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## Tyrannick Faith: Martyr Drama, the Heroic Mode, and Dryden's *Tyrannick Love*

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Religious uniformity (as promulgated under the 1662 Act of Uniformity and later renewals of the act) was Restoration England's chief strategy for addressing the nation's deep religious divisions. The ultimate failure of the Stuart monarchy may be attributed in part to the failure of this strategy, which kept alive the wounds of the Civil War and amplified political dissent. Recognizing the dangers that uniformity posed to their reigns, the Stuart kings often pursued other strategies, including toleration (which they attempted to grant in 1660, 1672, and 1687, with increasingly disastrous results). As their poet laureate, John Dryden also explored the possibilities of state management of dissent through toleration. Michael McKeon has observed that Dryden signaled his misgivings about the kingdom's prevailing model of unity-in-uniformity in the poem that earned him the poet laureateship, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667). Writing in response to the Fire of London and the Second Dutch War, and to the fractures in English unity those events had exposed, Dryden promoted an alternative model that "involves the abolition of division by subsuming group interests under that of the court." According to Dryden, it is possible for the state to maintain stability even with a diverse, sectarian population, but it requires universal submission to "court ideology."<sup>1</sup> That such submission would be an enormous prop to the power of the court is, of course, the most attractive aspect of this model of toleration, at least for Dryden and his patrons. Colin Jager finds Dryden maintaining similar positions in his poetry of the 1680s as well. In *Religio Laici* in particular, Jager perceives an anxious exploration of "the role of state power in creating and sustaining the largely empty spaces of tolerance"—empty spaces that set the boundaries of what cannot be tolerated, but that seek to avoid differentiating between anything that manages to exist within those boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

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As political propaganda, the poems considered by Jager and McKeon were, inevitably, of limited use, confined as such works were to a relatively elite sphere of circulation and discussion. But Dryden also had access to a social arena that could more widely disseminate his arguments for religious toleration: the theater. As a site where people of diverse backgrounds and opinions came together to observe *characters* of diverse backgrounds and opinions resolve conflicts, the theater was an appropriate (if potentially dangerous) place to mount a vigorous defense of religious toleration. Most of Dryden's plays have little to say in support of toleration, and many even seem to argue against religious plurality (a fact no doubt indicative of the public's general feelings on the subject). Yet a few of his dramas do exhibit tolerationist agendas, and none more daringly than his heroic martyr drama, *Tyrannick Love; or, the Royal Martyr* (1669). *Tyrannick Love* is one of Dryden's least studied plays, no doubt due to its poor critical reputation. Although it had a successful initial theatrical run and was revived several times in subsequent decades, its critical reputation decayed with that of heroic drama itself, and it has never recovered. Scholars generally view it as a poorly plotted and hastily written propaganda piece, starring a villain whose bombast threatens to slip into self-parody.<sup>3</sup> Eventually it even fell out of favor with its own author, who, embarrassed by the grandiloquence of Maximin (and *The Conquest of Granada's* Almanzor), said of some of their lines, "I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I writ them: But I repent of them amongst my Sins."<sup>4</sup> I would argue, however, that the play ultimately fails not so much as a result of careless composition as of its outsized ambitions.<sup>5</sup> The play is one of only a handful written in the Restoration to take religion as its central subject, and possibly the only one performed.<sup>6</sup> Even more audaciously, *Tyrannick Love* confronts the problem of religious dissent and seeks to resolve it by urging toleration, even for (indeed, especially for) Catholics.

The difficulty of supporting such an agenda in Restoration England is reflected in the play's artistic failure. *Tyrannick Love* is simultaneously a martyr drama and a heroic drama, and the tension between the respective ideologies of those genres is ultimately more than Dryden can manage. The result is a mess, but it is an instructive mess, representative as it is of an important moment in both the history of the development of English views on toleration, and the history of the development of Restoration drama. It would be an exaggeration to say that the heroic drama genre eventually failed because it was unable to reconcile its absolutist ideology with England's pressing need to develop a public culture capable of tolerating religious dissent, but perhaps not an extraordinary exaggeration. In *Tyrannick Love*, we can see the ideological strain that results from this failure, a strain that would be almost inherent to Tory drama by the time of the Exclusion Crisis.<sup>7</sup>

As in that later crisis, the issue at stake in *Tyrannick Love* is English Protestants' intolerance for the Catholic inclinations of their royal family. Dryden clearly and provocatively challenges this intolerance by writing a play about the martyrdom of St. Catharine of Alexandria, a subject that gives the play a Catholic tinge. The (probably fictitious) fourth-century saint, martyred by a pagan Roman emperor, had enjoyed enormous popularity in medieval England until the Reformation suppressed her veneration. Her legend gained new currency when Charles II married the Portuguese Catholic princess, Catherine of Braganza. As the queen's namesake, St. Catharine was the subject of several celebrations

in the 1660s, and a portrait of the queen as St. Catharine painted in 1664 was widely distributed as an engraving.<sup>8</sup> In early 1669 the queen became pregnant, and Dryden took the occasion to write a play in her honor. In staging this play, then, Dryden revived the Catholic tradition of hagiographic pageantry, flattered a queen distrusted by much of the public on account of her religion, and dramatized the oppression of a religious minority by a powerful religious establishment.<sup>9</sup> Given the connection between the play's martyr and England's Catholic queen, much of Dryden's audience would have understood the play's oppressed heroes as allegorizing the condition of English Catholics. Conversely, they would have understood the play's critique of the cruelty of religious oppression to be directed primarily at Protestants (and at the Church of England in particular).

That Dryden chose to convey this critique in a martyr drama styled as a heroic drama should not, perhaps, be surprising, given that heroic drama was the most popular genre of serious drama during the early Restoration. As Susan J. Owen observes, the creation of heroic drama "was almost an act of state," with Charles II taking an active role in shaping the genre and its popularity eventually waning with that of the Stuart court.<sup>10</sup> Heroic drama was intended to reinforce and naturalize the royalist, absolutist ideology of the Stuarts, the constructed nature of which had been painfully exposed by the beheading of Charles I and the subsequent decade of kingless rule.<sup>11</sup> Elaine McGirr has argued that the heroic mode "dramatized the end of civil war and the restoration of art and authority," and that its "absolutist ideology and baroque obfuscation" served the Stuarts by quelling dissent and uniting the English population under their authority after the republican experiment of the Interregnum.<sup>12</sup> *Tyrannick Love's* very title associates the play with this agenda; Stuart propaganda frequently portrayed Charles I as a "Royal Martyr." It is no coincidence that, as McGirr implies, heroic drama shared some of the baroque sensibilities of continental theater. The baroque was itself a product of a weakened institution (the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church) working to repair many of the broken illusions that had once placed its authority beyond question. In the words of Wylie Sypher, baroque art "overwhelmed heresy by splendor; it did not argue, but proclaimed; it brought conviction to the doubter by the very scale of its grandeurs; it guaranteed truth by magniloquence"; it was "able to win assent from the spirit through its power over the sensorium alone."<sup>13</sup> It was, in short, an artistic style that appealed to absolutism, especially absolutism in crisis.

