RUIN AND REFORMATION IN SPENSER, SHAKESPEARE, AND MARVELL
Ruin and Reformation in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Marvell

STEWARD MOTTRAM
Acknowledgements

Books, like buildings, are never as easy to build as to design. Like buildings, the construction work often exceeds time and budgets, and like all best laid plans, can often go awry. This book has been no exception. It was originally conceived as a project on the influence of Gildas’s De excidio Britonum on early modern English and Welsh literature, the work for which first began in earnest towards the end of a two-year Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at Aberystwyth University in 2008–10. The generous support of the Leverhulme Trust enabled visits in 2009–10 to the British Library, London, the Huntington Library, California, and to Cambridge University Library, and the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge—a rich resource for work on Matthew Parker’s protestant interests in the pre-Saxon church, and the library in which the argument of Chapter 2—which explores Gildas’s influence, via Parker and his circle, on William Vallans and Edmund Spenser—took shape. My thanks to the generosity of the Leverhulme Trust, and to the support of staff at all the above libraries, and at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, whose collections helped me build my ‘Gildas project’ on firm theoretical foundations.

At Cambridge, I also benefited greatly from the friendship and intellectual conversation of Edward Wilson-Lee and other members of the Tudor Reading Group, with whom I shared my initial thoughts and ideas on William Vallans’s A Tale of Two Swannes in January 2010, and from the thoughts and comments of members of the Renaissance Graduate Seminar who attended my paper on Spenser’s Ruines of Time in December 2009. My thanks, also, to the comments of audience members at Cardiff University’s Shakespeare and Wales Symposium in April 2010, and at the Society for Renaissance Studies Conference in York in July 2010, before whom I delivered papers on my preliminary research for Chapter 3.

The project by this stage had already expanded beyond Gildas into something resembling its final focus on reformation iconoclasm and ruin creation, and these new ideas were cemented after my move in autumn 2010 to the University of Hull, where the Andrew Marvell archives at the Hull History Centre have since proved an irresistible attraction, providing rich resources for my final chapters, and pushing the parameters of the project still further into the seventeenth century. My increasing fascination with Marvell was helped by two events in 2014: by the award of an AHRC Early Career Leadership Fellowship to complete the book project and curate a public exhibition showcasing the Hull History Centre’s Marvell holdings, and by the visit to Hull in summer 2014 of Professor Nigel Smith, Marvell’s most recent editor and biographer, whose subsequent support for my work on Marvell, and for the annual Andrew Marvell Lecture at the University of Hull, I here gratefully acknowledge. I also want to take this opportunity to record my gratitude to Simon Wilson, the university archivist at the Hull History Centre, for his enthusiasm for the 2015 Andrew Marvell exhibition, and for my research interests in Marvell more generally.
If the Leverhulme Fellowship provided the intellectual scaffolding for this project, it was my AHRC Fellowship of 2014–15 that helped bring the building project of this book to a state of near completion, and my sincere gratitude to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for providing me with the headspace needed to research and write the final chapters. My thanks also to my editors at Oxford University Press, Jacqueline Baker and Eleanor Collins, and for the comments of the two anonymous readers for the Press, who offered not only warm support for the project, but also welcome suggestions on how to improve its conceptual framework and cross-disciplinary appeal—suggestions that have been instrumental to the shape and scope of the book, as this has developed since 2015 into the form it takes here.

The work of revision was made possible thanks to the generosity of the University of Hull, which awarded me a semester’s study leave for this purpose in autumn 2017. These revisions—like much of the book itself—were completed in the congenial surroundings of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. Thanks also to the many colleagues at Hull who have read and commented on drafts of various chapters—to Janet Clare, Jason Lawrence, Richard Meek, and other members of the university’s Andrew Marvell Centre. Thanks, too, to audience members who attended my papers on Spenser and Marvell at Lancaster (May 2015), Dublin (June 2015), Glasgow (July 2016), and at the AHRC Remembering the Reformation symposium at York in October 2016. Particular appreciation goes to Jamie Reid-Baxter and Willy Maley at Glasgow, for their enthusiasm for my work on Spenser and Scottish presbyterianism. Philip Schwyzer, at Exeter, has also kindly read and commented on material from this project, and on several occasions has provided me with drafts of his own unpublished work on monuments, ruins, and religious iconoclasm—itself a continued source of scholarly inspiration.

The conclusion of this book was inspired by my several visits in recent years to the church of All Saints’, Bolton Percy, which in the early 1650s was also Marvell’s local parish church. My thanks to the hospitality of all parishioners at Bolton Percy, and particularly to Alan Swain, Chairman of the Friends of All Saints’, and the church historian, Sarah Firm, both of whom gave me a warm welcome on a cold morning in the church in December 2017.

Early versions of some of the material in Chapters 2 and 3 have been previously published in *Spenser Studies*, 31/32 (2016/17): 533–56. © 2018 University of Chicago, and in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and the Borderers*, ed. Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Farnham, 2013), 169–83. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to reuse this material.

