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Hilary Teynor Donatini

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THE HOLY HOUSE OF LORETO

Politics and Idolatry in the Long Eighteenth Century

Hilary Teynor Donatini

Mary Beatrice d'Este of Modena had difficulty bearing an heir for the security of the Stuart succession. Like Charles II's wife Catherine of Braganza, Mary was a Catholic Queen Consort with no living children. When James II took the throne in 1685, "She was not yet twenty-seven and in the past eleven years she had been pregnant eight times, and had borne three daughters and a son, but she was still childless."¹ Mary gave birth on June 10, 1688, however, to the prayed-for son who

¹ Carola Oman, *Mary of Modena* (Bungay, Suffolk: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), 83.

would precipitate the Revolution of 1688–89. Friends attributed the birth joyfully to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and St. Winifred of Wales, as well as the medicinal benefit of the waters of Bath.² Enemies of the Stuart succession targeted the reports of James and Mary's prayer life for ridicule. The miraculous arrival was a sham: James Francis Edward Stuart was a substitute child, supposedly smuggled into Mary's bedchamber in a warming pan.

The warming pan story has been rehearsed and examined by a number of historians, most notably Rachel Weil.³ Overlooked, though, is how often satires against the Prince of Wales move beyond the warming pan itself to allude to Mary's Catholicism, specifically her veneration of the Virgin Mary. Satirists fixated on Mary's associations with the Santa Casa di Loreto, a famous pilgrimage destination where Mary of Modena's mother, Duchess Laura of Modena, was known to have prayed for her daughter's fertility. Although Mary did not visit this site in 1687, she reportedly prayed to the Lady of Loreto to help her conceive a child. Both mother and daughter donated lavish decorations to the shrine made from precious stones and metals.⁴ These expressions of Mary's Catholic faith made her, and by extension her son, easy satiric targets in a mostly non-Catholic country suspicious of Marian devotion.

In late-seventeenth- to mid-eighteenth-century England, two groups of authors invoked Loreto for two main reasons. The first group,

² Mary Hopkirk, *Queen Over the Water: Mary Beatrice of Modena, Queen of James II* (London: John Murray, 1953), 118.

³ For the most sustained and detailed discussion of this topic, see Rachel J. Weil, "The Politics of Legitimacy: Women and the Warming Pan Scandal," in *The Revolution of 1688–1689: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Lois G. Schworer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 65–82. See also Andrew Barclay, "Mary Beatrice of Modena: The 'Second Bless'd of Woman-Kind'," in *Queenship in Britain 1660–1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture, and Dynastic Politics*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 74–93.

⁴ Hopkirk, *Queen Over the Water*, 117. For some readers the Holy House might call to mind Our Lady of Walsingham, a shrine in Norfolk, England. This medieval pilgrimage site, which consisted of a reproduction of Mary's house at Nazareth, was built before the appearance of the Holy House in Loreto. However, according to Simon Coleman and John Elsner, it was derelict between the reign of Henry VIII and 1897, "when Roman Catholics re-established a copy of the Holy House of Walsingham in King's Lynn (about thirty miles from the village). In this displaced replica was put a statue not of Our Lady of Walsingham . . . but the Virgin of Loreto" ("Tradition as Play: Pilgrimage to England's Nazareth" *History and Anthropology* 15.3 [September 2004]: 276). Coleman and Elsner also recount the early twentieth century re-establishment of the original Walsingham shrine by Hope Patten, an Anglo-Catholic clergyman (277–78).

anti-Jacobite authors writing in or near the significant years 1688, 1715, and 1745, used the Holy House as a rhetorical weapon to bolster objections to James Francis Edward's and his parents' Catholicism by associating it with foreignness and idolatry, which the shrine evoked in contemporary audiences. The second, which included travel writers, represented it more generally to cast the Catholic practices they encountered at Loreto as superstitious, even pagan. The Holy House in these selected texts reveal a persistent anxiety over the exiled Stuarts throughout the long eighteenth century, as well as the ways in which Catholicism supplied a convenient "other" against which to establish a competing myth of purely Protestant, purely English identity. Creating this other meant representing the Santa Casa, and the Virgin of Loreto, as exotic, and the Catholic worship of their devotees not only as idolatrous but full of luxurious excess.

Loreto inspired pilgrimages, and continues to do so today, because tradition claims the Holy House as the Blessed Virgin Mary's birthplace and the site of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel appeared to inform Mary that she was chosen to be the mother of God. The most important early modern account of the translation of the Holy House from Nazareth to what we now call Italy is found in Orazio Torsellino's *Lauretanae Historiae Libri Quinque* (1597). This rector of Loreto's Jesuit college maintains that, because Muslim occupiers of Palestine prevented Christian pilgrims from worshipping at the house, it was carried overseas by angels in 1291 and deposited on a mountaintop in present-day Croatia.⁵ According to Torsellino, because the Holy House was not given its due reverence, angels kept moving it until 1294, when they finally transported the structure one last time over the Adriatic Sea to its present location in Loreto.⁶ Torsellino explains, in a 1608 English translation of the *Lauretanae Historiae*, that "either through the default of the inhabitants, or rather by the providence of Almighty God, within the compass of a yeare, she changed her seat three times in the territorie of *Recanati*;

⁵ Orazio Torsellino, *The History of Our B. Lady of Loreto* (1608) (Ikkley: Scholar Press, 1976), 10. Torsellino's name is sometimes styled as Horatius Torsellinus, while some authors spell his name "Torsellini." For a discussion of earlier historical sources of the Loreto translation and its significance to the Crusades, see Bernard Hamilton, "The Ottomans, the Humanists, and the Holy House of Loreto," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 31 (1987): 1-19.

