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Clothed With Salvation:
Pastoral Power and Eighteenth-Century Anglican Satire

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ABSTRACT

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Critics who work with eighteenth-century texts have long wrestled with the place of religion in the literary archive. *Clothed with Salvation: Pastoral Power and Eighteenth-Century Anglican Satire* approaches this topic from two perspectives: first from the recent academic debate over postsecularism, and second through the lens of pastoral power, a transitional concept developed by Michel Foucault in his 1977-1978 lectures at the Collège de France.

Eighteenth-century literary studies is an especially promising field for bringing the two together. In the last thirty years, the discipline witnessed an explosion of work arising from the adoption of powerful analytical frameworks, the culturalization of its interests, and the expansion of its traditional archives. Moreover, there is now widespread familiarity with most other aspects of Foucault’s genealogy of modernity. In bringing together the postsecular and the pastoral, I argue that literary articulations of pastoral power became particularly productive in Anglican satire when writers responded to the shift from naïve religion to reflective religion.

The dissertation advances a series of arguments about the literary dimensions of pastoral power that accompanied this change. It demonstrates (1) how the post-Civil War seventeenth-century anxiety over the pastorate colored the satirical representation of naïve religious belief; (2) how shepherd-flock and citizen-state games appear in tropes and figures of sovereignty and unrest during the Restoration; (3) how the workings of pastoral power made possible a satirical critique of contesting religious belief; (4) and how the typical techniques and strategies of pastoral technology became decoupled from salvation and repurposed in the satirical novel. Individual chapters explore these themes in the work of Samuel Butler, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne.
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Introduction

Critics who work with eighteenth-century texts have long wrestled with the place of religion in the literary archive. In 2002, Paula McDowell drew attention to one of the major critical hurdles when she noted that “While revisionist historians increasingly argue for the continued centrality of religion as a social and cultural force, literary studies and cultural criticism remain strikingly unaffected by these developments. Despite a few promising signs, religious writing remains marginalized in our literary histories and cultural studies models, its place in our field of vision directly inverse to its actual importance in the period we study.” In recent years, the marginalization of religious writing has persisted, although works have appeared to redress it. Contemporary scholars such as Misty T. Anderson, Martha F. Bowden, and Carol Stewart have all explored the role that religion played in the eighteenth-century imagination, each arguing in provocative ways for its centrality to literary production. Nonetheless, McDowell’s observation is as salient in 2016 as it was in 2002: most critics have remained less interested in religious works than in texts which can appear to bear the earmarks of a nascent modernity, and this neglect extends to canonical works that have explicitly religious themes. As Alison Conway and Corrinne Harol have recently argued, “religion (including secularization) is still a relatively limited and segregated aspect of scholarship on eighteenth-century culture: there are those (relatively few) critics who study it and those who do not.”

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few years is a new call to reframe the problematic of eighteenth-century religion through the lens of postsecularism.

If McDowell mobilized her claim in terms of the religious and the secular, both terms have come under renewed scrutiny. Increasingly critics who research the early modern period—and critics who work with literary texts from the eighteenth century—acknowledge that the nexus of religion and literature is more problematic than the simple neglect of certain varieties of text. There is a growing agreement that the problem is intrinsic to many critical models that unintentionally inscribe into our critical discussions intractable elements of a secularization thesis that nearly everyone wants to reject. Recovering the religious dimension of eighteenth-century texts has thus become less about recognizing a historical fact—namely that the British in the eighteenth century were on the whole very religious—than recognizing having perhaps gotten much about the place of religion wrong in the master narratives that orient research agendas. In a discussion of how thoroughly embedded in secularism most thought about literature is, Brian Cummings has recently argued that “Secularity was understood to be the inaugural moment of literature’s formation, a defining aspect of its identity. Literature was held to be a fundamentally secular form, and its emergence was explained in terms of the transition from a religious culture.” If Cummings is correct, as I believe he is, then as long as critics insulate the category of “literature” from categories associated with the non-secular, significant aspects of religious modernity will remain elusive. Cummings adds, “if religion and secularity turn out instead to have porous boundaries all along, everything we describe in historical writing via the assumption of a dialectic between the religious and the secular has to be rethought.”

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in complete agreement with Cummings and other critics who want to find ways of examining this porosity within literature.

Fortunately, there has been in the last decade a vigorous interdisciplinary interest in the religious origins of modernity and a reexamination of the question of secularism. Perhaps most representative of this postsecular critical trend has been the lively debate engendered by Charles Taylor’s *The Secular Age* (2007), a work which argues that the secularization thesis has been deeply flawed because it is frequently formulated in two “subtractive” ways that ignore the fragilized complexity of religious belief in the modern world. In the first formulation of secularization, the secularization thesis amounts to little more than the separation of religious institutions from political institutions; in the second, it signifies the widespread decline of religious participation in the West. Taylor boldly argues that both formulations are inadequate and that when taken together they fail to explain modernity and the persistence of religious belief within it. In his account, religion not only gave rise to modernity, but it also lives on as a sublated presence in the pluralistic West where the background conditions of belief formation have irrevocably changed. Taylor thus makes a strong case that if critics want to understand the porosity of the religious and the secular throughout the long history of modernity, then these two subtractive biases should be rejected. His magisterial work attempts to create new concepts that are up to displacing the older subtractive formulations, and my thought on these matters is deeply indebted to his insights.

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Though sympathetic to the ultimate aim of Taylor project—the re-interrogation of the secularization thesis—many scholars have been reluctant to embrace the details of his account. His history of modernity has been criticized for being apologetic, and it has been called Eurocentric in its focus on how “exclusive humanism” and the creation of an immanent worldview led to the liberal pluralism that he admires.\(^7\) Other thinkers have sought to recover the religious origins of modernity without Taylor’s sweeping historical generalizations and his Eurocentrism. For instance, Michael Allen Gillespie has argued that the religious origins of secular modernity are to be found in the struggles of theological nominalism to resolve contradictions within Christianity itself.\(^8\) In addition to fine-grained histories such as Gillespie’s that pinpoint the spiritual birth pangs of a “secular” modernity, there has also been a strong anti-essentialist and ontotheological current that is resolutely suspicious of concepts such as “secularization” and “religion.” This current views the two concepts as always being relational and implicated in networks of political theology.\(^9\) Finally, there has been an explosion of work on Foucauldian genealogies of secular power, perhaps the best known of these being the arguments of Talal Asad.\(^10\) Although each of these intellectual debates has informed one another and generated much heat in the humanities, they have not had much influence so far in eighteenth-century literary studies.\(^11\) In the pages that follow, I have tried to find a space within this broader intellectual current by building on the neglected Foucauldian idea of pastoral power.

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\(^7\) For a range of objections to Taylor, see *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010).


My aim has been to recover the religious and secular porosity of Anglican satire—the representational field and forms of knowledge that were produced by the micropolitics of pastoral power in the works of the Anglican satirists Samuel Butler, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne.

Eighteenth-century studies is an ideal testing ground for Foucault’s conception of pastoral power. The discipline witnessed an explosion of theoretical work in the last thirty years arising from the critical adoption of powerful analytical frameworks, the culturalization of its interests, and the expansion of its traditional archives. Critics have continually found that the period combines an emergent modernity shot through with the alterity of the past in surprising ways—whether it takes the form of commerce, race, class, gender, the private sphere, national identity, or other critical categories. However, within these competing stories about the birth of modernity, the Church of England—when it is acknowledged at all—has played an insignificant and trivial role, which is to say that very few literary critics have found anything remarkably modern in eighteenth-century Anglicanism itself. Anglicanism appears to belong to the past, even if its most significant literary satirists point to a secularized future. In a 2006 symposium paper, the historian Robert Ingram wrote, “The work of eighteenth-century religious historians has fallen on deaf ears among the wider profession because religion has little place in the analytical frameworks most use to understand the period.” As Ingram argued, these analytical frameworks are embedded in metanarratives about modernization that sideline religious practice and the social power of the established church in eighteenth-century England. Although his contribution was a call to open lines of communication to colleagues within his discipline of

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religious history, the interdisciplinary dissemination of advanced work on established religion in eighteenth-century Britain has been even more vexed.

I believe that the frameworks that have contributed so much to the discipline by defamiliarizing the past while exposing the first shoots of modernity have unintentionally occluded the vital influence of Anglicanism on British modernity. They have caused Anglicanism to appear to be, by turn, a residuum of an older culture; an institution of diminishing importance over the century; and a reactionary force that can only be of much literary interest to critics hiding conservative agendas or holding specialized interests in religious historiography and ecclesiastical biography. At the same time, the critical backdrop of a sleepy, enfeebled Georgian church with its army of latitude men and occasional Tory high-flyers continues to act as a convenient foil against which modern phenomena of all stripes can be distinguished. Images of a senescent church abound in literature from the second half of the eighteenth century. As Oliver Goldsmith’s “Chinaman” puts it in Citizen of the World— commenting on a “typical” Anglican congregation---“I now looked round me as directed, but saw nothing of that fervent devotion which [my friend] had promised: one of the worshippers appeared to be ogling the company through a glass; another was fervent, not in addresses to Heaven, but to his mistress; a third whispered, a fourth took snuff, and the priest himself, in a drowsy tone, read over the duties of the day.” While few readers would now accept Goldsmith’s depiction of a “Chinaman” without issuing many critical caveats and without the full armament of critical theory, the same cannot be said of his representation of religion.

Older work on religion amenable to modernization narratives and counter discourses (such as nonconformity and Catholic Jacobitism) continues to inform contemporary studies, but

mainstream Anglican religion is usually relegated to the background. W. M. Jacob aptly characterizes this state of affairs when he writes, “Conventionally the period between the death of Anne and the 1830s is regarded as a period of slumber in the established Church, enlightened only by the Methodist and Evangelical revivals. It is popularly seen as irreligious, when unless there was a determined alliance between squire and parson, churches were neglected and the laity were notable by their absence. When the laity were dragooned into church by a squire and parson, they are depicted as expressing their contempt for religion by sleeping or misbehaving during services.” A reader who takes this as the cultural backdrop while approaching other aspects of literary texts can hardly avoid obscuring the productive force of religion in the period. But old historical pictures are hard to displace, as can be seen in the difficulty that historians of ideas have had in dislodging the exaggeration of movements such as deism, the extent of toleration, and the openness of the bourgeois public sphere, all of which have the effect of making religion seem less relevant to the period’s literary practices than it was.

Briefly, consider the example of deism. While deism has long operated as a skyhook for secularization going back at least to Leslie Stephen’s *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), the contemporary understanding has been radically transformed by scholars who have shown that deism was not an orchestrated movement but a rhetorical device that polemicists used to tar opponents in a series of pamphlet wars in the late seventeenth century. Few historical individuals fit what later became the textbook definition of deism. For most of the period, “deism” was little more than a loosely defined epithet for heterodox views

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like Socinianism that were always measured by an orthodox baseline that was resolutely Anglican.

I underscore these critical myths of secularity and its genealogy because they are so widespread—so emblematic of what must be set aside if the porosity of religion and the secular is to be reopened. As Alison Conway and Corrinne Harol note, “We worry . . . . that eighteenth-century literary studies has lost its ability to advance secular critique, precisely because of its uncritical commitment to secularism.”¹⁶ When taken together, the enabling myths of secularism exert the talismanic force of common knowledge in the discipline. They have a momentum that usually lies behind abstracted pictures of eighteenth-century British culture. This permits the vibrancy of everyday Anglicanism to be obscured by an anachronism in which later features are imported to the past where they are misrecognized and circularly support the implied thesis that secular modernity has arisen from their supposed convergence. Fortunately, this is beginning to change as a growing number of scholars become convinced of the theological underpinnings of modernity. It no longer seems sufficient to concede that eighteenth-century England was predominantly Anglican and to leave matters there; to view Anglicanism as an uninteresting data point with little to tell us about the literature that interests us; and to do so while believing that what is worthy of study is a separate modernity that somehow frees itself of its non-secular encumbrances. One of the immediate scholarly challenges is thus for literary critics to work out how mainstream religion fits into the larger picture of British modernity, not as the ancien régime favored by the neoconservatives of the 1980s and 1990s, but as a genuinely productive force in modernity itself. It is to this end that I have enlisted Michel Foucault’s concept of pastoral power.

¹⁶ Conway and Harol, 571.
Drawing on Foucault has one immediate advantage for anyone who wants to explore the entanglement of religion and literature. Foucault’s profound influence on eighteenth-century studies means that there is near universal familiarity with many aspects of his thought baked into current conversations. Seminal older work by literary critics such as Nancy Armstrong and John Bender continues to inform how critics read eighteenth-century literary works, having attained the status of critical classics; Foucault’s theoretical vocabulary has become common currency over the last thirty years; and the recent explosion of interest in the problematics of governmentality and biopower speaks to the relevance and capacity of his thought to provoke new discussion. As Peter DeGabriele argues, Foucault’s pioneering accounts “of the increasing irrelevance of the analytics of sovereignty to the modern world” has become an important part of the work of many critics. \(^{17}\) DeGabriele points out that this shift from sovereign power to other forms of control can be seen in works such as Michael McKeon’s seminal *The Secret History of Domesticity*, which “claims that the eighteenth century saw the replacement of a political field defined by the sovereign decision with . . . an indefinitely inclusive public sphere.”\(^{18}\) Against this profound interest and acceptance, there has been very little interest shown in Foucault’s work on pastoral power, an analytic that Foucault believed to be crucial to his project of explaining the shift from sovereign to other forms of politicized power.

Foucault developed the concept of pastoral power in a series of lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 1977-78 as part of his analysis of the rise of governmentality. He spoke of pastoral power as a form of control distinct from political power, arguing that it had been a significant factor in the creation of the modern West. Although its technologies had evolved to

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
assure salvation in the next world through economies of sacrifice, practices of subjectivization, and the production of knowledge about individual souls, within its inner logic Foucault located a direct precursor to the welfare-distribution functions of biopower, going so far as to claim, “What the history of the pastorate involves . . . is the entire history of procedures of individualization in the West.” In the 1977–78 lectures Foucault basically claimed that any attempt to understand subjectivity and governance in Western history must account for the historical influence of pastoral power.

The near total silence on pastoral power in eighteenth-century literary studies—even by those who have been most interested in Foucauldian ideas—furnishes the jumping off point for this dissertation. What might be called Foucault’s forgotten analytic, pastoral power, remains an unjustly skimmed over part of the story that Foucault wanted to tell about modernity. In using it as an analytical concept, I have tried to investigate how contemporary readers might use the concept to approach literary documents, not only because traces of pastoral power pervade the literature of the period, but also because the concept can contribute to the critical discussion in surprising ways, not least in making a crucial topic interesting to readers who might be skeptical about how reading religion can enrich our appreciation of the literary archive. First, it can address the need felt by critics such as McDowell to bring neglected documents into the critical discussion; second, it can highlight unseen dimensions of well-known texts; and, third, it can free critics from reading literary documents as transcriptions of religious doctrine—free them from the morass of source studies into which work on literature and religion often sinks. As Foucault put it, “The point of view of pastoral power, of this analysis of the structures of power, enables us, I think, to take up these things and analyze them, no longer in the form of reflection and

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transcription, but in the form of strategies and tactics.” In following Foucault, my interest has centered on the satirical strategies and tactics of used by writers of pastoral power, not on the history of religious doctrine and debate.

On first contact, pastoral power might seem irrelevant to any analysis of post-Reformation England; after all, Foucault’s lectures on pastoral power focused on Catholic Europe and culminated in his arguments about the reason of state and the science of police. On one hand, it is not unreasonable to assume that the English Reformation severely restricted the role of pastoral power—that with the closing of the monasteries came a closing off of pastoral power’s golden age in England. On the other hand, the reforms of Henry VIII—with their rejection of pastoral instruments such as confession—might seem to have left a vacuum that was filled by such legislation as the poor laws and the rise of the charity movements. After the Reformation generation in England, the Catholic Church ceased to be the dispenser of alms in England, the chief administrator of many kinds of social welfare, and Foucault was largely interested in pastoral power as the precursor to the welfare state.

As far back as William Cobbett’s propagandistic attacks on nineteenth-century Protestant England, some thinkers have believed that England did not merely transcend its Catholic past. They have suggested that the pastoral technologies of Catholicism continued to inform religious life in England, often negatively. Cobbett maintained that with the loss of Catholicism, old English hospitality died. By destroying the pastoral infrastructure of Catholicism, Henry VIII had attacked the welfare of the British people. More recently, Eamon Duffy in *The Stripping of the Altars* has traced the multi-generation process of transforming traditional religion in

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20 Ibid., 216.
England. But to argue that with the loss of Catholic England came the fading pastoral power ignores a fascinating puzzle that Foucault recognized but left unexplored in his lectures, that “The Reformation as well as the Counter Reformation gave the religious pastorate much greater control, a much greater hold on the spiritual life of individuals than in the past: an increase in devotional conduct and of spiritual controls, and an intensification of the relationship between individuals and their guides” [italics added]. Although Foucault left this line of thought unexplored, I have taken it as invitation for my own contention that pastoral power played a significant role in Post-Reformation England.

These are the main pieces that I have tried to bring together—the desire on the part of some eighteenth-century literary critics to do service to the centrality of religion in eighteenth-century literature; the call of revisionist religious historians; the widespread interest in rethinking secularization; and an understudied part of Foucault’s genealogy of modernity. Two of the main goals of the project have been to explore how the varieties of Protestant subjectivization were represented by Anglicans, and how this social reality conditioned literary representation on multiple levels within the mainstream satirical tradition. Finally, I have attempted to ask new questions about literary representation that center on how this unique form of power was aesthetically productive while avoiding the pitfalls of approaches that interpret literary texts either as mere reflections of religious commitment or as barometers of religious demography and atmosphere. I maintain that the pastoral themes in eighteenth-century Anglican satire are not mere ornament. One potential objection to my approach might be that I have not written an intellectual history of pastoral power in the period, but my objective has been to look at old

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22 Ibid., 229.
issues through a new lens while constraining the overall scope of the project to discontinuous aspects of pastoral power, ranging in scale from Dryden’s imagining of England as an unruly pastorate to the much smaller pastoralized space of Sterne’s Shandy Hall.

Each chapter of this dissertation examines from its own angle the productivity of pastoral power that was unleashed when, in the words of Charles Taylor, there occurred a shift “in the whole background of belief or unbelief, that is, the passing of the earlier ‘naïve’ framework, and the rise of our ‘reflective’ one.”23 It was this bewildering moment that triggered the golden age of English satire. Instead of reading the period as one in which religion became enervated, my approach has been to look at different facets of pastoral power and to take note of their underlying structures of authority while investigating how Anglican satirists were provoked to dramatize pastoral themes. In speaking throughout the chapters of the productivity of pastoral power I have in mind the cultural shifts in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pastorates that allowed satirists to target a range of objects: grotesquely pastoralized individuals, the evolving civil theology behind the metaphor of the shepherd-flock relation, the proliferation of competing religious belief, and religious technologies such as confession and baptism. The project as a whole develops arguments to demonstrate (1) how the late seventeenth-century anxiety over the status of the pastorate was represented in satire on the Civil Wars and, more specifically, on radicalized protestants who claimed a kind of pastoral authority that Anglicanism denied them; (2) how pastoral power recurred in tropes and figures of sovereignty and political unrest during the Restoration; (3) how the representation of pastoral power participated in a critique of the explosion of contesting belief; (4) and how its typical techniques and strategies became decoupled from salvation and employed in the satirical novel. One through-line in the chapters

23 Taylor, 14.
is my assertion that the established church ought to be conceived, not as a residual part of a
culture that was undergoing the subtraction of secularization, but as a series of dynamic
articulations that were residual and emergent but always productive in satire. After all, the
Church of England was stronger and more tranquil during the second half of the eighteenth
century than it was during the first, and its strength was not a recapitulation of an earlier power
configuration. Building on accounts of the continued vitality of the church by scholars such as
William Gibson24, each chapter seeks to uncover a specifically literary effect of pastoral power in
eighteenth-century satire.

“Chapter 1: A Godly Thorough Reformation: *Hudibras* and the Secularization Thesis
” introduces the master theme of my study: the idea that the secularization thesis obscures the
productive strategies and techniques of pastoral power. Here I do some of the necessary
spadework for what follows. The chapter introduces and questions the secularization thesis. It
explores how critics have domesticated and then ignored Butler’s poem; it raises the question of
pastoral power in England at a time of political crisis; it looks back to England’s Reformation
history; it provides a working definition of pastoral power; and it demonstrates how the
misappropriation of pastoral power was travestied in Samuel Butler’s satire *Hudibras*, a text
where the traditional Anglican pastorate is literally absent but absolutely central to the meaning
of the narrative. It seems to me that the trauma wrought by the naïve religious belief that fueled
the Civil Wars stands behind the reflective character of later Anglican satire. The adventures of
Hudibras and his squire Ralpхо are made possible by a displacement of the Anglian Church.
The memory of the Puritan Revolution sets the stage for much eighteenth-century anxiety over
pastoral power and haunts the Anglican claim to be a privileged distributor of spiritual welfare.

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Butler’s satire reveals how Anglican pastoral power was challenged by the violence of the wars and temporarily suffered political defeat. It also sets the foundation for what comes next: a reading of Dryden that draws attention to how Absalom and Achitophel brings the center of pastoral power back into the Anglican pastorate through the figure of the British monarch.

“Chapter 2: Governing a Headstrong, Moody, Murm’ring race: Dryden and the Judaicization of Pastoral Kingship in Absalom and Achitophel” examines how pastoral power and sovereignty were rhetorically reshaped by Dryden during Exclusion Crisis. Dryden found an imaginative solution to real crises of Protestantism—created a way to re-enclose the unruliness of pastoral power run wild within the circuit of sovereignty through the unlikely image of Charles II as a shepherd king. This chapter draws on recent work on sacred monarchy and the idea of the godly magistrate; it introduces the neglected problematic of pastoral power as a complement to the political theologies of the seventeenth century; and it uses Foucault’s concept of shepherd-flock and citizen-state games to reveal the unresolved tension of how the need of a priesthood combined with a distrust of priestcraft. The chapter concludes with the argument that Dryden reached a poetic homeostasis, one meant to neutralize the problem of religious authority and political instability raised by Thomas Hobbes, and that both Hobbes and Dryden use the master trope of Judaicization to resolve seemingly irresolvable tensions that exist between pastoral and civil authority.

“Chapter 3: Postsecular Swift” is deeply indebted to Charles Taylor’s The Secular Age, a work that informs earlier chapters as well. It suggests that where Dryden had attempted to redirect pastoral power through the metaphor of the sovereign shepherd king, Swift’s satire of an explosion of belief revealed why such a solution was impossible in a sectarian world that had a

newly reflexive awareness of religious claims. The chapter presents an argument that Swift seems perennially modern because his work was an early polemical response to changes in the background conditions of belief formation that have echoed into the twenty-first century. My interpretation of Swift’s satire A Tale of a Tub views it as an eristic attack on the fragilization of religious opinion that occurred alongside the explosion of religious options in the early eighteenth century. I argue that Swift’s reluctant artistic pluralism in matters of religion is just as culturally significant as is his non-pluralist satiric norm. Regardless of where one puts Swift on the spectrum of heterodoxy and orthodoxy—a topic that has received much critical attention—I conclude that while Swift, the Anglican priest, remained conservative on issues of pastoral authority—at least publically—Swift the satirist was witheringly direct on how the outburst of Christian pluralism in England challenged the Anglican Church’s source of pastoral power. For this reasons, he can lay claim to being a postsecular satirist.

“Chapter 4: Humor Too Light for the Color of his Cassock: Laurence Sterne, Pastoral Technology, and the Work of Redemption” turns to the satirical fiction of Laurence Sterne. It discusses how Sterne’s work deals with the specter of pastoral failure. The chapter begins by confronting the uneasiness that Sterne’s work created in his first readers. It argues that many of Sterne’s satirical effects result from how his work plays with the porous boundaries of the sacred and profane. It decouples earnestly pastoral acts from their redemptive strategies, in essence, turning religious confession into moments of novelistic confession. I conclude that Sterne’s ungovernable humor is paradoxically the result of his unsettlingly conservative literary solution: his satirical representation shows the laity what pastoral technology excludes while creating breaches of religious decorum that leave the pastoral structures of eighteenth-century Anglicanism in place. In advancing these arguments, my aim has not been to write the literary
history of pastoral power in eighteenth-century England but to show how pastoral power might help critics approach religion in the period while avoiding the Scylla of arcane historicism and the Charybdis of biographical criticism, with its pervasive interest in personal faith.
Chapter 1:

A Godly Thorough Reformation:

_Hudibras_ and the Secularization Thesis

Few British literary works have so plummeted in critical and popular esteem as Samuel Butler’s once widely celebrated seventeenth-century masterpiece _Hudibras_, a rollicking epic satire on the violence of the English Civil Wars and the Puritan Commonwealth. The poem tells the episodic adventures of a Presbyterian “Don Quixote” named Hudibras who storms across the English countryside with his radically Protestant “Sancho”—the always argumentative Ralpho. Despite their many theological disagreements, the two figures share a goal: to destroy good old-fashioned English fun in the name of God and all his saints. Contemporary readers who recognize the title of the poem—and who may have encountered small excerpts in anthologies of satire or seventeenth-century poetry—will likely know this much about its content. The following chapter examines how this enduring remainder, the image of Hudibrastic interference, has diminished the poem, reducing its complex configurations of pastoral and political power to little more than an overlong joke about unmasking religious hypocrisy and putting to bed the wars of religion. Much of the work of this chapter demonstrates that our flattened reception of Hudibrastic interference has resulted from the implicit currency of the secularization thesis. The assumptions of this thesis shape how readers approach the poem, making it difficult to see that Butler’s satire speaks as much to the continuing presence of religious power in the eighteenth century as to the vanishing forms of the sixteenth and the seventeenth. Butler’s poem presents an apocalypse of pastoral power in which any member of the laity can claim pastoral authority.
In the early eighteenth century, *Hudibras* was so well known that William Hogarth at the end of his apprenticeship issued twelve large plates illustrating it. *Hudibras* was the ideal vehicle to trumpet his ambitious arrival. The commercially astute young Hogarth exhibited a natural ability to hitch his satirical talents to public taste in adapting Butler. As Margery A. Kingsley notes, the English public was at the time obsessed with images of the Civil Wars. It was also in the process of creating a cultural narrative about how England had transcended the religious violence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a narrative that would later be subsumed within larger narratives of secularization. In asserting the nascent cultural maturity of the early eighteenth-century, audiences could look back to what now seemed alien—the hot-headed, intolerant immaturity of the seventeenth. Butler’s satire thus deflated barely concealed religious anxieties. It laughed about what had gone wrong with English religion in the earlier period, and it seemed to all but confirm Shaftesbury’s conviction that any subject which could not bear humor was inherently suspicious. For Hogarth’s generation, *Hudibras* served as England’s great poetic diagnosis of diseased power at the heart of civil strife. No surprise then that Butler appealed to the young Hogarth who despised social and political pretension, and who, in turn, abstracted from the demanding details of Butler’s text, with its immense historical detail, discursive complexity, and deep learning, to present a new kind of visual reduction of that complexity.

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1 *Hudibras* was published in three parts in 1663, 1664, and 1678. The first combined edition appeared in 1684, four years after Butler’s death in 1680.
Hogarth’s success was remarkable. Someone studying the eighteenth century is now more likely to encounter Butler through Hogarth’s illustrations than through Butler’s himself. Moreover, many of the characteristics that are most Butlerian in *Hudibras* are now the ones singled out by the term Hogarthian. These include an exaggerated and saturnine fascination with the grotesque body, music, folly, folk tradition, public spectacle, and the abuse of power.4 Although Hogarth’s engravings of Butler are often reprinted, Butler’s poem has languished. *Hudibras* has become inaccessible, and its satire of religious power obscured. The last major scholarly edition came out over half a century ago.