Finally, heartfelt thanks, love, and appreciation to my wife, Rebecca, and to our little family, which has doubled in size since this book first began, with the arrival of our two children, Teddy and Bea, in 2013 and 2016. I can’t imagine a greater privilege than parenthood, nor a more perfect complement to the solitude and cerebral activity of scholarship than a child’s tactile curiosity in, and unrelenting enthusiasm for, the things of this world. It is with a father’s love and admiration, therefore, that I dedicate this book to my two children—the worthy buildings to which, one day perhaps, the ruins contained in this book will sometime speak.

*Hull and Leeds*  
*June 2018*
## Contents

*List of Figures* ix

*Abbreviations and Conventions* xi

**Introduction—Ruin and Reformation: The Past as Prologue** 1

1. **Spenser, the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and the Decline of the Preacher’s Plough** 24
   - *The Shepheardes Calender* and the Language of the Plough 27
   - Planting Religion in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* 47

2. **Wondering at Ruins: Vallans, Spenser, and the Reformation of St Alban** 54
   - Vallans’s *A Tale of Two Swannes* 56
   - Spenser’s *The Ruines of Time* 72

3. **Warriors and Ruins: Loyalism, Rebellion, and Recusancy in Cymbeline’s Wales** 92
   - *Cymbeline*, Wales, and the Stuart Union of Crowns 95
   - The Essex Rising and Welsh Catholicism 108
   - *Love’s Martyr* and Catholic Loyalism 118
   - *Cymbeline* and the Call for Religious Toleration 120

4. ‘Where ruine must reforme’? John Denham’s *Coopers Hill* (1642) 132
   - *The Sophy* and the Earl of Strafford 137
   - *Coopers Hill* and the Cathedral Debates 147

5. **Cloistered Virtue: Nun Appleton Priory and Presbyterianism in Marvell’s *Upon Appleton House* (1651)** 165
   - *Upon Appleton House*: Priory Ruins and Presbyterian Satire 171
   - Thomas Edwards’s *Gangraena* and English Presbyterianism 181
   - Gardening Eden: Marvell’s Fairfax and the Governorship of Hull 187

    **Conclusion** 197

*Bibliography* 209

*Index* 231
List of Figures


3.2. Inigo Jones, designs for *Prince Henry’s Barriers* (1610). Scene 2: St George’s Portico. © Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by permission of Chatsworth Settlement Trustees. 103


5.1. Wenceslaus Hollar, Map of Hull (c.1640). U DDMM/33/8. Reproduced by permission of Hull University Archives, Hull History Centre. 169


C.1. Civil war carvings upon a chancel stall (fifteenth century), All Saints’ Church, Bolton Percy, North Yorkshire. Photo credit: Stewart Mottram. 198

C.2. East window (fifteenth century), All Saints’ Church, Bolton Percy, North Yorkshire. Photo credit: Stewart Mottram. 200

C.3. Green man roof boss (fifteenth century), All Saints’ Church, Bolton Percy, North Yorkshire. Photo credit: Stewart Mottram. 201
Abbreviations and Conventions

REFERENCE WORKS

CSP Calendar of State Papers
OED Oxford English Dictionary

JOURNALS

BJJ Ben Jonson Journal
BLJ The British Library Journal
EHR English Historical Review
ELH English Literary History
ELR English Literary Renaissance
EMLS Early Modern Literary Studies
HLQ Huntington Library Quarterly
MLN Modern Language Notes
MLQ Modern Language Quarterly
MLR Modern Language Review
N&Q Notes & Queries
PLL Papers on Language and Literature
PQ Philological Quarterly
RES Review of English Studies
RQ Renaissance Quarterly
SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900
TLS Times Literary Supplement

I have retained original spelling and typography in all quotations but have expanded contractions by supplying omissions in square brackets.

I take the year to begin on 1 January, but I follow my sources whenever quotations or printed material give dates in the old style, i.e. dating the start of the year from Lady Day (25 March). In these cases, I give the date in the old style, but supply the new-style date in brackets.
... (may no such storm
Fall on our times, where ruin must reform)

John Denham, *Coopers Hill* (1642)
Introduction
Ruin and Reformation: The Past as Prologue

The final act of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (c.1594) opens with the Goth army encamped outside Rome under their Roman general, Lucius Andronicus. A ‘lusty Goth’ soldier enters leading the fugitive Aaron and his baby, whom we learn had been hiding in the most unlikely of locations:

Renowned Lucius, from our troops I strayed
To gaze upon a ruinous monastery,
And as I earnestly did fix mine eye
Upon the wasted building, suddenly
I heard a child cry underneath a wall.¹