But for precisely these reasons, the heroic mode seems a poor choice for a martyr play. Indeed, *Tyrannick Love* fits awkwardly into most descriptions of the heroic play genre. In his sweeping study of late seventeenth-century drama, Robert D. Hume only admits the play into the ranks of the heroic on what amounts to a technicality.<sup>14</sup> The central figure of the tyrant, Maximin, places the drama in an uneasy relationship with absolutist ideology. The inconsistency of its religious and political allusions threatens to render its defense of Stuart politics incoherent.<sup>15</sup> The nature of the play's influence on subsequent dramatists suggests that some members of its audience found it to contain powerful *anti-monarchical* implications. These problems proceed from the difficulty Dryden has with taking a literary mode designed "to captivate its audience, to awe it into passivity, and to subject it to a heroic reading of history and celebration of monarchy," and reconciling it with martyr drama, a genre that more naturally supports resistance to authoritarian forces.<sup>16</sup>

Such an ideology of resistance is evident in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1622), perhaps the last Catholic saint's play written for the English stage prior to *Tyrannick Love*. As Jennifer Waldron has argued, *The Virgin Martyr* responds to James I's efforts to secure an alliance with Catholic Spain and his promotion of a royal ideology that increasingly made him look like "the absolutist villains of anti-Catholic propaganda." As one would expect from a play about steadfast faithfulness in the face of persecution, its titular virgin martyr advocates resistance to authority. The play constitutes a staunchly Protestant attack on royal absolutism and divine-right kingship.<sup>17</sup> In attempting to use martyr drama to *defend* royal absolutism, Dryden comes up against the limits of what the heroic mode's quietist politics could achieve. He does his best to argue for toleration on absolutist grounds, but the play's manifest weaknesses suggest that the heroic mode was not well suited for spreading the tolerationist ethos that he believed England needed.

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By the time Dryden composed *Tyrannick Love* in the late 1660s, the precarious national unity ushered in by Charles's restoration had been weakened by widespread dissatisfaction with the nation's religious settlement and disenchantment with the monarchy. Charles had sought to expand religious toleration in his kingdom, either through comprehension of Dissenters into the Church of England or by means of an indulgence that would suspend some of the penalties against Catholics and Protestant Dissenters in ecclesiastical matters. Parliament, however, jealously guarded the privileges of the Church of England. Thus Catholics found no reward for their service to Charles in his exile, Dissenters remained embittered by the penalties they had suffered since the return of the monarchy, and members of the Church of England looked upon their tolerant monarch with suspicion. Plague and fire in London only unsettled the country further, the public sensing a divine rebuke of the status quo. Charles attempted to take advantage of this disquiet, proposing a bill of comprehension in 1667, that would have made Presbyterians a part of the Church of England while offering toleration to most Dissenters. Parliament not only defeated the bill but compelled Charles to renew the enforcement of the Act of Uniformity.<sup>18</sup> Angered and disappointed, in Easter Week of 1668 thousands of Dissenting Londoners took to the streets in the Bawdy-House Riots, causing considerable destruction of property. At court, it was feared that revolution was at hand.<sup>19</sup>

The riots were eventually brought under control, but for several years following Charles moved away from efforts at comprehension, instead working to build support for indulgence, an effort that culminated (however briefly) in the 1672 Act of Indulgence. In his discussion of the many attempts made to achieve comprehension or indulgence during the Restoration, Roger Thomas has suggested that Charles was always tepid on the notion of comprehension, favoring indulgence. Unlike comprehension, indulgence would benefit not just Dissenters but Catholics as well, a matter that took on increased importance as the Stuarts' ties to Catholicism strengthened in the closing years of the 1660s.<sup>20</sup> The Duke of York likely determined to convert to Catholicism in 1668, and in January 1669 Charles informed his Catholic counselors, Lord Arundell and Sir Thomas Clifford,

that they were to negotiate a secret treaty with Louis XIV that would provide funds for England to wage another war with the Dutch in return for Charles's public profession of the Catholic faith.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not Charles's offer was a sincere one, that it would even appear plausible illustrates the Stuarts' increasing solidarity with the Catholic world and the instability of England's religious settlement in early 1669.

Such was the state of religious politics in England when Dryden began to pen *Tyrannick Love* in honor of the Catholic queen, who had recently become pregnant. Dryden certainly knew the rumors about the royal family's Catholic sympathies, and it is not unthinkable that he may have known some of the truth behind the rumors. He would later be made privy to the secret conversions of Anne Hyde (York's first wife) in 1670 and of Charles II on his deathbed in 1685. James Winn has suggested that Arlington and Clifford (both of whom Dryden was on good terms with) may have hinted to him that a play celebrating the Catholic queen would be very welcome at this time.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of whether or not the play was solicited by the court, Dryden evidently recognized an opportunity to advocate for state-managed religious plurality using the artistic and social advantages of the public theater.

Dryden's interest in challenging the precept of unity-in-uniformity may have informed the changes he made to the historical setting of St. Catharine's legend. Tradition places St. Catharine's martyrdom in fourth-century Alexandria, but Dryden sets his play in Aquileia in 238 CE. In his preface, Dryden claims these changes are due to an error; he mistook the early third century Maximin I for Maximin II, who was "the Contemporary of Constantine the Great" and one of the more plausible candidates for the emperor of the St. Catharine legends.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Dryden is being truthful here, but he may also have preferred to set the play in 238 CE, known in histories of Rome as the Year of the Six Emperors. As the name suggests, it was one of the most chaotic periods in Roman history. By introducing religious conflict into the period's dynastic disputes, Dryden associates the problem of religious intolerance with civil war, better reflecting recent English experiences. The change of setting also makes *Tyrannick Love* unique among Dryden's heroic plays by dramatizing the formation of a unified but religiously heterogeneous society. Dryden once claimed that the moral of *The Conquest of Granada* is that "*Union preserves a Common-wealth, and discord destroys it.*"<sup>24</sup> This moral would apply equally well to his entire body of heroic plays. But in most of these plays, unity includes religious uniformity and is achieved at the point of a sword. By the conclusion of *The Conquest of Granada*, every Moor has been converted, expelled, or killed. Had *Tyrannick Love* been set in the age of Constantine, its conclusion would have been little different. The Christian triumph over pagan Rome would have been only a few years off as the final scene closed.<sup>25</sup> Setting the play a century before the conversion of the Roman Empire makes the play a depiction of the triumph of *toleration* rather than of the triumph of a single religion. Unity is restored to civil society when that society ceases to persecute its religious minority.