A generation after Hogarth’s illustrations, Samuel Johnson all but predicted the fate of *Hudibras*. An admirer of the poem and a promoter of Butler, Johnson wrote that much of the Civil War detail of *Hudibras* had begun to recede into the past. As a consequence, the poem was losing its satirical bite. Moreover, the vagary of public memory and shifts in taste were beginning to create difficulties for eighteenth-century readers who were, for the first time, starting to need explicators of *Hudibras*’s hundreds of jokes on issues ranging from fashion to scholastic theology. Within a generation, Butler’s work was beginning to fade. Johnson lamented, “Our grandfathers knew the picture from the life; we judge the life by the contemplating of the picture.”5 In hindsight, Johnson’s judgment aptly characterizes how Hogarth’s illustrations have come to eclipse their source. Whereas Hogarth’s adaptation of Butler presents Hudibrastic inference as an accessible frolic, Butler’s lengthy burlesque and

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4 The *Hudibras* plates themselves are generally regarded as a minor work that continues to be of interest to critics for their insight into Hogarth’s artistic development. For example, Frederic Ogee writes, “Whereas in the early stages of his career, [Hogarth’s] pictures were entirely subordinated to texts, they gradually gained some form of aesthetic independence, and soon it was texts which, in turn, tried *a posteriori* to account for their visual profusion.” “Introduction” in *Hogarth: Representing Nature’s Machine* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001), 4.

Skeltonic tetrameter can wear out the most patient of readers, interfering with their pleasure. The problem first identified by Johnson has become nothing short of a major barrier to entry into the poem.⁶ This situation has been compounded by the assumption of many that the glibness of Hudibras’s surface humor means that reading its pages is not worth the effort. The aesthetic payoff is simply too low.

Nonetheless, Hogarth’s illustrations can return readers to Butler. They remain a powerful introduction to the poem and its themes of power gone mad in the hands of religious zealots. Contrasted with the density of Butler’s text, no plate in the series exemplifies the immediacy and relevance of this theme felt by eighteenth-century readers than the widely-praised Skimmington plate from an episode in Part II, Canto 2. However, if the Skimmington plate has drawn the most critical praise from art historians and Hogarthian scholars, then it is useful to acknowledge that Hogarth begins the Hudibras series with a visual act of didacticism in the rarely discussed frontispiece. Hogarth’s was not merely an adaptation of the Butler’s poem but a lesson in how to read it. Hogarth advised that readers attend to Butler’s universality, not his particularity.

Near the center of the top of the didactic frontispiece, the viewer finds a portrait of a dour Samuel Butler. He casts his heavy-lidded eyes upon his readers, and readers might sense that they are to be judged as severely as Butler had judged the objects of his satire. Beneath this portrait is an ornate Roman-style bas-relief. Hogarth’s caption explains that this depicts “Butler’s Genius, in a car, lashing around Mount Parnassus,” scourging the ignorant and hypocritical. Standing in front of the bas-relief are two smaller scenes. The one on the left depicts a satyr who embodies the rhetorical mode of the poem—a satyr because of the

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⁶ Critics have continually debated the generic status of Hudibras. For the classic statement that sees it as being the reverse of mock heroic, see Ian Jack, “Low Satire: Hudibras” in Augustan Satire: Intention and Idiom in English Poetry: 1600-1750 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1952), 15-42.
longstanding mistaken belief about the etymology of the word. This satyr opens a bound volume of *Hudibras* to a passage in Canto 1 for a cherub who diligently sculpts the bas-relief while reading the poem, creating a Möbius-like loop of reduplicated representation, as if to say that *Hudibras* is eternal in its timeless themes. Most significantly, the scene on the right depicts Britannia sitting in regal splendor, an emblem of England, holding a spear and leaning backward while a laughing faun holds a mirror to her face. She is being compelled to see how universals embody the particularity of the Civil War.

David Bindman offers the standard interpretation of the frontispiece when he writes that the various elements imply “that Hudibras and his ilk are still a presence and that the poem is relevant to the present time”—and this may well be all that Hogarth intends to convey. It is true that hypocrisy and ignorance are two primary targets of *Hudibras*—ones that Hogarth focuses on in his series. Butler’s description of the hypocrite in his underappreciated *Characters* can serve as precise a gloss on the character of Hudibras himself as one could hope to find. Butler tells us that

> The Inside of [the hypocrite] tends quite to cross the Outside, like a Spring that runs upward within the dearth and down without. He is an Operator for the Soul, and corrects other Men’s Sins with greater of his own . . . . He is a spiritual Highwayman, that robs on the Road to Heaven—His Professions and Actions agree like a sweet Voice and a stinking Breath.

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9 In a classic overview of Butler’s temperament and opinions, Edward Ames Richards found six separate charges that the poet makes against the characters in his poem: hypocrisy, greed, lust, intellectual narrowness, low social status, and a foolish mysticism. *Hudibras and the Burlesque Tradition* (New York: Columbia UP, 1937), 19.
The image of the hypocrite highwayman immediately brings to mind the overall topos of the poem: the dispossession of what rightfully belongs to the English people.

Hogarth wanted readers to look into Britannia’s mirror to see how universal themes cut across time, binding the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. Critical models of secularization have often created a hard break between the world of the Civil Wars and the public sphere of the eighteenth, and many readers are now suspicious of claims about aesthetic universalism. *Hudibras* is relevant to the eighteenth century now not merely because it strips hypocrisy and ignorance bare. It is relevant because it was a major literary attempt to represent the breakdown of religious power in seventeenth-century England. This breakdown would condition the literary representation of the eighteenth in ways that the seventeenth could not have anticipated.

However, if the eighteenth-century has been constructed as the seedbed of modernity by many of our best critics, then Butler’s art has come to seem exceedingly trivial—in part because it appears to belong to the prehistory of the secularization process. Butler himself has been accorded the status of a minor Restoration poet to be read by the few. His main concern is usually held to be a kind of religious violence that the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere effaced.\(^\text{11}\) While later chapters in this study will investigate how the distinct form of power isolated within *Hudibras* entered into new configurations, *Hudibras* is an ideal place to begin asking how secularization occludes pastoral power and how Foucault’s alternative analytic of power can be recovered and brought into the contemporary discussion. As long as seventeenth-

\(^{11}\) Craig Calhoun points out that while adherents of the public sphere argument have gestured towards the persistence of religious voices in the public sphere, “[I]n both academic and public understanding, both the Enlightenment and the public sphere came to be understood in secular terms. Jürgen Habermas’s classic book, to which we owe today’s commonplace usage of the term public sphere is an influential case in point . . . He generally ignored religion in his historical account of the public sphere, as he has acknowledged.” “Afterward” in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011), 126-7.
century texts such as *Hudibras* remain separated from the eighteenth-century, this will continue to be difficult to acknowledge. The eighteenth-century Britannia of our critical constructions will continue to look into the mirror of *Hudibras* and no longer see herself reflected. She will not know where to cast her gaze because she seems positioned on one side of the great divides of history whereas *Hudibras* appears to sit on the other. In such a situation, *Hudibras* can only tell about a former world that she transcended as the price of her entrance into modernity.

**Hudibras and the Secularization Thesis**

The sharp premodern/modern division that beleaguer interpretations of *Hudibras* is of a piece with the much-contested secularization thesis that informs most thinking about the history of religion in the West. The degree to which notions of secularization operate as a tacit backdrop in the reading of literary religious texts—and of literary texts that are heavily concerned with religion—can hardly be overemphasized. Since this contributes so powerfully to the sense that readers share a modernity with the eighteenth century that they do not share with *Hudibras*, a large part of the burden of this chapter falls on teasing apart how that operates. Before turning to the form of religious power that this secularization thesis obscures in *Hudibras*, I consequently want to examine the thesis itself, and I want to interrogate how it has colored criticism of the poem because I believe that we should look there to find out why criticism on *Hudibras* has effectively stalled. Alison Conway and Corrinne Harol have recently pointed to need for such interventions. Noting the many reasons “eighteenth-century English literary studies might be resistant to taking up challenges to the secularization thesis,” they speak for the discipline as a whole when they write, “we have often pursued lines of inquiry and narration that are deeply
indebted to a narrative of secularization.” Misty Anderson points to one of the chief dangers of such pursuits in her study on Methodism and the eighteenth-century literary imagination. She argues that modernity is not a thing that we moderns simply share with the eighteenth century but a promise of things to come—a teleological expectation that people have and which they use to plot historical continuity onto the past and project it into the future. She writes, “Thinking about modernity in these terms reminds us to be wary of the looking-glass effect of eighteenth-century culture.” Anderson’s point canon formation reflects this future-looking orientation. Secular modernity is one such telos that bends the light of criticism. As a result, a literary text like Hudibras that deals with religious topoi can cease to look like a fellow traveler depending on how readers envision the future. As one-half of the religious-secular doublet, secularism shares with religion a feature cogently identified by William T. Cavanaugh that makes it incredibly difficult to interrogate: everyone already thinks that they know what religion is. It is that thing secularization overcame. In matters of religion and secularization, as Cavanaugh argues, the main critical challenge is not that we know too little about our object domain, but that we are confident that we know so very much, and this certitude short circuits our stipulative procedures.

As Bryan S. Turner has recently pointed out, the process of secularization presents intractable problems of definition, but the history of the term “secular” itself is relatively straightforward. In its original use, “secular” simply referred to the religious authority outside religious orders—use that Butler employs throughout the text of Hudibras. During the great speech in the poem in which Ralpho likens Presbyterian synods to bear gardens, he uses the term

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“secular” in this sense, arguing that a Presbyterian lay-elder’s “little finger is as heavy / As loins of patriarchs, prince prelate, / and bishop-secular” (1.3 ll. 1221-4). The first modern mention of the term can be found in the nineteenth century in the work of the activist and reformer George Holyoake, who used “secular” to argue that the non-religious aspects of culture were the ones that most productively fostered the development of humanity. Holyoake’s normative use of the term—which essentializes both itself and religion into the kind of transparently distinct conceptual objects that Cavanaugh warns against—is the use currently in greatest circulation. It is used this way by critics of religion who want to boost the notion of secularity as a cultural remedy, by proponents of faith who want to lament its encroachment, and by ordinary people who want to discuss religion and politics.

Parallel to this normative, demotic use of the term, one finds the broader intellectual theorization of secularity introduced in the work of Max Weber and expanded by Ernst Troeltsch in modern sociology. This level is most relevant to understanding how Hudibras came to be viewed as a text belonging to the premodern world only—one with a simple lesson that speaks only for the nonsecular error. Here the concept of secularization becomes more than an umbrella used to cover a wide array of features in the changing fortunes of organized religion over the last half millennium; rather, it aims at being a value-free account of the long trajectory of modernity. While scholarship on the secularization thesis is vast, the classical formulation was clearly outlined in a seminal article of the late 1960s by Larry Shiner. Shiner perspicuously identifies

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the six senses of secularization that repeatedly show up in scholarly discussion. Although not all of the six senses are of equal importance in situating how Hudibrastic interference has been interpreted, I want to unpack Shiner’s typology because his six dimensions comprise the background that informs so much writing not only on it but also on works that deal tangentially with religion in the West. Moreover, it is the necessary background to the current debate over secularization in the academy that has revivified the widespread interest in probing the secularization thesis.

In the first and simplest sense identified by Shiner, secularization merely picks out the waning of religious belief: religious doctrines, practices, conventions, and symbols cease to resonate in the way that they had in earlier periods. They lose their aura and interest in them becomes marginalized. To some critics the declining literary stock of Hudibras owes much to this first dimension of secularization: the poem simply does not speak to the contemporary secular reader. What do most modern readers care about the intense infighting between Presbyterians and Independents and their jostling over the Solemn League and Covenant (1.2 ll. 505-510; 2.2 ll. 155-6)? What can it mean to them that characters speak in the nasally high tones of Presbyterians or Independents (1.1 ll. 230; 1.1 ll. 516)—a description that the poem’s original audience would have immediately understood and which gives double meaning to lines such as “It is plain enough to him that knows / How saints lead others by the nose” (1.1 ll. 553-4)? For these modern readers, the poem is felt to buckle under the weight of its religious encumbrances and the mass of its dead cultural signifiers—not to mention the hundreds of topical references to geography, education, and historical actors that pile atop one another Hudibras unfolds.

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This view informs Alan Yadav’s sophisticated reading of how *Hudibras* underwent a process of decay and eventual monumentalization. Yadav argues that as time passed, features such as the doctrinal topicality of the work lost the ability to capture the imaginations and affective investments of readers; in the place of any overall appreciation, passages, fragments, and other set pieces came to stand in for the whole of the poem. In turn, the whole was lost. Yadav terms the first process “decay”, which I would suggest maps onto the loss that accommodates Shiner’s first dimension of secularization. In addition to decay, Yadav identifies a second process that he terms “monumentalization,” writing that “monumentalization arises in large measure as a response to the first process of continual decay.”

Basically, as living work dies, parts of it become petrified and act as a synecdoche for the whole. Such an interpretation accounts for Christopher Hill’s sardonic claim that “One difficulty with *Hudibras*, as has been said of *Hamlet*, is that it is so full of quotations,” where quotations become a kind of monumental remainder that blocks access to the whole.

Yadav’s reading concludes *Hudibras* itself enables its monumentalization: its outward distaste and rejection of partisan politics allow the reader to escape from some aspects of its thick and unwieldy historicity even though the poem remains inescapably caught in its historically determined nationalist and gender-coded ideologies. If the lesson of *Hudibras* is simply that the world was full of religious madmen and fools, then the allusiveness of the text can be ignored. What remains is *Hudibras* the monument for anthologies. Because modern readers are no longer in a position to feel the direct contemporaneity of *Hudibras* as a text about the stakes and politics of religion, historical

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elements that modern audiences feel strongly about—namely chauvinism and sexism—can be excluded.

Shiner’s second sense of secularization has also played a major hindering role in the keeping the poem from contemporary critical appreciation. Shiner writes that this second dimension of secularization marks the change in society as it moves away from being focused on the supernatural realm, and all that supernaturalism might entail, to being focused on the shifting pragmatics of living for worldly aims. According to Shiner, this Weberian sense of disenchanted secularization usually accommodates the view that the secularizing process moves individuals toward the widespread acceptance that human flourishing does not depend on divinity in the final instance. Critics have deployed this second dimension to understanding Butler biographically and philosophically, finding him to be a transitional figure, one who bears some marks of skeptical modernity but who ultimately remains a relic of pre-modernity. He seems to be a thinker who in the last instance is insufficiently modern when compared to his significant influences and antagonists such as Thomas Hobbes. Secularization allows critics to place Butler’s work on a scale of naturalized epistemology along which religion becomes increasingly purged.

What makes Butler such a difficult thinker to place, however, is his commonplace book, which remained unpublished in part until the twentieth century. Butler vexes the binary of the natural versus the supernatural. His work abounds with skeptical and contradictory obiter dicta. As the primary source for our biographical understanding of Butler, the remarks in the commonplace book range freely over ideas that cross-pressure one another and thwart all attempts to cast him as an actor in a narrative in which the supernatural is drained from the

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natural. Although the commonplace remarks can be grouped into families, the families sit in uneasy tension with each other, making the determination of Butler’s precise views on most subjects all but impossible. Their editor writes somewhat apologetically, “While artistic unity is not to be expected in a commonplace selection, there are controlling ideas more or less explicit in these (as in other) writings of Butler’s.” If readers look hard enough and exclude enough, they can place Butler on natural-supernatural secularization scale. What these controlling ideas amount to has been a continual source of controversy. One does encounter Butler’s great themes in the commonplace book, but his thought seems to be always both lapidary and provisional; accordingly, the attempts to pin him to a consistent set of philosophical commitments miss how fickle and mercurial his mind could be. Nonetheless, it is a frequent temptation that critics have succumbed to—this search for a key to the poem in Butler’s personality and philosophy—and it has often served to do little more than fossilize him.

For instance, despite Butler’s frequent anticlericalism and distrust of certain kinds of supernaturalism, he writes the following in the commonplace book: “In the Primitive Church when there was no Ecclesiastical Government, nor any use of Civil Power, among Christians to Constraine the loose freedom of Opinions, there were more Heresies bred in 2 or 3 hundred yeares, then in 1200 after when there was church Government and Authority to suppress them.” Such passages seem to support the view of Susan Staves, who argues that Butler was appropriated by a critical tradition of Whigs such as William Hazlitt, who read him as a hostile

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22 Ricardo Quintana, in what remains to my mind the strongest attempt to grapple with Butler’s thought, achieves something like this in concluding, “As a Restoration figure in the narrow sense Butler’s significance may seem to lie primarily in his commentary as a moral philosopher. But it was as a satirist that he came closest to embodying the spirit of the age then beginning—the age of Swift and Hogarth.” “Samuel Butler: A Restoration Figure in a Modern Light” *ELH* 18.1 (1951): 31.

critic of all religion. This makes Butler an early hero of secularization. Staves, however, insists that Butler was a skeptical Anglican conservative, arguing that he simply “thought the Presbyterians and Independents were crazy, lower-class fanatics who had absolutely no right to impose their wills on respectable people.”

For critics such as John Wilders, editor of the authoritative volume of Hudibras, Butler was an uneasy Christian skeptic who distrusted church authority but who was attracted to the rationalist theology of thinkers such as Hales, Chillingworth, and Tillotson. For Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, Butler’s personal philosophy accounts for why he is so concerned with the many inadequacies of religion—mainly dissimulation, fraud, and supernatural pretense, a view that seems to find support in Butler’s claim that “Clergy-men expose the Kingdom of Heaven to sale, That with the Money they purchase as much as they can of this world.”

Most critics have concluded that Butler remains a Christian thinker despite having a vexed relation to both Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical authority.

If we ask what this means in terms of Shiner’s second form of the secularization thesis, Butler’s naturalism, rationalism, skepticism, and condemnation of particular expressions of religion can make him appear to be a figure of minor importance in the history of secularism, but he is one who does not go far enough. It is true that his poem is one unrelenting anti-romance. There are no positive religious models in Hudibras; there are no genuinely supernatural moments that might point to transcendental spirituality. Unlike a fellow court poet, the Earl of Rochester, Butler keeps the option of real religious faith open. The first climax of the aesthetically weak Part 3 of the poem is Hudibras’s confession of his hypocrisy, triggered through supernatural

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24 Ibid., 44.
27 Butler, Prose Observations, 44.
impersonation and fraud. Hudibras’s lady deceives the Presbyterian knight into believing that he is being hounded by evil spirits. When one of her servants disguised as a spirit asks him,

What makes Morality a Crime,  
The most Notorious of the Time?  
Morality, which both the saints,  
And wicked too, Cry out against?  (3.1 ll. 1289-92)

Hudibras answers,

‘Cause Grace and Virtue are within  
Prohibited by Degrees of Kin:  
And therefore no true saint allows,  
They should be suffered to espouse.  
For saints can need to Conscience  
That with morality dispense;  
As vertue’s impious, when ‘tis Rooted  
In Nature onl’ and not Imputed.  (3.1 ll. 1293-1302)

The negative force at the heart of such an episode can make it appear that Butler believed that people in such a world are better off without any religion because there would be no need to impute virtue to anything but nature. On the other hand, his satiric norm might be far simpler—that hypocrisy should be judged by a true religion, one that undercuts “Nature onl’.”

Skinner’s remaining senses of secularization have only a tangential relation to the poem, but they are worth going through briefly because, when measured against them, Hudibras stands out as belonging to the prehistory of secular modernity, not to the emerging modern world that so often interests contemporary eighteenth-century literary critics. In the third sense, the religious worldview moves into the private lives of individuals. Learning to distinguish which beliefs belong to the private sphere, as opposed to the public, becomes a major component of institutional action and being a good citizen. Matters of religious belief may have personal
saliency, but they are for the most part off-limits as a source of justification meant to sway others in an increasingly pluralist society in which deliberation hinges on non-religious reason giving and deference to tolerance. Such a position is familiar from the self-idealized world of well-scrubbed liberal secularism, but it could not be further from the world of *Hudibras* in which individuals have private lives only insofar as they have something dissimulate. In *Hudibras*, public matters are always decided by public appeals to religion, often through violence after religious justification proves to be inadequate or exhausts itself. Hudibras’s appeal to the bear-baiters in Part I, Canto 2, is exemplary of this: he calls out, “Shall saints in civil bloodshed wallow / Of saints, and let the cause lie fallow?” (1.2 ll. 503-4). In the fourth dimension of secularization, what was seen as having been rooted in the divine comes to be seen as having always been the result of human action in the earthly realm. It is the instantiation of the far end of the naturalization spectrum. As I have argued, Butler’s attacks on religious bunkum may seem to encourage finding such a view in his work, but there is ample evidence to support the contrary view that Butler was merely critical of certain forms of religious justification that are bankrupt. Fifth—and more important than the two previous forms for Butler—there is a desacralization of the world as an object of possible human understanding, a position that Butler may seem to intimate throughout the poem, not least in his satire of the astrologer Sidrophel in Part II of the text. Butler’s strategy in this episode is to expose the fraudulence of Sidrophel’s occult philosophy through a method of relentless disenchantment. For example, Sidrophel employs an apprentice astrologer called Watchum whose

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\ldots \text{business was to pump and wheedle,} \\
\text{And men with their own keys unriddle;} \\
\text{To make them to themselves give answers,} \\
\text{For which they pay the necromancers;} \quad (2.3 \text{ ll. 335-9})
\]
While this may seem to point to an endorsement of a secularized epistemology, it is worth remembering that Butler leveled the same method of disenchantment against no less an object than the new science itself in his minor masterpiece “The Elephant in the Moon,” a satire on the pretensions of the Royal Society. For Butler both the new science itself and astrologers were suspect. “The Elephant in the Moon” concludes

That those who readily pursue
Things wonderful instead of true,
That in their speculations choose
To make discoveries strange news,
And natural history a gazette
Of tales stupendous and far-fet,
Hold no truth worthy to be known
That is not huge and overgrown,
And explicate appearances
Not as they are, but as they please,
In vain strive nature to suborn,
And for their pains are paid with scorn. (ll. 509-520)

Since Butler’s satirical target in both his attack on astrology and on the new science is chicanery and intellectual pageantry, it would be a mistake to assume that natural history for him had much to do with the kind of de-sacralization of the world that Shiner identifies in the fifth dimension of secularization. The sixth and final form of secularization—where rational and utilitarian considerations move forward as the most important tools for understanding the universe and humankind’s place in it—is altogether absent in Butler.

These six dimensions sum up what might be called the traditional view of secularization. Five of them seem to push Butler to the “nonsecular” side of the nonsecular/secular binary.
Most of the senses have provided tempting inroads to understanding certain aspects of Butler’s poem by scholars; they have, almost by default, made his work seem quaintly premodern in ways that writer that Swift is not.

From the late 1960s onward, this six-fold conceptual framework, as well as each of its parts, has been under enormous pressure to justify itself in sociology and throughout the humanities. A list of those thinkers who reject or want to complicate aspects of the secularization thesis would be long, for there is near universal agreement that elements of the traditional view need to be adjusted or rejected. In 1987 Jeffrey Hadden identified the key objections expressed by many who had been dissatisfied with the traditional account. Hadden argued that secularization was too elastic a concept and should be done away with since it had become more of a doctrine than a theory—a point that I have tried to underscore by juxtaposing Butler with each primary postulate of the secularization thesis. Noting this irony, Hadden details some of the core problems with the hypothesis: the logical coherence of the secularization account is questionable and often serves as a flimsy pretense for lumping together a host of loosely related ideas; empirical data does not support secularization; the emergence of new religious movements should count as disproof of the secularization thesis, and religion is still a powerful force in geopolitics. In the wake of such objections, the usefulness of secularization as an analytic for understanding the last few hundred years fell under suspicion in sociology and religious studies at the same moment that grand accounts of Western civilization fell out of fashion throughout the humanities. Although major studies that embrace the secularization thesis continued to appear after the

1960s, including recent work by Steve Bruce, Rodney Stark, and David A. Martin, these works invariably made a point of addressing the challenges faced in rehabilitating it.\(^3\) For instance, Rodney Stark addresses the issue of new religious movements: they “do best in places where there is the greatest amount of secularization—for example, in places with low rates of church membership such as the west coasts of the United States and Canada, and northern Europe.”\(^3\) In recent years, however, secularization theory has become once again a major topic of debate in the humanities. Bryan Turner points to one obvious reason for this: religion has become a major critical problem of political life in the modern world since “many important social movements find their inspiration in religious ideas and they are often directed by religious leaders.”\(^3\) After several hundred years of disavowal, sectarian justification has become a problem again, and the entanglement of political with pastoral power in Hudibrastic interference seem relevant.

**Freeing Hudibras from the Secularization Thesis**

How does the recent work on secularization differ from work marked by the classical formulations of the secularization thesis? How might the new approaches revitalize the reading of texts such as *Hudibras*?\(^3\) I suggest that critics do this by freeing *Hudibras* from a narrow seventeenth-century periodization that relatives its religious significance to the prehistory of modernity. The most recent attempts to reconceive of secularization have sought to understand


\(^3\) Turner, 127.

religion, not as that which modernity excludes, but that which somehow is transcribed within itself, that which serves as its continuing condition of possibility, that which is transcoded by it, and so forth. Most representative of this trend has perhaps been the intense debate engendered by Charles Taylor’s *The Secular Age* (2007). Taylor argues that secularization has been envisioned in two “subtractive” ways that ignore the fragilized and complex presence of religion in the modern world.\(^{34}\) Although he characterizes secularization theories as belonging to two families in contrast to the six ways identified by Shiner, one can see a close similarity: each of the six iterations of the classical thesis depends on the negation of religion that Taylor refers to through the term “subtraction.” In the first version identified by him, the subtraction of secularization refers to the separation of religious institutions from political institutions—in effect, religion is subtracted from public life. If one accepts this model as the measure of secularization, *Hudibras* stands out as being a non-secular text because it has not undergone this process of subtraction, as I have underscored. One will obviously not find the party politics that arose with the development of liberal political institutions in its pages; instead, public sectarianism in the poem is decisive in triggering political action, and religious zealots jockey for control of a minimalist state where the justificatory ideologies of liberalism would make no sense. In Taylor’s second family of theories, secularization signifies the widespread decline of religious participation and belief in the West; yet everyone in *Hudibras* claims to believe in religion and the importance of religion to governance. In short, if we accept either model, the poem remains a text belonging to the prehistory of secularism. However, Taylor argues that both formulations prove to be inadequate for explaining modernity, for he believes that religion not only gave rise to modernity but also persists as a sublated presence in the pluralistic West where

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the background conditions of belief formation have irrevocably changed. While Taylor’s account has been criticized for being apologetic and Eurocentric in its focus on how exclusive humanism and the creation of immanent world views occasioned the liberal secularism that he admires,\textsuperscript{35} I believe that he is right in arguing that modernity should not constitute the hard “subtractive” break with religion that secularization stories promote. In the case of Hudibras, this will be difficult to recognize until readers avoid the positive presence that enables continuity or sublation instead of discontinuity.

Other thinkers have sought to recover more neutrally the religious origins of modernity. For instance, Michael Allen Gillespie has recently argued that the origins of modernity are to be found in the struggles of theological nominalism to resolve contradictions within Christianity itself.\textsuperscript{36} Against these accounts, there has also been a strong anti-essentialist and ontotheological current that is resolutely suspicious of concepts such as “secularization” and “religion,” which are seen as always being relational and implicated in political theology.\textsuperscript{37} There is a strong current of work arguing that the notion of a secularization process falls apart in the face of multiple modernities where Western modernity is merely one cultural formation.\textsuperscript{38} Finally, there has been much work on Foucauldian genealogies of secular power, perhaps the most influential of these being the arguments of Talal Asad.\textsuperscript{39} Although these intellectual debates have informed one another and generated much heat in the humanities, they have not had much influence so far.

\textsuperscript{35} For a range of objections to Taylor, see Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan Van Antwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010).
\textsuperscript{37} One compelling example of this approach is William T. Cavanaugh’s The Myth of Religious Violence (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).
\textsuperscript{38} Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., Multiple Modernities (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002).
\textsuperscript{39} Talal Asad, Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003).
on eighteenth-century literary studies. In exploring how *Hudibras* can be brought into this recent conversation in the remainder of this essay, I want to turn to a positive religious presence that modernity does not suppress but disavows as being religious. This presence is pastoral power, a type of power introduced in the work of Foucault that offers a key to understanding how *Hudibras* might be about more than the politics of seventeenth-century religion.