Much has been written on what Helga Duncan calls ‘this famously anachronistic’ reference, and one can hardly blame Lucius’s ‘lusty Goth’ for straying to gaze on the anomaly of a Christian edifice within a play set in pagan Rome.² But if ruinous monasteries were remarkable within the classical landscape of *Titus Andronicus*, they were sights familiar to Shakespeare’s contemporaries in the late sixteenth century. The dissolution of the monasteries left an indelible scar on the landscape of England and Wales: some 645 abbeys, at William Camden’s reckoning, were ruinated in the late 1530s. A further ninety colleges, 110 religious hospitals, and 2,374 chantries and guild chapels were suppressed under the Chantry Acts of 1545 and 1547.³ Travelling around England and Wales between 1535 and 1543, John Leland witnessed at first hand the effect of the dissolutions on communities across the realm. At Worcester, a hospital for the relief of ‘dyvers marchant men . . . fawlyn in decaye and age’ had been ‘suppressyd’, and now ‘a clothiar dwellythe in it’, while to the north of the city lay the ruins of a convent, ‘now suppressyd, the churche clene rasyd downe, and a ferme place made of the resydewe of the buildings’.⁴ As Cathy Shrank notes of Leland’s *Itinerary*, ‘a subtext of devastation lies beyond the understated past tenses and attention paid to unemotive particulars’.⁵

³ Camden’s statistics are recorded in John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine* (London, 1611), 778. The actual number of religious houses suppressed in the 1530s was closer to 800. See A. G. Dickens (ed.), *Tudor Treatises*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society 125 (Leeds, 1959), 35.
The trauma of dissolution was not only confined to Leland’s generation. John Stow was still capturing its wanton destructiveness in 1598 when, writing of Elsing Spittle Priory in Cripplegate, London, he lists ‘the monuments that were in this church defaced’, before describing the priory’s transformation into ‘a dwelling house’: ‘the church yard is a garden plotte, and a faire gallerie on the cloister: the lodgings for the poore are translated into stabling for horses’. Stow’s emphasis on the ‘translation’ of ecclesiastical property for domestic use exposes the rubble of dissolution hidden beneath the surface of London’s rebuilt and repurposed abbeys and priories, in the process reminding readers of ruins no longer visible in London’s late Elizabethan cityscape but discernible only as textual remnants on the page. This drive to preserve the memory of ruins on paper anticipates the spate of antiquarian studies of churches and monasteries in the early seventeenth century, studies sparked, Margaret Aston writes, by a sense of nostalgia for Britain’s monastic past: ‘And with nostalgia came invigorated historical activity’. It was ‘by Inke and paper’, as William Dugdale notes in the preface to his History of St Pauls (1658), that antiquarians hoped to preserve ‘the Shadows’ of ecclesiastical structures ‘so neer unto ruine’. Ruins were thus remembered and reconstructed as paper monuments—a process exemplified by the publication in 1655 of the first volume of Dodsworth and Dugdale’s monumental Monasticon Anglicanum. A comprehensive history of English and Welsh monasteries, Monasticon Anglicanum was also a condemnation of ‘their dissolutions and ruine, which gave the greatest blow to Antiquities that ever England had’. Critics traditionally approach Renaissance interest in monastic ruins as an offshoot of the cult of antiquarianism amongst Camden and his contemporaries. Early modern antiquarians developed a ‘sensitivity to anachronism’, Peter Burke argues, born from new-found recognition of the ““differentness” of the past”. Yet as Jonathan Gil Harris reminds us, historical artefacts inhabit not only the past but multiple periods from that past. They are thus not just anachronic but ‘polychronic’, in that objects typically inhabit more than one historical period at any one time. The stones of a ruined monastery are several billion years old, but their ornamentation is the work of medieval stonemasons, their ruination of reformation iconoclasts. Angus Vine talks of the ‘resurrective impulse’ behind antiquarianism, but if antiquarians resurrect the past, then which of each monastery’s polychronic pasts should they aim to reconstruct: their pre-reformation history as medieval religious houses, or their post-reformation life as ruins? The answer depended largely on the religious sympathies of antiquarians themselves, for if the ruins of monasteries

---

8 William Dugdale, The History of St Pauls Cathedral (London, 1658), A3v.
Introduction

were windows on the past, theirs was a past coloured by the confessional biases of the viewer. In *Britannia*, Camden balances nostalgia for these ‘Monuments, of [Christian] piety’ with protestant moralizing on the ‘weeds [that] grew out over-rankly’ in these ‘seed-gardens [of] Christian Religion’, a combination of antiquarian pity and protestant piety even starker in Speed, who regrets ‘the destruction of so many beautiful Monasteries’, even as he compares monks to ‘false Prophets . . . hauing stings like vnto Scorpions’.

The ‘resurrective impulse’ reflected in Renaissance writing about ruins was thus motivated by both nostalgia and morality, a desire to translate the monuments of history into what John Davies of Hereford calls ‘the Monuments of sinne’. As William Lambarde writes of Canterbury’s ruins in his *Perambulation of Kent* (1576):

as I can not on the one side, but in respecte of [the] places the[m] selues, pitie & lament this general desolation[.] . . . So on the other side, considering the maine Seas of sinne and iniquitie, wherein the worlde (at those dayes) was almost whole drenched, I must needs take cause, highly to prayse God, that hath thus mercifully in our age deliuered vs, disclosed Satan, vnmasked these Idoles, dissolved the Synagoges, and raced to the grounde all Monumentes of building, erected to superstition and ungodlynesse.