The play's plot is a much embellished version of St. Catharine's legend. The central conflict is between the usurping Roman emperor Maximin and St. Catharine, who is brought to him as a prisoner after she starts converting soldiers and philosophers at his court. Maximin persecutes Christians, but he is torn between his need to execute her and

his desire to marry her. (She, of course, repulses all of his advances.) Meanwhile, several other characters are caught in conflicts between the duty they owe to their tyrannical sovereign and their love for people threatened by his villainy. Maximin intends to marry his (very willing) daughter Valeria to the captain of the Praetorian Guard, Porphyrius, who secretly despises the tyrant and is in love with his wife, the empress Berenice. Berenice returns Porphyrius's love but refuses to leave Maximin, even when Maximin seeks a divorce from her. St. Catharine converts Berenice and Porphyrius to Christianity, and they are all sentenced to death. St. Catharine goes triumphantly to her martyrdom, but Berenice and Porphyrius are spared when Maximin's soldiers rise against him. Maximin dies blaspheming the gods, and the play ends as Porphyrius and Berenice prepare to leave public life so that they may live and worship together in peace and privacy.

Most of this plot sounds like relatively standard fare for early Restoration heroic drama. The great exception is the presence of St. Catharine and the focus on conversion and martyrdom. Dryden informs us in the preface to *Tyrannick Love* that he wrote the play to teach "*the Precepts and Examples of Piety*."<sup>26</sup> Yet a few lines further on, he makes a key alteration to this stated purpose. Defending the stage from those who consider it inherently irreligious and immoral, he writes, "*I only maintain, against the Enemies of the Stage, that patterns of piety, decently represented, and equally removed from the extremes of Superstition and Prophaneness, may be of excellent use to second the Precepts of our Religion*."<sup>27</sup> Although he has just asserted that a play can teach both precepts *and* examples of piety, here Dryden indicates that this play will only "*second*" those precepts; its primary concern is with the "*patterns*," or examples. He thus declares that the play will teach correct behavior, not correct ideas. The play bears him out in this, avoiding discussion of Christian doctrine, or even much use of Christian language, despite its hagiographic subject.

As the absence of such language in *Tyrannick Love* and the unperformed *State of Innocence* (1674) leads Derek Hughes to suggest that Dryden may have been a deist in this period of his life, it is worthwhile to pause here and consider the play in the context of Dryden's personal religious history.<sup>28</sup> That vexed history saw Dryden's public religious identity transition from childhood Dissenting Puritanism, to a particularly Erastian Anglicanism, to an idiosyncratic Catholicism.<sup>29</sup> *Tyrannick Love* seeks to reconcile adherents to all of these religions (although it extends the fewest olive branches to Dissenters). One reasonable explanation for Dryden's conversions and his promotion of tolerance is that he lacked any doctrinal convictions and perhaps even embraced deistical views. An acquaintance of Dryden's, Charles Blount, believed that *Religio Laici* was a deist poem, and some scholars believe that Blount was correct to understand it as such.<sup>30</sup> I find the idea of Dryden holding deistic views in the 1660s plausible, but I would also warn that too much may be made of the doctrinal emptiness of *Tyrannick Love* (and especially of the much later *Religio Laici*), just as too much has been made of the "deistical" views expressed by Alexander Pope. As Howard Erskine-Hill has argued regarding Pope's poetry, what appears to be deism is really the universalism of a man whose experiences have led him to detest sectarianism and who considers the distinctions between the various Christian denominations to be mostly trivial.<sup>31</sup> I would suggest that the appearance of deism in Dryden's work may be similarly explained. Dryden attempts to construct the "largely

empty spaces of tolerance,” as Jager calls them, because they are necessary for the management of dissent, not necessarily because he was empty of doctrinal convictions himself.

The play’s lack of interest in promoting any specific church’s doctrines is evident as soon as St. Catharine is introduced into the action. She debates Maximin’s head priest Apollonius over the relative merits of the Christian and pagan religions, and the debaters agree to limit their argument to the question of which religion provides superior “precepts of Morality” for its adherents.<sup>32</sup> It quickly becomes clear that these precepts are nothing more than commands to live virtuously, and neither disputant bothers to identify a single virtue or to question whether Apollonius’s pagan religion teaches different virtues than St. Catharine’s Christian religion. The saint only wins the debate because Christianity demands purity of thought as well as purity of action from its adherents—a level of virtue that has no observable effect in the world. The Christian’s superiority is, quite literally, inside her own head. Nevertheless, the priest declares he has been overthrown and must embrace the Christian religion, despite the fact that neither debater has so much as mentioned Christ or even God, or said anything that could possibly offend a Christian of any sect, including the Catholic queen of England who bears Catharine’s name. The play thus establishes that Christianity is a superior system of belief without reference to a single Christian doctrine, and, importantly, situates that superiority only in the realm of thought. As a guide to *behavior*, Christianity has no advantage over pagan philosophy.

The focus on morality and virtue in the debate is in keeping with the play’s general depiction of piety as grounded not in what one believes, but in how one behaves. Piety means showing a proper respect for *all* authorities, not just religious authority. As the setting of the play might suggest, Dryden’s conception of piety is essentially Roman in nature. In the dedication of the *Æneis* (1697), Dryden describes Roman piety at length. *Piety*, he writes, “in *Latin* is more full than it can possibly be express in any Modern Language; for there it comprehends not only Devotion to the Gods, but Filial Love and tender Affection to Relations of all sorts.” He further asserts that “a thorough Virtue both begins and ends in Piety,” and that “Piety alone comprehends the whole Duty of Man towards the Gods; towards his Country, and towards his Relations.”<sup>33</sup> Roman piety was thus a unifying force. In fact, notwithstanding the occasional Christian and Jewish persecution, Romans generally tolerated the religions of the peoples they governed, a practice that contributed to their imperial success. Dryden might well propose Roman piety as a model for the kind of piety England needed if it were to stand as a great empire in opposition to the Dutch and the French.<sup>34</sup>

The play’s privileging of correct behavior over correct belief explains a peculiarity of the temptation episode of the play’s fourth act. This scene is easily the play’s most spectacular, one that would have called upon all of the special effects at the command of the theater. A magician summons aerial spirits to arouse earthly desires in St. Catharine while she sleeps. The spirits sing and dance, characters enter and exit via ropes and trapdoors, and supernatural beings deliver some of the play’s best poetry. The episode closes when St. Catharine’s guardian angel, Amariel, descends “*with a flaming sword*” and chastises the spirits. The stage directions note that the spirits “*crawl off the Stage amazedly*” as St. Catharine sleeps on, unharmed (s.d. 4.1.148+). As an entertainment the scene is a

triumph, but Dryden's inclusion of these elemental beings in a hagiographic play is puzzling. Hagiography already has a legion of traditional tempters: Satan and his fellow devils. Why are we instead treated to a temptation scene featuring these troublesome but pointedly non-diabolical spirits?