To understand how Foucault arrived at the notion of pastoral power, one must turn to the lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979 in which he introduced the idea of governmentality, a conceptual assemblage that brought together his previous thinking on sovereignty, discipline, and biopower. His genealogical analysis of governmentality—what he terms “the conduct of conduct”—traces the development of broad issues of guidance that culminate in the specific mode of rationality that characterizes modern political regimes in the West.40 This rationality takes as its object the management of populations and deploys conceptual tools to achieve this end—abstractions such as the rational agent of economic theory, the production of norms through statistical research, and so forth. Foucault argued that the deep background of this rationality could be seen in the new political discourses that appeared in the sixteenth century and dealt with how best to govern, how to be governed, and how to govern oneself and others. Before this time, political thinkers had usually thought regarding the sovereign who stood beyond or outside the frame within which governed subjects were conceptualized. The collapse of feudal institutions and the Reformation and Counter-Reformation occasioned a shift in which sovereign power did not disappear altogether but took on a new guise. The legitimacy of the state was no longer derived from a transcendental point

outside the population but rather from an immanentizing one. The legitimacy of the state would now claim to come from its life-sustaining and life-enhancing policies.

What has not been sufficiently noted is that Foucault also argues that an essential precondition for the emergence of governmentality is pastoral power. He traces this phenomenon to the period of early Christianity when Catholicism assimilated the idea of an Eastern, Pre-Christian pastorate. The goal of pastoral power was to ensure that the souls of the flock were saved; it required the submission of the individual to the care of the pastor and the pastor’s commitment to die for the flock. Unlike sovereign power, pastoral power is individualizing and produces an incitement to speak—to prove that the individual takes both injunctions of spiritual self-care and the overall truth of the pastoral mandate itself seriously. A crucial part of Foucault’s argument is that pastoral power is transferred and transformed during the rise of governmentality: the other-worldly ends of the pastorate are replaced by the this-worldly concerns of biopower (both inside and outside the state) that optimize life through such discourses of control as sexuality, education, public health and nutrition, and specialist-patient interaction. Although there has been a considerable amount of work done on governmentality and biopower, pastoral power has received comparatively little attention, and it offers a way for us to sort through one of the messiest configurations facing anyone who wants to work on religion and politics. In Hudibrastic inference members of the laity use pastoral power to license their political intervention into the body politic: both Hudibras and Ralpho want to destroy the pleasures of the English people because they see those pleasures as threats to pastoralized subjectivity. Ironically, neither Hudibras nor Ralpho knows that a breakdown in pastoral power has grotesquely deformed their own personal characters.
To see how this might affect our readings of a text like *Hudibras*, let me begin with Foucault’s heuristic premise that pastoral power is not identical to political power. This is tantamount to asserting that pastoral power differs from political power that is exerted in the name of religion. In Foucault’s lectures, he put forth this crucial distinction with great force: “Finally, the absolutely fundamental and essential feature of this overall pastoral power is that throughout Christianity it remained distinct from political power.” Foucault added that “This does not mean that religious power only took on the task of caring for individual souls. On the contrary, pastoral power . . . is only concerned with individual souls insofar as this direction of souls also involves a permanent intervention in everyday conduct, in the management of lives, as well as in goods, wealth, and things.” Pastoral power is thus “a form of power that really is a terrestrial power even though it is directed towards the world beyond.” Both forms of terrestrial power, political and pastoral, can be found on nearly every page of *Hudibras*, but critics have been single-mindedly interested in what the poem has to say about the religious variety of political power and have thus overlooked its entanglement with pastoral power. While *Hudibras* certainly targets the more familiar form of political power in its attack on the base motives of the sectarians, an exclusive emphasis on it as a satire of political power in the hands of fanatical religionists has made it fit too readily into the subtractive narratives of secularization and has trivialized its significance. The political/pastoral power distinction, however, allows us to appreciate how *Hudibras* is more than a satire about the abuse of Protestant religion by political hypocrites and ignorant temporizers: it is also a satire about the usurpation of pastoral power that followed the collapse of the pastoral structures of the Anglican Church during the Civil Wars, a moment when individuals hostile to the episcopacy arrogated pastoral authority and dismantled the Henrician reformed tradition in England through the assault on the Anglican episcopate.
That *Hudibras* deals with two different sorts of religious power becomes important in evaluating the often heard claim that it is hard to separate politics and religion with any analytic precision in the periods before modernity—odd because it is usually coupled with the procedure of privileging the political. In the historiography of the English Civil Wars, this has been a particularly vexed issue: without the notion of pastoral power, one is faced with what I believe to be an impossible task: sorting out when pre-modern political power is simply political and when it is religiously political. Glenn Burgess has recently written, surveying the state of the field, “All historians have recognized the religious character of the events of mid-seventeenth-century England; most, though, have also seen their non-religious dimensions as the key to their significance and meaning.” 41 When historians such as Burgess urge us to place greater emphasis on the religious aspects of the Civil Wars, they are usually directing interpretation to the politics of religion, arguing that a greater focus should be placed on the religious motivations of historical agents, a view that leaves pastoral power undefined. To see how pastoral power is elided, consider the classically liberal interpretation of the Civil Wars that emerged through a series of thinkers that includes Clarendon, Bolingbroke, Hume, Guizot, and their twentieth-century descendants discussed by Burgess. In its skeletal form, this interpretation conceptualizes the religious divisiveness of the Civil Wars as a precursor of the modern political state consensus that formed after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The fanatical and volatile religion of the period is thus seen to be a birth pang of the normatively superior modern state that the Restoration period moves toward after fighting one last war of religion. This line of historiography tells us that the British learned that warring over sectarian religion was simply not worth the political costs; the messiness of religion in the Civil War period is thus subordinated to

another story that is more worthy of being told—namely, how British politics grew up and learned to set aside extreme religious volatility by creating a public sphere in which religion was comparatively neutralized. In this liberal account, good (tamed) religious politics wins out over bad (unruly) religious politics; the change in politics eventually catalyzes a shift in kind through the ongoing process of secularization. Against this, one can juxtapose the radical historiography of historians such as Christopher Hill. For these thinkers, religion in the seventeenth century should be thought of as a political idiom: it is not that seventeenth-century politics was of a fundamentally different kind than the politics that came afterward; rather, in the past, individuals did class-based politics in a register that became alien to the language used by later class-based politics.42

When readers dismiss Hudibras as having little to tell them about religion and modernity in Britain after the seventeenth century, it seems to me that they are often caught in this sort of analytical trap: either politics grew up and became increasingly non-religious thereby making Hudibras a political relic—or politics is simply always politics, whether done in a religious idiom or not, making Hudibras a rather limited poem about hypocrisy and ignorance that centers on a narrow subset of seventeenth-century political issues. Instead, I want to suggest that we read Hudibras as a poem about how a specific crisis in pastoral power was used as a springboard for the particularly intense moment of theologized political power that Butler ridicules. Pastoral power did not vanish in the eighteenth century—its particular mid-seventeenth-century configuration with political power did. Accordingly, the last part of this chapter will explore this

42 As Peter Lake writes, “For Hill religion was the idiom through which contemporaries talked about and acted upon a number of topics that were, by modern standards, not religious at all. It was, accordingly, a cod waiting to be cracked by the modern historian.” “Introduction” in Religion and Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke, ed. Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (Woodbridge: Boydell P, 2006), 2.
idea in two ways by examining two aspects of Butler’s poem: first, in its concern with the political usurpation of the pastoral power by pastoral upstarts who intervene in the lives of their fellow countrymen; and, second, in the logic of one of Butler’s most characteristic rhetorical strategies: his burlesquing of political power through analogies of pastoral power and of pastoral power through analogies of political power and Butler’s concomitant critique of politicized pseudo-sainthood.

Insofar as Hudibras has a plot, its narrative usually turns on the usurpation of pastoral power by Sir Hudibras and Ralpho and their joint attempt to intervene in the everyday lives of those around them through coercive political force, figured in Sir Hudibras’s pistols and sword (1.1 ll. 85; 1.1 ll. 351). That the two characters are not simply types of anti-Romance who sally forth on failed adventures is one signature difference between Butler’s creations and those of Cervantes. As the narrator tells the reader in the poem’s opening lines, it was only after “Civil dudgeon first grew high / And men fell out they knew not why” that did “Sir knight abandon dwelling / And out he rode a-colonelling” (1.1 ll. 1-2; 1.1 ll. 13-14). Hudibras is a man of his moment who believes that his specific pastoral interventions into the lives of the English are warranted not because he fought on the winning side of a factional dispute but because he is a knight of the reformed church—one charged to protect individual souls by directing their conduct: “For he was of that stubborn crew / Of errant saints whom all men grant / To be the true church militant” (1.1 ll. 190-2). His companion Ralpho believes that he is likewise licensed to intervene in the

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43 Although it used to be pro forma to emphasize Cervantes as an overriding presence in Hudibras, this has changed in the last two decades, a point made by Werner von Koppenfels who writes, “quite a few of the more stimulating modern discussions of Hudibras no longer think it worthwhile to look at the Cervantes connection, or have come to treat it marginally at best.” “Samuel Butler’s Hudibras: A Quixotic Perspective of Civil War” in Cervantes in the English Speaking World, ed. Dario Fernandez-Morera and Michael Hanke (Barcelona: Reichenberger, 2005), 26.
lives of others because of his privileged access to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Whereas Hudibras is guided by his overwrought scholasticism and logic chopping, Ralpho is guided by an inner light that costs nothing and is effortless; consequently, he is loose in giving political advice to his master throughout the poem: “For Saints themselves will sometimes be / Of gifts, that cost them nothing, free” (1.1 ll. 495-6). Ralpho’s inner light is one

. . . that falls down from on high,
For spiritual trades to cozen by;
An ignis fatuus that bewitches,
And leads men into pools and ditches,
To make them dip themselves, and sound
For Christendom in dirty pond,
To dive like wild-fowl for salvation,
And fish to catch regeneration. (1.1 ll. 501-507)

Hudibrastic interference is at its core both a benighted pastoral and political intervention into the affairs of individuals. It satirizes the pastoral power being wielded by those who would not have traditionally held the pastoral function of the shepherd—figures who would have belonged to the traditional flock—and their bungled attempts to modify the behavior of other individuals for base political gain in the name of religion. This is ultimately what undermines the sectarian appropriation of pastoral power in Part III, Canto 2, of the poem when the narrative voice explains why the sectarian consensus eventually fell apart following the death of Oliver Cromwell—why the sectarians breached their original agreement to work alongside each other. After the death of Cromwell,

Rebellion now began for lack
Of Zeal and Plunder to grow slack,
The Cause and Covenant to lessen,
And Providence to b’out of Season:
For now there was no more to purchase
O’th’ Kings Revenue and the Churches,
But all divided, shar’d and gone,
That us’d to urge the Brethren on. (3.2 ll. 34-38)

Butler suggests that when spoils grew thin, the desire of the sectarians to reform the church began to slacken. The mutually dependent configuration of pastoral and political power lost momentum until the saints of the Commonwealth identified in each other further sources of wealth to be despoiled.

The logic of Hudibrastic intervention can be seen in what is widely regarded as the most aesthetically successful section of the work, Part 1. Butler begins by introducing his two main characters and announcing their quest in Canto 1; he tells of their confrontation and battle with the bear baiters in a lengthy burlesque of the epic tradition in Canto 2, and he concludes with the defeat and imprisonment of Hudibras in Canto 3. Following the extended character sketches of Sir Hudibras and Ralpho in the first canto (the most widely anthologized part of Hudibras), Butler sets the stage for what ensues:

In western clime there is a town
To those that dwell therein well known;
Therefore there needs no more be said here
We unto them refer our reader
(For brevity is very good
When w’are, or are not, understood).
To this town people did repair
On days of market or of fair,
And to cracked fiddle and hoarse tabor
In merriment did drudge and labour.
But now a sport more formidable
Had raked together village rabble.
‘Twas an old way of recreating
Which learned butchers call bear-baiting. (1.1 ll. 659-72)

These sarcastic opening lines inform the reader that the intervention planned by Hudibras and Ralpho will be an unnecessary one. It will take place in an anonymous town filled with ordinary people who are going about their ordinary business and who merely hope to find some respite from everyday work. Hearing a rumor that these villagers will hold a contest between a bear named Bruin and some dogs, Sir Hudibras explains to Ralpho that he and his squire are obligated as Christians “To save th’expense of Christian blood” and bring the festivities to a halt (1.1 ll. 722). He reasons that since there is no plausible excuse for the activity to take place, it must be a “feud by Jesuits invented” meant to set Christian “brother against brother / To claw and curry one another” (1.1 ll. 233; 1.1 ll. 743-45). While such a Jesuit threat signals paranoia about Continental Catholicism and is political—Hudibras calls it nothing less than “a Machiavellian plot” (1.1 ll. 735)—his fundamental justification devolves upon the anti-Christian character of the sport: bear-baiting is harmful to the souls of the participants because it undoes the work of the Protestant saints in England. Ralpho agrees that the sport is an imminent spiritual threat: “The word ‘bear baiting’/ is carnal, and of man’s creating” (1.1 ll. 799-800). Since there is no record of it in the Bible, Ralpho adds that it is “unlawful and a sin” (1.1 ll. 803) and idolatrous (1.1 ll. 809). Armed with this perspective, Hudibras puts the matter plainly to the astonished crowd of bear baiters when he confronts them,

For as we make war for the King
Against himself, the self-same thing
Some will not stick to swear we do
For God and for religion too.
For if Bear Baiting we allow,
What good can reformation do? (1.1 ll. 514-518)
Hudibras is at pains to remind the crowd that the war against the King was more than a war against a monarch: it was a war against a man who had failed in his pastoral duties as the head of the established church, and this is why men like Hudibras and Ralpho have usurped the pastoral authority of the shepherd function of the King and have used it against him in his name—why, as the poem tells us, “Botchers left old clothes in the lurch, / And fell to turn and patch the Church” (1.1 ll. 544-5). Foucault points to this when he writes, “The Reformation as well as the Counter Reformation gave the religious pastorate much greater control, a much greater hold on the spiritual life of individuals than in the past: an increase in devotional conduct and of spiritual controls, and an intensification of the relationship between individuals and their guides” [italics added].

When Hudibras questions why a bear and dogs would ever fight one another, he is simply unable to understand a feature of everyday governance that Butler knows each of his readers will instinctually appreciate: people occasionally want a break from their physical and spiritual toil. Hudibras’s inability to recognize this identifies him as a failed conduit of pastoral power and shows that he perceives the situation through only two lenses: intensified political power (his wild suspicion of the Jesuit plot) and intensified pastoral power (his unreasonable suspicion of the imminent threat to Christian souls). Puzzled, he turns to Ralpho and asks:

For what design, what interest
Can beast have to encounter beast?
They fight for no espoused cause,
Frail privilege, fundamental laws,
Nor for a thorough reformation,
Nor Covenant, nor Protestation,

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44 Foucault, 229.
Nor liberty of consciences,
Nor lords’ and commons’ ordinances,
Nor for the church, nor for church lands,
To get them in their own no hands,
Nor evil counsellors to bring
To justice that seduce the King,
Nor for the worship of us men,
Though we have done as much for them. (1.1 ll. 753-766)

The first two lines ask a question that Butler would have all readers ask themselves about characters in the poem: what is the “interest” behind the human action? But the soundness of this question in the mouth of Hudibras is undercut by his bombast about bears and dogs. In the lines that follow, he provides an account of what he believes can in fact license human violence; and Butler flags its political climax in greed through a wonderful use of calculated rhetorical delay: “Nor for the church, nor for church lands” (1.1 ll. 761). It is telling, however, that the passage ends on a note of spiritual failure that emphasizes the pastoral nature of the bear-baiting intervention. Hudibras concludes by reminding Ralpho that men have worshipped animals at different times—but that animals have never worshipped humans. Moving from this conceit of pagan worship, he embarks upon a flight of whimsy, claiming that Nero sewed Christians inside the skins of bears and forced them to fight dogs, “From whence, no doubt, th’invention came / Of this lewd, anti-Christian game” (1.1 ll. 793-794). The movement from self-interest to paranoia about godless governance is made complete.

What I have outlined is the sort of convoluted act of pastoral rationalization that usually precedes the commencement of the action in the poem. Hudibras and Ralpho must justify their actions through pastoral speech that justifies their behavior to one another before they can take political action. Only after such rhetorical cleansing has taken place can the first form of
religious power legitimate their monomaniacal appropriation of political power. The hypocritical and ignorant duo thus become risible because of their indefatigable certainty that they are England’s privileged custodians of pastoral power—what in the words of Hudibras allows saints like him to be “wisely mounted higher / Than constables, in cerule wit” (1.1 ll. 708).

This tension between the pastoral and the political shows itself most characteristically in the way in which politics becomes an analogue for pastoral authority and vice versa throughout the poem. To demonstrate how this works, I would like to focus on Ralpho’s great speech in Part II, Canto 2. At the end of Part II, Canto 1, Hudibras’s lady agrees to free him from his imprisonment in a dungeon on the condition that he agrees to punish his flesh with a self-administered whipping. Hudibras promises; and once again free, he rides forth with his squire. Soon, however, he slows his horse on the plain: a scruple enters his head, and he tells his companion that he is forced to consider whether it is a greater Christian sin to punish his own flesh or to break his word. Much of the comedy of the episode stems from the reader’s knowledge that Hudibras is too much a man of the flesh—too great a lover of carnal pleasure—to ever flagellate himself. Obeying the logic of pastoral rationalization that precedes action—something that structures the poem—Hudibras turns to Ralpho for guidance. He says,

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\begin{align*}
\text{Whether it be direct infringing} \\
\text{An oath, if I should waive this swingeing,} \\
\text{And what I’ve sworn to bear, forbear,} \\
\text{And so b’equivocation swear,} \\
\text{Or whether ‘t be a lesser sin} \\
\text{To be forsworn than act the thing,} \\
\text{Are deep and subtle points which must,} \\
\text{T’inform my conscience be discust; (2.2 ll. 55-62)}
\end{align*}
\]
This provides the opportunity for Ralpho’s speech on the nature of Hudibrastic sainthood and political action. He begins his argument with a concession: a case can be made for not breaking one’s word. Even so, he will “state the case aright / for best advantage to our light” (2.2 ll. 72-3). The first moment of the argument centers on the pastoral conceit that the inner man of the spirit and the outer man of the flesh are engaged in an unending battle. Butler writes, “Not that they really cuff or fence, / But in a spiritual, mystic sense” seek to dominate one another (2.2 ll. 81-2). While this war is noble, it is abominable to make such a confrontation between body and soul literal; and Ralpho attributes this making literal of spiritual struggle to pagans, Jews, Indians, and Catholics who mortify their flesh (2.2 ll. 86-98). He adds that since those groups are willing to flagellate themselves, that makes flagellation “impious” and a “heinous sin” in itself (2.2 ll. 100; 2.2 ll. 102). With this first point made, he moves to the second part of his argument, asserting that oaths are made of words and words are “. . . but wind / Too feeble instruments to bind” or hold deeds (2.2 ll. 106-7). He likens deeds to substance and words to shadow; and when deeds and words come into conflict, the weaker of the two should yield to the stronger. In effect, Hudibras has no obligation to be in thrall to something as airy as words. After this second argument is made, Ralpho then says that while he and Hudibras have different views on many religious issues, they are both reformation saints; Hudibras is therefore entitled to all the privileges that go in hand with sainthood. More specifically, since the saints are engaged in a great battle with the Devil—and since the Devil can break his oaths, saints should be able to break theirs too; otherwise, the Devil would have more power than the saints and to grant this would be impiety (2.2 ll. 123-128). Moreover, according to scripture, swearing is only wrong when it is done idly or in vain, not when it is done in the name of self-interest or gain (2.2 ll. 129-132). Finally, to break an oath is a kind of self-denial, which is a saint-like virtue (2.2 ll.
Throughout this section of the speech, Ralpho begins to undermine the notion of sectarian sainthood.

The remainder of the speech consists of weighing the spiritual privileges of sainthood against the pragmatics of politics; in other words, it stages a confrontation between the political and the pastoral in which each is understood in terms of the other and which ultimately voids the pastoral authority of the sectarians to intervene into the lives of other countrymen. Ralpho reminds Hudibras of the history of the Civil Wars, asking him if there was any oath that the sectarians did not in time break (2.2 ll. 141-148). The Protestant saints in the House of Commons had broken their words before they broke the civil peace in the first part of the 1640s; they broke the Allegiance and the Supremacy oath; they broke the Protestation in which they had promised to protect the episcopate of the Church of England and the church’s doctrine; they broke the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 when they abolished the monarchy and established the republic in 1649; they broke their oath to fight for the King’s safety and his right to rule; they broke their commitment to fight alongside and die for the Earl of Essex; they broke their promise not to abolish the House of Lords when it was dismantled in 1649; they broke their word to stand up for all members of the House during Pride’s Purge of 1648 when Cromwell’s men blocked access to the House of Commons for members who had disagreed with Cromwell. Divine history, Ralpho seems to say, pushes us toward one inevitable conclusion: oaths were never meant to bind those who wield true pastoral authority; they were created “. . . to confine the bad and sinful / Like mortal cattle in a pinfold” (2.2 ll. 199-200). The politicization of sainthood becomes total when Ralpho argues that, because a member of the House of Lords is not compelled to swear an oath but gives his verdict on his honor and “A saint’s of th’heavnly realm a peer” (2.2 ll. 201), oaths have no meaning for Lords:
It follows, though, the thing be forgery
And false, th’affirm, it is no perjury,
But a mere ceremony, and a breach
Of nothing but a form of speech. (2.2 ll. 205-208)

It is only a short distance from this to Ralpho’s undermining of the roots of pastoral power in the interrogation of conscience:

Is’t not ridiculous and nonsense
A saint should be a slave to conscience,
That ought to be above such fancies,
As far as above ordinances? (2.2 ll. 247-250)

At this point, pastoral power appears to have collapsed into de-sanctified political power: there is no truth of the individual to be found through its exercise. If Foucault was right that “a world subject to pastoral government . . . was a world in which there was an entire system of truth, on the one hand, and truth hidden and extracted on the other,” then Ralpho’s speech ends by pointing to a world in which pseudo-saints and false shepherds rule supreme: “For truth is precious and divine / Too rich a pearl for carnal swine” (2.2 ll. 257-258). If the classical secularization thesis would have us lump together pastoral power and religiously inflected political power, then Hudibras points to their dialectical struggle against one another at a moment of intense social crisis in England’s history. As this chapter has shown, that thesis in its familiar form reads the story of modernity as being about the diminution of both forms of power in the West. With the restoration of Charles II, the Church of England was reinstated to its episcopal form. Men such as Sir Hudibras and Ralpho who held their religious beliefs naively were to be replaced by individuals who were self-consciously reflective in matters of religious belief. Butler himself had opened path forward by satirizing naïve belief as belonging to the

45 Foucault, 236.
world that had fallen apart. John Dryden would use his poetic gift to depict the transformed nature of pastoral power, presenting Charles II first as an ironic shepherd king. It would be a different satirical solution to the entanglement of pastoral and political power, one that in the world of poetry—at least—could block political inference.
Chapter 2

**Governing a Headstrong, Moody, Murm’ring Race:**

*Dryden and the Judaicization of Pastoral Kingship in Absalom and Achitophel*

Like many of his compatriots in 1660, the metallist and seal-engraver Thomas Simon was optimistic that his financial troubles were about to improve with the regime change.¹ During the Commonwealth, his talents had been in high demand, but they had not insulated him from prolonged periods of monetary struggle. He was in step with much of the country, not only in welcoming the return of a king but also in celebrating farewell to a Commonwealth government that had overextended itself, one budgetary statement from 1660 recording the yearly debt totaled more two million pounds with a deficit of over one million.² In 1655–56, Simon and his engravers had been employed by that government, producing the great seals of Scotland and Ireland as well as lesser seals for the British law courts, the admiralty, and the English, Scottish, and Irish councils.³ For much of this work Simon and his men were never fully paid, and out of frustration he wrote to the councils of Oliver Cromwell’s government in 1656: “I beg you to consider that I and my servants have wrought five years without recompense, and that the interest I have to pay for gold and silver eats up my profit.”⁴ When the Lord Protector died in 1658, the government commissioned Simon to create the effigy of Cromwell’s face that would be used in the funeral procession from Somerset House to Westminster in which John Milton,

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³ Worth.
⁴ Quoted in Wroth.
Andrew Marvell, and John Dryden marched side by side.\textsuperscript{5} Two years later, Simon petitioned the new government to become its chief engraver while asking forgiveness for having produced the seal for the Long Parliament in 1643,\textsuperscript{6} the strife-filled year after Charles II’s father had entered parliament and uttered the famous words the “birds have flown” over the five members who escaped by boat down the Thames.\textsuperscript{7} On both accounts Simon’s petition was refused, yet Charles II’s government would later employ him to produce new seals, and it would consider his designs for coinage at several points thereafter. In the Restoration year, however, Simon produced a series of coronation coins.\textsuperscript{8} On the back of the second and finest of these, he depicted Charles II as a shepherd. Watchful, Charles protects the English people, themselves represented as the sheep of a well-governed flock. Simon’s hopeful—and opportunistic—appeal to the imagery of the sovereign as a shepherd in the wake of colossal failures of seventeenth-century government was merely one instance in a flood of rhetoric, visual and otherwise, that envisioned the restored monarchy in terms of pastoral kingship.\textsuperscript{9}

Consider four sermons delivered in the months of May and June 1660, all typical of the moment. Each emphasized pastoral kingship through likening Charles II to King David, the preeminent figure of pastoral kingship in the Western tradition. On May 10, Robert Mossom, who had been reduced to running a small school as a sequestered minister during the Commonwealth, and who would eventually rise through the Church of Ireland to become the

\textsuperscript{5} Barbara K. Lewalski, \textit{The Life of John Milton} (Malden: Blackwell, 2000), 360.
\textsuperscript{6} Wroth.
\textsuperscript{8} G. Vertue, \textit{Medals, Coins, Great Seals, and other Works of Thomas Simon} (London: 1780).
\textsuperscript{9} Matthew Jenkins has argued that the shepherd motif was one of a “multiplicity of representations and conceptions of kingship [meant] to appeal to a broad cross-section of the population.” \textit{Culture and Politics at the Court of Charles II, 1660-1685} (Woodbridge: Boydell P, 2010), 72.
Nelson 57

bishop of Derby, delivered a sermon entitled “England’s Gratulation for the King and his Subjects Happy Return.” In it he explicated Psalm 75, reminding his readers that King David, like Charles, had suffered a period of exile from which he had returned. Psalm 75 presents a message of bringing spiritual and political accord to civil disunity, and Mossom reads it as a testimony to David’s strength as a visionary and spiritual leader. For Mossom, Charles, like David, was chosen by God to rule a divided flock. They both oversaw a people in which “there was no harmony” and where there was “all but discord in the church.” But if the king were wise—if he were in accord with his people, and if the people were in accord with the king, and if both with God—then all political disagreement was surmountable under the stewardship of a pastoral king. “Think we,” wrote Mossom, “that David’s person to be the King’s, and Israel’s condition to be England’s.” On May 18, Simon Ford, an Anglican clergyman who took pride in being a controversialist, delivered a sermon at Lyme-Regis on the parallels between the two monarchs in which he argued that the Davidic charge of Charles II was more than a regime change—the restitution of King David had come short of that of Charles. Accordingly, England should embrace its own David. It had only to look at “the whole series of kings of Israel after the revolt from the House of David” who were “not only Tyrants in Title, but in

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10 Robert Mossom, England’s gratulation for the King and his subjects happy union. First preach’d on the day of publique thanksgiving, appointed by the Parliament, May the 10th. 1660. Since publish’d as a common tribute to Caesar, at his so much long’d for arrival (London, 1660).

11 Exegesis of Psalm 75 has often centered on the relation between temporal and spiritual monarchy. Saint Augustine wrote the following about it: “In our eyes, though Christ, who is David’s stock according to the flesh, is God, God blessed above all things for ever. And so he is both our king and our God: our king because, being born of the tribe of Judah according to the flesh he is the Messiah, our Lord and Savior; but our God too, who exists before Judah, and before heaven and earth, for through him all things were made, both spiritual and corporeal.” Saint Augustine, Exposition of the Psalms (New York: New York, 2002), 55.