Lambarde tempers ‘pitie’ for Canterbury’s monasteries with ‘prayse’ for their ruination, arguing that the dissolution had delivered England from ‘the maine Seas of sinne’. It was not only catholic sin, however, that writers saw reflected in ecclesiastical ruins. Lambarde’s triumphalism is more muted in other, more overtly nostalgic responses to the monasteries by the recusants and ‘conformist fellow travellers’ whom Eamon Duffy discusses in relation to the ‘bare ruined choirs’ of Shakespeare’s sonnet 73. Duffy sets ‘Shakespeare’s one-line evocation of the ruins of England’s monastic past’ within the context of a range of writers from the 1590s whom, he argues, used nostalgia for England’s catholic monasteries as a form of traditionalist protest against protestant sins. As structures that stand simultaneously for England’s pre- and post-reformation pasts, monastic ruins are inherently polychronic—examples of what Gil Harris calls ‘palimpsested time’, whereby the palimpsest of a past erased by succeeding generations stubbornly shows through. Palimpsests reflect an ideological battleground between two (or more) competing versions of the past, Gil Harris writes, but he notes that palimpsests need not necessarily speak for the victors of that ideological contest. Duffy’s discussion suggests that, as palimpsests, monastic ruins were also ‘read’ in the early modern period in ways that privileged the catholic ‘under-text’, challenging Lambarde’s triumphalism by reminding readers of religious alternatives to the protestant status quo.

---


17 Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter*, especially 13–19 (15).
Huw Griffiths has written of ruins as ‘almost necessarily, ironic’ structures in English Renaissance literature—fragments of a ‘lost, broken and ruined’ past that ‘disclose failure in place of achievement’.¹ Like Gil Harris’s palimpsest, Griffiths’s ruin is the remnant of a past that refuses erasure in the present. Its ruinousness is thus a form of ‘radical untimeliness’, or anachronism, Griffiths writes, reminding early modern readers of a superseded past in ways that problematize the ‘narratives of national destiny’ that English Renaissance literature constructs.¹ Griffiths emphasizes the centrality of ruins to any discussion of the links between English literature and English national identity in the early modern period, and while ecclesiastical ruins go unmentioned by Griffiths, his account nevertheless offers a useful starting point for considering how the ruinous monasteries of Renaissance literature might bring their own ‘radical untimeliness’ to bear on narratives of England’s protestant destiny in the long century following the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII.

Reading representations of monastic ruins in early modern English writing reveals that it was not only recusants, and their ‘conformist fellow travellers’, who exploited the ruin’s unruly potential. Untimely reminders of England’s pre-reformation past also leave their mark on literature from across the confessional divide. In John Webster’s Duchess of Malfi (c.1614), Antonio enters with Delio upon ‘the ruins of an ancient abbey’ in Renaissance Milan:

ANTONIO I do love these ancient ruins: We never tread upon them but we set Our foot upon some reverend history; And questionless, here in this open court, Which now lies naked to the injuries Of stormy weather, some men lie interred Loved the church so well, and gave so largely to ‘t, They thought it should have canopied their bones Till doomsday. But all things have their end; Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men, Must have like death that we have.

ECHO Like death that we have.²

Antonio approaches these abbey ruins as might an antiquarian, noting their value as a window on ‘reverend history’, and comparing the ruined building to the bodies of those benefactors of the church who lie buried beneath his feet. But the ruins themselves refuse their role as lifeless remnants of a bygone age, denying Antonio’s claim that ruins ‘have like death that we have’ in a defiant echo of these, Antonio’s final words. Echoes are the auditory equivalent of visual reflections, as the role of


¹ Griffiths, ‘Sonnet in Ruins’, paras 26, 33.

² John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, ed. John Russell Brown (Manchester, 1997), 5.3.2; 5.3.9–19.
Echo in Ovid’s myth of Narcissus makes clear. And in this particular echo, Antonio not only hears his final words repeated; like Narcissus, he also sees as in a mirror his future fate reflected, for Antonio’s death at Bosola’s hands is the subject of the play’s next scene. The echo that brings the ruined abbey to life is, then, the same echo that foretells Antonio’s imminent death. Antonio sees monastic ruins as windows on the past, but Webster’s ruins demand we see them as prospective mirrors on the future, reminding Antonio, and Webster’s audience, that he, and we, will also fall to ruin.