⁶ Torsellino, *The History of Our B. Lady of Loreto*, 28-29, 34.

and within five yeares after her departure out of *Galiley*, honoured foure places with her residence; yet by change of place she changed not religion, but more and more increased the same.”⁷ For him, the doubts surrounding the reasons for the house’s constant travels did not lead to doubting the authenticity of this life-size relic of the Holy Land. The physical translation of the Santa Casa from the Holy Land to Italy mapped a genealogy from the site of Christianity’s origins to its administrative center. Although the Santa Casa did not end up in Rome, its regional proximity to the Vatican reinforced continuity in a faith whose claims to apostolic succession stretched back to Peter.

Belief in the Santa Casa’s legitimacy or in the Catholic church’s unbroken apostolic succession required a greater leap of faith than belief in James Francis Edward’s legitimacy, but all of these convictions followed from an openness to the will of God. Mary’s devotion to the Virgin of Loreto, according to her Catholic logic, fulfilled God’s will and was itself legitimized through her pregnancy. In their prayers for conception, Mary and her mother sought a very specific kind of intercession that would associate their family with Christ’s family, with an heir acting as the savior of the Stuart line.⁸ Read through the lens of divine reason, Mary’s pregnancy was proof of the God-given right of the Stuarts to rule.⁹ Loyalists had to

⁷ Torsellino, *The History*, 47–48, italics in the original. Paul V. Murphy notes that Torsellino’s history was “translated into Italian, Spanish, German, English, French, Flemish, Czech, and Hungarian.” See “The Jesuits and the Santa Casa di Loreto: Orazio Torsellini’s *Laurentinae Historiae Libri Quinque*,” in Thomas M. Lucas, S.J., ed., *Spirit, Style, Story: Essays Honoring John W. Padberg, S.J.* (Chicago: Jesuit Way, an imprint of Loyola Press, 2002), 271. According to Murphy, the tradition of the Holy House “can be seen as part of a broader *translatio sacri* of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance when Latin Christians carried to the West relics that could no longer be visited after Islamic victory” (269).

⁸ Marina Warner, in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), views the Virgin Mary as an updated version of an ancient fertility goddess: “The quickening and obstetric functions of the classical goddesses like Hera and Demeter have been taken over by the Virgin in Catholic cult, not only in the iconography of sacred images and their use of symbols, but also in the emotive folklore and usages of her following” (277). See also Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

⁹ Sympathetic writers wanting to reinforce the sacred character and divine right of the monarchy occasionally drew analogies between the English royal family and the holy family in panegyrics. Barclay gets part of the title of his essay, “Second Bless’d of Woman-Kind” from Aphra Behn’s panegyric on the birth of James Francis Edward, “A Congratulatory Poem to Her Most Sacred Majesty, On the Universal Hopes of All Loyal Persons for a Prince of Wales”

trust in God's will that Mary of Modena could produce an heir after so many failures, whether or not they subscribed to Mary's Catholic beliefs.

Given the central role of the Santa Casa in the Stuart mythos, what would one have experienced in a visit there in Mary of Modena's time? What would her mother Duchess Laura have seen at Loreto? Working from the perimeter of the fortified complex to the Santa Casa itself, the seventeenth-century visitor would have encountered a hilltop cluster of buildings bounded by thick walls built to defend the precious relic of the Santa Casa and its valuable pilgrim offerings. Upon entering the central courtyard, the pilgrim would have been flanked by loggia and arcades, some of which were designed by Bramante. These led the visitor to the domed basilica's facade, originally by Bramante but covered up by Giovanni Boccacini's 1580-87 design.¹⁰ Once inside the sanctuary, the seventeenth-century pilgrim would have seen numerous Renaissance art treasures, including paintings and frescoes by Luca Signorelli.¹¹ Even the humble stone Holy House is encased by an elaborate marble screen based on Bramante's designs, covered with scenes from the life of the Virgin. The actual Santa Casa is quite small: "31 by 13 feet in plan and 14 feet in height."¹² The structure's roughly hewn interior walls contrast with the sculpted exterior casing to produce a mixed effect of modesty and grandeur. An altar at one end of the chapel displays the celebrated image of the Madonna and child carved from Lebanon cedar and surrounded by votive offerings. Of particular interest is, "the Gift of the Duchess of Modena, and of her Daughter Queen Mary of England" that resided there, about which one visitor remarked: "Near [the statue of the Virgin] are several rich Lamps, the Gifts of divers Princes, and others; I took particular notice

(1688). See also "A Congratulatory Poem to the King's Most Sacred Majesty, On the Happy Birth of the Prince of Wales" (1688), in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. I, *Poetry*, ed. Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 294-99.

¹⁰ Renato Roli, *Sanctuary of Santa Casa, Loreto: Treasures of Christian Art* (Bologna: Officine Grafiche Poligrafici il Resto del Carlino, 1966), 5. For a scholarly analysis of Loreto's art and architecture, see Kathleen Weil-Garris Posner, "Cloister, Court, and City Square," *Gesta* 12.1/2 (1973): 123-32. Her published dissertation is a deep and thorough examination of the sanctuary sculptures: *The Santa Casa di Loreto: Problems in Cinquecento Sculpture* (New York: Garland, 1977).

¹¹ For a close reading of Signorelli's paintings in the Loreto cupola, see Louis Marin and Lionel Duisit, "The Iconic Text and the Theory of Enunciation: Luca Signorelli at Loreto (circa 1479-1484)," *New Literary History* 14 (Spring 1983): 553-96.