12 Simon Ford, Parallela; or The loyall subjects exultation for the royall exiles resauration. In the parallel of K. David and Mephiboseth on one side; and our gracious sovereign K. Charls, and his loving subjects, on the other (London, 1660).
Exercise.” Charles himself would be like David restored since the sufferings of the two men were comparable. Ford agreed with men like Mossom that exile had taught both sovereigns wisdom from the same hard school. He wrote that Charles’s II’s “Crown [was] made of gold perfected in fire.” On May 27, Simon Ford, who had been forced to support himself by teaching during the Commonwealth, presented the scholarly and pedantic “David’s Return from his Banishment” at St. Maries in Oxford. He drew on familiar parallels between the exilic periods of David and Charles, and he hoped that even those who were divided on the restoration of the monarchy would recognize that kings are inherently people of value. “Surely David,” he cajoled, “whilst a shepherd, stood for unities, yea but David once a king stands for thousand: David considered as the son of Jesse stood but for single tens at most; but David considered as the Lords anointed stands for thousands at least.” On June 20, John Martin put the Charles-as-David analogy succinctly. He wrote, “the Church of God hath esteemed it very well worth our most earnest solemn address of Thanksgiving; when a good king, such as David, is seated in his throne.”

In imagining what the Restoration might become, each of these clergymen hoped that the political and the pastoral would coexist under a new government easily with a modern shepherd king.

By the time John Dryden produced the most enduring comparison of Charles II to David in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), earnest comparisons between the restored monarchy and the offices of pastoral kingship were harder to sustain, and they were seldom found in pulpits or in a popular press that was fixated on the politics of exclusion and other crises which beset Charles II’s government. As Jonathan Scott has written, the bloom was off the Restoration rose as early as 1667— “one of the bitterest parliamentary sessions of the reign”—during which people began

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to reminisce about “Oliver’s time” in public. In 1668, Charles’s longtime mentor Clarendon fell from the office, and the character of royal policy began to change as Charles took a more direct lead in guiding his own government. The Triple Alliance the United Provinces and Sweden was used by Charles to make way for an ultimate alliance with France, which was signed at Dover in May 1670 and fomented a great deal of popular suspicion that Charles himself was a crypto-Catholic, a matter intensified by the failure of the third Anglo-Dutch War of 1672-4 and the open conversion of James, the Duke of York, to Catholicism in 1673. By 1675, it was clear that the politically powerful Earl of Shaftesbury (who had helped engineer the Restoration) and Earl Buckingham had abandoned the king. The stage was set for the emergence of the highly vitriolic party politics of the late 1670s and early 1680s around the issue of exclusion which split the country and dominated London politics for two years. In July 1679, the politics of legislation had become sufficiently heated around the matter for Charles to take the extreme step of dissolving the first Exclusion parliament. As Gary S. De Krey writes, “After 18 years of the Cavalier Parliament, the kingdom had seen another parliament that lasted less than 18 weeks,” adding that Charles “had tried to rid himself of the parliamentary opposition by ridding himself of a parliament.” It is into this toxic political world of the emerging modern state and its party politics that Dryden represents Charles as an unlikely emblem of pastoral kingship.

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16 Mark Knights writes that while “exclusion crisis” is a convenient and established shorthand for the period: “it does not do justice to the depth and complexity of what was the critical period in Charles II’s reign, when politics and opinion were in crisis.” *Politics and Opinion in Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 5.
Why would Dryden return to the typological image of Charles II as a pastoral king under such circumstances, when such an appeal would almost certainly ring hollow, especially considering the ending of the poem where David steps forth to restore order to his troubled kingdom? Critics have offered explanations that range from the political to the aesthetic. Ronald Paulson has contended that Dryden’s typology is intended to elevate contemporary politics; Earl Miner, that Dryden’s typology underscores a pre-Reformation sense that good works are more important than faith; Steven Zwicker, that typological displacement enables the reader to imagine a line in which even a Catholic heir can succeed; Paul Korshin, that Dryden’s typology presents a mode of postfiguration in which troubling, less acceptable figures are matched to ones who have already been accepted; and Michael McKeon, that history and religion become typologically, and prudentially, aestheticized. What unites many critics is an often unstated agreement that the playful Biblicism in Absalom and Achitophel is not primarily devotional; its fundamental mode is not spiritual, not religiously religious, but something else. Thus one challenge that has traditionally faced critics of the poem is to discover how its religious imagery points to something other than religion. Against this, I want to suggest that the thoroughly religious logic of pastoral power—and the pastoral function of the shepherd king—is essential to the ideological aims of the poem. At the same time, I maintain that such an investigation does not mean that one should accept that the poem is religious in any ordinary sense. The residual imagery of pastoral power gives Dryden a way to think about intractable

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problems of population and governance attendant on the coalescence of the modern state, and it allows him to offer a representational solution to the perennial dilemmas that theorists of civil religion would explore.

Perhaps because Absalom and Achitophel is such a successful cosmopolitan satire—and because it so memorably treats Charles II as a flawed king—critics have not taken the ideological component of pastoral kingship seriously that it wears on its sleeve. In the opening lines of the poem, Charles II is presented as a typologically ironic David, one with an overabundance of sexual energy. Lest it be taken as so satiric that it drains the idea of pastoral kingship in the poem of any gravity, it should be recalled that the Biblical David himself was a sexual and spiritual failure at points in his reign, most significantly in his affair with Bathsheba (alluded to in lines 709-10) and in engineering of the death of Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba’s husband. When the prophet Nathan rebukes the Biblical David in 2 Samuel, Chapter 12, over the affair with Bathsheba, he does it through an overtly pastoral parable. Nathan appears before the shepherd king, saying: “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.” He continues, “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took

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23 Criticism of Absalom and Achitophel has often split according to how critics have read the depiction of David in the text. The rehabilitative view is put well by Howard D. Weinbrot: Dryden’s poem “begins and ends with David/Charles II’s conduct. At first, he is an irresponsible monarch self-indulgently and destructively spreading his seminal seed . . . The poem ends when David finally grasps the true nature of kingship, resolves the conflict between his roles as loving father and powerful monarch, and warns Absalom that his disloyal behavior threatens both his life and the nation’s.” Literature, Religion, and the Evolution of Culture, 1660–1780 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), 346.
the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

Confronted with the narrative, the angered King David tells the prophet that the man who killed the ewe must die to which Nathan responds, “Thou art the man!”

Like a shepherd with his own flock, the Jewish people, David understands how damning such a failure is. Yet in spite such failures—and in part because of them as I shall argue—David has long been the West’s preeminent icon of pastoral kingship.

This is to say that although Dryden’s transformation of Charles II into David is satiric, configurations of pastoral kingship inform some of the deepest ideological work that Absalom and Achitophel accomplishes, which is to use a Judaicization of Christianity to defuse major problems in Christian civil religion that were expressing themselves during the Restoration. These configurations make it possible for Dryden to reduce the ideological field that had been created by the Exclusion Crisis and impose a unitary view on a factious political reality where no such view could be achieved historically. Dryden does this by developing one overarching typological shift that has been underemphasized: the transposition of the Christian pastorate onto the ancient pastorate. Here the work of Michel Foucault is particularly helpful. As Foucault reminded the audience of his lectures on pastoral power, the notion that a king, a god, or a chief is like a shepherd is a common trope in the Mediterranean East where spiritual power was often imagined as being exerted over a multiplicity in movement—a flock—and where kings themselves were likened to shepherds. As Bruce Curtis has put it, in these lectures Foucault was attempting to understand how the concept of population—so essential to the administration of

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25 Steven McKenzie draws attention to another pastoral failure in David’s life. After David goes to watch the battle that precedes his slaying of Goliath, his older brother chides him for leaving his few sheep unwatched, yet the “shepherd image also hints as the future that awaits this exceptional youth as a ruler of his people.” King David: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 50.
modern governmentalities—developed out of and transformed previous conceptions of “populousness.” Whereas earlier conceptions of the social body envisioned “that units of government (kingdoms, empires, countries, parishes, soldiers or souls, for instance) are distributed across different orders or classes,” the later concept of population was “dependent, in the first instance, on the establishment of practical equivalences among subjects, objects or events.” The first was organic in its view of society; the second, atomistic. Dryden’s figuration of the British people as a flock in the poem is as clear a figure of populousness as one could find. But the central drama of the poem is the battle between it and another figure of populousness with which it competes and over which it eventually triumphs—what Foucault called the citizen-state game. As Michell Dean points out, “It’s hardly exaggerating to say that the tradition of political thought in the West has been largely preoccupied with the image of the [citizen-state game]. However, it is the line that can be traced around the figure of a shepherd who guides a flock rather than a sovereign ruling over a territory and its citizens, that Foucault finds more significant for his history of governmentality.” Whereas David in the poem represents the principal player in the shepherd-flock game, Achitophel represents the chief agent in a dangerous citizen-state game as when, in his second speech, he argues that David’s

    ... Right, for sums of necessary Gold,
    Shall first be Pawn’d, and afterwards be sold:
    Till time shall Ever-wanting David draw,
    To pass your doubtful Title into Lw:

27 Ibid., 508.
28 Ibid.
29 Foucault argued that governmentality arose from the fusion of citizen-state and shepherd-flock games.
If not; the People have a Right Supreme
To make their Kings; for Kings are made for them.
All Empire is no more than Pow’r in Trust,
Which when resum’d, can be no longer Just.

Or when the collapses Biblical history into a citizen-state game in which the Jews threw off the shepherd relation that underwrote their initial covenant with God

The Jews well know their power: e’r Saul they Chose,

God was their King, and God they durst Depose.

By enveloping the citizen-state game in a narrative frame which privileges the shepherd-flock game, Dryden produces a text that stages a confrontation between the civic and the religious. But this confrontation is not straightforward. When Foucault examines the Jewish treatment of pastorality and the origins of Western pastoral power (where Christian sovereigns were often thought of as being shepherds), he is careful to distinguish it from the Eastern pastorate of cultures such as ancient Egypt where rulers were frequently imagined to be shepherds. Ancient Israel differed from these Mediterranean societies because the shepherd-flock relationship in Israel was always between God and the people, with one exception: “No Hebrew king, with the exception of David, is explicitly referred to by name as a shepherd (berger). The term is reserved for God.” 31 King David is thus the point of exception where Dryden injects ideas of Christian pastoral kingship onto the ancient pastorate.

This complex relationship between Eastern and Western pastorates stands behind some of the most perplexing aspects of the poem. When Dryden’s David finally takes control for his difficult flock, he appears divine, his would-be usurpers exposed as false prophets and messiahs. But the new time that the final lines of the poem triumphantly announce (“Henceforth a series of new

time began, / The mighty years in long procession ran,” lines 1028-29) is the restored pre-Messianic time of the Eastern pastorate and the Davidic line of kingship re-imagined through the divisive politics of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, not the post-Messianic time of the Western pastorate itself. In addition, the Eastern shepherd king metaphor that frames the poem also establishes a custodial relationship between God and the earthly sovereign that operated in the Eastern pastorate, if not in ancient Israel itself, where, as Foucault argues, “if God is the shepherd of men, then the king is, as it were, the subaltern shepherd of men, and it if the king is also the shepherd of men, then the king is, as it were, the subaltern shepherd to whom God has entrusted the flock of men and who, at the end of the day and the end of his reign, must restore the flock he has been entrusted with to God.”

How one interprets Absalom and Achitophel’s problematic resolution will thus depend on how much weight one is willing to give to its appropriation of the culturally residual metaphors of pastoral kingship. On the face of it, David’s intervention into the fraying civil order of a willful Jewish people restores them to God, and God nods approvingly to his subaltern: the pastoral hierarchy is reestablished through the people’s subordination to the crosier and of David’s crosier to God’s will. Dryden writes, “Once more the Godlike David was restored / And willing nations knew their lawful lord” (lines 1030-1). That David acts to bring about a political and spiritual restoration at all in the poem is inseparable from his acting out of goodness only. Pastoral power, unlike political power, is “entirely defined by its beneficence; its only raison d’etre is doing good, and in order to do good.” And it is not incidental that when the civil order becomes dangerously unstable that his virtues as a leader display themselves most clearly.

32 Ibid.
33 Foucault, 126.
Foucault labeled this characteristic of pastoral power wielded by the shepherd “the principle of alternate correspondence.” He explains

If in fact it is true that the sheep’s merit constitutes the shepherd’s merit, then can we not also say that the shepherd’s merit would not amount to much if all the sheep were always perfectly worthy of merit? Is not the shepherd’s merit due, at least in part, to the sheep being recalcitrant, exposed to danger, and always about to fall? And shepherd’s merit, which earns his salvation, will be precisely that he has constantly struggled against the dangers, brought back the stray sheep, and that he has had to struggle against his own flock . . . . Conversely, we can say that the pastor’s weaknesses may contribute to the salvation of the flock. How can the pastor’s frailties contribute to the flock’s salvation? Certainly, the pastor should be perfect, as far as possible . . . . But if the pastor has no weaknesses, if he is too proper or too clean, will he not take something like pride in this perfection?^{34}

Alternative correspondence is at the heart of Absalom and Achitophel: David’s legitimacy as ruler is tied to his flaws and how he overcomes them. Whether it is the death of Uriah or a blind spot for James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth, the internal logic of pastoral kingship makes room for personal error since, as Foucault adds, “the pastor’s faults and weaknesses contribute to the edification of his sheep and are part of the movement, of guiding them toward salvation.”^{35}

At this point, I hope it is clear that pastoral kingship is not merely an ornamental element in the poem. It drives its typological plot complications and governs how populousness is figured in its world. In the second half of this essay, I want to turn to how pastoral kingship in the poem actually governs and what political problems it solves, if only imaginatively. To do this, I argue that Dryden’s poem grapples with the same issues that theorists of civil religion were beginning to struggle with.

**Pastoral Power in Dryden’s Typology of Civil Religion**

Dryden’s appropriation of the biblical narrative from Samuel II allows him to develop a poetics of civil religion in Absalom and Achitophel, one that brings the rhetorical strategies of the

^{34} Ibid, 171.
^{35} Ibid, 172.
poem into alignment with aspects of Hobbes. Although notions of civil religion existed before Jean Jacques Rousseau coined the term in Chapter 8 of the fourth book of *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau was the first major philosopher to identify civil religion explicitly as an analytic problem, even while acknowledging his debt to Hobbes. Before turning to Hobbes’s model of civil religion in *De Cive* (1642) and *Leviathan* (1651), it is worth considering why Rousseau thought civil religion such an important issue for at least two reasons: the remarkable clarity of Rousseau’s discussion emphasizes an important theme in Dryden’s text—its attempt to invoke pastoral power to resolve an age-old conflict in Christian civil religion—and moving through Rousseau to Hobbes will make Hobbes’s own conception of civil religion more legible than it might otherwise be. Moreover, when Rousseau’s theory of civil religion is supplemented with Hobbes’s interpretation of the danger of prophets as a source of political

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*The influence of Hobbes on Dryden is one that scholars have long pursued, although the nature of that influence has been subject to continual debate. The seventeenth-century writer of lives John Aubrey wrote that Dryden was a great admirer of Hobbes and that Dryden’s plays drew on Hobbesian theory explicitly. Following this lead, the most fruitful line of investigation into the influence of Hobbes on Dryden has centered on the plays. By contrast, the influence of Hobbes on Dryden’s most celebrated poems has been comparatively understudied with the general consensus following Louis Bredvold’s seminal argument that intellectual spirit of Dryden’s poetry is dominated by a skepticism that is fundamentally at odds with Hobbes’s dogmatic materialism and absolutist political theory. See Louis Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden: Studies in Some Aspects of 17th-century Thought* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1956).


Currently there are two main approaches to civil religion. One approach ultimately derives from the sociological work of Emile Durkheim and dominates the discussion of civil religion in sociology. It views civil religion as a spontaneous phenomenon that occurs naturally in large-scale social formations. The other view of civil religion ultimately derives from Rousseau and his philosophical antecedents. It conceives of civil religion as a political instrument to be used by the state for secular ends. As I will argue, the political rhetoric that Dryden uses to bind pastoral power in *Absalom and Achitophel* puts the civil religion of the poem in the second category. For a discussion of the civil religion debate, see Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001).
instability in the Old Testament, one begins to see how pastoral power informs civil religion the
diagnosis of Dryden’s poem. Such an analysis risks being anachronistic, but in looking back at the
political tradition, he had inherited allowed Rousseau to be perspicuous where Hobbes and
Dryden are often muddy. My contention is that all three respond to how competing sources of
religio-political authority create irresolvable political faction, unease in the social body, and
problems of for governance; all three create imaginaries of civil religion that seek to de-
spiritualize the dangers of pastoral power, precisely the kind of de-spiritualization that occurred
when the “caring for souls” of pastoral power fused with other rationalities of power to produce
governmentality.

In a penetrating discussion of Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, Timothy O’Hagan writes that
“Civil religion represents the point at which the coercive power of the state is entitled to limit the
range not only of the practices but also of the beliefs, of its citizens.”

39 It is the point “at which the Empire of the Laws reaches its outer limit, at the inner workings of our hearts.” It is thus unsurprising to find pastoral power, with its intense interest in guiding internal governance,
entangled in the matrix of civil religion in all Christian states. For Rousseau, sovereign control of civil religion is a necessary part of any well-functioning state apparatus. Accordingly, the sovereign should possess the authority to make the people account for their religious beliefs to the degree that their spiritual beliefs affect the security and solidarity of the state. Such a civil profession of faith is not exactly one of religious dogma; instead, it is an expression of social sentiments without which people cannot be a good citizen.

40 What matters finally is not whether the claims of religion are based in eternal verities, but, as Mauritzio Viroli puts it, the

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consequence religion has for the unity of the body politic. This pragmatic interest in religion and political stability is not far from what critics such as Michael McKeon have found in Dryden’s conservative appeal to the virtues of social stability and political harmony within *Absalom and Achitophel*. Yet the poem is one that paradoxically uses a typology of religion while putting forth lines that come dangerously close to ironizing religion entirely. While the poem contains lines such as “Religion, and redress of grievances, / Two names, that always cheat and always please . . . .” (lines 747-8), Dryden presents his readers with a pastoral king who must intercede into a politically volatile people to reestablish civil concord since “God cannot Grant so much as they can crave” (line 988).

Rousseau tells us that while the sovereign lacks the power to compel his subjects to believe in the tenets of civil religion—tenets that he later defines as ideally existing along the axis of Enlightened natural religion—the sovereign retains the power to banish, and in extreme cases, execute citizens who are unbelievers since a healthy citizenry is essential for the survival of the polity. This aspect of sovereign authority is crucial for Rousseau since it not only ensures the health of the state but also because no state “has ever been founded without religion serving as its base.” The sovereign is the custodian of this basis of the state, which is simultaneously the social cement without which societies cannot flourish. As Dryden has David argue, “Kings are

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43 Despite the values Rousseau endorses (the chief one being toleration), his belief that religion was ineradicable alienated many of his contemporary thinkers. Graeme Gerrard writes, “What most shocked and offended the philosophes, and alienated Rousseau from atheists and deists alike, was his rejection of the Enlightenment idea of a secular, rational state.” *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment: A Republican Critique of the Enlightenment* (New York: SUNY P, 2003), 72.
44 Rousseau, 146.
the publick Pillars of the State, / Born to sustain and prop the Nations weight” (lines 953-4).

How comes it then, Rousseau asks, that under its historical regimes has Christian civil religion often been a source of civil strife instead of political tranquility?

To answer this question, Rousseau constructs a narrative about a diremption at the heart of civil religion in Christian states, one that follows from his theory of how religion functioned in the politics of ancient cultures where the gods and laws of each state were inseparable.45 We are told that political war was always theological in ancient states since “the departments of the Gods were, so to speak, fixed by the boundaries of the nation”46; the deities of one nation had no right over the gods of another. But this world-historical configuration changed when the Jews refused to acknowledge any gods but their own, planting the seed for an eventual political cleavage between a transcendentally spiritual source of authority and secular political authority. It is here that Rousseau introduces his famous charge against actually-existing Christianity as a political form of life: “It was in these circumstances that Jesus came to establish a Spiritual Kingdom on earth; which, by separating the theological from the political system, led to the State’s ceasing to be one, and caused the intestine divisions which have never ceased to convulse Christian peoples.”47 In other words, in Christian states citizens experience an insuperably divided loyalty. On one hand, the normative force of religion compels them to look to a spiritual authority that transcends the civil interests of the state; on the other hand, they are normatively obliged to honor an allegiance to the state and its civil interests. Not only this, but the tug of different sources of authority is exasperated by the fact that competing Christian states have what

45 Rousseau writes, “it was precisely because every State, since it had its own cult as well as its Government, drew no distinction between its Gods and its laws.” Ibid., 143.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid, 144.
should—in theory—be isomorphic spiritual commitments alongside what will often be different, and sometimes opposing temporal interests.

Such a situation fractures the domains under which sovereign, pastoral, and religico-political power exert themselves. And this is, of course, not only a matter of theory. One such moment in the history of Christian civil religion constitutes a significant part of the backdrop of *Absalom and Achitophel*. At the time when Dryden wrote the poem a very public debate raged in England over the relationship between the spiritual and temporal authority of the sovereign, most famously in the return of divine-right-of-kings ideology with the Restoration, and in polemics on how sovereign power articulated with the spiritual and political power of the church. In *Godly Kingship in Restoration England*—a path-breaking work that recovers the ways in which the English monarch as the head of the Church of England continued to condition late seventeenth-century politics—Jacqueline Rose has argued the Restoration church was intensely invested in establishing whether the episcopacy was *iure divino* and whether a strong supremacy could be squared with it. As one example of how the division in civil religion identified by Rousseau expressed itself in the 1670s, consider Rose’s example of William Falkner’s *Christian Loyalty*.

Published late in the decade shortly before Dryden wrote his poem, *Christian Loyalty* presents an argument for divine right theory while defending the royal supremacy against attacks from dissenters and Catholics as well as from reformed churchmen who took a moderated stance on supremacy. In making his argument, Falkner breaks with theologians such as Herbert Thorndike, who held that Old Testament monarchs were inadequate models for Christian kings.

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49 Ibid, 137.
and “stressed the importance of Davidic precedent to the Church of England.” The ancient kings of Israel had been protectors of the spiritual authority of the priestly class, according to Falkner. They had kept safe the holy ark; they had fought vigorously against idolatry; they had been a check on false prophets. In *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden is at pains to present Charles II as precisely the sort of Davidic figure that writers such as Falkner were championing in polemics; after all, it is Absalom himself who responds to the temptation of Achitophel with the lines, “If David’s Rule Jerusalem Displease, / The Dog-star heats their Brains to this Disease” (lines 333-4). In asserting that the authority of the sovereign is fundamentally jurisdictional, not spiritual, in origin, Falkner restricts pastoral power to the church, but he maintains that it is nonetheless perfectly complementary with the church when wielded beneficently by the monarch. Needless to say, it is a view diametrically opposed to Rousseau’s conclusion; it is also at odds with the universe of Dryden’s poem, which is populated by a citizenry “No King could govern nor no God could please” (line 48). In *Absalom and Achitophel*, spiritual chaos reigns until the pastoral king speaks. Falkner, echoing the position of many Anglican churchmen of the day, carefully outlines the restraints that the English sovereign must respect. He writes that no king can arrogate church lands and property, and, because the authority of the chief magistrate is secular in origin, no person occupying the position can change the nature of good and evil. What a good king can do is work with the church to foster worship and to act as the church’s protector.

In Falkner one sees how a polemicist of the period could negotiate a position that embraced the theory of divine right while eschewing absolutism. This raises the thorny issue of divine right and pastoral authority in Dryden’s text. We might ask ourselves, why does Dryden make

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50 Ibid, 138.
51 Ibid.
no direct argument for divine right in representing Charles II as a pastoral king? Part of the answer surely lies in Dryden’s stance as a political moderate who strives to keep absolutism at a safe distance. As he writes in the “Prologue to the Reader,” “If I happen to please the more Moderate sort, I shall be sure of an honest Party.” Virtuous toleration puts him on the side of the partisan of non-dogmatic partisanship. But another part of the answer is simply that the poem structures divine right into its implicature without committing itself to divine right ideology directly. The Biblical David was chosen by God and was anointed by the people to be the king of the Israel. No Biblical figure had more often served as an exemplar of the divine-right theory for exponents of the ideology. During the reign of James I, Lancelot Andrewes wrote that “Got not only sent us a king, but a race and succession of kings,” a direct comparison the British succession to the Biblical one in Numbers. And the rhetoric of divine right extended beyond the reigns of both of James’s grandsons. While religious scholars of the period have debated J. C. D. Clark’s argument that divine right theory was robust until the Jacobite uprisings of the eighteenth century, the consensus view is expressed by William Gibson, who writes that “What England had rejected in 1688 was not the notion of a divinely-ordained monarchy, but a Catholic one with the dogmatic right of interference in people’s lives.” One finds here an example of what Glenn Burgess has demonstrated in “Divine Right of Kings Reconsidered”—that the theory of divine right in seventeenth-century England was not usually an absolutist theory, contrary to what the most seminal work on divine right, John Neville Figgis’s The Divine Right of Kings, had argued. Figgis’s work has exerted a tremendous influence on the default view of divine right in the

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period. For Figgis, the ideology constituted a moment in the historical development of sovereignty. Absolutism becomes identified with divine right because sovereignty itself is stipulated as being essentially separate from the law by virtue of being that which is capable of establishing law. The view is strikingly similar to Carl Schmitt’s well-known definition of sovereignty in *Politische Theologie* in which the sovereign state is neither a monopoly of domination or coercion but of decision. As Renato Cristi puts it, because the monopoly of decision possessed by the state is absolute and created from nothing, “The whole state is thus relativized by a power that stands outside and above it,” the upshot being that the foundation of positive law is ultimately arbitrary. It may seem that if one substitutes the arbitrariness that is at the core of sovereign decision in Schmitt with the investiture of divine right in the sovereign one would have something like logic that informs absolutist divine right wherein kings can make arbitrary decisions that override law.

But this is not the sort of case that one finds divine right theorists of the period making, and it is far from the law-bound sovereign in Dryden’s poem. As Glenn Burgess writes on the Caroline arguments for divine right, “this was not necessarily because [these theorists] rejected absolutism, but because they were working on a different plane. Often they scarcely engaged with what we might identify as the problem of absolutism at all,“55 which means that “the divine right of kings and the theory of royal absolutism were not the same thing.”56 At first, this may seem surprising, but there are at least three reasons for it. First, the divine right tradition in Restoration England often overlapped with forms of constitutionalism and residual codes that placed kings in a cosmic hierarchy of natural law; in turn, natural law placed as series of checks

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55 Ibid, 843.
56 Ibid, 841.
on what decisions they could enact—precisely what one sees in Falkner. Second, one ideological strength of divine right is that leaves the extent of sovereign authority undefined; it only entails that the ultimate authority of sovereignty be divine, not human as in the case of popular will; and, third, divine right ideology in England grew from a tradition that explicitly rejected absolutism in the form of the *plenitude potestatis* of the pope and functioned as a tool to combat first Catholic and then Presbyterian resistance strategies. In sum, divine right was separate from absolutism, with “its claim that the king alone was superior to the positive law and not bound by it.” By selecting David as the stand-in for Charles II, Dryden is able to avoid raising the contentious issue of divine right while keeping it open in the nebulous space between the typological and literal levels of the poem. As some critics have argued, actual sacral kingship in Restoration England was undergoing a process of demystification because of how it had been publicized in the public sphere. However, *Absalom and Achitophel* itself uses its rhetoric to present counterfactual world in which no such demystification has occurred: what was a ground of ideological contestation in Restoration England is a non-issue in the eastern pastorate of Absalom and Achitophel’s David. In it pastoral kingship—with its penumbra of the sacred—exists under the constraint of law, one compatible with, if not explicitly endorsing, non-absolutist divine right. At the end of the poem David appeals not to a sovereign authority that transcends law but to law that authorizes sovereign authority, addressing the concern raised earlier about “unbounded, arbitrary” lords: “The law shall still direct my peaceful sway / And the same law teach rebels to obey” (lines 991-2); “Law they require, let Law then shew her face” (line 1006); and “For lawful pow’r is still superior found; / When long driv’n back, at length it stands the ground” (lines 1024-5). Divine sanction is given directly when “Th’ Almighty, nodding, gave consent; / and peals of thunder shook the firmament” (lines 1026-7).
The pastoral kingship of David in the poem means that divine right can be decoupled from what the poem clearly envisions as being immoderate: absolute divine right free from the just oversight of law, and pushes divine right into the background while bringing questions of civil religion to the fore.