Webster’s ruins speak of mortality, but the monastic ruins of early modern English literature also cast their prospective mirrors beyond the ruin of individuals to offer a purview on the future ruin of protestant England and its post-reformation church. It is with this Shakespearean idea of the past as prologue that Ruin and Reformation is particularly concerned. The five chapters that follow trace the legacy of monastic dissolution in early modern literature, from the establishment of the national church in 1534 to the disestablishment of state religion by the Cromwellian protectorate in 1653. But rather than focus on monastic ruins as windows on history, whether as objects of antiquarian curiosity, or polemical historiography, this study uncovers an alternative tradition, exploring writers—including Spenser, Shakespeare, and Marvell—who view the monuments of England’s catholic past as a prologue to further acts of reformation and religious violence in the protestant present. It is not only in recusant writing reviving memories of medieval catholicism, therefore, that monastic ruins find representation in ways deliberately designed to unsettle and provoke. The same ruins that for Lambarde confirmed the righteousness of the English reformation could also reflect protestant fears over the break-up of England’s post-reformation church. The present study therefore has important implications for our understanding of the experience of reformation in early modern England and Wales and its reflection in English literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The dissolution of the monasteries marked a foundational moment for protestant England, its reformation conquest of Rome. But the violence that the agents of dissolution had visited on the religious houses of England and Wales would be revisited across the following century in the further acts of reformation that were threatened or enacted upon the post-reformation church. If the monastic ruins of English literature celebrate the dissolution of medieval catholicism, then they also gesture towards the fear of future dissolution for the church established on the ruins of England’s religious past. The chapters that follow explore how Shakespeare and his contemporaries returned to this originary moment of English reformation in order to give expression to fears, threats, or acts of further religious violence in the present.

* * *

That England reinvented itself after the Henrician reformation as a little world divided from the world—Virgil’s *penitus toto divisos orbe*—is a commonplace of critical thinking, and Shakespeare and his contemporaries are often credited with forging new, national metaphors of identity on the anvils of English literature.
In a celebrated formulation, Shakespeare reimagines England in glorious isolation from Catholic Europe—‘a sceptred isle’, shielded by its ‘moat defensive’ against ‘the envy of less happier lands’.[21] Shakespeare’s concern with boundaries at first gives England the appearance of reassuring homogeneity: England is defined metonymically by its ‘royal throne’, then metaphorically as a ‘seat of Mars’, ‘other Eden’, ‘precious stone’, and so on. But as the metaphors multiply, ‘this England’ seems increasingly in danger of dissolving into semantic plurality, and these suspicions are confirmed when we look closer at Shakespeare’s England and find, not just a royal throne, but a land ‘leas’d out’ to local variety.[22] The England that is described in Richard II ‘was wont to conquer others’, just as its symbolism as a ‘sceptred isle’ also lays imaginative claim to Britain’s Welsh and Scottish coastlines. But the ‘moat defensive’ that surrounds Shakespeare’s England is ultimately unable to defend Englishness from its ‘shameful conquest of itself’.[23] In Richard II, English hubris erodes with the recognition, not just of external threats to its identity, but of the dangerous plurality within.

In Richard II, Shakespeare’s John of Gaunt struggles to define a kingdom, not a church, but the same sea walls that surround the English nation imagined in early modern literature also encircle its new national, Protestant church—a fact that points to the close cousinage of English Protestantism and Englishness in the early modern period. Church and nation travelled together in post-reformation England and Wales under the single rule of the reigning sovereign, and with churchgoing enforced by act of parliament under Elizabeth I, regular attendance on Sundays and holydays became a marker of one’s national loyalties, as Elizabethan approaches to recusancy as a crime of civil disobedience rather than religious dissent reflect.[25] Those who absented themselves from the communion table therefore absented themselves from the political community of the nation. Translating biblical tropes of the church as a ‘garden enclosed’, the pre-reformation church in England was characterized in medieval literature as an ‘island garden’—a hortus conclusus, Lynn Staley writes, surrounded by the sea as a wall. The reformation gave new impetus to these ecclesiastical metaphors, and the island image of the English church is implicit in Lambard’s above characterization of monastic dissolution as the means by which God had delivered Protestant England and Wales from the maine Seas of sinne and iniquitie’. Lambard’s metaphor relies on a reader’s foreknowledge of the island garden as an image for the church, yet whereas the

[21] Richard II, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge, 2003), 2.1.40, 48, 49 (pp. 96–7). These same metaphors of insularity also carried a colonial charge. As Willy Maley writes, the English reformation sounded a retreat from mainland Europe that initiated a ‘retreat into Britain’, ‘a westward and northward expansion of Englishness’. See Willy Maley, Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature (Basingstoke, 2003), 12; also, Philip Schwyzer, Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales (Cambridge, 2004), 5.