¹² Weil-Garris Posner, "Cloister, Court, and City Square," 124.

of the two Angels of Gold, kneeling, and lifting up their Hands, with an Heart of Gold beset with Diamonds, and a Lamp continually burning out of them."¹³ Some of the gifts of these "divers Princes" were specifically donated in thanksgiving for the arrivals of heirs in European royal families: "Louis XIII celebrated the birth of the future Louis XIV in 1638 from the long barren Anne of Austria by a golden image of a baby weighing 24 lbs., proffered to the Virgin on a cushion by a kneeling angel of silver weighing 351 lbs."¹⁴ It is difficult to overemphasize the political importance and spiritual force of the Santa Casa to European Catholics at all levels of society. In equal proportion, the Holy House inspired venom, ridicule, and bemusement in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century anti-Catholic writers.

Although criticisms of Catholic articles of faith such as the veneration of Mary and the unbroken succession of papal authority undergirded anti-Jacobite attitudes about the Stuart succession, cultural differences fueled their fears as well. The controversy over a Catholic, foreign-blooded heir to the English throne during James II's reign hinged on problems of translation because Stuart detractors doubted that his mother's European Catholicity could be Anglicized. Like the previous two Queens consort, James's mother Mary was a foreigner chosen to embody, along with the King, the English nation. Her life with James II was a study in the obstacles to cultural translation, especially when the customs and religion she carried to England were ill received. For example, the mass that she instated in her chapel in St. James and Whitehall palaces, and which derived from continental practices, alienated the Protestant majority of English natives.¹⁵ The mass was neither translated in terms of language (it was in Latin at the time), or theology (it hinged on transubstantiation, an element foreign to mainstream Church of England services). The avoidance of vernacular language in Catholic worship made its faith seem strange and "outlandish," a word often used, according to Colin Haydon, in anti-Catholic discourse to emphasize foreignness—that is, being literally

¹³ William Bromley, *Several Years Travels Through Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Provinces, Performed by a Gentleman* (London: 1702), 202.

¹⁴ R. W. Lightbown, "Ex-votos in Gold and Silver: A Forgotten Art," *Burlington Magazine* 121.915 (June 1979): 355.

¹⁵ Frances E. Dolan describes these chapels briefly in *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 153.

outside of the land, detached from the location that secures one's identity and sense of belonging.¹⁶ The representative English family's practice of an "un-English" religion clashed with the monarch's role as head of the Church of England and the nation as a whole.¹⁷

Negative sentiments were widespread during James's exclusion about the problem of a foreign, Catholic Queens consort in the Stuart line, particularly Henrietta Maria of France, Catherine of Braganza, and Mary of Modena. Each woman's Catholicism was problematic to varying degrees, with Catherine planting the seed of James II's eventual exclusion from the throne, and created the possibility of divided allegiances in their children.¹⁸ Rachel Weil addresses popular responses to Mary's Catholic foreignness, suggesting that "in the warming-pan literature Catholicism is associated with a kind of monstrous motherhood that deprived men of their paternal rights. It was common, for example, for writers to take a jab at Mariolatry through an identification of Mary of Modena's 'miraculous' conception with that of the Virgin Mary."¹⁹

¹⁶ Haydon observes that "Catholic culture was essentially continental, 'unEnglish.'" "I Love My King and Country, But a Roman Catholic I Hate": Anti-Catholicism, Xenophobia, and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c. 1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39. See also Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 27. In *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), Arthur F. Marotti claims, "English nationalism rests on a foundation of anti-Catholicism" (9). Raymond D. Tumbleson argues, along similar lines, that "Anti-Catholicism acted as the mechanism of cultural reproduction necessary to mobilize autonomous subjects in the service of the centralized state; it supplied the other, the enemy" (*Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660–1745* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 15). Also see Allison Shell's *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially her introduction.

¹⁷ On James II's Catholicism, see, for example, J. C. H. Aveling, "A Catholic King, 1685–88," in *The Handle and the Axe: The Catholic Recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), 222–237, as well as Maurice Ashley, *James II* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 97–98. Steve Pincus places James's Catholicism in a European context in *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Maurice Ashley claims that Henrietta Maria's "influence upon her second son, though not noticeable in her own life time, proved more profound than she could realize" (*James II*, 15).

¹⁹ Weil, "Politics of Legitimacy," 76.

Accusations of Mary's illicit affairs with priests joined claims of idolatry as satiric weapons against the Prince of Wales's claims to legitimacy. Anti-Jacobites posited the English priest Edward Petre or papal nuncio Ferdinand D'Adda as James Francis Edward's biological father.²⁰ These tropes were recycled and embellished not only in satiric works but also in related anti-Jacobite invective published on the occasion of James Francis Edward's birth.