Other Restoration theologians went much further than Falkner in making claims for the supremacy. In *A Vindication of the King’s Sovereign Rights* (1684). Thomas Pierce began his first chapter with a series of arguments for why kings can depose churchmen, an example of the strong current of anticlericalism that characterized the 1670s and 1680s. S. J. Barnett has reminded scholars that “For the century and a half prior to the Enlightenment . . . . Europeans experienced permanent, institutionalized anticlericalism: Protestants and Catholics were anticlerical with regard to each other, and radical Protestants and Protestant churches likewise.” One might add that in men such as Thorndike this extended to within the Anglican Church itself. It is precisely this sort of intramural anticlericalism that colors many of Dryden’s lines, which is to say that while anticlericalism of the sort identified by Burnett exists in the poem (for instance, in Dryden’s representation of Catholics as Egyptian Jebusites), the many anticlerical barbs aimed at the Anglican church itself are never merely anticlerical: they are always in service to the poem’s larger argument about protecting the supremacy and its right to secure the succession. The reader is told that “Priests of all Religions are the same”; that priests are protective of the laity not from any sincere pastoral concern but because “the Fleece accompanies the Flock”; and that priests are quick to change their spiritual fealties (“Gods they had tri’d of every shape and size / That God-smiths could produce, or Priests devise,” lines 49-50). In Thorndike, it is

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57 Rose, 139.
Charles II who struggles against unruly Anglican prelates while needing to protect the supremacy; in Dryden, Charles II is represented as an Israelite monarch who finds himself in a fight against a labile priestly class who threaten his sovereign power. It is the story Rousseau tells *in nuce*. The frequent renegotiations of spiritual and temporal authority, such the ones that characterized the debates on supremacy during the Restoration, and that inform Dryden’s poem, led him to write, “Holy worship always remained or reverted to being independent of the Sovereign, and without a necessary tie to the body of the State.”

In England the problem was especially evident because the kings “of England have established themselves as heads of the church, and the czars have done the same. But through this title they have made themselves not so much its masters as its ministers.” British monarchs became not the church’s “legislators, but only its princes.” Real English monarchs such as Charles II could never speak with the Davidic authority that Dryden’s typology enables. Only Thomas Hobbes, Rousseau tells the reader, “dared to propose the reunion of the two heads of the eagle.”

As Ronald Beiner argues in *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy*, the third and fourth parts of *Leviathan* were an elaborate attempt by Hobbes to effect a Judaicization of Christianity in order to stabilize sovereign power under a Christian monarch. In these sections of *Leviathan*, Hobbes exerts a massive amount of intellectual labor to reinterpret Jewish biblical history so that Christian history becomes radically continuous with it. Hobbes’s reworking of Christian political theology is structured to eliminate two kinds of conflicts that he believed characterized the Jewish and Christian history. In the first group one

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59 Rousseau, 145.
finds examples of political unrest that arose in ancient Israel where political authority was destabilized by being centered in too many competing sources—namely in a priestly class; in the spontaneous emergence of prophets; and, after Saul, in standing kings, a point very relevant to diagosis of Absalom and Achitophel. In the second group, one finds the insurmountable problem of divided spiritual and temporal authority that Rousseau would associate with a Christianity that was too other-worldly, a point relevant to the real-world frame that informs the poem’s typological logic. As Beiner argues, Hobbes wants to argue how the Second Coming of Christ would initiate a period of history in which civil and spiritual authority are unified under the messiah as sovereign. Yet this project is perhaps secondary to Hobbes’s goal of showing that Christian civil religion should cease all assertion of “any otherworldly claims whatsoever, and [to limit] itself to this-worldly claims on behalf of Christ’s eventual reclamation of temporal power.” Once Christ does reclaim temporal power at the Second Coming, Hobbes argues, the absolute theocratic monarchy will be installed. Until then monarchs should enjoy full civil and ecclesiastical authority as Christ’s early stewards. If so much depends on the Second Coming, we might ask, what was the purpose of the first coming? It is a question that Hobbes answers in Chapter XLI of part three of Leviathan: “If then Christ whilest hee was on Earth, had no Kingdome in this world, to what end was his first coming? It was to restore unto God, by a new Covenant, the Kingdome, which being his by the Old Covenant, had been cut off by the rebellion of the Israelites in the election of Saul,” the meaning of which lies in Hobbes’s version of Jewish history.

For Hobbes, the Old Testament “tells the story of alternation between the ‘maistry’ (i.e. mastery) of kings accompanied by the ‘ministry’ of priests, on the one hand, and on the other

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62 Beiner, 55.
hand, the maistry of priests accompanied by the rival authority of prophets.”\textsuperscript{63} During the Mosaic period, ecclesiastical and civil authority were united in the person of Moses who was sovereign in both his religious and temporal authority, but this sovereignty was inherently volatile and broke down following Moses’ death, Mosaic theocracy being one in which priests have both civil and ecclesiastical authority but are unable to contain prophets—spiritual authorities who arise from outside the institutions of the state. From this struggle emerges the Hobbesian solution: a monarchy is the only way to end the “threat of anarchy associated with Hebrew theocracy.”\textsuperscript{64} Hobbes is clear that after the Jews rejected the Judges and demanded a king, all spiritual and temporal author nominally rested with the sovereign.\textsuperscript{65} In practice, this failed to be the case because of prophets. For this reason, Hobbes examines in great detail what the Old Testament has to say about prophets, beginning his attack on them in the first section of \textit{Leviathan} when he discusses the dangers of enthusiasm. He is perhaps clearest in “On a Christian Commonwealth” when he presents a \textit{reductio ad absurdum} of what happens when the spiritual of authority of the sovereign conflicts with that of the prophet:

So that from the practice of those times, there can no argument be drawn, that the Right of Supremacy in Religion was not in the Kings, unlesse we place it in the Prophets; and conclude, that because Hezekiah praying to the Lord before the Cherubins, was no answered from thence, nor then, but afterwards by the Prophet Isaiah, therefore Isaiah was the supreme Head of the Church; or because Josiah consulted Hulda the Prophetesse,
concerning the Book of the Law, that therefore neither he, nor the High Priest, but Hulda
the Prophetesse had the Supreme authority in matter of Religion; which I thinke is not the
opinion of any Doctor.66

What does this have to do with Absalom and Achitophel? While the poem is at pains to
dissociate itself from Hobbesian absolutism—just as it distances itself from absolutist divine-
right ideology—and its answer to the question whether people “. . . . can give away, / both for
themselves and sons, their native sway?” is clearly not Hobbesian (lines 759-60), as many critics
have noted its desire for peace, its charges of priestcraft, its diagnosis of “public lunacy” and
“rebellious times,” and much of its language (“They led their wild desires to woods and caves, /
And thought that all but savages were slaves,” lines 55-6) are all Hobbesian. What has been
overlooked is that the danger of false prophecy in Dryden’s poem can hardly be overstressed and
acts as a kind of meta-typological level in the poem that echoes Hobbes.

Near the heart of the Exclusion Crisis was the unseemly figure Titus Oates, represented in the
poem as the false prophet (“where the witness fail’d / the Prophet spoke,” line 655), who
fabricated evidence about the Jesuit plot assassinate the king. The wave of anti-Catholicism
spurred by Oates’s claims gave opponents to the Duke of York’s succession the excuse they
needed to go against the supremacy in the name of protecting both king and nation. David
bewails this situation in the final section of the poem when he calls out, “My Pious Subjects for
my Safety pray / Which to Secure they take my Power away” (line 983-4), and then deflates his
opponents with the withering “From Plots and Treasons Heaven preserve my years, / But Save
me from my Petitioners” (lines 985-6). However, if we take David’s question seriously,
“Whence comes it that Religion and the Laws / Should more be Absalom’s than David’s cause?”
(the question at the center of the poem’s exploration of civil religion), one answer given by the

66 Ibid., 331.
poem can be found in how Dryden’s typological construction parallels Hobbes’s analysis of the
danger of prophets to sovereignty, which operates metonymically in the poem as a signifier of
the cleavage between spiritual and civil authority that animates the philosophical tradition of
civil religion.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the depiction of Anthony Ashley Cooper as a false
prophet. When Achitophel addresses Absalom, he does so in the language of prophecy. As
critics have long noted, the passage is a Miltonic pastiche, but it is one that draws on the themes
in Hobbes that could not be further from Milton’s republicanism. Achitophel begins his
apostrophe by declaring,

Auspicious Prince! At whose Nativity
Some Royal Planet rul’d the Southern sky;
Thy longing Countries Darling and Desire;
Their cloudy Pillar, and their guardian Fire:
Their second Moses, whose extended Wand
Divides the Seas, and shews the promis’d Land:
Whose Dawning Day, in every distant age,
Has exercis’d the Sacred Prophets rage (lines 230-7)

Throughout the passage, Achitophel’s rhetoric presents Absalom as being a figure of typological
fulfillment, a second Moses who exhibits a false messianic promise. Swayed by this promise, the Jews
abandon the body politic for the politics of ochlocracy. The messianic politics of Absalom and
Achitophel threaten to introduce the Christian diremption into the poem’s diagesis. As Dryden writes,
“The crowd, (that still believe their kings oppress,) / With lifted hands their young Messiah bless” (lines
727-8). But by the end of the poem this spurious power contrasts with the actual pastoral sovereignty of
David, who reminds the reader that he alone has been anointed with the real “pow’r to save” in the poem
(line 999).
While Hobbes and Dryden offer alternative solutions to the various crises that confront sovereign authority, both use Judaicization to resolve *seemingly* irresolvable tensions that exist between pastoral and civil authority when that authority buckles under the diremption identified by Rousseau. By displacing the events of the Exclusion Crisis from Restoration England to David’s Israel and the Eastern pastorate, *Absalom and Achitophel* revivifies the political chaos of the Old Testament (the factiousness of a Hebrew people with a politically divisive priestly class and politically destabilizing prophets) while finding a solution to these problems in the hybrid figure of Charles II as King David, a Jewish *and* Christian monarch who could only exist in the political poetics of a literary work; a pastoral authority who embodies both Eastern pastor and Christian “Vicegerent of God”; one who transcends—if in satiric space only—Foucault’s claim that throughout Christendom “the king remained king, and the pastor a pastor.”67 Despite its attempts to distance itself from the best known aspects of Hobbes’s theory of sovereignty, Dryden’s poem thus effects what Beiner has termed the object of Hobbes’ civil religion: the substitution of what Hobbes called “a Priesthood of Kings” for “a Kingdome of Priests.”68

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67 Foucault, 155.
68 Quoted in Beiner, 58.
Chapter 3: Postsecular Swift

Swift, Religion, Contradiction

In 1706 Jonathan Swift pieced together a small collection of aphorisms entitled “Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting” in which he wrote, “If a Man would register all his Opinions upon Love, Politicks, Religion, and learning, &c., beginning from his Youth, and so go on to old Age, what a Bundle of Inconsistencies and Contradiction would appear at last.”

The words encapsulate the central preoccupation with paradox and contradiction that has dominated criticism of Swift’s elusive A Tale of a Tub. No other text by Swift so invites its readers to square the corrosive power of Swift the satirist with that of Swift the Anglican priest. None seems to threaten quite so radically the sources of pastoral power that license Christianity; and none seems to risk severing the pastoral connection to the divine quite so boldly as his performance as the hack, the Tale’s narrator. Consider a typical digression of the hack: “the most unciviliz’d Parts of Mankind, have some way or other, climbed up into the Conception of a God, or Supream Power, so they have seldom forgot to provide their Fears with certain ghastly notions, which instead of better, have served them tolerably well for A Devil.”

Although the hack glibly attacks idolaters, pointing out that even the most uncivilized parts of humanity have gods, he seems unaware of how dangerously close he comes to undermining the supports of pastoral power by turning God of Anglicanism into a psychological projection.

The following chapter examines the reception of the Tale, contending that readers have been overly concerned with diagnosing Swift’s own theism or atheism—of turning the hack into

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1 Jonathan Swift, Miscellanies in Prose and Verse (London, 1728), 231.
2 103.
a literary prism for Swift’s own religious subjectivity. It argues that the postsecular thought of Charles Taylor can be used to avoid this temptation and can open the *Tale* to a new kind of interpretation, one that accounts for its chief characteristic—its obsession with an efflorescence and consequent fragilization of belief. A concept that this chapter employs often, fragilization is a technical term coined by Charles Taylor to refer to the effect of alternative religious beliefs becoming available to believers in a shared social space. Writing of this postsecular condition, Taylor says, “It is a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle, and hence fragilize each other. It is a world in which belief has lost many of the social matrices which once made it seem ‘obvious’ and unchallengeable.”

I argue that Swift the ethnographer of pseudo-religion is one of the first artists to register this cultural shift toward fragilization. He is the first major satirist to make it his literary target. Finally, the chapter concludes by pulling together several postsecular ideas in a close reading of the *Tale’s* strange allegory of a Father who leaves his three sons three cloaks. As the *Tale’s* centerpiece, the hack’s religious allegory will be interpreted to advance my position that Swift’s profound “secularity” isn’t to be found in what was in his head but in his satire’s representation of a startling fact: just how shatterable belief had become by the early eighteenth century. In short, Swift’s attentiveness to what Taylor calls “fragilized belief” is what makes him a postsecular satirist *avant la lettre*.

This aspect of Swift has often been viewed as Swift’s irreligion. It was a concern about pastoral contamination by the non-transcendent that the English theologian William Wotton seized upon in the first major critical assault on the text. Wotton had been an enemy of Swift’s former patron William Temple in the Ancients and Moderns quarrel of the 1690s, and in 1705 he published *Observations Upon the Tale of a Tub*. When Wotton’s response appeared, the

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3 Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age*, 531.
authorship of the *Tale* was still being debated. It had been variously attributed to Edmund Smith, John Philips, and Edmund King.¹ Wotton’s own candidate was Swift’s cousin Thomas. No matter the author, the *Tale* had gone much too far in Wotton’s mind. He wrote, “God and Religion, Truth and Moral Honesty, Learning and Industry are made a May-Game.”⁵ More importantly for my argument, Wotton suspected that Catholicism, fanaticism, and enthusiasm were all proxies for the author’s real target—“all that is esteemed as Sacred among all Sects and Religions among Men”⁶—and his response to Swift’s satire was unequivocal. He viewed Swift as a dangerous crypto-atheist. To those readers who, like Edmund Curll several years later, would argue that the *Tale* only mocked excesses, he rejoined: “I would not so shoot at an Enemy, as to hurt my self at the same time.”⁷ Wotton understood that Swift’s satire embraced a radical literary rejection of transcendence that was potentially threatening to Wotton’s own rhetorical embrace of a naïve, transcendental metaphysics. The *Tale* seemed to be so thoroughgoing in its satire that it drained the sacred from the world, and stripped away all sources of pastoral authority.

To Wotton, such an act of satirical aggression amounted to clerical self-wounding. Where Wotton’s Anglicanism outwardly endorsed a supernatural worldview and immediate religious certainty, Swift’s *Tale* presented a parable of Christian history that seemed toxically materialist, skeptically demystifying, and mediated by a hubbub of signification. This difference between the two priests was not merely one of propositional belief (they may both have believed in the

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
same God); it also extends to how each man related to the background conditions of belief formation itself. Even if they each believed in the same Articles of Faith, they performed their faith differently. Wotton went on writing religious polemics as if nothing had changed; Swift responded to a world where one could now choose whether to be a Catholic, a dissenter, or an Anglican, and his art addressed the aftershocks of the availability of this choice. This is why Wotton found it inconceivable that any person who was a devout Anglican priest could have authored the book. Swift’s response to Wotton was thus especially fitting. Swift did not rebut him head on as a pastoral combatant, though he easily could have done so. Had he done so, he would have been forced to fight on Wotton’s ground. Nor did he invoke a pastoral source of authority. Instead, he incorporated Wotton’s own material fragments as scholia within the revised version of the Tale, having the hack quote Wotton repeatedly. Wotton was reduced to a footnote, another believer amongst a cacophony of belief. This actualized one of the Tale’s strangest properties: its uncanny capacity to entrap the signifying practices of its commentators.\(^8\)

If the Tale’s narratives often seem cut off transcendence, the Tale is capacious enough to enfold its religious objectors.

Wotton’s public excoriation of Swift’s text can serve as a reminder that more than the mere orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Swift’s satire has been at issue from its first appearance—even as many critics, tied to the secularization thesis, have struggled to pin down the character of its satiric norms, acting as if those norms operate from a stance that gauges the truth or falsity of

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\(^8\) Acknowledging the hermeneutic dangers of writing about the Tale has become a gesture pro forma in Swift criticism. One attempt to account for this slipperiness that draws heavily on the Stanley Fish’s early work on seventeenth-century rhetoric is Richard Nash, “Entrapment and Ironic Modes in Tale of a Tub,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 24.4 (1991), 415-31.
religion. For these readers, Swift’s satiric norms can be mapped onto the non-secular/secular binary of theism and atheism. This is not to say that work on Swift in the last two decades has not benefited tremendously from a better understanding of varieties of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the early eighteenth century. The intellectual histories of J. G. A. Pocock have helped readers understand that, as Pocock writes, “Orthodoxy is not a mere rejection of tensions or an attempt to freeze or deny them; it is a particular way of responding to tensions and seeking to recombine them, and this is no less so where it is conservative in the sense that it aims at maintaining durable and traditional positions.”

Scholars such as Justin Champion have looked anew at how the transformation of cultural power in England fundamentally altered the justification of orthodoxy itself. Commenting on the years during which the Tale was composed, Champion writes, “The change from a ‘magical’ form of authority to different cultural techniques of power did not imply a transcendence of ‘religion,’ so much as a mutation of the social and literary form by which it was represented.”

In these terms, Swift’s satire was part of a larger trend within a changing cultural discourse that extended beyond Anglicanism. Much of Swift’s satire indexes this mutation in unnerving ways, refracting religion through various lenses of what later critics would see as being a disenchanted residuum, the progressive byproduct of period’s debates over atheism and materialism.

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9 A commonplace but dissatisfying trend in criticism boils many of the ambivalences and apparent inconsistencies in Tale to Swift’s lack of control over the text. Representative is Ashley Marshall’s judgment that “We have a reasonable sense of what A Tale is doing and can describe it with assurance to mystified undergraduates as a satire on abuses in religion and learning, but there are lot of indeterminacies, and a conceivable explanation remains that Swift, then a novice satirist, simply lost control of the text.” “The State of Swift Studies 2010,” Eighteenth-Century Life 34.2 (2010), 90.


Some critics have argued that the Tale—which Claude Rawson has recently characterized as “the most inventively and relentlessly satirical work in the language,”12—simply got away from its author, its indeterminacy a result Swift’s loss of control. If true, what I have identified as Swift’s postsecularism would simply be textual wildness. Roger Lund advances one such a position when he writes, “Having released the subversive energies of irony and ridicule, Swift then found it impossible to control them.”13 Other critics have staked out territory at the other extreme, seeing the Tale as a masterful display of total control, as when Howard Weinbrot maintains that the disorientation the Tale can create in its reader is an effect of its Menippean aesthetic.14 Far from being really unruly, all apparent contradiction points to the reader who fails to recognize Swift’s genre. Between such extremes of control and ungovernableness, critics have attempted to answer Wotton’s intractable question—how an author who outwardly professed deep orthodoxy could have released so much apparently heterodox energy.

Swift himself was not unaware of this critical problem. He eventually led the charge to dismiss its significance by appending a provocative “Apology” to the revised fifth edition of the Tale (1710). In an attempt to end the controversy that swirled around his creation, Swift presented himself as an unjustly accused defendant—a man whose unimpeachably orthodox opinions had been kept in proper order all along.15 He assured discomfited Anglican readers

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14 Howard D. Weinbrot, Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).
that one-half of the Tale’s objective had been to mock “Abuses in Religion”; the other, to correct the abuses in learning that had arisen from the new empiricism of the seventeenth century. No attack on true religion had been intended. The purity of his authorial intentions having been demonstrated, Swift hoped to convince a Christian audience that all charges of genuine impiety had been unfounded. In a wonderful aside that recalls Socrates’ table-turning idea that his Athenian jurors reward him with a lifetime of free meals, Swift added, “Had the Author writ a Book to expose the Abuses in Law, or in Physick, he believes the Learned Professors in either Faculty, would have been so far from resenting it, as to have given him Thanks for his Pains.” But if—as I have been suggesting—what unsettled its original readers was its radical capture of the then nascent postsecular condition, then Swift’s avowals are immaterial. Needless to say, the “Apology” neither engendered belated gratitude nor neutralized its dangerous reputation. Even now, the Tale’s allegory and digressions resist critics who want to tame its blistering wit. As the hack writes, inviting his readers into the Tale’s textual web, “I desire of those whom the Learned among Posterity will appoint for Commentators upon this elaborate Treatise; that they will proceed with great Caution upon certain dark points, wherein all who are not Vere adepti, may be in Danger to form rash and hasty conclusions, especially in some mysterious paragraphs, where certain Arcana are joined for brevity sake, which in the Operation must be divided. And I am certain, that future Sons of Art, will return large Thanks to my Memory, for so grateful, so

16 For an important account of the politics of the Tale’s reception, see Ian Higgins, “The Politics of A Tale of a Tub,” Swift’s Politics: A Study in Disaffection (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 19-143
useful and Innuendo.”\footnote{Swift, 73.} It is no exaggeration to say that each generation has lined up to condemn, approve, or somehow explain the hack’s unsettling performance.\footnote{Much of the most interesting criticism on the Tale in the last decade has rejected this formulation as being misleading, arguing instead that Swift moves past the edge of orthodoxy to make affirmations in paradoxical ways. For instance, James Noggle writes, “Swift’s own orthodoxy comes to find expression paradoxically in his most unorthodox insistences on materialism.” The Skeptical Sublime: Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 95.}

Following Swift’s lead, many of Swift’s best religious interpreters have focused their efforts on the question of Swift’s own personal belief or lack of belief. Judith C. Mueller is typical here when she writes that the Tale “leaves its reader wondering about the author’s opinion of any and all religious belief.”\footnote{“A Tale of a Tub and Early Prose,” in The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 213.} Wondering—and wanting an answer. Critics have sought to clarify the boundary that delimits belief and atheism in his text. From such a perspective, it can seem that Swift delights in crossing the line between religion and irreligion, but it is porous.\footnote{The appeal of post-secularism as a critical category has much to do with how it can upturn older conceptualizations. As Hent de Vries writes, “As a new concept with an inflating currency in contemporary debates in the social sciences, philosophy, and cultural criticism, it is increasingly appealing precisely because of its contrasting and corrective function—undoing some of the central assumptions and pretensions of the modern Enlightenment as well as of its accompanying political liberalisms, reductionist naturalisms, and the like—not as a proclamation of yet another epoch which would somehow follow or bury the ‘secular age’ and its so-called ‘immanent frame,’ per se.” “Global Religion and the Postsecular Challenge,” in Habermas and Religion, ed. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Polity: Cambridge, 2013), 203.} By the same token, attempts to chart the contours of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the Tale have usually failed because they have been overdetermined by an implicit acceptance of the secularization thesis explored in Chapter 1. This overdetermination of Swift criticism often boils down to a series of stark questions. These questions, in turn, inform the context of reading Swift. Crudely, two are, \textit{In what way is Swift a herald of modernity? How can we really know what the historical Swift}
believed? A tacit acceptance of the secularization thesis makes it appear as if the critic can best answer the question of Swift’s modernity by answering the question of his personal belief: if the critic can demonstrate that Swift was a closet freethinker, for instance, then Swift becomes aligned with the entire current of freethinking, which places him on the side of the moderns, on the size of the secular. Once one knows how modern Swift is, one can answer where he fits within a progressive narrative of secularization.

In *The Secular Age*, Charles Taylor has qualified such progressive narratives, and it is his model of secularity—his account of postsecularism—on which I base my analysis of Swift. Taylor does not reject progressive narratives entirely, but he does maintain that we should supplement them with a new formulation. By not doing so, we risk overlooking important elements of secularity by too narrowly defining Western secularization as the result of two kinds of narratives. The first kind tells how, in the West at least, widespread religious belief declined. The second kind explains how Western political institutions became desacralized even as they became increasingly democratic. Both narratives cross-ramify in predictable ways in reductive accounts of Western secularization. To qualify these two master narratives, Taylor writes a history of what he calls “shifting background conditions.” According to Taylor, changing background conditions reveal that it is not merely what one believes that is important for understanding secularity but how one believes. Taylor puts it succinctly when he writes, “To put the point in different terms, belief in God isn’t quite the same thing in 1500 and 2000.”21 The framework in which a conviction occurs is as significant as the propositional content of the belief itself.

21 Taylor, 13.
To modify Taylor, one might say that belief in God wasn’t quite the same thing in 1500 as it was in 1704. In the last generation, scholars of eighteenth-century religion have done much to correct the view that deism, atheism, and heterodoxy created a full-blown cultural crisis for Anglicanism, but, as Justin Champion has written, the early eighteenth century was, nevertheless, a time when “it was possible to unpick some of the power of these discourses and institutions.” Swift’s *Tale* seems to me to register this new discursive vulnerability in religious discourse brought on by the debates over deism, atheism, and heterodoxy, not by directly challenging the claims of orthodox discourses and institutions, but by a satirically strategic uptake of new ways of talking about competing religious belief. It is this new way of talking that Swift presents in the garrulous, undisciplined hack who can glibly throw off the line “The Worshippers of this Deity had also a System of their Belief, which seemed to turn upon the following Fundamental.” The hack believes that he can take in the nature of religion as neatly as he can pare an apple. The voice of the hack foregrounds just how much the background conditions of belief had changed since the early days of the Protestant Reformation while satirizing both Catholic and Protestant excesses. As I will argue, the new possibility of discoursing about religion dovetails with Charles Taylor’s assertion that accounting for secularity means answering the following question: “How did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naively within a theistic construal, to one in which we all shunt between two stances, in which everyone’s construal shows up as such; and in which moreover, unbelief has become for many the major default option?” To put Taylor in conversation with Swift, atheistic unbelief is not the major default option in the *Tale*; but, significantly, rationally...

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23 49
ungrounded religious belief is. Everyone believes in something in Swift, and that is the problem. In Swift belief has become fragile because fools who believe in every kind of doctrinal nonsense abound.

If the “secular” heart of Swift’s satire is to be found here—in the sense that religious belief has become fragile in Taylor’s specialized sense—then the postsecularist critic can be agnostic when it comes to the historical Swift’s beliefs. Secularity thus entails inhabiting a conceptual space where unbelievers and believers mutually constitute the shared backdrop of each other’s belief formation: the atheist and the theist are both postsecular in this Taylorian sense. Here, where entangled beliefs arise from competing religious positions, the selves of both believer and nonbeliever become buffered, the result of belief sets that have cross-pressured one another.

With this in mind, a post-secular reading of Swift need not concern itself with determining his private religious views from their public textual traces, nor need it suggest how to delineate the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of the Tale’s satire. Instead, Swift is a “secular” writer in an explicitly post-secular sense—the sense in which both believers and non-believers share marks of secularity. Swift’s work is an early product of a dawning secular age because it so profoundly registers a change in “the whole background of belief or unbelief, that is, the passing of the earlier ‘naïve’ framework, and the rise of our ‘reflective one.’”