[25] Churchgoing was enforced by the 1559 Act of Uniformity (1 Eliz. cap. 2). For government policy on recusants, see Alexandra Walsham, Church Papists: Catholicism, conformity and confessional polemic in early modern England (Woodbridge, 1993), 11.

cloistered gardens of monasteries had acted in medieval times as an image of England’s ecclesiastical hortus conclusus in microcosm, here the medieval metaphor is inverted, and it is on the ruins of monasteries that Lambarde constructs the strong sea walls of England’s protestant church.² As trophies of reformation, the crumbling edifices of monastic ruins paradoxically reinforce the walls of Lambarde’s protestant island. But monastic ruins also proved unstable metaphors for English protestantism—as unstable as the fabric of ruinous monasteries themselves. England’s break with Rome inaugurated a new era of anxiety, as escalating tensions with catholics in Britain and Ireland jostled with puritan unrest within the national church—a crucible of religious conflict that exploded in the wars of the three kingdoms of the mid-seventeenth century.

Carol Wiener turns the ‘sceptred isle’ of Richard II on its head, redefining Shakespeare’s England as ‘the beleaguered isle’, and arguing that the island metaphors of England’s literary self-image reflect, not English smugness, but English fears over the threat of catholicism at home and abroad.²⁸ Wiener’s analysis of an English protestant nation forged in the fires of anti-catholic fear is certainly evocative and has since been developed in the work of Peter Lake and others.²⁹ Helen Hackett, for example, is among several contributors to the volume Region, Religion and English Renaissance Literature to explore tensions in England between catholic regionalism—Hackett speaks of ‘local “islands” of Catholicism’—and the centralizing imperatives of the national church and state.³⁰ But catholicism was not the only threat beleaguering post-reformation England. Religious regionalism was as much a feature of England’s national church as of its relationship with regions of catholicism in the early modern period. Wiener’s argument that ‘puritanism’ represented a difference in degree, not kind, to ‘English mainstream anti-Catholicism’ fails, in this sense, to account for the growing divisiveness of puritan non-conformity within the national church under Elizabeth and the Stuarts. Lambarde’s metaphor offers the reassuring image of a wall protecting English protestantism from ‘the maine Seas’ of catholic iniquity. But what happened when the combined pressures within and without the national church became too great a burden for England’s sea walls to bear? Like Lambarde, the Elizabethan minister, Michael Sherbrook, vicar of Wickersley, near Rotherham, from 1567 to his death in or around 1610, also defined the monasteries in triumphalist terms,

²⁷ Staley, Island Garden, 29–51, and especially Staley’s discussion of Cistercian writers, 46–8.
as monuments to ‘superstition and Idolatry’. But for Sherbrook, these same monasteries were also monitorys for English protestants under Elizabeth I.³¹ As God had punished the papists with the protestants, Sherbrook writes in ‘The Fall of Religious Houses’ (completed c.1591), so ‘hath the Puritans risen from among the Protestants to their Overthrow; if God permit the Puritans to have as good Success against them, as the Protestants had against the Papists’,³² To Lambarde’s anti-catholic triumphalism, Sherbrook adds a note of anti-puritan paranoia. As unruly metaphors for English protestant identity in early modern literature, monastic ruins embodied these anxieties, their crumbling edifices emblematic of cracks already emerging in the edifice of English protestantism in the century after England’s break with Rome.

Recent decades have witnessed an ‘archipelagic turn’ in the study of English Renaissance literature, inspired by the ‘new British history’ of the late 1970s. Nowadays, we look beyond Anglo-English literature, and Anglocentric concerns, to acknowledge England’s imaginative claim to ‘this sceptred isle’ as merely one chapter in what John Kerrigan calls ‘the long, braided histories played out across the British-Irish archipelago’.³³ These devolutionary energies have renewed interest in the Anglophone literatures of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, as well as in the politics of British-Irish state-formation—Spenser and Ireland, Shakespeare and union, Marvell and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms—that we now recognize behind ostensibly ‘English’ texts like The Faerie Queene, the Henriad, and ‘An Horatian Ode’.³⁴ But while archipelagic criticism has done much to recognize the richness and complexity of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish cultures, a flipside of this devolutionary focus has been a concomitant tendency to overlook the complexities of Englishness in the early modern period, all too often reduced to a single preoccupation with colonialism. Kerrigan has spoken of an ‘Englishness... often taken as given’ in early modern studies: a stable, unchallenged identity against which critics construct the complexities of Britain’s Celtic cultures.³⁵ As Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton argue, the study of Shakespeare and England has been ‘acknowledged more in the breach than the observance’, with England—and Shakespeare—complacently identified with a cultural elitism and ‘a colonizing

³⁵ Kerrigan, Archipelagic English, 12.
will to dominance within the nations of the British archipelago’. But criticism is awakening to the realization of how far our approach to England’s ‘colonizing will to dominance’ has been distorted by what Kerrigan calls the ‘Anglocentric and Victorian imperial paradigms’ of past generations of critics all too ready to see England’s future destiny as the administrative centre of the British empire reflected in the spectred isles of Shakespeare’s England. Having devoted literary criticism onto England’s British neighbours in the early modern period, practitioners of the ‘archipelagic turn’ might now turn this same devolutionary lens to the study of England as it was imagined by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. ‘What one discovers’, Kerrigan writes, ‘is that “England” was a shifting entity, open to reconceptualization, defined against and meshed with its neighbours’.

