fact that a body is never discovered. This is explained by the anomalous line in Amy's coded dialogue to her mistress. Amy says she would act without her mistress's or 'any-body's leave'. But if one thing is made abundantly clear in the narrative it is that Amy is subject to Roxana alone: there is nobody else whose permission she would seek or need. The hyphenation in 'any-body' links the word to the hyphenated statement 'out-of-the-way'. This suggests that Amy is telling Roxana that she will remove Susan's body 'out-of-the-way'. While the hyphenation of words such as 'anybody' or 'somebody' is not unique to this instance in the text, it is similarly used by Amy to denote Susan's body earlier, when she stated that she would have killed Susan if there had 'been no Watermen in the Boat, and no-body in sight' (255). Here, if no-body is taken to refer to a person, it is merely a repetition of Amy's first statement, that there were people around. Rather than repetition, another interpretation is that Amy means that if she had thrown Susan in the river it would have

⁸⁶ The Quaker woman reports to Roxana, but doesn't see any sinister intent in Amy's statement.

left a body in sight. Through the linkage of no-body and any-body Defoe subtly emphasises that Amy is referring to removing Susan's murdered body out of the way.⁸⁷

Amy's removal of Susan's body is, in part, an attempt to protect herself from blame. It is not just as narrator, but when she commits the crime, that Roxana implicates Amy in Susan's murder. In following Roxana, Amy knows that Roxana disguised herself as her maid when she committed the murder. This is suggested in the second additional piece of objective evidence that Roxana forwards in the text to implicate Amy. This is the two letters that Roxana received from her eldest son's guardians, where Susan was last seen before she disappeared. Despite the fact that she had previously demanded strict secrecy from Amy in her dealings with them about her identity, Roxana now writes to these people, as she hopes to obtain proof that Amy killed Susan.

At this stage, Amy's coded message to Roxana – that she has witnessed her murdering Susan and has removed the body – threatens to bring the partially suppressed knowledge that she is Susan's murderer to the surface. Roxana has visions of Susan dying a gruesome death, 'with her throat cut', or her 'brains knocked out' (264). These visions are similar to her visions about the death of the jeweller – the difference being that they are not a guilt-induced premonition, but a grasping towards memory of what took place. The murder of Susan was a hands-on murder; thus, her dissociation from reality is less than complete.

The first letter seems to confirm that Susan left the house with Amy. Susan's brother's guardians know Amy because she interacted with them in her role as the children's mother's agent. However, this letter alone is vague and could in fact implicate Roxana. It merely states that Susan left with 'the gentlewoman who used to be so kind to her' (264). Roxana could be the 'gentlewoman who used to be so kind to her', i.e. provided for her. Amy was merely her agent. As this vague letter plays into Roxana's fears that she has murdered Susan, she writes again, demanding a description. From the description of the woman that comes in the second letter, Roxana says it could only be 'Amy and none but Amy' (264). She satisfies herself that Amy killed Susan, and secures evidence to prove it. However, we know that Susan has vowed not to be alone with Amy, and that Roxana is a woman of disguise. As with the murder of the

⁸⁷ Admittedly, this reading excludes the possibility that the typesetter was responsible for the hyphenation. However, due to the compatibility of this reading with the larger argument forwarded here, I would argue that Defoe intended for these words and phrases to be hyphenated.

jeweller, the reader must piece together the evidence for him/herself. The letter reports that Susan left with Amy in a coach (264). The most likely scenario is that Roxana sent Susan a message that she would be arriving in a coach, and that she was to come with her, but that she was not to tell the others in the household, as secrecy was of the essence. Roxana then stayed in the cab, dressed as Amy (perhaps waving at a member of the household when Susan left the house), to ensure that the people of the house believed that Susan left with Amy.