Some of this invective took the form of satirical poems and ballads, in which the pope, the foreign power who divided the loyalty of English subjects, was said to lurk behind Mary of Modena's insidious influence.²¹ For example, the broadside ballad "Catholick Hymn on the Birth of the Prince of Wales" includes, among many vituperations against Catholic clergy, two references to the Holy House of Loreto.²² This ballad cropped up in 1688, among a flurry of books, pamphlets and broadsides trying to prove the Prince of Wales's illegitimate lineage. Its first allusion to Loreto refers indirectly to the infallibility of the pope and the supposedly miraculous birth of James after Mary's prolonged infertility:

Then streight we repair
To the Infallible Chair,
Who advise we must not forget o
To present at the Shrine
Of the Lady Divine,
That Miracles works [sic] at *Loretto*

The other reference to Loreto appears in the final stanza, connecting the foreign shrine with the domestic shrine of St. Winifred in Wales, whose

²⁰ Barclay mentions these accusations in "Mary Beatrice of Modena," 76. For some satirical texts on James Francis Edward's paternity, see, for example, "Father Peter's Policy Discovered, or The Prince of Wales Proved a Popish Perkin," (London: 1689). The "perkin" refers to another pretender to the throne of England, Perkin Warbeck, mentioned in the broadside *The Sham Prince Exposed. In a Dialogue between the Pope's Nuncio and Bricklayer's Wife* (London: 1688). For an interesting discussion of the strained relationship between Petre and D'Adda, see John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England, 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 236. On Father Petre, also see Pincus, 1688, 126.

²¹ Although beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to acknowledge James II's own sometimes tense relationship with the papacy. See Miller, *Popery and Politics*, especially the chapter, "James II and Rome," 229-238.

²² "Catholick Hymn on the Birth of the Prince of Wales" (London, 1688).

healing waters James visited during his quest for an heir. In this ballad both locations are portrayed in the light of superstition:

Then we will not forget ho
To sing Praise to Lorreto,
And set up great Winnifreds Fame
And let all Men be willing
That new *Pauls* which is Building,
Henceforth be call'd *Nostre* [sic] *Dame*.

The author's contemporary audience would have recognized the stanza's two locations as blatantly papist. Notre Dame, the most famous Catholic cathedral in France, complements St. Winifred's well in Wales, which boasted a miraculous history of healing sick pilgrims. After the Duchess Laura of Modena died in July 1687, her grief-stricken daughter Mary went to Bath for replenishment and relaxation. The waters at St. Winifred's well were consumed like those at Bath, yet within the context of a spiritual experience akin to that of Lourdes in France.²³ James's controversial journey to the shrine of St. Winifred to pray for the fertility of his wife recalls ancient church practices before the split from Rome, a home grown Catholicism forgotten or ignored in this satirical ballad. According to Alexandra Walsham, "from the mid-Elizabethan period onwards, the Protestant authorities seem to have feared that the spring was becoming a rallying point for recusant militancy and conspiratorial activity."²⁴ In the course of describing James's visit to Holywell, Walsham places his involvement with the shrine in a broader European context: "The politicisation of sacred and historically evocative landscapes was one of the characteristic features of this process over the European mainland. In this context

²³ The Lourdes grotto is one of the most visited pilgrimage destinations in the world, the alleged site of Marian apparitions in 1858 and source of healing waters. For a thorough introduction to the history of this shrine, see Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Penguin, 1999). Alexandra Walsham observes that Holywell has long been called the "Lourdes of Wales" for its "thaumaturgic healing" and that in the eighteenth century, "The well was attended from sunrise until late at night and littered with barrows and crutches left behind as *ex votos*" ("Holywell: Contesting Sacred Space in Post-Reformation Wales," *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Will Coster and Andrew Spicer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005]: 211, 231).

²⁴ Walsham, "Holywell," 229.

it is hardly surprising that the [Holywell] chapel became the target of Protestant outrages in 1688."²⁵ The king's visit, one among many pilgrimages, parallels not only that of his mother-in-law's prayers and donations at Loreto, but also those of the European heads of state (such as Louis XIII). James's royal patronage at a renegade Catholic shrine, along with Mary and her mother's prayers to the Virgin of Loreto, gave anti-Jacobites further ammunition for connecting the illegitimacy of Catholicism with the illegitimacy of the Prince of Wales.

In the final line of the ballad stanza, the renaming of St. Paul's as Notre Dame amplifies the theme of feminine usurpation seen in the reference to the cathedral of "Our Lady." Although the biblical Paul and Mary were, of course, neither English nor members of any particular Christian denomination, their names create a contrast between a saint congenial to Protestantism, with his history of evangelization and inclusion in the Bible, and a foreign cathedral dedicated to Mary. The contrast thus represented the rift between evangelical Protestantism and Catholic Marian devotion. Mary is mentioned throughout the New Testament, of course, but Protestants charged that Catholic devotion to Mary stepped outside of biblical boundaries. According to Frances Dolan, "As God's rival and gatekeeper," Frances Dolan observes, "Mary became, for many seventeenth-century Englishmen hostile to Catholicism, the embodiment of usurped, arbitrary power, the symbol of Catholics' misplaced obedience and reverence."²⁶ Notre Dame not only suggests feminine usurpation of male authority but foreignness as well, with James as an "un-English" ruler who would remake London in the image of Paris. In this ballad, Paul is associated with the English language and nation, St. Paul's being the iconic London cathedral and the proper focus for Protestant devotion.

The ballad's suggestion that under the Catholic Stuarts St. Paul's would be renamed Notre Dame conflates nationalities in ways that reflect both Catholicism's universal nature. However, the ballad's ultimate effect is the lumping together of disparate qualities that happens in the course of stigmatizing a group. The last Queen consort from France was Henrietta Maria, Charles I's wife. Catherine of Braganza was from Portugal, and Mary was, of course, from Modena (in what we refer to today as present-day

²⁵ Walsham, "Holywell," 230.

²⁶ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 119.