One field to recognize the complexity of early modern Englishness is the terrain of church history, where historians tracing the development of English protestantism across the ‘long reformation’ of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have come to emphasize the plurality of confessional identities within the established church. ‘Anglicanism’, as Nicholas Tyacke reminds us, is ‘a nineteenth-century coinage’, but critics are recognizing to what extent the ethos of the via media it describes was also anachronistic in the early modern period. Seen in this light, the national church comes to be characterized, not by uniformity but by the shifting boundaries of orthodoxy and conformity, a movement from the centre to the margins, where what Alexandra Walsham calls the ‘lively cocktail’ of permissible beliefs and practices were contained within a church whose membership was defined by the limits of acceptability. This was a church grounded on ‘often deliberately ambiguous national policies and foundation documents’, Peter Lake and Michael Questier argue, and policed at the local level by a variety of bishops with a variety of beliefs.

So as the homogeneity of England’s homogenizing, colonizing culture is now emerging as the subject of closer scrutiny in archipelagic studies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, a similar lens applied to the field of church history has enabled historians to see beyond what Lake and Questier call the myth of an ‘ideologically stable Anglicanism’ towards recognition of the extent of plurality and diversity

36 Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (eds), This England, That Shakespeare: New angles on Englishness and the bard (Farnham, 2010), 1–20 (1, 4).
38 Kerrigan, Archipelagic English, 12.
within the established church. These developments in our understanding of established religion in England and Wales have in turn helped inaugurate a ‘religious turn’ in recent approaches to English Renaissance literature, one that applies the ‘nuanced vocabulary and framework’ of religious historians to a conversation about how faith—in all its early modern permutations—represents itself in literature. The value of applying a more ‘nuanced vocabulary’ to our discussion of faith in fiction is clear if we turn to a well-thumbed example—George Herbert’s seemingly straightforward celebration of ‘Anglicanism’ in his poem, ‘The British Church’. Herbert locates ‘the British Church’ snugly—and, for some critics, all too snugly—between the hills of Roman Catholicism and the valley of Genevan Calvinism, a middle ground or ‘mean’ between ‘Outlandish’ religious extremes and one the poem defines by the contours of Britain’s island coastline, whose surrounding seas combine with God’s grace, Herbert writes, ‘to double-moat thee’—And none but thee. The poem cannot be confidently dated, but its preoccupation with the double moat of the British church resembles Herbert’s Latin poems from the early 1620s. The sixth epigram of Lucas, ‘In pacem Britannicam’, also alludes to the encircling metaphors of water and Word in its equally smug celebration of British peace at a time of escalating conflict in mainland Europe: ‘Though she is always in the sea, [She has no waves] Sit licet in pelago semper, sine fluctibus illa est’, Herbert writes of England here. To storm-tossed Europe, ‘In pacem Britannicam’ continues,

The sea is the cause of shipwreck to them;  
To England, a source of strength—  
And water, which wrecks walls, is itself a wall.  
For sure Religion flowers here, the Queen of Peace,  
And you, Christ, move upon our waters.

42 Gillian Woods, Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions (Oxford, 2013), 1–24 (5)  
44 ‘The British Church’ is not in the Williams Manuscript (Dr Williams’s Library, London, MS Jones B 62), which contains fewer than half the poems found in Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Tanner 307, a folio MS of The Temple containing all poems printed in the first (1633) edition and probably compiled at Little Gidding after Herbert’s death. The Williams Manuscript, which contains his autograph revisions to poems, also contains two of Herbert’s three collections of Latin poems, Lucas and Passio discerpta. Internal allusions in Lucas to Urban VIII (pope between 1623 and 1644) point to 1623 as a terminus a quo for the Latin component of the Williams MS, but Amy M. Charles (ed.) (The Williams Manuscript of George Herbert’s Poems: A facsimile reproduction (Delmar, NY, 1977), xv–xxviii) has argued for a much earlier date in the mid-1610s for some of the manuscript’s English poems. It is therefore difficult to assign a terminus a quo for those English poems, including ‘The British Church’, which do not appear in the Williams MS. With the manuscript’s poems dateable to between the mid-1610s and mid-1620s (or later), a terminus a quo for ‘The British Church’ would necessarily need to be equally broad. For further discussion see Charles (ed.), The Williams Manuscript, who includes a table comparing the content of the two manuscripts (xxxiii–xxxv), and Wilcox (ed.), English Poems, xxxvii–xl, who assigns a date ‘in the period from 1615 to 1625’ for the composition of the Williams poems (xxxvii).  
Introduction

During Herbert’s time, Great Britain’s islands and the ocean that surrounded them were often referred to as “pelago semper.” This term, from Virgil’s “Eclogues,” suggests a place of exile and separation from the mainland. In his poems, Herbert often turns to the sea as a metaphor for the separation between England and Scotland, and the ocean serves as a physical barrier to the crossing of religious boundaries. However, the sea is also a symbol of his love for ceremonialism, as seen in his poem “To the Sunne: Essays on George Herbert,” where he describes the “sacred ritual” of the English church.