Following the apparent confirmation of Amy's guilt from these people, Roxana is able, on one level, to see Amy's discussion with the Quaker as expressing her intent to kill Susan. However, that part of Roxana knows that she is the murderer is evident in the oblique coded messages she leaves for Amy as she departs for Holland with her husband. In her discussion with the Quaker, to be relayed to Roxana, Amy also tells her mistress that, while she will not murder for Roxana, while she will not unnecessarily take the blame for murder (thus, she removes the body), she will take the blame for the murder if the body is discovered. She conveys this message to Roxana through the very act of speaking in terms of removing Susan 'out of the way', thereby implicating herself in Susan's disappearance. Acknowledging that she has understood Amy's message, as she departs from England, Roxana leaves orders for her not to follow her to Holland 'unless she gives full satisfaction to my Friend the Quaker, that she had not murth'd my child' (267). Amy does follow her to Holland, is reunited with Roxana, but she does not make the oath to the Quaker. Significantly, Roxana never asks Amy herself if she committed the murder. Amy comes because she knows that Roxana's coded message is 'come, but refuse to make a vow that you didn't kill Susan', i.e. provide further evidence that you are the murderer in case this secret ever does come to light. Roxana knows from her encounter with the Jewish jeweller that 'the most secret crimes are by the most unforeseen accidents, brought to life and discovered' (243).

In the abrupt conclusion that follows her account of Susan's disappearance, Roxana states that any repentance she feels is not sincere repentance but 'a consequence' of her 'misery'. While she has finally sought relief through confession and, in writing, has found a confessional outlet that is not prohibited by her Protestant faith, any guilt she feels is not transformed into true repentance. Seeing her initial sin as the first link in a chain leading to murder, Roxana's text confirms her sense of reprobation; she continues to maintain that 'without question, a woman ought rather to die, than prostitute her virtue and honour' (40-41). Defoe suggests that a full and frank

confession (which she does not make) may have altered this perception. But, as in the storm, her fear of the death penalty prevents a full confession. She presents lies, not truth, thus preventing the healing that confession offers. Her narrative – like Moll’s, but to a more disturbing degree – is ultimately symptomatic of a divided identity. On the one hand, she desires to confess and repent: on the other, as she believes she is damned, she is unable to see the spiritual value of confession, and refuses to sacrifice herself to the law.

In *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, Defoe complicates the idea of wilful sinning after conversion by showing how threats to survival compel his protagonist’s to commit major transgressions. He suggests that Calvinist spiritual autobiography is not an adequate forum for truth-telling. The emphasis placed on the narrator having to demonstrate election, and the idea that the converted did not commit sins, sabotages the confessional function of the form. Rather than once-off repentance at conversion, he advocates ongoing confession to allow the individual to unburden the conscience, and to bring the sinner back to the path of virtue. Defoe’s placing of hidden sins in these novels not only serves as the means to demonstrate the negative effects of not confessing sins, but also allows him to develop increasingly complex plots and narrative voices. In *Roxana* he brings the unreliability of the confessional narrator to a level that has rarely been surpassed in modern novels. Here, through the issue of mental illness, he further complicates ideas of wilful sinning. He blurs the line between what is reality and what is fantasy, between what is a sin of necessity – ensuring survival – and what is unjustifiably sinful. He also more forthrightly suggests that he places a value on Catholic confessional practices, which allow for the unburdening of the conscience of guilt; and suggests that, like the doctrine of reprobation, excessive penal systems prevent repentance.

Conclusion

This study has assessed continuities and contrasts between Protestant and Catholic discipline. The analyses of Jacobean revenge tragedies and spiritual autobiographies reveal that instilling socio-religious obedience was a central motive of Protestant confessional practices in England, but that in the early modern period there was increased resistance to confessional discipline. This was engendered by the Protestant repudiation of the authority of the father confessor, the emphasis on personal conscience, and the self-expressive, self-discovery and ‘truth’ demands of Calvinist spiritual autobiography. The analysis of confession in three works of fiction by Defoe suggests that lack of consolation in Protestant, particularly Calvinist, confessional practices, further differentiated the early modern confessional subject from his/her medieval counterpart.