Italy). "Notre Dame" rhymes, but one wonders why the author did not choose St. Peter's or another Roman Catholic icon to suggest something closer to the Queen's nationality. Yet in this ballad, the variety of Catholic experience is distilled into one stereotypical location. The imaginary re-naming of St. Paul's into Notre Dame, a conceptual translation of one structure into another, is analogous to the literal translation of the Holy House from Nazareth to Loreto and the logic of replacement in the claims of James Francis Edward's bastardy. Wales and England are not one, but the power of this balladeer's creation of a Catholic other transforms, or translates, St. Winifred's well into a seemingly foreign locale.

This issue of translation is closely allied with problems of interpretation in anti-Catholic discourse. The materiality and physicality of Catholicism became targets of satire when Mary and her mother donated objects, gold angels and a diamond-encrusted heart, to the shrine of Loreto. Anti-Jacobite writers criticized these donations as pagan idolatry throughout the century, in order to stifle James Francis Edward's claims to legitimacy. The anonymous author of *A Compleat View of the Birth of the Pretender* (1744) maintains that the Jesuits "pretended too, that this Conception was miraculous, and the Effect of a solemn Petition, which the late Duchess of Modena had put up in Heaven to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or of a Vow the Queen had made to our Lady of Loretto, with the Present of a Golden Image, enrich'd with Precious Stones."²⁷ In the run-up to the Forty Five, this anti-Catholic critique of both idolatry and luxurious excess proved a powerful tool of persuasion. The invocation of events from over seventy years before the final major Jacobite rebellion suggests the endurance of the Jacobite threat and the creativity with which Hanoverians countered it.

Whether in the context of anti-Jacobite polemic or the more general genre of travel writing, the splendor of the shrine of Loreto attracted notice, which its visitors associated with Catholic opulence.²⁸ Several

²⁷ *A Compleat View of the Birth of the Pretender* (London: 1744), 6.

²⁸ Loreto was a stop on many English and continental travelers' itineraries, whether in the context of a Grand Tour or for other purposes. See, for example, Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 41 and 167. Laurence Sterne alludes to the Loreto treasury in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, vol. 2, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1978), 629. The Marquis de Sade visited Loreto in 1776 and recorded some brief impressions in his *Voyage d'Italie*, ed. Maurice Lever (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 30–36.

travel writers corroborate the description of these gifts from Mary and her mother (though they do not always mention the connection with James's birth), including this anonymous author: "Near [the statue of our Lady] are several rich Lamps, the Gifts of divers Princes, and others; I took particular notice of the two Angels of Gold, kneeling, and lifting up their Hands, with an Heart of Gold beset with Diamonds, and a Lamp continually burning out of them, these were the Gift of the Duchess of Modena, and of her Daughter Queen Mary of England."²⁹ This relatively neutral description still reflects the point of view of one unaccustomed to the material aspects of Catholic worship. What might appear to the untrained observer to be a display of power or influence, or even a distraction from God, helped believers to train their thoughts toward the divine. Such moments of bedazzlement emerge in most English travelers' accounts of Loreto and reflect an inability to translate Catholic religious practices into an English Protestant mind set.

The tone of travel writers ranges from fascination to disgust, depending on the width of the interpretive and ideological gap between their own faith tradition and Catholicism. Both the Catholic Queen consort and the Virgin Mary were belittled in print by disgusted authors who hoped to diminish their attraction and influence. Antonio Gavin's description of the statue of the Madonna and Child in the Loreto Chapel takes a particularly sarcastic turn:

Those that are rich and wealthy bestow great presents upon the wooden Statue of the Virgin that is in the Chapel, which without any addition or modification, they call The Holy Virgin of Loretto: They present her with Necklaces, and Bracelets of Pearls and Diamonds, Hearts of Gold, Medals, Candlesticks, Lamps Embost, Pictures of Gold and Silver of a prodigious weight, and bigness. Many present her with Rings, and most precious Jewels, as a token of their espousing of her. She hath above fifty Gowns, all of them of an inestimable price; insomuch as she is at this day the richest Puppet that is in the Universe, and the piece of Wood the most sumptuously drest that is to be found in the whole World.³⁰

²⁹ *Several Years Travels Through Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Provinces, Performed by a Gentleman* (London 1702), 202.

³⁰ Antonio Gavin, *The Frauds of Romish Monks and Priests, Set Forth in Eight Letters*, 4th ed.

In this account Gavin, a Church of England clergyman, addresses neither the role of this statue in a broader context of worship nor the importance of images in Catholic theology; nor would one expect him to in such a virulently anti-Catholic work. Such a criticism of idolatry and luxury, observes Dolan, "reinforce[s] her [Mary's] connection to materiality, the flesh, the mortal, the transient; for most Protestant writers, these associations conjoin with feminine gender to disparage Mary, proving that she is a human creature of the earth, not a goddess or creator in heaven."³¹ Behind the dismissal of the Virgin of Loreto as a "puppet," a word used to describe an "idolatrous image" in Gavin's time, is a discomfort both with Mary's earthiness and the central place of the material in Catholic theology, as well as the power of this particular female image.³² The Catholic mind finds no fault with using images as focal points for prayer, or even with the idea that a physical object can be holy, let alone Mary's role as intercessor. Protestant writers such as Gavin believed that an undue elevation of Mary must crowd out Jesus, the foundation of true Christianity.