This peculiarity makes sense when we acknowledge that this "religious" play is less concerned with disobedience to God than with disobedience to civil authority. Unlike devils, these aerial spirits are "Not in their Natures simply good or ill; / But most subservient to bad Spirits will" (4.1.17–18). Only the influence of the black magician and the mischievous spirit, Damilcar, moves the spirits to prey on the saint. Unlike devils, they do not require extermination or expulsion, merely firm government. Amariel addresses the spirits less like an angel than like a supervisor, reminding them at length of "the task assign'd [them] here below" of controlling the world's meteorological phenomena (4.1.163–70). In contrast to the undutiful and mercurial spirits, Amariel arrives from the "Empire of Eternal day, / Where waiting minds for Heav'n's Commision stay." He only intervenes because "A darted Mandate came / From that great will which moves this mighty Frame" (4.1.149–50, 151–52). He is the very model of the dutiful subject: utterly passive when without orders and fervently zealous when acting on them. Maximillian Novak suggests that this episode represents "the combat between religion and human folly rather than a combat between good and evil."<sup>35</sup> I believe it would be better characterized as a combat between submissive dutifulness and rebellious undutifulness—or, more simply, between piety and impiety. Dryden has altered the supernatural elements of the hagiographic tradition to promote *civil* obedience and encourage the audience to focus on "the task assign'd [them] here below" rather than on theological disputes over the details of the hereafter.

Of course, if the confrontation between Amariel and the aerial spirits is an allegory for the proper exercise of piety, it is a disingenuously simple one. There can be no conflict between civil piety and religious piety for the spirits, because God is their master in both cases. The human characters of the play face greater difficulties as they struggle to behave piously to their cruel and blasphemous emperor while also behaving piously to God, their countrymen, and others who have a legitimate claim to their loyalties. This tension is a familiar one in Restoration heroic drama, which almost invariably constructs its plots around the conflict between the duties of honor and the demands of love. Dryden effectively maps the conflict between civil and religious piety onto the conventional heroic play conflict between honor and love. Civil piety is more or less identical to honor in this play, and while love for a woman is obviously not the same thing as pious adoration of God, St. Catharine associates the two when she declares, "Love, like that pow'r which I adore, is one" (4.1.365). Dryden's heroes always love women whom they regard as celestial or divine and who act as consciences for them, insisting that their heroes perform their duties to the state. (Berenice, for instance, twice prevents Porphyrius from killing Maximin.) Thus the worthiness of heroic love is demonstrated by service to the state, just as (Dryden encourages us to believe) religious piety is best demonstrated through civil piety. The Restoration convention of the struggle between the heroic virtues of love and honor was readily adaptable as an allegory for the agonizing imperative to reconcile religious interests



with conflicting but superseding state interests. Indeed, this allegory is arguably implicit in the entire Restoration heroic play genre.

The play seeks to move its audience to embrace religious tolerance through its sympathetic portrayal of a series of martyrs or potential martyrs. The first such potential martyr to voice fears of intolerance is actually the play's persecutor, the tyrannical Maximin. While ironic, it is also appropriate, given that Dryden's primary concern is to protect the Catholicizing Stuarts from the intolerance of their subjects. Maximin delivers a short but powerful speech on his terror of religious zealotry:

The silly crowd, by factious Teachers brought  
 To think that Faith untrue their youth was taught,  
 Run on in new Opinions blindly bold;  
 Neglect, contemn, and then assault the old.  
 Th' infectious madness seizes every part,  
 And from the head distils upon the heart.  
 And first they think their Princes faith not true,  
 And then proceed to offer him a new;  
 Which if refus'd, all duty from 'em cast,  
 To their new Faith they make new Kings at last.

(2.1.143–52)

For a brief moment, Maximin morphs into Charles I, the “Royal Martyr,” executed by subjects led into rampant impiety by intolerant zeal. Importantly, this speech—one of the better-written ones in the play—appears early, before Maximin has demonstrated the full extent of his depravity. Dryden allows his tyrannical monarch a moment to plead for toleration from his subjects before inverting this dynamic for the remainder of the play.

The most important royal martyrs and potential martyrs in the story are its virtuous heroines, St. Catharine, Berenice, and Valeria. These women form another of the play's unique qualities: *Tyrannick Love* is the only one of Dryden's heroic plays with no villainous female character. The reason for this peculiarity has already been suggested. This play correlates these objects of heroic love with the divine object of religious piety. Also, each of these female characters reflects Catherine of Braganza in some way. St. Catharine is her namesake; Berenice reflects the queen biographically, as a childless empress who remains dutifully obedient to a husband with a roving eye; and Valeria, as a young princess, passionate and headstrong in her love for a man who does not love her in return, is a figure of the queen viewed through a highly romantic lens. These women have distinct temperaments, different objects of devotion, and different approaches to balancing that devotion with the imperative to act piously, yet they are all exemplary figures, intimating that piety does not require uniformity of belief.

As a religious figure, St. Catharine is designed to appeal to a diverse audience, bearing the Catholic queen's name but speaking more like an Anglican. Her first lines of dialogue place her in a position between two extremes, navigating Anglicanism's so-called “middle way.” Brought before Maximin on the charge of preaching her outlawed religion to his philosophers and soldiers, she insists on the reasonableness of her actions:

[*Max.*] Fair foe of Heav'n, whence comes this haughty pride,  
 Or is it Frenzy does your mind misguide  
 To scorn our Worship, and new Gods to find?  
*S. Cath.* Nor pride nor frenzy, but a setled mind,  
 Enlightned from above, my way does mark.  
*Max.* Though Heav'n be clear, the way to it is dark.  
*S. Cath.* But where our Reason with our Faith does go,  
 We're both above enlightned, and below.

(2.1.163–70)

St. Catharine claims that faith and reason have allowed her to avoid the pitfalls of pride and frenzy, qualities that the religious rhetoric of the day often associated with, respectively, Catholics and Dissenters. Furthermore, in her debate with Apollonius, St. Catharine's arguments draw on a sermon titled *The Excellency of the Christian Religion* by John Tillotson, a major Church of England apologist, giving her words an Anglican gloss.<sup>36</sup> Yet Dryden's choice of Tillotson's tract as the basis for the debate is quite strategic. The tract's primary argument is for the superiority of Christianity over the religions and philosophies of *heathens*, not of the superiority of the Church of England over other Christian sects. Bruce King has noted that Tillotson's claims "are based upon the practical, ethical side of Christianity, rather than its mysteries."<sup>37</sup> The sermon is therefore fitting within the context of the play (St. Catharine *is* arguing about the superiority of her religion with heathens), but it also suits Dryden's broader goal of encouraging tolerance, as Christian sects disagreed more over their religion's mysteries than over its ethics. St. Catharine's dialogue may be borrowed from a Church of England apologist, but she says little that any Christian would have disagreed with.