The plays’ depictions of the demise of one confessional system and efforts by authority to develop replacement confessional modes in order to retain social, political and patriarchal control show a strong correlation with Foucault’s conception of the disciplinary functions of confession. Diehl has argued that depiction of Puritans in early modern plays may offer a means through which to develop Foucault’s analysis of modern discipline. He argues that:

[a]lthough [Foucault] locates the beginning of modern conceptions of discipline in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he never examines the disciplinary methods of the English puritans, although their reputation in their own time as “our English disciplinarians” suggests that their disciplinary practices would reward further study.¹

The plays discussed in this study highlight the confessional significance of English Puritan discipline. Foucault argues that confessional discipline was retained in evolving discipline practices. *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, I have demonstrated, emphasise the historical link between courts and confession; suggest that early modern legal practices were a new form of confessional discipline; and present early modern medical practices as supporting legal confessional discipline. Further study of Protestant socio-religious discipline in early modern English dramas may add additional ‘historical

¹ Diehl, ‘Disciplining Puritans and Players’, 84.

specificity' to Foucault's underdeveloped analysis of Protestant confession, and to his argument that confession is a central element of modern disciplinary methods.²

All three plays highlight that Calvinism also demanded female subjugation to patriarchal authority. Linking this to confession, they support Bernstein's argument that the 'cultural constructions of gender, that is, the equation of domination with masculinity and submission with femininity, are embedded in the rhetorical folds of confession'.³ In the context of portraying a shift in relationships between individuals and authority in the early modern period – brought about by upheavals in the traditional confessional system – the plays also portray increased resistance to confessional/patriarchal discipline.

Uncovering these plays' depictions of the confessional significance of patriarchal discipline allows issues of female rebellion and conformity in spiritual autobiography to be more clearly seen in relation to confessional discourse. Webster's play suggests that some Protestant women were keenly aware that confessional authority was a means to discipline and control female subjects and their sexuality. He further suggests that the Protestant emphasis on personal conscience led to less compliance. Isham's portrayal of and justification for her filial rebellion in her narrative validates these views. There is also a similarity between the Duchess's use of equivocation when hiding her desires and beliefs from confessional authority and Isham's reluctance to openly admit certain of her desires and beliefs in her narrative. Both evasions imply adverse consequences of revealing resistance to confessional and patriarchal authority in the early seventeenth century. This strongly suggests that expressions of resistance to confessional authority may be deeply buried in other confessional texts.

Norwood's text reveals that the development of conversion narratives both facilitated acquiescence to confessional discipline and provided avenues for self-expression which produced resistance to the brutal self-renunciation of Calvinist conversion. His narrative also shows that for some early modern individuals, Calvinism was an unappealing faith, but that the idea of reprobation could provoke conformity to Calvinism.

² Griffiths-Osborne argues that there is a 'paucity of historical and religious specificity' in Foucault's analysis of confession. 'Confession, the Reformation', 14.

³ Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, p. 2.

In *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* Defoe also suggests that, even for the most wayward character, the idea of reprobation could, in moments of crisis (Crusoe fearing death on the Island, Moll fearing death at Newgate) provoke conformity to Calvinism. With devastating irony, he then presents Calvinist confessional practices as leading to spiritual corruption. In *Moll Flanders* he depicts a symbiotic relationship between religious and secular authorities; between the law and confession. Before depicting Moll's conversion, he also posits that the idea of reprobation could lead to spiritual defeatism and criminality. Developing this idea in *Roxana*, here he also presents Calvinist theology and attitudes to confession as potentially provoking mental instability.

However, even when *Roxana*'s portrayal of psychosis and murder, uncovered in my analysis, is taken into account, it seems reductive to configure Roxana's transformation from chaste wife and mother to whore solely in terms of sinfulness provoked by feelings of reprobation. The similarities with Beatrice's radically divided identity in *The Changeling* – brought about by her unconscious assimilation of the anti-authoritarianism of Protestantism, while simultaneously remaining affected by confessional discourses of female obedience and sinfulness – suggest that the depictions of female resistance to confessional/patriarchal authority in the Jacobean plays may provide a point of departure for further examinations of the gendered dimensions of both Roxana's and Moll's 'sinful' lives.

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