Protestant interpretations of Catholic materiality and Mariolatry underlie Gavin's criticisms. Although English Protestantism in the long eighteenth century encompassed a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices, from High Church Anglicanism to Puritanism, these denominations united in their rejection of Catholic-style Marian veneration. The subtext of Gavin's ridicule is fear that a worshipper will become too dazzled by the rich fabrics and jewels, and ultimately by Mary, to contemplate the truth of Christ. Putting aside for the moment the problem of Mary as an intercessor, a "gatekeeper" for direct contact with Jesus, too many physical layers of mediation existed at Loreto between the worshipper and God for Gavin's tastes or most English Protestants. Gavin's opinion that the horde of gold and jewels and the statue's changing wardrobe distract Christians from God instead of leading them toward truth is typical. The charge of idolatry takes the idea one step further, suggesting that pilgrims

(London: 1704), 162. This book was first published in 1691. Gavin, a Spanish Catholic priest turned Church of England clergyman, is also author of *A Master-Key to Popery* (London: 1725). In *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), Colin Haydon considers English Protestant perceptions of European Catholic opulence and excess: "Some churches were gorgeously decorated, it was noted, whilst the poor of the community suffered immense privations" (27).

³¹ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 110.

³² *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. *puppet*, (accessed 29 June 2009).

worship the mesmerizing riches at the shrine in place of, or even in spite of, God. As Corrine Harol maintains, “The problem with idolatry, from a Protestant perspective, is that it embodies the sacred rather than providing a means for transcendence of the material world.”³³ In his description of the Loreto Madonna and Child, Gavin’s language suggests two layers in his thinking about idolatry. The definition of the word “puppet,” which referred at this time to pagan idols, suggests the collapsing of the sign and the referent inherent in the idea of idolatry, the embodiment of the sacred, to paraphrase Harol, instead of the transcendence of the body. Reading this statue as an idol, Gavin projects an interpretive grid onto the pilgrims in order to prove that they collapse sign and referent as well. By using the phrase “piece of wood,” Gavin erases any possibility of divinity or even humanity in the Virgin’s image, thereby accomplishing the verbal iconoclasm that he was unable to perform physically at the shrine itself. Though a former Catholic priest, Gavin shows no attempt to acknowledge the Catholic interpretive process, which translates the spiritual into the physical world while at the same time allowing for the transcendence of the physical world to which Harol refers. The Catholic teaching at the time, as well as today, held that objects could be sacred without being worshipped as gods themselves.

One of the leading Catholic apologists of the eighteenth century, Bishop Richard Challoner, declared emphatically that idol worship was not sanctioned by the Church, but that Catholics should give “relative honour” to images of Christ and the saints:

[I]t is evidently agreeable, as well to Nature and Reason, as to Piety and Religion, to express our Esteem and Affection for those whom we honour and love, by setting a Value upon all Things that belong to them, or have any Relation to them. Thus good Christians, that love God with their whole Hearts, honour all Things that are dedicated to his Service, or that are Memorials of him, or have a Relation to him.³⁴

³³ “Virgin Idols and Verbal Devices: Pope’s Belinda and The Virgin Mary,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 45.1 (2004): 41–59, 50. See also Jonathan Sheehan, “Introduction: Thinking About Idols in Early Modern Europe” and “The Altars of the Idols: Religion, Sacrifice, and the Early Modern Polity” in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.4 (October 2006): 561–69 and 649–74.

³⁴ Richard Challoner, *The Catholick Christian Instructed in the Sacraments, Sacrifice, Ceremonies*

He further explains the Catholic interpretation of images "as Helps to raise our Thoughts to them. And is it not thus that a loyal Subject, a Child, a loving Friend, value the Pictures of their King, Father, or Friend?"³⁵ Challoner makes two important rhetorical moves in this passage. First, separating the image from the person, the sign from the referent, he counters the interpretation of idolatry as a process through which sign and referent become indistinguishable. Second, he humanizes the example by analogy, and infuses that analogy with politics, grouping the words "King," "Father," and "Friend" to suggest that the king as patriarch of the nation is worthy of "honour and love." This analogy subtly works against the idea that Catholicism is antithetical to English loyalty, for it associates respect for the king with respect for God.

Challoner's clarification of Catholic beliefs concerning images of Christ and the saints includes a response to Church of England divine Conyers Middleton, author of *A Letter from Rome, Shewing an Exact Conformity Between Popery and Paganism*. The preface to Challoner's *Catholick Christian Instructed* offers point-by-point refutations of Middleton's attacks on church teaching and devotional practices in his *Letter from Rome*.³⁶ In the *Letter*, Middleton provides an eyewitness account of Catholic idol worship and paganistic practices. In his section on Loreto, for example, Middleton describes the dark coloring of Mary and the Christ child's image in exotic and even diabolical terms:

The mention of *Loretto* puts me in mind of the Surprize I was in at the first Sight of the *Holy Image*; for its Face is as black as a *Negro's*, that one would take it rather for the Representation of a *Proserpine*, or *infernal Deity*, than what they impiously stile it, the *Queen of Heaven*. But I soon recollected, that this very Circumstance of its Complexion made it resemble the more

and Observances of the Church, by Way of Question and Answer (London: 1737), 249.

³⁵ Challoner, *The Catholic Christian*, 249.

