
The Dangerous Popess

Pope Joan, the Exclusion Crisis, and Restoration Theater

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Abstract

As a tale of subversive female power and disguise, the myth of Pope Joan has captured the attention of many throughout the ages. The early modern period saw much debate about the reality of Pope Joan as Protestants realized her existence could undermine the credibility of the Catholic Church. However, in 1680, Elkanah Settle, a prolific English playwright, wrote and produced his play *The Female Prelate* which completely ignored the question of Pope Joan's reality. Instead, this play focused on Pope Joan's story and a new plot line about a Duke of Saxony's futile search for justice for the murder of his father. This play coincided with the height of the Exclusion Crisis, a moment of profound political unease surrounding the succession to the throne due to the Popish plot, a fictitious Catholic plot to murder King Charles II. This crisis also marked the emergence of the first Whig party, a party dedicated to excluding James the Catholic heir presumptive from the succession. The Whigs used political rhetoric to mobilize the public in support of the exclusion agenda. Connections between Settle and the Whig party indicate that *The Female Prelate* may have served as a piece of political rhetoric in favor of the Whigs. Additionally, the Restoration stage provided an influential audience if the play could make it past court censors. This thesis analyzes how *The Female Prelate* interacted with the theatrical, political, and gender context of 1680 London in order to make pointed commentary on the Exclusion Crisis.

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Introduction

The Myth of Pope Joan

Ever since the thirteenth century literature, theater, and even movies have continually reintroduced the myth of Pope Joan into the culture. Her story holds a certain mystique which drew the interest of writers at least every thirty years since 1250 based on the “Chronological Bibliography of Works or Fragments of Works about Pope Joan” listed at the end of Alain Boureau’s book *The Myth of Pope Joan*.¹ Indeed, the myth itself continues to be deployed in the present day as a way to explore the gendering of political and religious power. Google search results for “Pope Joan” are up to about eighteen million as compared to the 3.3 million figure used to emphasize Joan’s importance in a 2013 paper.² Excerpts from the documents which first reference Pope Joan have been translated into many languages, including Brazilian Portuguese because, as the authors state in the English translation of their abstract, “the Popess is still poorly studied in Brazil.”³ In 1996 even the musical producer Michael Butler, best known for bringing

¹ Alain Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, 1st Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

² Thomas F. X. Noble, “Why Pope Joan?,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 219–39.

³ Dominique Vieira Coelho dos Santos and Camila Michele Wackerhage, “PETRE, PATER PATRUM, PAPISSÉ PRODITO PARTUM : translation of the fragments of the first documentation of the ‘popé’ Joan,” *Mirabilia: electronic journal of antiquity and middle ages*, no. 17 (2013): 219–33.

the rock musical *Hair* to Broadway, attempted to popularize a Pope Joan musical.⁴ The turn of the twentieth century has witnessed a renaissance of work on Pope Joan.

The myth is relatively simple. Sometime during the ninth century a young woman, either from England or Mainz, Germany, traveled to Athens to study. In many versions she makes this trip with a lover, but importantly she's dressed as a male. She excels in her studies so well that she eventually moves to Rome, enters the church, becomes a cardinal, and is elected pope. She rules successfully for a short period of time. Having taken a lover, however, she unknowingly becomes pregnant. While in a procession, she gives birth on the road and a mob subsequently murders her either by stoning or being thrown into the Tiber river. Supposedly, this sequence of events led to papal processions avoiding a particular street corner in Rome ever since. Additionally, the myth has shaped the story that a newly elected pope must sit in a perforated chair and have his manhood verified.⁵

The myth has a powerful attraction right to the present day. I first came across the myth of Pope Joan through the 1982 play *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill.⁶ During a semester abroad in Madrid spring of 2019, I watched a Spanish production of the play at Teatro Valle Inclán.⁷ Despite understanding perhaps eighty percent of the dialogue, the play, and specifically the contemporary use of Pope Joan, captured my attention. The first act of *Top Girls* imagines a dinner party between five female historical figures and a modern successful woman. Throughout this dinner party the historical figures, one of whom is Pope Joan, recount their life stories. The

⁴ Lewis Lazare, "Pope Joan," *Variety* (blog), March 3, 1996, <https://variety.com/1996/legit/reviews/pope-joan-2-1200445483/>.

⁵ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 2.

⁶ Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*, ed. Bill Naismith and Nick Worrall (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408167595.00000034>.

⁷ "TOP GIRLS en el Teatro Valle Inclán," *Madrid Es Teatro* (blog), accessed February 1, 2021, <https://madridesteatro.com/top-girls-en-el-teatro-valle-inclan/>.

chaos of the monologues-- probably only rivaled by the chaos of real-life dinner parties -- and the discussion between the imagined historical figures provided space for the playwright and actresses to imbue historical stories with personality and intense emotional outpouring. The combined effect made it easier to relate to these previously unfamiliar historical figures.

When the character of Pope Joan recounts her rise and fall from the papacy, it is as if she is telling a well-worn contemporary story. She speaks with pride about how she rose to success above the men around her. Then she speaks humorously about giving birth on the parade route, but the laughter ceases the moment she explains how that led to her death and the death of her child:

Joan

Far away I heard people screaming, 'The Pope is ill, the Pope is dying.' And the baby just slid out onto the road.*

Marlene

The cardinals / won't have known where to put themselves.

Nijo

Oh dear, Joan, what a thing to do! In the street!

Isabella

*How embarrassing.

Gret

In a field, yah.

They are laughing.

Joan

One of the cardinals said, 'The Antichrist!' and fell over in a faint.

They all laugh.

Marlene

So what did they do? They weren't best pleased.

Joan

They took me by the feet and dragged me out of town and stoned me to death.