As Taylor argues, this distinction between naïve and reflective frameworks arose because the reflective framework of religion “opened a question which had been foreclosed in the former by the unacknowledged shape of the background.” Both Swift’s obsession with espousals of nonsensical religious belief and his playful handling of mock religious etiologies makes the historically reflective nature of religion in his work. Swift dissects how a novum of competing beliefs deforms his

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24 Ibid., 14.
25 Ibid., 13.
satirical targets. When his Aeolists “maintain that the original cause of all things to be the wind,” they present a one such “live option” within the framework of the Tale. If the real world has counterparts to the Aeolists, then these advocates of air threaten to contaminate readers who hold that the church should be built upon a rock. This quality of diegetic reflexivity on issues of religious belief separates Swift’s satire from that of his predecessors.

Taylor’s description of fragilization thus seems profoundly relevant to Swift. Although Swift obviously did not live in the kind of democratically pluralist world that the liberal West so frequently idealizes, few writers are so imaginatively pluralist as he. Swift is our great reluctant pluralist, a normative pluralist in reverse. Nothing so excited his satirical rage as the eighteenth-century cross-pressuring of religious belief. From the familiar ethnographies presented in Gulliver’s Travels to the Tale’s multiplying taxonomies and proliferation of discourses, one sees in Swift the creator of jostling worlds of belief that veer between fragility and mania, so much so that the more his characters believe, the more vulnerable they become until they lose their grip on reality.

This concern with the destructive potentials of belief is perhaps most clearly seen in the Tale’s famous Digression concerning the Original, the Use and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth in which Swift’s hack speculates on the difference between the memory of things actual and of fanciful things believed. The hack writes:

Nor is Mankind so much to blame in his Choice, thus determining him, if we consider that the Debate merely lies between Things past, and Things conceived; and so the Question is only this; Whether Things that have Place in the Imagination, may not as
properly be said to *Exist*, as those that are seated in the Memory, which it may be justly held in the Affirmative . . .

In his ontological confusion, the hack opens the trapdoor onto an abyss of belief. It is with great irony that Swift has the hack next declare his great disappointment that “no famous modern hath ever yet attempted a universal system in a small portable volume all things that are to be known, or believed, or imagined, or practiced in life.” The hack’s fantasy belongs to a figure who has not quite caught up with eighteenth-century post-secularity, the humor of his wish turning on Swift’s contemporary readers’ recognition that the hack himself is a symptom of the very state of affairs that makes such a portable consensus an impossibility. There is already too much belief on offer to make a unifying consensus possible. The satire suggests the welter of beliefs has become a social pathology.

The *Tale* is a radically immanent satire not only of competing religious trends (eighteenth-century Catholicism, enthusiasm, deism, and, perhaps, the Anglican *via media*) but also of the entire place of religious in the postsecular world that the new science had made possible. As Charles Taylor writes, “the new science gave a clear theoretical form to the idea of an immanent order which could be understood on its own, without reference to interventions from the outside (even if we might reason it to a Creator, and even a benevolent Creator), the life of the buffered individual, instrumentally effective in secular time, created the practical context within which the self-sufficiency of this immanent realm could become a matter of experience.”

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26 Swift, 111.
27 Ibid., 82.
28 Taylor, 543.
religious satire from that of earlier Christian humanists who had also mocked clerical excess while embracing epistemological humility. Writers like Erasmus and More had written satires without using the immanent framework that Swift learned to exploit, and their works are largely free from anxiety over fragilization, though they too are products of Reform. They satirize vices like drunkenness and fraud, but in Swift’s great list of vices, an issue of belief heads the list: “There are several pernicious vices frequent and notorious amongst us, that elude the punishment of any law we have yet invented, or have no law at all against them; such as atheism, drunkenness, fraud . . . .”29 Because demarcating what is progressively secular from what is residually religious risks smuggling in a version of secularization thesis, it is liable to obviate this unsettling feature of Swift’s work, his anxiety over the entire problematic of early eighteenth-century belief. It also obscures how far Swift is from the naïve framework of pre-modern religious belief when he looks coldly on atheism, even if he were as orthodox as he would have his readers believe.

What disturbed early readers of the Tale is not merely its rebarbative humor and its author’s suspected priestly status. It is that Swift used the venerable discursive mode of religious parable and allegory to construct a satirical microcosm in which pastoral authority operated with no recourse to redemptive notions of transcendence, either naïve or reflective. The phenomenology of the Tale’s satire blocks the transcendent at every turn, cutting off its cast of religious frauds and fools from genuine sources pastoral authority. This disconcerting foreclosure of pastoral authority within an immanent frame that allegorically models the world suggested that a similar foreclosure might be possible outside the fiction: our world might also be a universe where the spirit is literally wind and afflatus, eructation.

29 Swift, A Project for the Advancement of Religion and Manners (London: 1709).
One of the clearest statements of the postsecular position I advocate comes from “What is Secularity?”—an essay published in the same year as The Secular Age. Taylor explains that one of his project’s goals is to understand how “world structures” in the West have become increasingly closed to the experience of transcendence.\(^{30}\) A “world structure” is not only a set of beliefs about the world and what is in it but also a framework that either does or does not possess an openness to transcendence. According to Taylor’s account, in the development of Western civilization, a transformation took place in which the supernatural and the natural became distinct categories. Once it became possible to make clear distinctions between them as two levels of reality, the natural was in place to become the only reality that many Westerners acknowledged.\(^{31}\) This state of affairs is what Taylor calls a “closed world structure”—a notion that I extend to fictional world structures. The referent of “transcendence” in such a world structure must mean something different in the periods before, during, and after secularization; and Taylor seeks to draw our attention to how the postsecular concept of “transcendence” becomes analytically clear only after it has become difficult to sustain.

To put it differently, the closed world of the naturalistic universe was coming into focus not only through the messy sorting processes associated with many of scientific discourses that Swift satirizes but also through the debates of Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Ranters, Muggletonians, Familists, Independents and Quakers that fueled Swift’s mill. At the same time that this religious pluralism was making its first appearance in England, helped along by a rhetoric toleration, it was becoming much harder to experience transcendence. Religious

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 52.
identities were becoming less porous because they were increasingly buffered. This helps to explain why Swift was sometimes taken to be a deist by readers, which can now seem strange. Isaac Newton’s popularizer Samuel Clarke went so far as to call the Tale the work of a profane and debauched deist. Clarke was identifying something significant: both the real world imagined by eighteenth-century deists and the fictional world of Swift’s satire share a kind of immanence. Such closure can also be registered in the movement away from transcendence in religious discourse displayed in Christian apologetics of Edward Stillingfleet, Henry More, and John Ray, and in the more expressly philosophical and rationalist form that apologetics takes in many of the Boyle lectures. It is one of the ironies of the Tale’s reception that both it and Clarke’s rationalist Boyle lectures index this same shift toward immanence and closure.

In writing a history of how the possibility of first-personal, transcendent religious experience becomes shifted to a new set of background conditions through secularization, postsecularism makes it clear how the process “fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and unwavering.” Badly reductive accounts have given short shrift to the felt dimensions of secularization, contenting themselves to count the heads of believers and non-believers. As I have suggested, they have tackled the matter solely in propositional terms in which secularity equates to subtracting erroneous religious beliefs and replacing them with true naturalistic ones. Just as significant, however, is how individuals come to stand in a different relation to the propositions they hold after they have a range of options for religious belief before them. This is the crucial distinction between the “naive” forms of religion that antedate the secularization process in the West and those reflective forms of religions that

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32 Taylor, 37-38.
34 Taylor, “What is Secularity?” 58.
occur during and after it. As Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman write, these “changes came not only from outside religion but from inside as well, especially through the impulses of reform. After the Reformation, all Christian faiths, including Catholicism against fierce preferences, became denominations.” Swift’s satire on Reform in the Tale witheringly points to this—just as much as his complaint that “Arch Bishop Tillotson is the Person whom all English Free Thinkers own as their Head . . . . This great Prelate assures us, that all Duties of the Christian religion, with respect to God are no other but what natural Light prompts men to, except the two Sacraments, and praying to God in the Name and the Mediation of Christ.” The acid that Swift splashes on Christianity is of Christian manufacture. It is doubly ironic that Swift could spot so clearly in Tillotson precisely what his closed-world satire was doing in another context.

Part of my motivation for contending that Swift is a satirist of early secularity is the now widespread recognition that postsecularist conceptions of modernity are badly needed. Manav Ratti writes, “The postsecular is caught in a double bind between religion and secularism. It cannot be captured through dichotomies like ‘neither religion nor secularism’ or ‘either religion or secularism.’ If it emerged in such stark and easy dichotomies, then the intricacies and subtleties of postsecularism’s arguments, potentials, cautiousness, and debates would devolve to become something like ‘religionists versus secularists.’” Swift’s Tale is a profound record of this emergence. By modeling the allegory of Tale as one in which exercises in grotesque reason-giving run up against non-transcendence, he either intentionally or unintentionally left open the

36 Jonathan Swift, Mr. Collins’s Discourse of Free-Thinking, Put into Plain English (London: 1713), 29.
possibility that other non-transcendent explanations remained viable. This formal feature of his text threatened to cut off the need for any faith in transcendental causes, even if Swift himself remained dismissive of what most critics have taken to be the traditional vehicles of British secularization in the period, the New Science and deism.

Moreover, the Tale’s enabling assumption that reason debunks reveals that reason also cannibalizes itself. The fact that people believe they can reason their way out of the confusion arguably becomes its chief norm. Taylor has contended that when the eighteenth-century apologist argued with the deist, the apologist shared with his interlocutor argumentative assumptions that separated both from pre-modern religionists. The most fundamental of these was a faith in the normativity of reason-giving about nature’s processes. Taylor writes, “Once we claim to understand the universe, and how it works; once we even try to explain how it works by invoking its being created for our benefit, then this explanation is open to a clear challenge: we know how things go, and we know why they were set up, and we can judge whether the first meets purpose defined in the second.” Swift’s satire consistently implies that the reader should be an evaluator of bad explanations of “how things go,” regardless of the details of the historical Swift’s occurrent beliefs—that ever-shifting “Bundle of Inconsistencies and Contradiction.”

We see this when Swift’s hack reports that the worshippers of a certain deity “held the universe to be a large suit of clothes which invests everything; that the earth is invested by the air; the air is invested by the stars; and the stars are invested by the Primum Mobile.” Here, readers are given a parodic backwards version of what Taylor describes. Readers are obviously meant to laugh at the literalization of figurative language, the ground level of the joke, but, more importantly, the conceptual pun on the Latin verb *vestire* invites readers to draw on their own

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38 Taylor, 306.
causal understanding of nature, a point underscored by the joke’s punchline, which centers on the post-Aristotelian debate over the Primum Mobile. Many readers would almost certainly recall that Galileo had insisted that God could not have stopped the sun for Joshua without arranging it first through the Primum Mobile. To modify Taylor, when Swift’s clothing idolaters claim to understand the universe, and how it works; when they try to explain how it works by invoking a logic about literal investiture created for their benefit, then their explanations are open to a clear challenge by those who reject the idea that everything is clothing. Confronted by their claim to know how things go, the satirical norm positions us to judge—as part of the larger satirical game—whether the causal explanans meets the explanandum. Taken together, Swift’s mock-causal explanations, his elaborate ethnographies, and his non-transcendent allegory of Peter, Martin, and Jack attack the Moderns by exaggerating their logic, but it also reinscribes that logic at the level of the norm. In creating this closed world structure within immanent frame, Swift’s satire problematizes the naïve conceptualization of religion which isolated the foundation of pastoral power in an invisible, spiritual, and transcendent authority.

A typical example of Swift’s delimitation of this pastoral authority can be found in Section XI of the Tale. By this point in the Tale’s absurd allegory of Christian history—the story of the father who leaves three sons three coats—the allegory’s stand-in for John Calvin, Jack, has become obsessed with finding a scriptural basis for his every action. This is represented as Jack’s obsessive referencing his father’s will—the Bible. Finding himself at a strange house, Jack

was suddenly taken short, upon an urgent Juncture, whereon it may not be allowed too particularly to dilate; and being not able to call to mind with that Suddenness, the Occasion required, an Authentick Phrase for demanding the way to the Backside; he chose rather as the more prudent Course to incur the Penalty in such Cases usually
annexed. Neither was it possible for the united Rhetorick of Mankind to prevail with him to make himself clean again: Because having consulted the Will upon this Emergency, he met with a Passage near the Bottom (whether foisted in by the Transcriber, is not known) which seemed to forbid it.

Much has been written about Swift’s scatological satire, and the preceding passage is characteristically Swiftian in its excremental travesty of spiritual pretense and intellectual arrogance. As Swift so often does, he begins by invoking a bodily function to align his readers against his satiric object, Calvinism. But the scatological humor gains an additional force from an immediate linguistic context, a context that foregrounds immanent concerns that cut off transcendent authority. On the one hand, there is the social humbug of “the Occasion required” and the euphemistic “urgent Juncture,” which demystify Jack’s spiritual motive. On the other hand, there is the legalistic language of “penalty,” “cases,” and “annexed,” which highlight his procedural hubris. Both registers—the social and the legalistic—are firmly planted in the self-consciously non-transcendental; both bring into focus a ludicrous juxtaposition of the excreting body and Jack’s “spiritually” oriented hermeneutic excess. The final irony of the passage thus hinges on the word “seemed.” In believing that scripture in Revelation (the punning “Passage near the Bottom”) forbids him to bathe, Jack refuses to clean himself. Cut off from clear transcendent authority by the mediation of the will, his own misinterpretation of scripture leaves him damningly cautious and mired in non-transcendent materia.

In emphasizing Swift’s complicated deployment of religion, critics have followed the lead of Swift himself who dramatized it out of satire with deceptive simplicity. He reflected on this aspect of his reception on several occasions. One of the most memorable of these is “A Dialogue
Between an Eminent Lawyer and Dr. Jonathan Swift" in which an exacerbated Swift turns to a friend for advice on managing his reputation. Swift asks what can be expected if

. . . there are persons who complain
There’s too much satire in my vein;
That I am often found exceeding
The rules of raillery and breeding, (lines 1-4)

Swift’s friend replies that the answer is clear. Swift should retreat since there is no way for him to win:

Your case consider’d, I must think
You should withdraw from pen and ink,
Forbear your poetry and jokes,
And live like other Christian folks . . . (lines 15-18)
Take subjects safer for your wit
Than those on which you lately writ. (lines 21-22)

That Swift refused to take up those “subjects safer” and “live like other Christian folks” throughout his life has ensured that the religious dimension of his work has remained contested.

Although I agree with critics such as Todd C. Parker that a critic’s understanding of Swift’s beliefs almost always informs the critic’s final interpretations of his texts, it should be clear at this point why I believe them to be tangential to the interest of Swift’s postsecular satire. Swift displays postsecularity, not because he holds certain religious propositions to be true or untrue, not because he is can seem irreligious in his satire, but because his work foregrounds a key feature of secular understanding: the fragilization of religious belief at a time when both

40 In Swift as Priest and Satirist, Parker puts the matter baldy, “Did [Swift], like Abraham, believe in a numen praesens beyond himself even if he himself never touched it nor was touched by it? This isn’t the only question we should ask about Swift’s religious writings and career, but neither should we entirely fail to ask it.” Swift as Priest and Satirist (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2009), 16.
believers and nonbelievers were coming to accept an immanent framework. Accordingly, what I set forth in the following pages is not a Rosetta stone for unlocking the Tale’s heterodoxy or orthodoxy but a way of appreciating satire from one postsecularist position. Where Section II of this essay briefly surveys how critics have dealt with issues relevant to Swift and the secularization thesis, Section III presents my case for a postsecularist reading of Swift’s allegory of Peter, Martin, and Jack.

II. Major Trends in Swift Criticism and the Question of Secularization

Contemporary criticism of the Tale has been dominated by two broad stances. The first is the personae criticism of the 1960s and 1970s; the second, the post-structuralist and postmodernist approaches of 1980s and 1990s. Although both are distinctly of their time, they significantly reshaped how readers approach Swift and remain the primary theoretical contexts for a postsecularist rethinking of Swift.

Personae criticism was less a unified theory than a set of readings intended to isolate personae in Swift’s work. By pinpointing each of Swift’s rhetorical masks, critics attempted to show how Swift the person was separate from the voices that he ventriloquized. Its founding document was perhaps Ronald Paulson’s Theme and Structure in Tale of a Tub (1950), which looked closely at how voices in the Tale—madman, Hack, virtuoso, and so forth—were unified around a single benighted persona who fell into homologous forms of error. The influence of Paulson’s

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41 As Taylor writes accounts of secularization must take into account “the massive change in the whole background of belief or unbelief, that is, the passing of the earlier ‘naive’ framework, and the rise of our ‘reflective’ one.” A Secular Age (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), 14.

approach is seen in works by Jay Arnold Levine, Robert C. Elliott, and Michael DePorte;\textsuperscript{43} but it reached its fullest expression in J. R. Clark’s *Form and Frenzy in Swift’s Tale of a Tub* (1970),\textsuperscript{44} which received an influential review by Claude Rawson that marked a clear change in fortunes of persona-based criticism of Swift. Rawson argued against the need for personae theory by suggesting that it could be more distorting than clarifying; and Irwin Ehrenpreis, the leading Swift scholar of the time, declared not long thereafter that personae criticism had been wrongheaded from the start: it may have been an advance on readings that merely conflated Swift with his creations, but it often paid a steep price in its neutralization of the unruliness in Swift’s art.\textsuperscript{45} Any contradictory element could be chalked up to a persona, reducing Swift criticism to ad hoc typologies: lines A to B belong to persona X, lines C to D belong to persona Y, etc. Persona-oriented critics could argue for an intellectually conservative Swift because heterodox and irreligious elements belonged to Swiftian personae, not to Swift himself, the Church of England man. Critics like Wotton who responded to Swift’s satire unfavorably had been duped by the masks. Personae criticism was thus tightly bound to assumptions about Swift’s intentions. As Frank Boyle writes, “It is rare, if not unknown, for even the most naive of readers to attribute Iago’s ideas to Shakespeare, but something like this has been a common—at times pervasive—practice of readers of Swift from naive to professional. So insistent is the


\textsuperscript{44} In a sly footnote, Martin C. Battestin summarizes the major points in the debate: “The question of consistency [in *A Tale*] is more vexed: it is said that there is a single persona operating throughout (e.g. Paulson and Clark; that there are six personae (Quintana); that there is one who functions only in the digressions and preliminaries (Harth); that, though there is a persona, he is too protean to be characterized at all (Rosensheim).” *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974), F18 312.

conflation of Swift and his works that the critical success of the term ‘intentional fallacy’—the principle that, because no reader can recover what was in an artist’s mind at the time of composition, a work of art must be considered on its own terms—did little to slow down such reading of Swift’s works.”

The belief that one could isolate persona implied that one could ultimately know Swift’s deepest rhetorical motivations. Such an assumption put the critical horse before the cart. When looking back at personae theory in 2000, Rawson identified its two weaknesses, both of which make it unappealing for understanding secularity in Swift’s work. First, it was often anachronistic in that it treated personae as if they were rounded characters—the sort of creations that one found in the later realistic novels of the eighteenth century; second, in driving an iron wedge between Swift and the personae, it was liable to overemphasize the degree of disengagement between Swift and his creations. Some of the great successes of Rawson’s own work in the last few decades center on examining Swift’s strange proximity and resemblance to the objects that he satirizes as well as the fluidity of his rhetorical stances. The insights produced from this position are often inimical to a persona-based approach that calcifies Swift as the knowable historical figure behind his masks. As Rawson puts it, “The ambivalence of the disavowal is the flipside of Swift’s characteristic blending of indirection and forceful attack.”

Persona criticism thus differs from the kind of postsecularist approach I envision in that it demands that readers buy into a version of Swift the man, a version that is inextricable from the content of the readings.

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48 Ibid., 245.
The second great attempt to explain the contradictoriness of the *Tale* occurred in the 1980s and the 1990s during which many critics adopted practices that celebrated Swift’s inconsistency under the banners of post-structuralism and postmodernism while others sought to explain it through an anti-essentialist historicism. If the personae criticism had argued for Swiftian texts with multiple personality disorders, these critics argued for a text that was unstable because of the ontology of language. For instance, Clive Probyn argued that Swift’s work is haunted by a fear of transience that one sees most clearly in an anxiety over textual corruption and impermanence; Terry Castle used Jacques Derrida to explore the unstable relation between orality and writing; and Robert Phiddian wedded historicism to deconstruction to understand how the *Tale* parodies “pre-texts” that have usually been considered subliterary.⁴⁹ Other critics objected in varying degrees to the deconstructive, postmodernizing trend. One of the earliest and most lucid of these responses came from Marcus Walsh, who argued that the most appropriate context for understanding questions of linguistic instability in Swift was the historical record of seventeenth-century hermeneutic debate, a context that required little in the way of epistemological skepticism.⁵⁰ Most of the poststructuralist approaches shared a quasi-formalist assumption that contradictions in the religious satire of the *Tale*—apparent or otherwise—could be absorbed into the nature of textuality itself. Such approaches tended to sideline the question of secularism in Swift’s work on methodological principle. Moreover, these approaches often showed relatively little concern with the thick religious context of Swift’s satire. This side of Swift’s texts was being dealt with in more traditionally historicist terms elsewhere, which led to Balkanization in Swift criticism on the whole. This counter tradition takes off from the scholarship of Louis Landa’s *Swift and the Church of Ireland* (1965) and encompasses such

groundbreaking works as Philip Harth’s *Swift and Anglican Rationalism* (1958), David Nokes’s *Jonathan Swift: A Hypocrite Reversed* (1985), and, most recently, Christopher Fauske’s *Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland, 1710-1724* (2002). Despite the meticulous approach to the historical record found in these documents, work in this vein has inevitably become the domain of arch-specialists.

**III. Post-secular Swift**

In the final part of this chapter, I want to underscore the preconditions of Swift’s religious allegory and demonstrate how the *Tale’s* satire opens up to a post-secularist interpretation. Crucial to my reading of Swift are the following three interrelated claims: Swift’s parable of Christian history takes place within an immanent framework; this immanent framework assumes a closed “take” on transcendence; and this closed “take” subverts traditional sources of pastoral power, regardless of what the historical Swift believed. In Swift’s allegory, the sources of pastoral authority are severed from a transcendental site that justifies them. For these reasons, Swift is a significant recorder of a fragilized pastoral power.

Consider how Swift sets up his mock allegory. The hack relates that a Father had three sons by one wife, and all of a single birth. Each son is born so close to one another that even the midwife cannot tell which boy is the eldest. While the brothers are still young, their Father dies, leaving them with an important patrimony: a will, three magical coats (they never wear out and expand to fit the wearer’s body), and strict but straightforward and plainspoken instruction to brush these coats often and keep them in good repair. The Father also threatens the sons with a vague punishment for not obeying the dictates of the will, but he kindly promises that the sons will flourish if they obey its dictates, which includes further instructions for taking care of the

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51 For an extended discussion of having a closed “take” on transcendence, see Taylor, 550.
magical coats. For seven years, all goes well for the three sons: they travel the land, overcome amazing challenges like encounters with dragons and giants—all while keeping their coats in good order. Swift’s aside about these giants and dragons is the first in-allegory clue that what follows will be ironic. Dragons and giants introduce a fairy tale element that would subvert the allegory’s moral seriousness if readers were to read it naively. Swift has clearly poisoned us within a religious allegory that is self-aware, which violates one of the traditional constraints of religious allegory: its posture of high moral seriousness toward its overall in-frame coherence.

Swift next introduce a series of complications. At the end of the seven years, the sons happen upon a town and fall in love with three worldly ladies. The three soon find themselves doing whatever they can to outperform the competing suitors of the town. They want to win the favor of the fair coquettes. The hack tells us details about the sons’ lives at this time, and we learn that the three whore, cheat coachmen, run up debts, kill bailiffs, kick fiddlers, and so forth. The Tale now begins to turn up its satirical volume. Although the brothers woo the ladies ferociously and fall into error, their courtship falls short because there is a new sect in town to which every person of good standing belongs and which commands deference. The first moral dilemma of the allegory is raised: unless the brothers go against the Father’s will, their coats will remain too simple to impress the ladies, for this unusual sect that so beguiles society worships a clothing idol and demands that its devotees modify their garments. Readers will have at this point begun to track the connection between coats the now deceased Father left the sons and the fashionable clothing displayed by the idolaters; both compromised religion and idealized religion in the allegory center on raiment. The brothers, caught between their desire to win the ladies and a willingness to obey their loving Father’s commands, ultimately rebel against their Father’s last will and testament by flagrantly misinterpreting its simple dictates. It is an act of bad faith that
allows them to maintain the appearance of being faithful to the Father’s commandments while
skirting his intentions. The hack reminds us many times that the Father’s desires are simple to
understand. The first act of deliberate misinterpretation occurs after one of the brothers
convinces the other two that the will can be read as to license the wearing of shoulder-knots
whereupon the three brothers sew shoulder-knots onto their coats and become men of the town.
Unfortunately, the shoulder-knots they adopt soon go out of fashion, as fashion is wont to do,
and the brothers modify their coats again—this time with fringes. When interpreting the will
becomes too burdensome to keep up with the ever-changing fashions of the world, the three
brothers lock it away. This frees them from having to review the will each time an undesirable
interpretive crux arises. For now, they all decide to use the will a source of distant authority for
whatever they want to do to their coats. In what follows, I would like to unpack the secular
significance of this arrangement.

Throughout all of this, the sons’ positions within an immanent frame predominate. All of
the actors in the Tale are decidedly within a rhetorical structure that envisions the world as being
ontologically bounded by immanence: the will, the sons, the ladies, and the idolaters reside on
the same level of being, the this-worldly stage on which the narrative events of the Tale unfold.
One of Swift’s primary models for the allegory, the parable of the prodigal son, is instructive
here, and will help us see how Swift dis-embeds several longstanding tropes associated with
pastoral power.

Christ’s famous parable centers a Father who has two sons, one obedient and the other
prodigal. It may seem to present the same kind of narrative reality as the allegory of the Tale, but
these similarities are largely superficial. In the prodigal son’s narrative, there is no clear
distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The parable straightforwardly equates God
with the prodigal son’s loving Father, and it just as plainly equates the prodigal son himself with a humanity prone to stray. Swift is able to slip by so much of what will make his satire increasingly disturbing in later sections of the *Tale*—when its immanence spins out of control under a polyphony of discourses—because the initial structure of parable is so familiar to his readers. Crucially, the prodigal son parable relies on establishing two opposed locations, symbolized by the dichotomy of home and world. It is at home that the prodigal younger son says to the Father, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me,” and it is at home the Father divides his goods between the two sons. Although the prodigal son journeys to a far country and wastes “his substance with riotous living,” as do the three sons in Swift’s *Tale*, home remains a place to which prodigal can ultimately return; and although the location of the prodigal’s abandoned home itself is within the “world,” the moral lesson is unambiguous: home, which acts as a symbol of Godliness, should possess an importance that ranks far above the world. That the prodigal son comes to realize this allows him to reconcile with the Father and return to his rightful inheritance. When the son confesses his error—“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son”—the Father turns to the servants, calling out, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.” Ontological reconciliation is easy and readily attainable in the parable of the prodigal son, dependent though it is on an *anagnorisis* of spiritual error.

This contrasts with what I am calling the closed world structure of the *Tale*. There the Father of the three sons confesses that he has no estate to divide, and he leaves the three sons without a home. In lieu of an estate, he presents the coats and the will to the sons because he is going to die, not because one of the sons has asked him for an early patrimony. When the Father eventually does die, his death removes his presence from the world structure of the *Tale*,
although his wishes live on in the letter of the will. As the hack puts it, “Here the Story says, this good Father died, and the three Sons went all together to seek their fortunes.” The hack’s emphasis on story insinuates a subtly fictional element into the Tale that is absent in the narrative of the prodigal son. Because the three sons have no way to communicate with the dead Father directly, they come to rely on interpreting the letter of the will as a surrogate for the Father’s living authority; and because there is no estate connected to the will, only words, there is no symbolic place like the home found in the prodigal son parable to which the brothers can return: the three brothers in Swift must get along with the “very exact and severe” material recorded in the will only. This difference between the Father of the parable of the prodigal son and the Father of the Tale’s allegory, as well as the differing situations of the two sets of sons, introduces an ontological divide into the structure of the Tale’s allegory that is absent in the parable. It is a gap much like what Taylor has in mind when he writes that the secular “constitutes a ‘natural’ order, to be contrasted with a supernatural one, an ‘immanent’ world, over against a possible ‘transcendent’ one.”52 The buffered desires of the allegory’s sons are far removed from the simple riotous living of the prodigal son. The dead father of the three sons—if his identity persists after his physical death within the allegory—has certainly passed on to a space beyond the confines of the immanent world in which the sons have human agency; on the other hand, the living Father of the prodigal son narrative remains directly accessible within the world, and there is no anxiety created by not having direct access to him. Furthermore, it is the active agency of the Father that establishes reconciliation. The entire point of the prodigal son is that one can easily return to the Father and home. It is not a point possible to make within the narrative conditions established in the Tale.