³⁶ This preface was published in London twice on its own: *A Plain Answer to Dr. Middleton's Letter from Rome* in 1741, and as *A Plain Answer to Dr. C—s M—s Letter from Rome* in 1742. For a discussion of this exchange, see Sheridan Gilley, "Challoner as Controversialist," in *Challoner and His Church: A Catholic Bishop in Georgian England*, ed. Eamon Duffy (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1981), 90–111.

exactly the *old Idols of Paganism*, which, in *sacred* as well as *profane Writers*, are described to be *black with the perpetual Smoak of Lamps and Incense*.³⁷

Later in the century John Northall, describing the same statue, observes, "The dark complexion of our Lady would bespeak her an Indian queen, as well as the glittering of her robes."³⁸ In both cases, racializing the statue distances the reader from it, and more generally from the veneration of Mary encouraged in Roman Catholicism. Referring to the statue as a "Negro" or an "Indian Queen" represents the Catholic Church as distinctly "outlandish" to an English audience, as it carries out strange and essentially foreign rituals. Middleton and Northall push their readers beyond the boundaries of Europe to Asia and Africa, countries less easily integrated into notions of English identity than those in Europe. The association with dark skin thus degrades and deflates the Loreto statue's significance, with the "Indian Queen" label suggesting exoticism, excess, and greed. English writers such as Middleton and Gavin interpret the pilgrimage as a sensual rather than spiritual experience, arguing for authentic Christian worship as something divorced from the tangible world. In contrast, Challoner points out that Christianity can be both sensual and spiritual. These travel writers ignore the theological foundations that Catholics and Protestants share (something Challoner addresses in his response to Middleton) in favor of categorizing Catholics as non-Christians, even devil worshipers. Such holds true in the comparison between Mary and the goddess Proserpine.³⁹ For Middleton, Proserpine's dwelling place (Hades) corresponds more to Christian conceptions of hell than to the value-neutral underworld that it sometimes symbolizes in ancient myth.

³⁷ Conyers Middleton, *A Letter from Rome, Shewing an Exact Conformity Between Popery and Paganism* (London: 1729), 29, italics in original.

³⁸ John Northall, *Travels Through Italy* (London: 1766), 398. Northall also links the Santa Casa tradition with Roman pagan religion: "Whoever were the first inventors of this imposture, they seem to have taken the hint of it from the veneration that the old Romans paid to the cottage of Romulus, which stood on Mount Capitol, and was repaired from time to time as it fell to decay" (400-1).

³⁹ Middleton's point of view harmonizes unexpectedly with a present-day feminist's work. In *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion, and Politics in Italy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum writes, "Persephone as queen of the underworld was worshiped as goddess of the dead, holding the keys of heaven and hell before they were given to St. Peter in the christian age" (38).

Middleton's association of the Madonna in the Santa Casa with hell hinges primarily on the color of the image. Because the statue is made of dark cedar wood, it is considered to be a "Black Madonna," an image of Mary, often with the Christ child, found in many European shrines. Marina Warner explains the significance of the dark Madonna: "In Catholic countries, where blackness is the climate of the devils, not the angels, and is associated almost exclusively with magic and the occult, Black Madonnas are considered especially wonder-working, as the possessors of hermetic knowledge and power."⁴⁰ Torsellino, however, offers another perspective on this blackness: "this very darkening (a token of antiquitie and religion) doth exceedingly increase the majestie of her virginall countenance."⁴¹ This interpretive move is similar to the one that he makes concerning doubts about the veracity of the translation of the Holy House from Nazareth to Loreto. Torsellino takes a seemingly illogical or negative aspect of the shrine and argues that it increases its holiness. As he notes in his preface, he is operating here within the framework of divine, not human, reason.

Warner and other recent writers on the Black Madonna are concerned primarily with a task similar to that of Conyers Middleton, but for very different ideological ends. Middleton's critique of Mariolatry is to validate his own Protestant form of Christianity. In the case of twentieth- and twenty-first century discussions of Black Madonnas, feminists wish to reclaim an ancient, gynocentric religious tradition from patriarchal suppression.⁴² These authors focus on the wooden figure of the Madonna of Loreto, which is only one aspect of the shrine as a whole, and visitors throughout the centuries have been drawn by the house itself as much if not more so than the dark image of the Virgin Mary. Although discussions of the Black Madonna as an earth goddesses help explain why Loreto would be a pilgrimage destination for women praying for fertility, devout Catholic Mary of Modena would not have considered her prayers and the prayers of her mother to be aimed at a pagan goddess. Some scholars, however, view her prayers for the

⁴⁰ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 275.

⁴¹ Torsellino, *The History*, 15.

⁴² See, for example, Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas*, especially 109–111.

Virgin of Loreto's intercession as a translation of ancient fertility worship into a framework acceptable to Catholic teaching.⁴³ Like the anti-Catholic travel writers and the anti-Jacobite satirists, these scholars focus on the wooden figure of the Madonna of Loreto. This is, however, only one aspect of the shrine as a whole, and visitors throughout the centuries have been drawn by the house itself as much if not more than the dark image of the Virgin Mary.

A French devotional book on Loreto, for example, invites the reader to meditate on the humble nature of the Santa Casa structure in contrast to the miracles it housed: "Notice the simplicity and poverty of the Holy Virgin's House, the holy and gentle life, respectful and submissive, that she led there, first with her father and mother, later with her husband and son. Pray passionately for the holiness and peace that reigns in her house; may it also reign in yours."⁴⁴ Throughout this manual the author is focused less on the wooden image and votive offerings than the Santa Casa as a domestic model and the site of the Incarnation. Although he speaks with pride about the ex-votos and luxurious clothing of the image, including the donation from Louis XIII to celebrate his son, the author is much more interested in what transpired in the space throughout the life of Mary and the early history of the Church.⁴⁵ Grounded in scripture, his musings on the Temple of Jerusalem as forerunner to the Santa Casa consider both sites as the dwelling places of God.⁴⁶ The physical magnificence of the Temple is translated to a primarily spiritual

⁴³ Stephen Benko develops this view in *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), which is less polemical than Birnbaum's *Black Madonnas*. He asserts, however, that "the Black Madonna is the ancient earth-goddess converted to Christianity" (215). See also Leonard W. Moss and Stephen C. Cappannari, "In Quest of the Black Virgin: She Is Black Because She Is Black," in ed. James J. Preston, *Mother Worship: Themes and Variations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 53–74. While not addressing the blackness of the image, Hamilton claims that Loreto was a "thaumaturgic shrine...long before the legend of the Holy House had been attached to it, for pilgrimages had been made to the miracle-working image of the Virgin in the old church since at least the early fourteenth century" (18).