As the highest exemplar of Christian piety in the play, St. Catharine is utterly devoted to the principle of non-resistance (which the Church of England's clergy claimed to embrace). She thus offers a lesson in how a truly pious subject behaves to authority: with complete deference to monarchical power in all matters except conscience. Such deference includes submitting to punishment when disobeying on grounds of conscience. St. Catharine does not simply accept martyrdom; she is eager for it. "My joyful Sentence you defer too long" (2.1.261), she complains when Maximin dithers between killing and courting her. Yet it is precisely the extremity of her piety that undermines St. Catharine's usefulness as an exemplar. Few non-saints would be capable of emulating her fearlessness in the face of death. Furthermore, her passivity does not entirely eliminate the danger she presents by her uncompromising defiance. Our sympathy for her is sorely tested when she starts allowing other people to die rather than make the smallest concession to earthly interests. She refuses to save Berenice's life by running away from Maximin (who only wants to kill Berenice so he can marry St. Catharine) because doing so would make her *appear* to have a lack of faith in her eternal reward. She admits to feeling conflicted—caught "Betwixt my pity and my piety" (4.1.510)—but she concludes that the mere appearance of cowardice is a worse crime than allowing her fellow Christian to die. Shortly after this temptation she has the opportunity to save her mother's life, and again refuses, shocked that her mother would ask her to even contemplate compromising her faith.

St. Catharine is to piety what *The Conquest of Granada's* Almanzor is to courage: the virtue's perfect exemplar. In both cases, their perfection makes them almost monstrous.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, St. Catharine is even less capable of living within Roman society than Almanzor is of living within Granadine society. In the end, Almanzor recognizes the authority of a father and a sovereign. St. Catharine's respect for earthly authorities is expressed only by her unwillingness to actively attack them. Even had she not been killed, it is difficult to imagine how she could have taken part in the restoration of civil society at the play's conclusion. A person who sets the slightest religious duty ahead of the most compelling earthly duties cannot function in such a context. Such zealotry would be viewed with suspicion by Dryden, even if accompanied with the strongest commitment to non-resistance.

St. Catharine is not the only virtuous heroine who is excluded from the peace at the play's end. Maximin's pagan daughter, Valeria, also dies in the final act, motivated not by religion but by passion. Yet within her pagan moral code, she is as pious as St. Catharine, and as devoted to Porphyrius as the saint is to God. When Porphyrius rejects her hand in marriage, she sacrifices herself to Maximin's rage in order to spare Porphyrius from it, "[d]ying for Love's, fulfilling Honour's Laws; / A secret Martyr" (4.1.311–12). Does Dryden parallel these royal martyrs to illustrate the superiority of St. Catharine's Christian triumph to the unchristian tragedy of Valeria's suicide? It seems unlikely. Even the characters are more moved by Valeria's death than St. Catharine's. Porphyrius treats Valeria's sacrifice religiously, promising to fast for her one day in seven for the rest of his life and reaffirming that promise in the final line of the play. St. Catharine, on the other hand, is not mentioned by any of the survivors in the closing dialogue. Given the taste for romance among Dryden's audience, Valeria's behavior would have encouraged sympathy for her, despite her pagan religion. Valeria's "martyrdom" underlines the play's use of heroic love as a metaphor for religious faith and presents the audience with an example of piety that is obedient and faithful even though unchristian.

While these two women promote piety and even tolerance (St. Catharine does not seem particularly bothered to be surrounded by pagans), their refusal to compromise with authority does not serve the agenda of the poet laureate or his king—or, for that matter, of Catholics and Dissenters who were not keen on dying. The play offers a more practical example in Berenice, and in Porphyrius, whose piety is of a like nature to his lover's. Both have human weaknesses and seek excuses to satisfy their desires and consciences at the expense of strict piety. In spite of having secretly converted to Christianity, Berenice would happily take advantage of divorce if Maximin were to seek it. She refuses to initiate the divorce not out of religious scruples, but out of a sense of her own honor (3.1.296–97). Meanwhile, Porphyrius contemplates assassinating the tyrant, insisting that his act of civil impiety is necessitated by religious piety. Berenice charges him with using the name of religion to disguise impious action. "Heav'n ne'r sent those who fight for private ends" (2.1.47), she chastises him.

Coupled with their more human piety is a more human theory of the nature of faith. Porphyrius, like St. Catharine, attempts to justify religious dissent to Maximin, but his justification for dissent is strikingly different from hers. Whereas St. Catharine insists that

reason and faith together may guide a person to religious truth, Porphyrius claims that religious difference exists because faith *precedes* and *overrides* reason:

If, for Religion you our lives will take;  
 You do not the offenders find, but make.  
 All Faiths are to their own believers just;  
 For none believe, because they will, but must.  
 Faith is a force from which there's no defence;  
 Because the Reason it does first convince.  
 And Reason Conscience into fetters brings;  
 And Conscience is without the pow'r of Kings.  
 (4.1.599–606)

For Porphyrius, faith is not an act of will, but operates more like a passion, occurring spontaneously and defying reason because it is necessarily prior to it. Porphyrius thus insists that intolerance is an artificial imposition (“You do not the offenders find, but make”) on an unintentional and *unavoidable* diversity of religious beliefs. To persecute people for having different faiths would be as arbitrary and cruel as to persecute people for not all loving the same woman. In fact, his description of faith aligns with Maximin’s earlier description of the nature of love as beyond the control of will or reason: “The cause of Love can never be assign’d; / ’Tis in no face, but in the Lover’s mind” (3.1.122–23); and later, “’Tis lawless, and will love, and where it list: / And that’s no sin which no man can resist” (4.1.376–77). If Maximin takes himself at his own word, he ought to realize that heresy, too, can be no sin.

Yet Maximin is unmoved. He responds with the common defense of the Church of England status quo, that giving free reign to other people’s misguided consciences sets the stage for a rebellion. Porphyrius’s rebuttal suggests that liberty of conscience is not incompatible with the status quo:

[Conscience’s] Empire, therefore, Sir, should bounded be;  
 And but in acts of its Religion, free:  
 Those who ask Civil pow’r and Conscience too,  
 Their Monarch to his own destruction woo.  
 With needful Arms let him secure his peace;  
 Then, that wild beast he safely may release.  
 (4.1.611–16)

Porphyrius supports toleration of religious exercise, but he also supports the exclusion of religious dissenters from public office, as was already the practice in England. The play does not object to one church having a monopoly on power in a kingdom, merely to its having a monopoly on conscience.

Berenice and Porphyrius remain ideal characters, but their struggles to live up to their ideals prevent them from seeming inhuman or maddened like St. Catharine or Valeria. And unlike those single-minded characters, Porphyrius and Berenice have to balance numerous claims placed on them: by Maximin as benefactor or husband, by the empire

as its protector or empress, by the soldiers, by their coreligionists, by each other, and by the demands of their own pride. They live in the world, not above it, and this requires a degree of compromise and tolerance for dissenting views. Indeed, toleration appears to be the means by which the torn fabric of the state will be mended in the play's denouement. "Sheathe all your Swords, and cease your enmity," Porphyrius says to the soldiers, "They are not Foes, but *Romans* whom you see" (5.1.639–40). Soldiers and rebels, Christians and pagans are now denominated under a single word: Romans. The final line of the play, in which Porphyrius promises to "Joy for [Berenice's] life, and mourn for *Valeria's* Death" (5.1.676), similarly unites the Christian and pagan in his heart. Imperial identity and human feeling overcome religious sectarianism.