52 Ibid., 542.
An intensification of this immanent framework occurs with the cross-pressuring of belief experienced by the brothers when they arrive at the town. Soon after finding themselves struggling against an immanent pull to modify their religion in the form of tailoring their coats, they come to believe that if they make changes to their coats they will be able to move without friction through a world ruled by fashion—to make their home in it. Significantly, this pull comes not from a simple desire to partake in the tavern sins that so tempted the prodigal son. It arrives in the competing religion of the clothing idolaters. This contributes to the allegory’s unsettling nature. It places in the foreground the epistemological difficulty in evaluating competing sectarian beliefs once one is trapped inside an immanent framework: how can one disentangle the immanent level shoulder-knots and fringes from the similarly levelled coats left by the inaccessible Father? The clear answer is the sons’ Father gave them the coats, but this reply is undercut by the fact that both are articles of clothing. What happens to the brothers as they become increasingly cross-pressured has often been interpreted straightforwardly as little more than a foolish concession to the fallen world, a lapse on their part from the good old days of missionary Christianity, which is represented in the allegory as the seven years during which the sons obeyed their Father and lived both happily and heroically. From the post-secularist perspective that I am proposing, what is most significant about these seven years is that the three brothers have been cut off from a transcendent order from the very beginning, one that would ground pastoral power.

The first modulation in the background conditions of the Tale arrives in the contrast between the simplicity of the Father’s plainspoken language and the rhetorical convolutions the hack uses to describe the idolaters. The hack tells us that the Father said:
Because I have purchased no Estate, nor was born to any, I have long considered of some good Legacies to bequeath You; and at last, which much care as well as Expence, have provided each of you (here they are) a new Coat. Now, you are to understand, that these Coats have two Virtues contained in them: One is, that with good wearing, they will last you fresh and sound as long as you live: The other is, that they will grow in the same proportion with your Bodies, lengthening and widening of themselves, so as to be always fit. Here, let me see them on you before I die.⁵³

No lines in the Tale stand out as being so deliberately written in the plain style. It is a rhetoric that recalls Milton’s decision to represent God’s language in a similarly plain style, as when God the Father tells the disincarnate Son about humanity:

I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain’d
Their Freedom, they themselves ordain’d thir fall.⁵⁴

As John Broadbent long ago noted, Milton has God speak in a plain style to produce the effect of “stolid honesty,” a foil to Satan’s rhetorical excess. A similar counterpoint can be found in Swift’s juxtaposition of the hack’s needlessly baroque rhetoric with the Father’s plainspoken commands. In explaining the doctrines of the idolaters, the hack writes

These postulates being admitted, it will follow in due Course of Reasoning, that those Beings which the World calls improperly Suits of Cloathes, are in Reality the most refined Species of Animals, or to proceed higher, that they are Rational Creatures, or Men. For, is it not manifest, that They live, and move, and talk, and perform all other

⁵³ Swift, 47.
⁵⁴ Milton, Paradise Lost, lines 124-128.
Offices of Human Life? Are not Beauty, and Wit, and Mien, and Breeding, their inseparable Properties? In short, we see nothing but them, hear nothing but them.\textsuperscript{55}

Here, it should be noted that the Father is being ventriloquized by the hack. Swift implies that once the Father passes from the \textit{Tale}, so too does his rhetorical style. Readers are left with the language of the hack. This change falls in with a shift from a naïve to a reflective religion within the \textit{Tale’s} world structure. Leaving the world of pseudo-Biblical simplicity behind, readers will now experience the difference between the Father’s naïve “Now, you are to understand” and the hack’s reflective “These postulates being admitted.”

Closely related to the issue of transcendence is the problem of a pastoral authority that derives from transcendental sources. A fascinating aspect of the \textit{Tale’s} allegory is that it never occurs to the three brothers to appeal to transcendental sources of authority for the management of their coats. After all, these three sons are analogues for the Pope, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. This reflective touch, as much as any other feature, separates the world frame of most of the \textit{Tale} from naïve frameworks found in the earlier religious allegories that Swift travesties. The \textit{Tale} simply makes it impossible for its characters to advance such an appeal: they possess neither the language nor the conceptual equipment to do so. It is only after one of the brothers becomes an enthusiast (and takes the name Jack) that we witness a parody of transcendental appeals in the hack’s digression about the Aeolist sect, itself a masterpiece of immanent satire.

Furthermore, the \textit{Tale} is constructed in such a way that the reader’s attention is deflected from how transcendence has been blocked from the three sons from the outset. Almost immediately after the death of the Father, Swift plays up the comedy of the sons’ deliberate misinterpretation of the will, which quickly spirals out of control. This rhetorical legerdemain minimizes the

\textsuperscript{55} Swift, 50
degree to which readers are likely to notice that the arrangement of the Tale’s initial elements sets the epistemological coordinates of the ensuing farce. Within the allegorical frame, the sole source of authentic spiritual authority will always be Father’s written record—an object as material as the coats that the brothers wear or any other piece of furniture mentioned in the Tale. Swift’s decision to frame the allegory as a closed world structure dramatically locks out transcendent pastoral authority, making it unthinkable within the allegory. Cut off from the father and stranded in the world, the hack explains that the three pastoral analogues “Resolved, therefore, at all hazards to comply with the modes of the world . . . . and agreed unanimously to lock up their father’s will in a strong box, brought out of Greece or Italy (I have forgot which), and trouble themselves no farther to examine it, but only to refer to its authority whenever they thought fit.”

In a provocative article on Swift’s Argument Against Abolishing Christianity and A Project for the Advancement of Religion, Judson B. Curry notes a critical problem in making sense of the two texts, which seem on the surface to be at cross purposes. While Swift’s Argument skewers Christian hypocrisy, the Project advocates a system in which public virtue is rewarded. Curry concludes that what unifies the two texts is that in both “Swift consistently ignores or avoids questions of inner faith, personal belief, and transcendent truth.” Each of these was a pillar of pastoral power. Whereas a tacit acceptance of the secularization thesis may encourage us to read these symptomatic absences as pointing to a Swift who is in some sense non-religious, Taylor’s approach to secularity encourages us to look at the tight connection between Swift’s sensitivity to the fragilization of belief and what made Christian belief true. Even if Swift is acting from a

56 Swift, 58.
fideistic motivation and a deep conservatism, his rhetorical structure in the *Tale* symptomatically captures a shift in the background of belief.

At one point in William Wotton’s response to the *Tale*, he pauses to inject a homiletic aside—to warn eighteenth-century readers that a person who “diverts himself too much at the expense of Catholics and the Protestant Dissenters, may lose his own Religion e’er he is aware of it, at least the Power of his heart.”\(^{58}\) Perhaps Wotton only meant that it was spiritually dangerous to be unchristian to any self-identifying member of Christendom, even one who as horribly deceived as Catholics and Dissenters. Yet Wotton’s qualifying “at least,” and his emphasis on the power of the heart, highlights the phenomenological side of *Tale*—how the *Tale* operates on its reader phenomenologically, trapping the reader with its immanent logic. Wotton thought that something had been captured in Swift’s textual web that threatened, unsettled, and endangered traditional religion. I have suggested that this can be explained by the changed background conditions of belief, conditions that ushered in reflective religious belief. Readers are faced with deciding whether to call this loss or change. For the traditional secularization thesis either Swift believed or Swift didn’t, or Swift half believed and half didn’t, or Swift oscillated. I have argued that this is an irrelevant position if the *Tale* is a satirical response to the fragilization of belief that came with an emerging secularity. If this is indeed true, then regardless of where one puts Swift on the spectrum of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, he is one of the first important writers of secularity. Swift, the Anglican priest, remained cautious on issues of pastoral power—at least publically; Swift, the satirist, was witheringly direct on how an explosion of Christian belief altered the background conditions that licensed pastoral power in the Anglican pastorate.

\(^{58}\) Wotton, 220.
Chapter 4

Humor Too Light for the Color of His Cassock:

Laurence Sterne, Pastoral Technology, and the Work of Redemption

“He promises to spin the Idea through several Volumes, in the same chaste Way, and calls it his Work of Redemption.”

In 1760 an obscure clergyman became an unlikely literary superstar. In the months that followed the publication of the first two books of Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, their unprecedented strangeness gave rise to the fad of Shandymania, inspired some half-dozen imitations, and made a middle-aged parson the cause célèbre of London. Not long after, however, Sterne made a series of fateful missteps that damaged his reputation. On an infamous trip to London in the spring of that year, his loose conversation—and his rumored seduction of an actress—became the source of town gossip, which alienated him from some of the city’s most influential literary figures. In the same year, he misjudged a segment of the public taste by titling a selection of his sermons after his fictional counterpart, the parson Yorick. The literary malfeasance of conflating a fictional character with an actual clergyman from York offended pious readers who wanted the novelty of Tristram Shandy kept far from their Anglicanism. In drawing a clearly defined parallel between himself and his character, Sterne also set the precedent of blurring the boundary between the outlandish world of his fiction and the mundane

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2 For an exhaustive discussion of Shandymania and Sterne’s imitators, see René Bosch, Labyrinth Of Digressions: Tristram Shandy as Perceived by Sterne’s Early Imitators (Rodopi: New York, 2007).
3 The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Vols 1 & 2 (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1760).
world of his Anglican vocation—of merging the techniques of the novel with the technologies of spiritual guidance. As if to twist saintly noses further, the subsequent volumes of *Tristram Shandy* raised the stakes. The riotous bawdy and sexual wordplay grew more pronounced, fueling the suspicion that Sterne was theologically suspect at best, dangerously irreligious at worst. In riffling the pages of his ostentatiously produced volumes, one could hardly miss double-entendres about large noses, inadvertently foul-mouthed nuns, hints of genital mutilation and sexual impotence, and a lascivious widow. This reinforced the view that behind his unruly and digressive games lurked a leering clergyman who not only reveled in labyrinthine innuendo but who had the temerity to make unrepentant commerce of it. His work seemed to fulfill worries that many people had voiced a generation earlier during the Pamela controversy that the corruptive potential of novels outweighed their capacity to instruct and edify. If ever there were an author who ignored Saint Paul’s stern admonition that “there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or course jesting, which are not fitting,” it was Laurence Sterne.

From this perspective, a bulletin that appeared in the *London Intelligencer* in January 1769 is symptomatic of the uneasiness Sterne created for his Christian readers. It is a reminder of his capacity to unsettle them and to elicit words of justification, each a breath apart. Its anonymous contributor “Philarates” submitted a French article for the inspection of English readers. He wrote to the editor of the *Intelligencer* that “the enclosed extract may probably be entertaining to your readers, by shewing them the estimation in which a late celebrated English author is held abroad.” Translated into English, the bulletin began

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4 *Eph. 5:4.*
It is well known that Mr. Yorick is the Doctor Sterne already celebrated as well on account of his sermons, as for the life of *Tristram Shandy*. This singular man, this truly original author, is lately dead, having just published the journey which we now introduce to the public.

Immediately afterwards, the French apologist felt forced to write that “The bad use Dr. Sterne has sometimes made of his talents has occasioned too great a prejudice against him.” As Sterne’s biographer Arthur C. Cash writes when Sterne died such notices were the order of the day. The first volume of *A Sentimental Journey* was not long off the press, and its reviews often became his obituaries. Cash cites the English reviews that appeared in the *Monthly Review* and the *London Magazine* as being representative. He puts it well when he writes that “neither [reviewer] could resist saying that Sterne, when he appeared before his Maker, needed the help of a recording angel whose tears would blot out sins.” There was some glee when Sterne’s corpse was “burked” and sold to Cambridge University for medical dissection, an event luckily prevented by the good fortune of an undergraduate recognizing his distinctive face. It seemed that Sterne had thwarted the sanctity of Christian burial itself. In the year of his death, the judgment was in: condemnation was warranted because expiation was owed. Sterne had put his literary gifts to irreligious use, and he had underscored his divagations by having so much of his humor turn on his readers’ awareness that he was a cassocked figure who mocked the specialist knowledge of clerics and all forms of religious pedantry. Later generations of readers would

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6 Ibid.
deal with this aspect of Sterne through a strategy of avoidance. They knew him best through the highly censored *The Beauties of Sterne* that appeared in 1782, which kept his memory alive by presenting a sanitized sentimentalist, a parson-like figure who conformed more to Anglican expectation than the real Sterne ever had.  

The following chapter confronts what now may seem quaint to most literary critics—the “bad use” of Sterne’s talents. What Sterne’s immediate readers recognized but later readers have usually downplayed is how deeply wedded his literary version is to his vocation as a member of the pastorate. It was a tremendously contentious issue for Sterne’s immediate readers. It preoccupied Sterne himself who wrote that his last work would be a one of redemption, but who could not resist making the violation of decorum one of his major themes.  

As Tristram tells readers, “No one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;—so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good-breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.” The chapter proposes that Michel Foucault’s concept of pastoral technology—how Christian practices such as confession and baptism produce individualization—is especially useful for addressing the tricky place of religion in Sterne’s texts. Mine is an unapologetically Foucauldian

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8 Of this process, Madeleine Descargues-Grant has written, “It was even Sterne’s fate to have his works artificially fragmented for the taste of the public, that is, anthologized and broken into more palatable pieces . . . .” “Sterne and the Miracle of the Fragment” in *Swiftly Sterneward: Essays on Laurence Sterne and His Times in Honor of Melvyn New* (Plymouth: U of Delaware P, 2011), 224f.


exercise that shows how pastoral power can be a critical tool for uncovering religion. It makes it analyzable without twisting Sterne’s fictions into works that evangelize. This is important because Sterne does not explicitly proselytize in his fiction, and his many layers of irony make pinpointing religious intention in his work extraordinarily challenging, if not impossible. As Martha F. Bowden has written, Sterne is a writer whose use of sentiment—often viewed as the most likely place to find his low-church theology—has been interpreted in a dizzying number of ways, as “satiric, parodic, mocking, self-satirizing, self-satiric, self-mocking, and downright embarrassing.”

At the same time, the imaginary worlds of Shandy Hall and Yorick’s France assume a Christian status quo that is unalterably given: religious discourse, religious jokes, religious types, religious allusions, and religious historical figures abound in Sterne and should be accounted for critically. Thus this chapter seeks to square a circle of sorts—to place Sterne’s doctrinally orthodox Anglicanism alongside his stunning breaches of decorum in a manner that explains how his art dealt with pastoral problems that concerned him. These problems include the contingencies of Christian character formation, the dangers of Christian judgment, and the difficulties of pastoral administration and the attendant risks of pastoral failure. By focusing on the overtly pastoralized figure of Yorick in both *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*, my claim is that Sterne’s subversive humor often resides in the disjunction between his representational practices, which draw deeply on pastoral power and Christian hermeneutics, and his simultaneous eschewal of overt Christian didacticism. He is a writer who seems to imagine

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no live alternative to Anglican Christianity but who leaves readers unsettled by his satirical treatment of its pieties.

The resulting literary effect is one in which the pastoral and the sententious are decoupled but where the earnestly pastoral acts as a counterpoint to his ungovernable humor. One might say that religion in Sterne is a bit like Mr. Yorick himself. When asked where he can be found, the maid Susannah responds, “Never where he should be.”

As an ever present background, pastoral power informs the rhetorical spaces where Sterne’s bawdy can do its thing—provoke us. He does not merely laugh, but he invokes God to sanction his laughter. This can be seen in Tristram’s remarkable political fantasy at the end of Book II: “Was I left like, like Sancho Panca, to choose my kingdom, it should not be maritime . . . no, it should be a kingdom of hearty laughing subjects . . . I should add to my prayer—that God would give my subjects grace to be as Wise as they were Merry; and then should I be the happiest monarch, and they the happiest people under heaven.”

In lines such as these, Yorick’s allusion to king and subject point to govermentality being imagined in pastoral terms. Sterne’s satire does not merely cross the line that delimits decorum: it constructs the line intratextually and dramatizes the crossing of it with great performative aplomb, putting in tension the governance of the political and pastoralized subject. To give one characteristic instance, when Tristram flirts with writing an offensive word, it is no accident that he reminds his readers of the sanctity of canon. And so we find Tristram writing of Phutatoris’s oath that it is “a word I am ashamed to write—yet must be written—must be read—illegal—uncanonical—guess ten thousand guesses, multiplied into themselves—rack—

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13 Ibid., 281.
torture your invention for ever, you’re where you was—In short, I’ll tell you in the next chapter.”

As a non-normative concept, pastoral power can help readers navigate through the Scylla and Charybdis in Sterne criticism that either reduces the religious content of his fictions to apologetics or sidelines the fiction’s profoundly religious roots as being peripheral to their art. Thus this takes part in a recent trend in the critical literature about which J. T. Parnell has written, “Some well-worn commonplace of Sterne criticism may have to be put to rest, but that is all to the good. We may, for example, have to accept that Sterne’s religious belief was no sham; that he may never have read the ‘novelists,’ let alone contemplated a devastating critique of the shortcomings of the emerging genre; and that Locke is no more the interpretive ‘open sesame’ than the doctors of the Sorbonne or Tobias Smollett.” Accordingly, the first part of this chapter discusses the central issue in Christian discourse, redemption, as it relates to Sterne, suggesting that redemption in Sterne is a kind of missing presence that structures his Christian hermeneutics. The chapter then looks at that Christian hermeneutic before providing a few thoughts on how Sterne uses pastoral asymmetry in his depiction of his two very different Mr. Yoricks.

Sterne and Redemption

It is unsurprising that Sterne characterized his own work in religious terms. In light his vexed reception, however, his private claim that A Sentimental Journey would be his “Work of Redemption” seems to have resulted in spectacular failure. What did Sterne mean in invoking

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14 Ibid., 263.
16 Richard Griffith and Elizabeth Griffith, Letters, 83.
redemption for his writing? Not only did he neglect to rehabilitate the judgment that
overshadowed his art, but he also failed to change the minds of the English public that saw him
as being personally unregenerate. Yet, as E. Derek Taylor has recently written—in a formulation
that aptly addresses the incredulity that the phrase is likely to elicit—“He seems to have meant
it” without irony. One of Sterne’s best contemporary readers, Thomas Keymer, expresses the
reason that many critics have been drawn to the image of redemption in Sterne when he writes
that the notion “wittily accommodates a wide range of things in need of redeeming as [Sterne]
wrote: his sins and his Christian soul, of course, but also his scandalous reputation, and his
persistent debts.” At the same time, Keymer inadvertently draws our attention to just how
elastic the notion of redemption can become. This elasticity has proven to be more of a
hindrance than a help, and before readers can get at literal redemption in Sterne, it is worth
examining how many dead ends such an inquiry threatens. After all, moments of explicit
redemption are strikingly absent in his work.

For the Anglican church of Sterne’s day, the importance of keeping redemption front and
center, well-defined, and inelastic was paramount. As Robert Ingram has noted, in 1761 Thomas
Secker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, argued that the spread of heterodoxy in the Anglican laity
was largely the result of divines spending too much time dwelling on morality and not enough

17 E. Derek Taylor, “A Sentimental Journey through Thomas Gainsborough’s ‘Cottage Door’
Paintings,” in Swiftly Sterneward: Essays on Laurence Sterne and his Times in Honor of Melvyn
2011), 29.
to Laurence Sterne (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 83.
time on the specifics of Christian doctrine. Sterne seems particularly vulnerable to the charge that Secker leveled at the clergy, and this might make religion seem less relevant to understanding his work; that is, if the religious content of Sterne’s work is largely identical with Enlightenment moral content, then there is little reason to deal with it in non-secular terms.

Redemption simply becomes elevated moral language divested of doctrinal belief. Sterne’s own published sermons were light on doctrine, and they have often been read to privilege moral rationalism over Anglican articles of faith, popular morality over categorical commands, and the bond of sympathy over rigid orthodoxy. The sermons were also incredibly popular among men who entertained Enlightenment values themselves, which has fostered guilt by association in some minds.

Moreover, one can find many instances of Sterne’s alter ego Yorick in Tristram Shandy acts in a way that seems to elevate morality over doctrine. Yorick indifferently catechizes Trim on the fifth commandment, but he does so only on Toby’s insistent prompting. When Walter Shandy declares his desire that Tristram should be “prudent, attentive to business, vigilant, acute, argute, inventive, quick in resolving doubts and speculative questions. . . . wise, judicious, and learned,” Yorick responds, “And why not humble, and moderate, and gentle-tempered, and good”? This attitude is perhaps mostly clearly revealed in the Phutatorius episode of Tristram Shandy in which a body of learned churchmen debate whether Tristram can be rechristened.

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20 Of course, the premise that the secular and the non-secular can be easily separated for analytical purposes is now widely questioned.
22 Sterne, Tristram Shandy, 348.
The episode is set in motion when Yorick says that he is unable to answer Walter’s question on whether Christian doctrine permits a rechristening. “I am a vile canonist,” he says. Later, after delivering an erudite sermon to the gathering, Yorick unexpectedly tears his sermon on the niceties of Christian doctrine into strips of paper, shocking all but perhaps Uncle Toby. Someone shouts, “See if he is not cutting it into slips, and giving them about him to in light their pipes!” Didius calls the act abominable, and doctor Kysarcii says that, “it should not go unnoticed.” Yorick is immediately presented with a dilemma. He is told that if the sermon were good enough to read to the group, then it was too good to tear to strips, and if it weren’t, then it was an insult to present it at all. Characteristically, Yorick slips through the horns, responding that that the dilemma is artificial. What matters is what is “from my head instead of my heart,” implying that compared to the universalism of the heart, a calcified doctrine is finally egoistic, a display of one’s own mastery of a body of knowledge. As Yorick puts it, “’Tis not preaching of the gospel—but ourselves—For my own part . . . . I had rather direct five words point blank to the heart.” Archbishop Secker’s other concern—that the Anglican laity was becoming too speculative and not being kept in line by Anglican priests—is also readily apparent in Yorick in *Tristram Shandy*, for example, in the passivity he displays when Walter Shandy recommends that he read Plato and in his willingness to let Walter ride his philosophical hobbyhorses.

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23 Ibid., 248.
24 Ibid., 262.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
Yet if Sterne was more moralist than catchiest by temperament, he did not violate the second part of Secker’s injunction. In it, Secker invoked pastoral imagery, claiming that it was vital that Anglican priests “succeed in pasturing our flocks as much as possible, and be of one mind, especially in matters of saving faith,” where “pasturing our flocks” largely meant administering the pastoral technologies of the Anglican church: christening, baptizing, delivering homilies, and so on. Secker added, “For there are those who claim to be ours who nonetheless disagree with much of what we teach, particularly concerning the Holy Trinity, the redemption of the human race, and the imparting of heavenly grace to the minds of believers.”

On this score, Sterne seems immune to criticism. There is scant evidence supporting the interpretation that he was anything other than an orthodox Anglican in belief, a man truly of one mind with the church in matters of saving faith. Yorick’s belief that a preoccupation with doctrine “’Tis not preaching of the gospel—but ourselves” maintains that the gospel is at the core of Christian belief.

Summarizing the current scholarly consensus, Tim Parnell writes, “If sometimes grudgingly, most commentators now accept [Melvyn] New’s argument that the Sterne of the sermons is an orthodox Church of England man, and ‘not a jester in the pulpit, nor a secularist or Shaftesburian.’” In other words, Sterne is now widely accepted as a figure who approaches contradiction: an Anglican whose doctrinal views on redemption are thoroughly conformist, though he wore those views lightly and in ways that raised eyebrows. As Keymer writes, “The

27 Quoted in Ingram, 78.
28 The chief proponent of this view is Melvyn New. Not everyone has agreed. For instance, Carol Stewart writes of the sermons, “Any student of Sterne is indebted to New’s work as an editor, but his understanding of Sterne’s Sermons as continuous with an ‘orthodox’ tradition has minimized what was unconventional or even, from the point of view of contemporaries, improper about them.” The Eighteenth-Century Novel and the Secularization of Ethics (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 132.
satirical play emanates, in other words, from a stable religious position: Sterne was neither
Shklovsky’s novelist nor Traugott’s absurdist, but a Christian satirist, and one whose revelry in
disorder and opacity did not oppose but instead upheld the need for conventional faith.”

It is a testament to the uneasiness that this apparent contradiction creates that so many critics
have approached the theme of religious redemption in his work indirectly, which is to say,
figuratively. After all, redemption is the core issue in Christianity. One sees this when
Elizabeth W. Harries writes that redemption in *A Sentimental Journey* comes through Yorick’s
breaking “through the barriers of decorum and reserve” and overcoming “doubt, distance, and
disaster” or when Dieter Paul Polloczek analyzes Yorick’s adventures and concludes that
“Yorick seeks to redeem himself from getting caught in the circularity of such power
struggles.” Held up as a metaphor, the phrase “Work of Redemption” supplements larger
arguments that are themselves tangential to the thorny issue of Anglican soteriology and
confirms Paula McDowell’s point that

revisionist historians increasingly argue for the continued centrality of religion as a
social and cultural force, literary studies and cultural criticism remain strikingly
unaffected by these developments. Despite a few promising signs, religious writing
remains marginalized in our literary history and cultural models, its place in our field of
vision directly inverse to its actual importance to the period we study.

Treating redemption in Sterne as a metaphor opens an escape hatch for the critic who can then
avoid religion. One can focus on events in the novel that are most amenable to secular reading.

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evens like Uncle Toby’s courtship, while ignoring the parson who bookends the novel. It marginalizes the centrality of the topic of the pastoral in Sterne by domesticating it, and it excludes the pastoral from the field of critical inquiry. The presumption here may be that talk of literal redemption—the ultimate aim of all pastoral technologies—is uninteresting at best, a conversation stopper at worst, or that by discussing redemption critics will be led into the morass personal belief when their own institutional conventions place a de facto bar on such discussion.

As a metaphor, however, redemption has limitations. Breaking through a barrier is an accomplishment, but it is not Christian salvation. Similarly, eluding the entanglements of a power struggle may be metaphorically redemptive, but it is far from the redemptive grace that appears in The Book of Common Prayer which Sterne used daily in his vocation in York.

When critics have not leaned heavily on metaphorical interpretations of redemption in Sterne, the notion has usually been folded into broader themes that mute the robust religious force that is otherwise associated with the concept. The most celebrated—the most frequently traversed—of these themes is undoubtedly sensibility, which has been of interest to critics of both Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey.\(^{34}\) On one hand, sensibility has been an incredibly productive field of inquiry when it comes to thinking one’s way through Sterne in the last few decades. For instance, it has deepened readers’ critical understanding how sentimental figures of empire inscribed its subjects through simultaneous acts of pity and distantiuation\(^{35}\), and it has shown readers how gender was negotiated in the literary world of the late eighteenth


\(^{35}\) Festa, Lynn, Sentimental Figures of Empire (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2006).
century.\textsuperscript{36} On the other hand, there exists an older critical tradition directly relevant to the question of non-metaphoric redemption in Sterne. This tradition connects the sensibility movement to the temperament of eighteenth-century Anglicanism.

The \textit{locus classicus} of such accounts is R.S. Crane’s seminal argument that the origins of sensibility are to be found not so much in moralist philosophers such as Shaftesbury but in the Latitudinarian theology of men such as John Tillotson and Isaac Barrow.\textsuperscript{37} The crux of his thesis is that because Latitudinarian theology emphasized sympathy and benevolence, it provides the best framework for appreciating how \textit{Tristram Shandy} and \textit{A Sentimental Journey} can seem to participate in a nascent eighteenth-century secularism while in fact conforming to a prominent current in eighteenth-century spirituality. The cult of feeling in sensibility is said to arise from patterns of specifically Christianized affect and \textit{caritas}. It is part of the \textit{habitus} of being saved.