⁴⁴ "Faites attention à la simplicité et à la pauvreté de la Maison de la Sainte Vierge à la vie sainte & paisable, respectueuse et soumise qu'elle y a menée, d'abord avec son Pere & sa Mere, ensuite avec son Epoux et son Fils. Priez-la ardemment pour la sainteté & la paix qu'elle a fait regner dan sa Maison; regne aussi dans la votre." *La Devotion de Notre Dame de Lorette* (Lille, 1742), 52.

⁴⁵ *La Devotion de Notre Dame de Lorette*, 41–42.

⁴⁶ *La Devotion de Notre Dame de Lorette*, 72–74.

splendor in the Santa Casa, with the richness of the ex-votos reflecting the extent of the shrine's miraculous power—not treasures to be admired merely for their earthly value. At the center of this devotional tract is Christ, surrounded by his family, and protected by the walls of a humble stone building. The Madonna, as this author and other Catholic apologists would stress, is meant to lead the faithful toward her son, not eclipse him.

Although non-Catholic travel writers who encounter the shrine inevitably focus on Mary, the image represents Mary and the Christ child, not just Mary alone. The image depicts Mary's role as mother to Jesus, and it carries special significance within the context of the Holy House. Writers such as Gavin, Middleton, and Northall rhetorically erase Jesus from the sacred image in a way that reflects their own perceptions of Catholic veneration of Mary, which many Protestants felt obscured or erased the primacy of God himself. According to Dolan, "Catholic depictions of the relationship between Mary and Jesus were disturbing not only because they seemed to freeze Jesus in infancy or to compel him back into it, but also because they suggested that he remembered his early dependency and revered his mother as a consequence, that her early nurturance of him translated into later authority over him."⁴⁷ Given that James II converted to Catholicism, these concerns about Mary's power over Jesus parallel anti-Catholic rhetoric that charged James with desecrating the throne with his mother's religion.

Erasures of Jesus in the context of anti-Jacobite polemic occur in two playing cards from the British Museum, which Dolan reproduces in her book *Whores of Babylon*.⁴⁸ The cards are from sets depicting "The Reign of James II" and then "The Revolution." The first card, labeled, "The Duches of Modena Presenting a wedge of Gold to the Lady of Loreta that ye Q[ueen] might Conceive a son," shows a woman kneeling to a statue of the Virgin Mary. The statue clutches a cross in her left hand and extends her right hand as if to accept the gold from the Duchess. There is no Christ to be found in this depiction—not even a tiny corpus on a crucifix. The other card depicts three tonsured clerics kneeling in supplication to a painting of the supposed Lady of Loreto, "for a Prince of Wales to

⁴⁷ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 114.

⁴⁸ Dolan, *Whores of Babylon* 154–55.

be born." The painting also portrays Mary only, with no indication of a Christ child. The creators of these cards were interested less in historical accuracy than in representing idolatry; for example, the Duchess proffering a piece of gold appears to be bribing Mary more than praying to her. Again, the contrast between Catholic and Protestant interpretive processes is apparent. In this case, anti-Jacobite, Protestant illustrators interpret the material manifestations of Catholicism as signs of greed and corruption, and this particular image suggests the corruption of James II's government as well. These visual texts serve a similar rhetorical function as the written texts above, representing a religion that, in the Protestant view, magnifies Mary and obscures her son.⁴⁹

The fundamental difference of opinion between Protestants and Catholics about the role of material objects in Christian worship made anti-Jacobite invective possible. Accusations of idolatry were rhetorical weapons to wield in the service of preserving national identity. An early seventeenth-century French Catholic text describing pilgrimages to Loreto brings home the completely differing interpretive apparatus that Protestant anti-Catholic writers used to explain the perceived greed and luxury among Catholic clergy:

The wretched misbeliever, who draws poison out of all this good juice, and turneth light into darkness, will say, that this [the riches of the Loreto shrine] was the marke whereat the covetousnes of Priests did shoot, and that to obtaine that, they have so much preached & magnified this place, drawing thither all the world by affected commendations: but the faythfull which have eyes to see the workes of God doe acknowledge the treasures of his heavenly blessing, having by the meanes of this sacred House brought abundance of all good.⁵⁰

Analogous to these questions of the legitimacy of the Loreto shrine is the controversy surrounding James Francis Edward's right to remain king—Stuart supporters and detractors held similarly contrasting interpretations of what was necessary for legitimate rule. Each side in the

⁴⁹ In Luke 1:46, during her visit to Elizabeth, Mary says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," which is the basis of the Magnificat prayer.

⁵⁰ Louis Richeome, *The Pilgrime of Loreto*, trans. "E.W." (Saint-Omer: 1629), 41.

war of words claimed in various ways to “have eyes to see the workes of God”—the right kind of vision for the nation. The chorus of voices that dubbed James Francis Edward a “bastard” even before he was born and the “Old Pretender” later in his life did not go unanswered, but anti-Jacobites won the interpretive battles that allowed Dutch and Hanoverian men to embody the English nation, even while the Stuarts were being derided for their ties to the continent.