Yet if the importance of religious difference is diminished under civil toleration, it does not disappear. To help bring peace to the empire, Porphyrius and Berenice must make the sacrifice of power that Porphyrius has insisted is required of anyone who refuses to accept the state religion. When the soldiers attempt to declare Porphyrius emperor he declines the honor, fearing that his acceptance would provoke a civil war. Berenice voices her agreement: "Of glorious troubles I will take no part, / And in no Empire reign, but of your heart" (5.1.669–70). These two pious survivors are examples of how religious dissenters ought to live if granted toleration: gratefully, and in retirement from public affairs. Conversely, the privileges of the existing political and religious establishment are fully preserved. To the members of the Church of England in the audience, this was undoubtedly the play's most compelling implication.

Problematically, though, the government restored at the conclusion of the play is not an absolute monarchy. Rather, Rome is restored under "Two Emperours," elected by the Senate. This co-emperorship is historically accurate, and perhaps the image of two emperors ruling together with the approbation of the legislature is intended to extend the play's theme of unity-in-diversity to the political realm.<sup>39</sup> Yet given England's recent experiences with parliamentary rule, the submission to leaders chosen by a republican legislature could strike a darker note. Moreover, the failure to restore order under a benevolent (and implicitly absolute) monarch denies a heroic play its *raison d'être*. The play's conclusion seems to subvert the absolutist ideology of its heroic mode.

Even more subversive is the play's central figure, the tyrannical Maximin. Maximin is not the only tyrant in Dryden's heroic plays to be led about by his passions, but none of Dryden's other tyrants has such mercurial passions. Maximin's uncontrolled will leaps from one extreme to another in an instant. "To tame Philosophers teach constancy" (1.1.234), he cries; he has no use for it. His variability is given its clearest expression in his love for St. Catharine, which is matched only by his hate for her ("Wild with my rage, more wild with my desire" [3.1.102]). This inner conflict receives darkly comic demonstration when he orders her execution and then kills the man who carries out the order. Even his name looks like a portmanteau of *maximus* and *minimus*, suggesting a man divided between two extremes. Dryden's heroic plays always depict the dissolution of a state from within, but usually the state is torn apart by warring factions. In *Tyrannick Love*, Maximin is sufficiently self-divided to tear the state apart all by himself.

Maximin's self-division is no doubt meant to demonstrate that impiety leads to faction and disunion, in contrast to piety's power to unite. Yet whereas Dryden presents piety as a universal virtue unconnected with any particular religious faith, the extremes of behavior between which the impious Maximin vacillates are suggestive of England's religious "extremes," Catholicism and Protestant Dissent, as viewed negatively from a Church of England "center." As both the ultimate temporal and spiritual authority in the Roman Empire, heading a powerful hierarchy of priests who, as he puts it, "gain by Heav'n" (2.1.180), Maximin is a Pope-like figure. His willingness to torture obstinate Christians is evocative of the Inquisition, and his repeated claims to be on par with (or even superior to) the gods is an exaggeration of the papacy's claims to hold the keys to heaven. At the same time, Maximin is guilty of many of the crimes with which Restoration writers typically loaded Oliver Cromwell and his fellow sectarian republicans.<sup>40</sup> He is a low-born man, a "*Thracian Shepherd*" (1.1.280), who becomes a regicide and a usurper. His treatment of the gods is profane, and in his final moments his blasphemy against the gods approaches an atheistic rejection of them—the last inevitable step for a man who has rejected all earthly order and authority. As a usurper of both religious and civil power, Dryden's villain seems to be simultaneously a Catholic tyrant and a Dissenting rebel, a Pope and a Cromwell, a man-god and a worldly atheist.

Maximin's Catholic and Dissenting attributes should not be understood as a rejection of the tolerant spirit of the rest of the play. What Dryden seeks through Maximin's portrayal is to show that the Church of England's intolerant policies are both cruel and self-destructive. By dressing intolerance in Catholic and Dissenting robes, he shames the Church of England by exposing it to be more like its intolerant, theocratic enemies than it would care to admit. And the self-destructiveness of intolerance argues for the necessity of toleration to preserve the church. That said, it must be admitted that Maximin's portrayal would reinforce the public's fears of the very people for whom Dryden seeks toleration. Despite honoring the Catholic queen and supporting toleration for English Catholics, the play still vilifies Catholicism through the anti-Catholic figure of its tyrant. Worse, the play stokes fears of the very sort of monarchical absolutism that Dryden is committed to defending. The popish-ness of the tyrant evokes the powerful association between popery and tyranny in the Protestant imagination, which then threatens to undermine the play's effort to support the monarchy at a time when it was strengthening its ties to Catholicism.<sup>41</sup> Maximin's portrayal exposes a deep contradiction at the heart of this experimental tolerationist heroic play. *Tyrannick Love* attacks religious absolutism in order to protect political absolutism, but the two are so closely related, both in the play and in Restoration England, that attacking the former subverts the latter.

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That *Tyrannick Love* had a successful first theatrical run is indication enough that the public did not perceive it as anti-Anglican. Of course, many playgoers would understand that the play is critical of the Church of England's hardline position against other religions, but the upheavals of recent years had caused many members of the church to question the wisdom of that position. Furthermore, the play clearly indicates that toleration will

help preserve the Church of England's prerogatives, and it places most of the burden of a peaceful religious settlement on dissenting groups. Catholics and Dissenters are tasked with exercising the self-control necessary to compromise with the state, sacrificing political power for liberty of conscience.

This expectation that religious minorities accept their exclusion from power (and thus, their exclusion from any means of guaranteeing their liberty of conscience) is indicative of the failure of this heroic martyr drama to articulate a practicable solution to religious intolerance grounded in a quietist political ideology. The inability of the heroic mode to support Dryden's tolerationist agenda should be discernible in many of the weaknesses of the play alluded to throughout this essay: its disingenuous suggestions that religious piety can be thoroughly expressed through civil piety; the inimitability of St. Catharine's heroic piety, which simultaneously manages to embrace non-resistance to an impossible degree and to subversively escape the submission to monarchical authority that non-resistance demands; the comparatively uninspiring, compromised nature of the surviving hero and heroine (possibly the least compelling of all of the heroes of Dryden's heroic plays); and above all, the irreconcilable contradictions between those aspects of the play's dialogue and representation that encourage attitudes of tolerance, and those aspects that insist on non-resistance even to an intolerant tyrant. In short, Dryden's tolerationist agenda is subverted by his absolutist medium. Dryden is in denial when he insists in the play's prologue that he will not "impose upon [his audience] what he writes for Wit," but will leave their "censures free" to judge of his play's merits themselves.<sup>42</sup> Later in his career, he will admit that the stage inhibits the free exercise of judgment—aesthetic or otherwise:

In a Play-house every thing contributes to impose upon the Judgment; the Lights, the Scenes, the Habits, and, above all, the Grace of Action, which is commonly the best where there is the most need of it, surprize the Audience, and cast a mist upon their Understandings; not unlike the cunning of a Juggler, who is always staring us in the face, and overwhelming us with gibberish, onely that he may gain the opportunity of making the cleaner conveyance of his Trick.<sup>43</sup>

He knew full well that heroic drama (which he had helped to theorize and establish as a genre) was a tool for indoctrinating the audience and suppressing dissent, not for encouraging toleration, and that the heroic mode was designed to homogenize the audience, not to convince it to accept diversity. The spectacle of a heroic play might assist an unwelcome message of toleration to be received without protest in the playhouse, but the ideology it promotes is ultimately not conducive to toleration. Amariel's quelling of the aerial spirits' riot—the most visually and aurally impressive episode of *Tyrannick Love*—attempts to support toleration by prizing good behavior over correct belief, but its adherence to the heroic model of power and authority imposing order on chaos works against the grain of its intent. In *Tyrannick Love*, Dryden attempts to use the force of spectacle to impose tolerance on the English people, just as his royal patrons repeatedly attempted to do with bills and declarations. He has about as much success as they did.

The most disastrous result of this failure is the influence of Dryden's tyrant-hero, Maximin, on subsequent Restoration drama. For much of the 1670s, *Tyrannick Love* and its evil hero were more heavily imitated by other Restoration playwrights than the aesthetically superior *Conquest of Granada*. The success of plays with a strong "horror element" such as Nathaniel Lee's *The Tragedy of Nero* (1674), Elkanah Settle's *The Conquest of China* (1675), and Aphra Behn's *Abdelazar* (1676) makes clear the public's fascination with the figure of the tyrannical ruler.<sup>44</sup> This taste for disturbing representations of tyrants indicates the growing distrust of Charles and York that would lead, politically, to the Exclusion Crisis, and theatrically, to the troubled dramas of the crisis years, when even Tory-authored plays tested their heroes by subjecting them to bad kings.<sup>45</sup> Dryden must have regretted that his hero-tyrant became the model for working through fears of the Stuarts and absolutism on the stage. It may be more than coincidence that the passage quoted above in which Dryden laments the power of spectacle to cheat its audience appears on the same page as the passage cited early in this essay in which he places Maximin's bombastic dialogue "amongst [his] Sins." The text in which they appear is the dedication of *The Spanish Fryar*, written at the height of the Exclusion Crisis, when Dryden and the Stuarts were particularly sensitive to the power the stage wielded over the public's politics and imagination. Scholarly treatment of the evolution of Dryden's dramaturgy has generally ascribed his abandonment of the heroic play to transformations in his aesthetics and the public's tastes, but the failures of *Tyrannick Love* and the dangerous imitations it spawned raise the possibility that Dryden gave up on the heroic play because its absolutist ideology was actually harmful to Stuart absolutism.

After the Glorious Revolution, Dryden would criticize the entire heroic play genre as fundamentally misguided. In the preface to *Don Sebastian* (1689), he claims that one reason he left the stage for seven years is that "*Love and Honour (the mistaken Topicks of Tragedy) were quite worn out.*"<sup>46</sup> The vogue for plays on the love-and-honor heroic model had indeed long since passed, but more interesting is his parenthetical remark, which denigrates the plays that had made him famous as flawed in their very conception. By the time he wrote *Don Sebastian*, Dryden was a sincerely religious Catholic convert who had been thrust outside of the political and religious establishments. Now a dissenter himself, it is not surprising that he should pass judgment against a genre that operated to quell dissent. Like his play from twenty years earlier, *Don Sebastian* argues for toleration, but it does so in the more appropriate genre of tragedy.<sup>47</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 146.



<sup>2</sup> Colin Jager, “Common Quiet: Tolerance Around 1688,” *ELH* 79, no. 3 (2012): 586.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, James Anderson Winn’s discussion of the play, which he pans for its compressed plot and uninspired poetry, in *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 204–207. For a discussion of the play’s theatrical history, see Maximillian Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg Jr., et al., 20 vols. (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–2002), 10:380, 386. (Hereafter, all citations of Dryden’s works are from this edition.)

<sup>4</sup> John Dryden, dedication of *The Spanish Fryar*, 14:100–101.

<sup>5</sup> Maximillian Novak holds a similar view, calling *Tyrannick Love* “largely experimental” and “Dryden’s most explorative work” of heroic drama, even as he admits that “the play does not hold together” (commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:398–99).

<sup>6</sup> Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:385, n. 27.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the troubled ideology of Exclusion Crisis-era Tory drama, see Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 200–238.

<sup>8</sup> Paulina Kewes also comments upon the celebrations, painting, and other public representations associating the queen with her saintly namesake. See “Dryden’s Theatre and the Passions of Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 138. Kewes believes that Dryden successfully avoids St. Catharine’s Catholic associations in his presentation of her in *Tyrannick Love*, whereas I wish to suggest that those associations were unavoidable, and that they served Dryden’s purposes. For further details on Catherine of Braganza’s public association with the saint, see Edward Corp, “Catherine of Braganza and Cultural Politics,” in *Queenship in Britain, 1660–1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 60–62.

<sup>9</sup> John Cox notes that as the Church of England grew more centrist in the late Elizabethan period, hagiographic plays of saints rejected during the Reformation began to appear on the London stage, upsetting more radical Protestants. See *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642*, ebrary ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132–36.

<sup>10</sup> Susan J. Owen, *Perspectives on Restoration Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 16; and Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 11–12, 16–17. Along with Owen, J. Douglas Canfield and Nancy Klein Maguire (among others) affirm the essentially political nature of Restoration theater. Canfield remarks that “the patentees

were political, not artistic, appointments,” making the theaters “state apparatuses,” and Maguire observes that “the Restoration playwrights bolstered the new government by organizing a theatrical/political network which produced pro-Stuart propaganda.” See Canfield, *Heroes & States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 3; and Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660–1671* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7

<sup>11</sup> Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Elaine McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660–1745* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 13, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Wylie Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature, 1400–1700* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 181, 185.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Hume is prepared to disqualify villain-centered plays as heroic, but makes an exception for plays like *Tyrannick Love* in which “a character of virtue figures prominently in contrast.” Novak similarly notes that *Tyrannick Love* demonstrates the difficulty of establishing “any monolithic concept of the heroic play.” See Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 193; and Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:383.

<sup>15</sup> Kewes likewise notes that similarities between the tyrant Maximin and Charles II endanger the play’s royalist politics, as does the unification of Rome under elected monarchs in the play’s denouement (“Passions of Politics,” 138). These issues, among others, will be discussed below.