Throughout ‘In pacem Britannicam’ it is Anglia, not Britannia, that is the subject of Herbert’s praise, albeit England as conceived in archipelagic terms as an island ‘in pelago semper’—an England writ large as Great Britain. This island vision of England also operates in ‘The British Church’, the title of which, Helen Wilcox suggests, conceals Herbert’s concerns with the established Church of England and its place in Europe’s religious landscape. Yet while ‘The British Church’ exiles religious radicalism to ‘Outlandish’ regions in mainland Europe, the extremes that Rome and Geneva represent in the poem are in reality no more ‘Outlandish’ than Herbert’s ‘British Church’ is British: both extremes had a home in England and the English protestant church in Herbert’s lifetime. The topography of Herbert’s poem emphasizes England’s distance from Rome and Geneva and focuses attention on the (British) sea walls that safeguard and surround the (English) church. But Herbert’s fantasy of a remote, moated church works against other visions of English protestantism elsewhere in Herbert’s poetry that contemplate regions of religious radicalism far closer to home.

F. E. Hutchinson argues that the accent on ‘British’ in ‘The British Church’ allows for inclusion of the Scottish episcopal church within Herbert’s vision of a British protestant via media, ‘Neither too mean, nor yet too gay’. But it is difficult to reconcile Hutchinson’s pan-British reading of the religious ‘mean’ Herbert celebrates with the tone of Herbert’s epigrams, in Musae responsoriae (c.1620), against Andrew Melville and Scottish presbyterianism. As his epigram ‘Ad Scotiam’ makes clear, Herbert identifies Scotland, not with its bishops, but with what he calls the ‘radical religion’ of presbyterianism, a radicalism that Herbert fears will ignite a nation ‘lying | Stretched out under Arctic cold’—[quae frigente iaces porrecta sub Arcto]’. Herbert’s attack in ‘The British Church’ on what Leah Marcus calls ‘Genevan bareness’—its anti-ceremonialism—echoes his attack in Musae responsoriae on Andrew Melville’s demands, in Anti-tami-cami-categoria, for an English church stripped of what Herbert calls its ‘sacred ritual’ ([Ritibus . . . Sacris]), its fondness for crosses, music, and clerical vestments. It is precisely this English love of ceremonialism that Herbert defends in ‘The British Church’.

---

66 ‘In pacem Britannicam’, ll. 5–8.
Church’, contrasting the ‘Beautie’ of the English liturgy with Rome’s ‘painted’ and Geneva’s ‘undrest’ appearance respectively.² Herbert uses the same trope of nakedness to attack the anti-ceremonialism of Scottish presbyterianism in the twenty-fifth epigram of Musae Responsoriae. Denuded of its ceremonies, the epigram compares Satan’s potential conquest of Scottish presbyterianism in the present to Julius Caesar’s historical conquest of the unclothed Britons he encountered on England’s southern shores in the first century BC.

Long ago, when Caesar
First set foot from his ships
Upon our isle,
Noting all the natives of the place
Living without clothes, he cried,
‘O victory is mine!
It will be simple,
It is assured!’

[Cum primûm ratibus suis
nostram Caesar ad insulam
olim appelleret, intuens
omnes indigenas loci
viuentes sine vestibus,]
O Victoria, clamitat,
certa, ac perfacilis mihi!⁵³

As Caesar had conquered the Britons, Satan would conquer the similarly denuded Scottish kirk. But the Caesarean analogy also implies anxieties about the level of protection England’s own sea walls afford, anticipating that Scottish presbyterianism could, Caesar-like, also ‘set foot’ on England’s shores. These anxieties are realized in ‘Church-rents’, where Herbert speaks of the ‘north-winde’ of presbyterianism fanning factions already within English protestantism and compares these ‘fretting jealousies’ to woodworm that did ‘worm and work’ their way into the timbers of the church, setting in motion a process of ruination that England’s sacrilegious ‘neighbours’ in Scotland had merely exacerbated: ‘Then did your sev’ral parts unloose and start: | Which when your neighbours saw, like a north-winde, | They rushed in, and cast them in the dirt’.⁵⁴ Herbert’s ‘British church’ celebrates a double-moated, sea-walled enclave in glorious isolation from the religious extremes of mainland Europe, but such a vision sits uneasily with the acknowledgement—in ‘Church-rents and schisms’ and the Latin poems from the early 1620s—that extremes and factions were worming their way into the edifice of the English church. Patrick Collinson’s work on the latent presbyterian, even congregationalist, character of Elizabethan puritan beliefs and practices reminds

---

² ‘The British Church’, ll. 4, 11, 12.