Thus in \textit{Tristram Shandy}, Walter and Toby are brothers and share a filial affection for one another, but in behaving philanthropically toward Le Fever and Le Fever’s boy, Corporal Trim and Uncle Toby become bound to one another in Christian brotherhood. As Sterne expresses it in Sermon 41, “For, as men, we are all allied together in the natural bond of brotherhood.” As Uncle Toby tells the corporal, “It is in the Scripture . . . . I Will shew it thee to-morrow:--In the meantime, we may depend upon it, Trim, for our comfort . . . . That God Almighty is so good and just a governor of the world, that if we have but done our duties in it,--it will never be enquired


\textsuperscript{37} R. S. Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the Man of Feeling,” \textit{ELH} 1.3 (1934).
into, whether we have done them in a red coat or a black one.” Typically, this passage is destabilized by Sterne’s satire. Where one reader will interpret Uncle Toby’s promise to look up the scripture for Trim tomorrow to be a satire on the importance of doctrine, another will see Uncle Toby as a figure who has so embodied the New Testament imperative to “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” that scriptural reconfirmation is spiritually unnecessary.

In a discussion of Crane’s legacy, Markman Ellis writes, by “Dwelling on the moral constitution of man, [these Latitudinarian theologians] stressed the necessity and blessedness of being righteous, and promoted the religious value of human works that increased justice, love and mercy” while maintaining “that the foundation of morals was in revelation rather than in reason.” While later critics have supplemented Crane’s account of sensibility, usually accepting it as being part of the story, the Cranean reading of sensibility dispatches with too far much religion in Sterne and fails to explain Sterne’s Menippean preoccupation with cataloguing the furniture of the Christian tradition. Furthermore, it has often had the profound consequence of making Sterne an exemplar of a lukewarm Georgian church that belies the intensity with which he writes passages such as “Tell me, ye learned, shall we for ever be adding so much to the bulk—so little to the stock? And “Shall we be destined to the days of eternity, on holy-days, as well as working days, to be shewing the relics of learning, as monks do the relics of saints—without working one—one single miracle with them?” Readers gain Sterne the writer but lose Sterne the priest.

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38 Sterne, 354.
39 Ellis, 14.
40 Sterne, 285.
As the creations of a clergyman whose own sensibilities were low-church, Sterne’s work might appear to be tailor-made for a Cranean-style account of sensibility. If his work can be enlisted to endorse the view, readers have reason to be cautious. Sterne frequently skewers sentimentality as being a bad guide in religious matters. Consider the following scene from *A Sentimental Journey*. After engaging in a round of polemical divinity (the term Sterne most frequently uses religious debate, both irenic and eristic) with the freethinking Madame de V, Mr. Yorick writes that the lady “affirmed to Monsieur D- and the Abbe M-, that in one half hour I had said more for revealed religion, than all their *Encyclopaedia* had said against it.”41 On the face of it, Yorick performs his duty as a clergyman, but Sterne’s satire hilariously depicts the conversation as a seduction scene in which sensibility seals the conversion. Sterne’s satirical norm comes into view when, in reflecting on the encounter later, Yorick tells the reader that Madame “put off the epocha of deism for two years,” suggesting that when sensibility is allied to revelation at the expense of reason, reason will ultimately reassert itself.42 Passages such as this demonstrate Sterne’s awareness of the limited value sensibility has a handmaiden to Christianity: the sentimental encounter that Yorick has with Madame de V is not enough to sustain her endorsement of revelation, and it seems to me difficult to read the scene, with its punch line of “two years,” as anything other than a satire of pastoral failure. Ironically, the encounter might look to support the freethinking position that reason will trump revelation in the long run, but this interpretation ignores that most Latitudinarians held that reason and revelation complement each other and are weak without one another. As Sterne has his other Yorick in *Tristram*47

42 Ibid.
Shandy say, “I wish there was not a polemic divine . . . in the kingdom;—one ounce of practical divinity—is worth a painted ship-load of all their reverences have imported these fifty years.”

One of Sterne’s Yoricks is a polemical divine and a fool while the other Yorick is a “wise fool” who despises polemical divinity. In place of a polemical argument for either reason or revelation, Sterne’s satirical norm suggests that Yorick in A Sentimental Journey would benefit from applying the techniques of pastoral governance instead of marshaling his skill in casuistry or being unmoored by sentiment. In an encounter like the one with Madame de V, the use of practical divinity that concerns itself with the care of the soul is far more useful than a host of borrowed arguments from controversialists: what is at stake is redemption.

Perhaps most recent critics have been reluctant to talk about literal redemption in Sterne because it seems like such an obvious dead end. If most critics will now grant that Sterne was an Anglican priest who officiated his office more or less ably, agreement ends on the question of the significance of religion in his work. This has led to a clear polarization in Sterne studies—and to a great deal of critical exhaustion. On one side are readers who are inclined to picture Sterne as a temporizer whose youthful association with libertines bespoke an enduring bad character and shallow, if orthodox, faith. More often than not, these critics want to move on to topics such as Sterne and politics, Sterne and race, or Sterne and empire. Religion itself becomes sidelined so that the discussion can turn to the real critical business. In an interpretative environment where what excites the most is understanding the many facets of an emerging modernity—and where, as Charles Taylor has argued, modernity is thought of as being the period in which secularism subtracts religion from culture and its institutions—this view has

43 Sterne, Tristram Shandy, 324.
common currency, even if it merely licenses ignoring or downplaying religion. On the other side are critics who promote Sterne as an Erasmian figure whose religious beliefs inform his humanist laughter.\textsuperscript{44} To the second group it seems as if the first group of critics misses the point of Sterne’s genius; to the first, it seems as if Sterne has had the ironic misfortune of falling into the arms of a legion of reactionary and unimaginative pedants. While this portrait of Sterne’s critics is admittedly done in broad strokes, one cannot read the secondary literature on Sterne and religion without bumping into this excluded middle.

For this reason, any critic who wants to address religion in Sterne must confront it one way or another. Where a critic stands on the issue simply determines how the critic will see other important issues in Sterne. So, for instance, in writing on didacticism in Sterne’s work, Patrick Muller argues, “While in his sermons Sterne enforces the Latitudinarian educational programme, his second novel shows the impracticability of didacticism in all areas of human life.”\textsuperscript{45} Muller’s reading grants that while Sterne was an orthodox moralizing parson in the parish house, his text does not convey these commitments. While Muller strikes me being ultimately correct in his interpretation, he sweeps away the religion with the didacticism. What would be of use at the current critical conjuncture is an approach that sets aside both Sterne’s private faith and personal flaws, one that avoids the critical polarization that has stymied discussion of religion in his work but that does not reduce the notion of redemption to hollow metaphor or equate religious content

\textsuperscript{44} Like Sterne’s, Erasmus’s religious satire has been difficult to explain satisfactorily. For example, David Weil Baker points to “Erasmus’ confusing willingness to take the part of those he seems to be attacking” in Divulging Utopia: Radical Humanism in Sixteenth-Century England (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999), 40.

\textsuperscript{45} Patrick Muller, Latitudinarianism and Didacticism in Eighteenth Century Literature: Moral Theology in Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith (Frankfurt: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2009), 361.
with didacticism and that reads Sterne as a producer of epistemological Christian comedies. Thus one of the most rewarding ways to understand redemption in his work at the present time is to treat it as a hermeneutic device. Redemption is very much like the scaffolding that keeps the stage standing but which the audience never sees. In these comedies of human understanding and misunderstanding—serious self-scrutiny and risible intellectual misrecognition—satire springs from what Michel Foucault called the Christian hermeneutics of the self. This Christian hermeneutics of the self—all of the cultural practices that the church uses to produce Christian subjectivity—is meant to culminate in Christian redemption, making the problematic of redemption a hidden cornerstone of Sterne’s art. The insistent presence of Yorick in Sterne’s fiction points to this. It is Yorick’s pastoral duty to ensure that his flock is redeemed.

Redemption functions in Sterne as the absent center that establishes the coordinates of play in his fiction. While Sterne does not write repentance narratives, and while his characters do not agonize over their fallen natures, his fictions nonetheless draw on the mechanics of redemption because they are inseparable from the pastoralized world that is predicated on it. Consider Foucault’s paradoxical insight that “the Christian pastorate is not fundamentally or essentially characterized by the relationship to salvation, to the law, and to the truth. The Christian pastorate is, rather, a form of power that, taking the problem of salvation in its general set of themes, inserts into this global, general relationship an entire economy and technique of the circulation, transfer, and reversal of merits, and this is its fundamental point.” This might seem counterintuitive. It is not that redemption is unimportant or inessential: it is the absent center that licenses the pastoral technology. Foucault’s claim refocuses critical attention from the

\[^{46}\text{Foucault, 183.}\]
binary logic of “redeemed or not redeemed”—the center of gravity in, for instance, repentance narratives—to the administrative practices and formative processes that are clustered around redemption. It is through these practices and processes that Foucault thought the Christian subject emerged and became governable. In positing salvation a displaced center, we are invited to conceive of redemption as putting the whole this-worldly apparatus of pastoral power in motion. Accordingly, to analyze pastoral power, it is necessary to turn one’s gaze from the bright center of redemption to its periphery. Instead of asking whether redemption has been obtained by an author or by a character, the significant relation becomes that between pastoralized subjects and their pastors.

This periphery of pastoral governance is precisely the space that Yorick occupies in *Tristram Shandy* as a character who is also a structural device: he appears in the beginning and ending of the text, functioning as its bookends. Throughout, he is always a presence on the edge of Shandy Hall, ready to offer advice and dispense wisdom. When Walter Shandy works himself into a lather, it is Yorick who “foreseeing the sentence was likely to end with no sort of mercy,” lays his hand upon Walter’s breast and calms him.\(^47\) When Tristram is mis-Christened, the Shandys turn to Yorick for advice. When Toby and Trim intervene in the Le Fever episode, Yorick is their guide them in how to do good deeds. When an opinion is needed on the nature of love in Toby’s courtship of Widow Wadman, Walter’s vitriolic condemnation of sex is countered by Yorick’s wiser view that the procreation of children is as beneficial to the world as the finding of the longitude. As a parson, Yorick’s role in the lives of the Shandys is to help ensure their final redemption as human beings, even if Tristram Shandy does not wave this in its reader’s

\(^{47}\) Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 335.
faces. In an implicitly secularized interpretation, it is easy to reduce Yorick your to being a mere guide. At the same time, Sterne never lets his readers forget that that Shandy Hall is a part of Yorick’s pastorate—his territoriality. As such, the business of redemption orchestrates the field of governance in which pastor and laity interact and constitute each other as subjects, even if Sterne does not place it at the center of his text.

**Sterne and Christian Hermeneutics**

Tristram coins a term for the history of his soul. He calls it “gonopsychanthropologia.” In his lectures on pastoral power, Michel Foucault argued that the technologies of pastoral power used by the pastorate to reveal human truth are the technologies that produce the distinctly Christian subject. In his essay “Technologies of the Self,” he explained that all technologies of the self “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.” As a clergyman himself, Sterne is profoundly interested in Christian knowing and its failures, and he combines them with his interest in the novel as a literary form, which was becoming a new intellectual vehicle for fashioning the self.

It is worth pausing to unpack just what pastoral technologies are and to investigate their roles. Sterne was able to translate the pastoral technologies that produced Christian individuals into the devices of the Christian novel. If Sterne the pastor produced Christian individuals, Sterne the writer produced Christian characters. In both, pastoral technology was front and center. Foucault

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48 Ibid., 233.
distinguished between techniques of domination and technologies of the self, seeing the analysis of the first as part of his critical project and the second as being part of its liberator potential.

Margaret A. McLaren writes that Foucault, in his best known work on the history of “institutions, discourses, disciplines, and practices,” focused on bringing the genealogies of techniques of domination into view.\(^{50}\) In his late work on technologies of the self, Foucault wanted to understand how Western individuals constituted their “identities through some ethical techniques of the self which developed through antiquity down to now.”\(^{51}\) Pastoral technologies belong to both analytic frameworks: they have been used as techniques of domination, but they constructed interiority in new ways that Foucault believed could be re-appropriated. As is well known, he became interested in the structural elements that serve as the preconditions of subjectivity early in his intellectual career, chiefly through an engagement with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.\(^{52}\) He pursued this investigation in a series of works that spanned three decades, beginning with his *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, continuing through theoretically oriented works such as *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and his groundbreaking work on discipline in *Discipline and Punish*, and ending in his late ethical work on the “care of self,” work that grew out of his research on the multivolume *History of Sexuality*. At the center of this ongoing project was a belief that the ontogenesis of subjectivity should be thought of in strictly nominalist terms.\(^{53}\) In an interview, Foucault explained, “my problem was not defining the moment from which something like the subject

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 148.

\(^{52}\) Michel Foucault, *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003).

\(^{53}\) Mark G. E. Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 82-84.
appeared, but rather the ensemble of processes by which the subject exists with its different problems and obstacles and across the forms, which it still hasn’t finished traversing.” 54 These processes produce different kinds of human subjects at various points in history. For example, in the fullest version of his typology of historical subjects, he contrasts classical stoics with Christian ascetics. As Edward McGushin writes, in a figure like Marcus Aurelius one finds “an elaborate attention to the world, a rigorous attempt to see things in their objectivity and to assign to things their true values.” 55 Stoic technologies of “temporal decomposition, material decomposition, and reductive description are ways of dispelling the power that the flow of representations has over the subject—they free the subject to know herself and see that is her rational nature that provides identity and continuity in the world, that the objects represented are totally discontinuous, isolated instances, bits of material and nothing more.” 56 By contrast, “The Christian ascetic will not concern himself with the objectivity of the idea but rather with its origin and its being. In this way Christian practices are hermeneutic rather than analytic. Their representation is examined to discover meaning interior to it . . . .” 57

Foucault termed the process of becoming a human subject assujetissement, a term that one finds in almost all of his writing. However, as Milchman and Rosenberg have argued, assujetissement has posed a major problem for English readers of his work. 58 On one hand, it refers to the processes by which subjects are formed at those points in discursive formations

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54 Quoted in Kelly, 83.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
where power-knowledge intersect. This objectifying use of the term is frequently found in Foucault’s early and middle period work, and it is perhaps his best known contribution to intellectual history. Here one finds the Foucault that is occasionally caricaturized as deterministic, a figure whose work leaves little room for agency in subject formation. In Foucault’s later work on the care of the self, he shifted to a different use of *assujettissement* in which the subject takes an active role in its continued formation. This was a new more flexible conception of *assujettissement*. Because he used a single French term to describe both aspects of subject formation, this difference in his thought has been underappreciated at times, with the term *assujettissement* being translated in a number of ways, including subjection, subjugation, subjectivation, subjectization, and so forth. Only recently has an informal critical agreement emerged in the secondary literature that translates *assujettissement* as “subjectification.”

Unfortunately, for readers who are interested in understanding what Foucault had to say about pastoral power, his work on the topic coincides with the period where his ideas about subjectivity were in transition.

How then is *assujettissement* relevant to the reader interested in Sterne and religion? The short answer is that subjectification in the Christian tradition occurred within the context of its enabling technologies of pastoral power: the catechism, baptism, confession, the liturgy, last rites. It is not a thing, but a set of processes that we find distributed throughout Sterne’s texts. As an Anglican priest whose vocation entailed that he deploy pastoral technologies in administering his living in York, Sterne was intimately familiar with their logic. He drew on them both in administering his living and in creating the subjectivities of his fictional characters, not least those of his two great protagonists, Tristram, who is obsessed with “the history of
myself,” and Yorick, who transcribes his sentimental travels. In the pulpit Sterne quotes *Philippians*, exhorting his congregation to work out their salvation with fear and trembling highlighting the importance of Christian agency in the subject formation process; in his art, he creates narratives that participate in pastoral technologies while satirizing the self-formation process. The great hermeneutic red herring in *Tristram Shandy* is thus Lockean epistemology and its empty promise to unlock character while being no more revelatory than Tristram’s speculation about animal spirits. While early critics of Sterne often fixated on Locke as a Rosetta stone for translating Sterne’s depiction of character, many contemporary critics have read Sterne’s appropriation of Locke as being deeply satirical. Yorick says that wit in judgment in Locke are like Farting and hiccupping. Walter Shandy thinks of himself as a Lockean but is one of the novel’s great epistemological anti-models.

Instead, the *assujettissement* of his characters is wedded the two-part process of subject formation that operates throughout the entire Christian pastorate. Part of Sterne’s accomplishment as an artist is to merge those pastoral technologies with the techniques of the eighteenth century novel. In the first phase of subject formation, the prospective Christian originates a self through pastoral technologies such as confession, and, in the second phase, renounces that emergent self through the intercession of pastoral technologies such as baptism, atonement, and absolution. Writing about this two-part hermeneutic process, James Bernauer explains that the first stage consists in “the constitution of the self as a hermeneutical reality, namely the recognition that there is a truth in the subject, that the soul is the place where this
truth resides, and that true discourse can be articulated concerning it.”59 In this stage, the self objectifies the smallest of its desires and thoughts. It inspects itself, and it comes to know its reality through that selfsame introspection. This task of Christian self-scrutiny is one of the signature features that differentiates the eastern from the western pastorates, and in the *Battle for Chastity*, Foucault wrote that it is an “indeterminate objectivization of the self by the self—indeterminate in the sense that one must be extending as far as possible the range of one’s thoughts, however insignificant and innocent they may appear to be.”60 Sterne consistently relies on this principle throughout his work: when his characters want to convey the truth of their beings, they appeal to the substance of their souls. They compose their souls through the introspective process of writing. In *A Sentimental Journey*, for instance, Yorick pities from his soul in his deepest encounters with others and then transcribes those encounters to understand them and himself. When Yorick flirts, his soul responds to every micro-vibration of the encounter. When he attacks others, he takes aim at the seat of their souls as the place where the secret truth of their character resides, as when he tells us that that the travel writers Smelfungus and Mundungus would be insensate to the pleasures of heaven, a fact he knows because of how they compose their own souls in their travel writing. Spiritual faults that might otherwise damn an individual can be excused by uncovering a mitigating truth about the soul. Such is the case of La Fleur. His “simple,” honest soul pardons his love of womanizing. Ultimately, Yorick values

his “melancholy adventures” because they make him “conscious of the existence of a soul.”

While *A Sentimental Journey* is notoriously rambling in its structure, it rambles with the purpose of bringing the truth of the self into view—and this truth is the truth of the Christian soul. Becoming conscious of the existence of the state of the soul is what the Christian hermeneutic of the self is all about. Tristram in *Tristram Shandy* and Yorick in *A Sentimental Journey* pay minute attention to documenting their subjectivities, which puts them in this hermeneutic tradition while separating them from earlier forms of spiritual autobiography where it is events, not consciousness, that is scrutinized to determine whether or not one had been redeemed. But what of the second phase of the Christian hermeneutic in which the exposed self is rejected? Sterne’s characters have already passed through this second process, which is to say that his characters are self-identifying Christians. They believe themselves to be redeemed and are engaged in the unending first stage of the process in which pastoral technologies exist to ensure that they continue speaking the truth. Explicating the significance of this hermeneutic in Foucault’s larger project, Golder writes, “Foucault links this Christian hermeneutic derived from the modality of pastoral power to modern systems of governmentality. This is a technique of political individualization—the production and conduct of governable identities through the deployment of truth, the truth of the subject, that comes to assume great importance in the organization of Western political systems.”

Throughout his writing Sterne demonstrates his extraordinarily pastoral interest in knowing oneself as a subject as well as knowing others as hermeneutic objects. His preoccupation with

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such knowledge extends beyond the ordinary interest that most novelists have in exploring their characters. He used his characters to explore himself. We need only recall that Sterne chose to use “Yorick” as his alias to be reminded of how constant this theme is in Sterne. Sterne creates Yorick, and Yorick allows Sterne to recreate himself. While Sterne enjoyed emphasizing the more obvious connection between Yorick the jester and Laurence Sterne the humorist, the issue of interpersonal comprehension latent in the name “Yorick” has generally been overlooked. When Hamlet says, “Alas, poor Yorick, I knew ye,” knowing is uncomplicated. Hamlet’s knowledge of his old friend Yorick amounts to knowledge by acquaintance. As a young man, Hamlet knew the jester in his father’s court, and he experiences no anxiety that he could be mistaken in knowing him in the graveyard. Knowing is correctly identifying surface features: the surfaces of Yorick’s skull are sufficient to ensure that the tie of identity is established between the jester and the Danish prince. For Sterne, knowing oneself or knowing another person is not so simple. As a transcendental process, it is fraught with spiritual peril. As Yorick warns in his sermon in Tristram Shandy, we are as likely to midjudge ourselves as not. Because self-knowledge is centered on interiority, susceptible to many points of failure, and freighted with comic potential, it is fragile. Thus his characters frequently misunderstand themselves and each other, although they are able to bridge these failures through affection. Walter Shandy envisions himself to be a philosopher of the hearth, and Toby Shandy imagines himself to be a general, but Walter’s philosophical play is as unserious as Toby’s martial games in the garden. However, Tristram’s desire to know himself exists more intensely, and behind the ludic
digressions lies a serious goal of total confession: Tristram wants to become real by confessing everything about him from the moment of his conception on.

The comedy arises from the incongruity between the seriousness of the goal and the means by which Tristram seeks it. So Tristram’s investigates the efficient cause of his being, which in turn leads him to make the many asides that constitute his “digressive progressive” method. Where the Baconian search for efficient causes had resulted in great progress by Sterne’s day, Sterne satirizes mechanism in Tristram’s belief that accounting for his efficient causation could reveal much about his nature as a particular human being. As a joke, it has a theological resonance since self-understanding has always been predicated in Christian theology on understanding man’s final cause. People exist to give honor to God, and it is God’s desire that humanity should be redeemed. If Tristram’s oversight of final causes is a theological joke, it is entangled in the Christian hermeneutics of the self where one must narrate one’s history—one’s sin—in order to become a redeemed subject. Foucault labelled this subjects who narrates the confessional subject. In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, he defined it in the following way:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is no simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the concession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console an reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it.

Sterne raises his pursuit of subjectivity to the level of confessional action by his relentless and obsessive thematicization of the self as a mystery whose truth must be exposed through the
veil of language. Tristram tells readers, “There is not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling any one who I am—for there is scarce any body I cannot give a better account of than of myself; and I have often wish’d I could do it in a single word—and have an end of it.” While it may be perplexing to Tristram, he feels that he is nonetheless compelled to it do it as are all Christians: it is a necessary condition of the Christian hermeneutic. It is not enough that Tristram should know who he is: he must be able to convey this knowledge in language—to tell it to another, be it Madam or Sir and by extension, all readers. As Foucault puts it in “Subjectivity and Truth,” to confess is “To declare aloud and intelligibly the truth of oneself.” Tristram’s interlocutors are his readers who have a presence in the novel—an agency that compels his discourse. He wants the best readers and complains that “there are readers in the world, as well as many other good people in it, who are no readers at all,—who find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret from the first to the last of every thing that concerns you.” He fears that his reader will stop reading, that his reader will overlook his excellence, that his reader will be impatient. More than anything he wants his reader to understand who he is, and he will insist that “I will not finish that sentence till I have made an observation upon the strange state of affairs between the reader and myself, just as things stand at present—an observation never applicable before to any one biographical since the creation of the world, but to myself—and I believe, will never hold good for another.” In assuming the persona of Tristram, Sterne displaces his real-life vocation, a position that aligns with the confessor, with that of a member of the laity who confesses.

As a pastoral technology, confession organizes the first stage of Christian decipherment: it is the mode through which the self can appear at all. Tristram is engaged in the opposite of
vanishing act: an appearance act. Through confession, one produces a detour through the self’s history, giving as full an account as is possible of its contingencies so that one can see in multifaceted detail. This backcrossing over individual history progresses towards absolution and the ultimate gold of the soul’s redemption. Confession, it might be said, is a conversation with one’s self that is overhead by others—it is heard by one’s confessors and self that one eventually becomes. To borrow from Tristram, it “is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time.” In *Tristram Shandy* digression and one-sided conversation are thus confessional processes that construct identity. Tristram explains as much when he tells the reader that digressions “are the life, the soul of reading!—take them out of this book, for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them;—one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer;—he steps forth like a bridegroom—bids All-hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail.” Without digressions—without the characteristic deviations that make an author identifiable—the very selfhood and soul of the author vanishes. In authorship, as in the Christian hermeneutic, one produces one’s self through confessional practice. In *Tristram Shandy*, it is unsurprisingly a process that requires addressing areas of personal history that are impolite, embarrassing, and shameful. Tristram’s conversational disclosures about his sexual wounding, his vanity, and his impotency are the sort of topics one expects to see one explored in confession but expects to see avoided in ordinary conversation. *Tristram Shandy*, however, closes the distance between the two modes of discourse. And Tristram is aware of this. He defensively stipulates, “Writing, when properly managed (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation. As no one, who knows
what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;--so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.” He teases the reader with knowledge that his playfully oblique revelations push the boundaries of polite conversation toward the confession. In the contract *Tristram Shandy* creates with its reader, such lapses and confessional gestures are revelatory.

**Humor and Asymmetrical Pastoral Technology in Sterne’s Two Yoricks**

In the end, all pastoral technologies are asymmetrical. They rely on a top-down logic to operate. The Christian shepherd who leads by example deploys them to protect the souls of the flock so that each of its members can be redeemed, but, as Foucault realized, also to govern undemocratically. This produces a tricky hermeneutic situation for the pastor himself, whose own Christian subjectivity is constituted through leadership around a blind spot: he can never disclose himself entirely to his flock and is obligated to police that blind spot as a fulcrum of his religious authority. On one hand, the pastor must rely on the good faith of the laity to subjectivize themselves through the constant self-interrogation of their consciences. They must embrace their own Christian self-governance as he governs them, correcting the course of those who stray and removing barriers to their ultimate progress towards redemption. Throughout this pastoralization, each member of the flock can confide in the pastor, working with him to discover themselves. On the other hand, no such recourse exists for the pastor who is isolated from the flock, an isolation that Sterne dramatizes in both Yoricks. The optical fantasy of pastoral technology is thus a one-way mirror: while the pastor is charged with managing the
economy of faults and merits in the flock, the flock is unequipped to judge the economy of faults and merits in the pastor, and to do borders on transgression. Because of the exposure that comes with pastoral leadership, the pastor is positioned to be judged perpetually by a laity that lacks hermeneutic access to technologies that would bind his conscience to theirs in the same way they bind theirs to him. The drama and comedy of being misjudged by the laity are not simply things that that happened to the historical Sterne whose “bad use of his talents” became notorious: it is a representational feature he builds into his fiction.

The asymmetry erected by pastoral technologies finds its expression in the two alter egos that Sterne created for himself, the Yoricks. Over both characters hovers the unmistakable specter of pastoral failure, which gives rise to Sterne’s signature tragicomedy. In *Tristram Shandy*, the depiction of Yorick focuses on the tragic, albeit highly ironized, side of this tragicomedy. Yorick is misunderstood by his ungrateful and overly harsh parishioners. Readers, however, have access to all the information needed to evaluate the injustice of this judgment. With his tongue-in-cheek, Sterne invites his readers to censure the laity for their impassive hearts in a famous black page that mourns Yorick’s death, and in the pages building to Yorick’s death, Sterne makes it clear that it was Yorick’s concern for the welfare of his parish that led to the hiring of the midwife; that it was his lack vanity that led him to ride a broken horse; that it was the Christian renunciation of his younger self, symbolized in the ornate saddle, that makes his good deeds possible; and that his greatest sin was no sin at all, merely a certain lack of gravity. By contrast, in *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne positions readers to judge a different kind of Yorick whose failure as a pastor is being satirized. Behind each representation of the same hermeneutic structural problem: given that the shepherd must know the souls of the
flock, how can they know the soul of the shepherd? How can they be sure that they are in
good hands? Sterne’s unsettlingly conservative literary solution was to use satirical
representation to show the laity what pastoral technology occluded—to transgress the
undemocratic boundaries of decorum while leaving the pastoral structures that created the
occlusion in place.
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