<sup>16</sup> McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> See Jennifer Waldron, *Reformations of the Body: Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theater* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 180–83; quotation on 182. Some scholars have suggested that *The Virgin Martyr* has a pro-Catholic subtext. Cox, for instance, claims it “has affinities with the Baroque idealism of the Counter Reformation *tragedia sacra* on the continent,” and Jane Hwang Degenhardt observes that embodied religion in *The Virgin Martyr* stresses a materiality that is strikingly Catholic. Yet Degenhardt also notes that the martyr’s beliefs are associated with Protestant doctrines, her persecutors with Catholic ones. Waldron argues that, far from exhibiting attraction to Catholicism with its emphasis on the materiality of the body, *The Virgin Martyr* “draws on positive Protestant investments in embodiment that had been part of the theatrical vernacular in post-Reformation England for quite some time.” See Cox, *Devil and the Sacred*, 171; Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 85–87; and Waldron, *Reformations of the Body*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> This brief outline of the politics of comprehension and indulgence in Charles II's reign derives from Roger Thomas's highly informative essay on the topic, "Comprehension and Indulgence," in *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662–1962*, ed. Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 189–253.

<sup>19</sup> For details about the Bawdy-House riots, see Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 82–91; and Melissa M. Mowry, *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660–1714: Political Pornography and Prostitution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 55–78.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, "Comprehension and Indulgence," 204–7.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Seaward, "Charles II (1630–1685)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/5144> (accessed January 20, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 201–2. Winn does not believe Dryden would have been told of the king's conversion plans, however.

<sup>23</sup> Dryden, preface to *Tyrannick Love*, 10:111–12.

<sup>24</sup> Dryden, preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, 13:234.

<sup>25</sup> In the earliest legends of St. Catharine, her persecutor is Maxentius, the Emperor whom Constantine later defeated in battle after seeing a burning cross in the sky, leading him to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity. For details on the uncertain identification of St. Catharine's persecutor, see Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 7, n.2.

<sup>26</sup> Dryden, preface to *Tyrannick Love*, 10:109.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> See Derek Hughes, "Heroic Drama and Tragicomedy," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 200.

<sup>29</sup> Dryden's religious beliefs are the subject of frequent debate among scholars. To name just two significant voices in that debate, James Winn (author of the most authoritative Dryden biography) considers Dryden's eventual conversion to Catholicism a sincere religious choice at the end of a long spiritual journey, while Steven N. Zwicker (one of the most insightful of Dryden scholars) views Dryden as putting politics, reputation, and

service to his king before religion, both in his writing and in his confessional choices. See Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 414–16; Zwicker, *Politics and Language in Dryden's Poetry: The Arts of Disguise* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), ch. 5; and Zwicker, “How Many Religions Did John Dryden Have?,” in *Enchanted Ground: Reimagining John Dryden*, ed. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis and Maximillian E. Novak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 171–82. A valuable analysis of Dryden's religious positions over the course of his career can also be found in John Spurr, “The Piety of John Dryden,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 237–58.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, William Empson, “Dryden's Apparent Scepticism,” *Essays in Criticism* 20, no. 2 (1970): 172–81; and Empson, “A Deist Tract by Dryden,” *Essays in Criticism* 25, no. 1 (1975): 74–100. In contrast, Phillip Harth and Winn view Blount as accidentally or intentionally misreading Dryden's poem. See Harth, *Contexts of Dryden's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 91–94; and Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 380.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Erskine-Hill, “Alexander Pope: The Political Poet in His Time,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 2 (1981–82): 136.

<sup>32</sup> Dryden, *Tyrannick Love; or, the Royal Martyr*, 10:133, line 184 (hereafter cited in text by act, scene, and line of this edition).

<sup>33</sup> Dryden, dedication of the *Æneis*, 5:286, 288.

<sup>34</sup> Spurr closes his discussion of Dryden's personal religious history with the suggestion that Roman *pietas* might better “describe the amalgam of associations and values to which Dryden held” than *religion*, even in the poet's old age (“The Piety of John Dryden,” 255–56).

<sup>35</sup> Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:397.

<sup>36</sup> See Bruce King, “Dryden, Tillotson, and *Tyrannick Love*,” *Review of English Studies* 16, no. 64 (1965): 364–77. See also Charles E. Ward, who detects “more than a tinge of the Anglican” in St. Catharine's words. *The Life of John Dryden* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 74–77.

<sup>37</sup> King, “Dryden, Tillotson, and *Tyrannick Love*,” 365.

<sup>38</sup> Hughes likewise remarks on “the chilling detachment of St Catharine from the fears and frailties of those who must die if she is to gain the martyr's crown.” *English Drama, 1660–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 50.

<sup>39</sup> McGirr notes that dual kingship became a major theme in Restoration drama due to the fact that Charles's brother was his heir and many feared that rival courts might develop between them (*Heroic Mode and Political Crisis*, 39–40).

<sup>40</sup> Dryden's allusion to Cromwell with this character was clear to his contemporaries. One of his literary enemies attacked him by quoting his elegy on Cromwell's death, *Heroique Stanzas*, as proof of his approval of "our English *Maximin*." Richard Leigh, *The Censure of the Rota*, in *Dryden: The Critical Heritage*, ed. James Kinsley and Helen Kinsley (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 60.

<sup>41</sup> For the classic study of Restoration anti-Catholic discourse, see John Miller, *Poperly and Politics in England, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>42</sup> Dryden, prologue to *Tyrannick Love*, 10:114, lines 8–9.

<sup>43</sup> Dryden, dedication of *The Spanish Fryar*, 14:100.

<sup>44</sup> Hume, *Development of English Drama*, 284–85. Jessica Munns also notes that "Dryden helped to set the new trend for plays centred on extravagantly bad rulers with *Tyrannick Love*." See "Images of Monarchy on the Restoration Stage," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 113.

<sup>45</sup> See Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 201. We might include among these plays Dryden and Nathaniel Lee's *Oedipus*. Anna Battigelli has argued that Dryden and Lee address Charles's crypto-papacy in that play through the paradoxical figure of the regicidal hero-king, Oedipus. See "Two Dramas of the Return of the Repressed: Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus* and the Popish Plot," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2012): 1–25.

<sup>46</sup> Dryden, preface to *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal*, 15:65.

<sup>47</sup> *Don Sebastian*'s argument for toleration is much subtler than *Tyrannick Love*'s, and its hopes less extravagant. Writing only a year after the Glorious Revolution, Dryden asks for little more than the sparing of Catholics' lives, since they, like *Tyrannick Love*'s Christians, cannot choose but believe their heresy. For further commentary on Dryden's defense of Catholics in *Don Sebastian*, see Jeremy Carnes, *The Papist Represented: Literature and the English Catholic Community, 1688–1791* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2017), chap. 1; and Carnes, "Catholic Conversion and Incest in Dryden's *Don Sebastian*," *Restoration* 38, no. 2 (2014): 3–19.



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