*They stop laughing.*⁸

As a liberal Catholic feminist, I became fascinated by this story of a woman who became pope. By intermission time, I was already researching the myth of Pope Joan on my smartphone.

⁸ Churchill, *Top Girls*, 18-19.

Much to my disappointment, a cursory search showed the story was indeed just a myth.

However, I noted how effectively Churchill used the historical figures, including Pope Joan, to comment on the state of current feminism.

Pope Joan's story riveted my attention not just because of the extreme tonal shock of a stage of boisterously laughing women falling silent, but also because the moment captured the main issue of the theater piece. The tagline of the show was, "Qué hacemos con Margaret Thatcher?"⁹ What do we do with Margaret Thatcher? What does it mean when women must reject their gender to become successful? Why must women choose between having a family and enjoying success?

Top Girls explored the modern gendered norm that women are forced to choose between professional success and personal life under 1980's society and second wave feminism.¹⁰ The play demonstrated how instances of personally successful women can still fail to represent true movement towards gender equity. At Margaret Thatcher's death in 2013, historians, feminists, and the press still could not decide whether Margaret Thatcher should be seen as a feminist icon or as someone who got through the glass ceiling and then "pulled the ladder up right after her."¹¹ What better way for Caryl Churchill to contrast family/femininity and power/masculinity, than

⁹ Madrid es Teatre, "TOP GIRLS en el Teatro Valle Inclán."

¹⁰Caryl Churchill has not given an interview to a major newspaper since the 1990s, so there is no confirmation from the playwright. Mark Lawson, "Caryl Churchill, by the People Who Know Her Best," *The Guardian*, 2012, sec. Stage, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/oct/03/caryl-churchill-collaborators-interview>; Andrew Dickson, "Caryl Churchill's Prophetic Drama," *The New Yorker*, November 18, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/caryl-churchills-prophetic-drama>.

¹¹ Hadley Freeman, "Margaret Thatcher Was No Feminist," *The Guardian*, April 9, 2013, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/09/margaret-thatcher-no-feminist>; "Giving Margaret Thatcher The Feminist Cred She Deserves — And Would Have Hated," 2017, <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2013/04/17/thatcher-funeral-lean-in-linda-bilmes>.

through the myth of a woman who disguised her sex to gain power only to be killed for her sex after having a child!

These particular connections were clear as day for me as a young woman only about four decades off of the initial audience of the play. It helped that I was taking a class that investigated social movements since 1970, but nevertheless I easily understood these points and connections specifically regarding how *Top Girls* used the myth of Pope Joan. Additionally, a Spanish translation of the play appearing four decades after its original production coincided with the flood of new revivals of the story, indicating the social relevance of both the play and the myth. So when I came across *The Female Prelate Being the History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan : a Tragedy: as it is Acted at the Theatre Royal* by Elkanah Settle and performed in 1680 while doing research for a class, I naturally wondered: what was Pope Joan doing in Restoration England?¹²

Why did a Restoration playwright revive the myth of Pope Joan for English audiences in 1680? There are a number of different angles to take on this problem. The myth itself provides some interesting ideas. A scheming woman at the head of the Roman Catholic Church might have been titillating for Protestant English audiences. Whether Pope Joan really existed was also a relevant question for audiences at the time. And why bring this myth to the stage? What did the dramatic form bring to this myth that essays and dialogues lacked? Could it be a different audience and better access to aristocratic and political classes? Restoration theater, and The Theater Royal in particular, had close connections to the court which made it the ideal place to

¹² Henceforth this work will be referred to as *The Female Prelate*. Elkanah Settle, *The Female Prelate Being the History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan : A Tragedy: As It Is Acted at the Theatre Royal* (London, England, 1680), <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/eebo/docview/2240956580/12740000/7693E733FD854181PQ/7?accountid=10598>.

bring up political ideas. That is, if the play could make it through court censors. *The Female Prelate* did.

The timing of *The Female Prelate* also brings up questions. London in 1680 was a tumultuous time for English politics and society. The Stuart house had been restored to the throne just twenty years before, following nearly twenty years of a commonwealth. Not only had the monarchy been restored, but the Anglican church and religion had been renewed as well. Furthermore, fears of a Catholic assassination plot against Charles II gripped public life only three years before in 1677. This scare, caused by the so-called Popish plot, created hysteria surrounding the Catholic community in London. A newly formed political party, the Whigs, used this as an opportunity to attempt to exclude the Catholic heir presumptive, James, from the throne. These attempts resulted in this time period being called the Exclusion Crisis. 1680 was the height of this crisis and the timing of *The Female Prelate* was not coincidental. The play appeared, in short, in the middle of a crisis and addressed the burning public issue of whether a Catholic heir should be excluded from the throne. The Restoration era also marked the first appearance of women on the English stage. With this advancement came exciting new roles on stage and *The Female Prelate* made use of female characters to deepen its agenda.

Reality or Myth?

The myth of Pope Joan itself is quite interesting. One of the big questions of debate throughout literature about her to this day is: Did she exist? Even though there are still modern websites and books which contend that Joan could have existed, historical consensus declares

that she did not.¹³ Two of the main pieces of evidence for the verity of the Pope Joan myth are the existence of a perforated chair and a change in papal parade route. The Female Prelate referenced both of these pieces of evidence. However, these two pieces of evidence are relatively simple to refute.

Legend has it that a chair was used to check the pope's sex just after election. According to legend, the pope would sit in this chair (fig. 1) and someone trusted by the cardinals would come from behind and check that his genitals were male.¹⁴ However, credible evidence for this rite does not exist. The documentation which outlines the papal coronation does not reference any such rite.¹⁵

Additionally, Boureau argues that since the rumor of such a rite was prominent in the oral tradition, it heavily tainted the early written accounts which described the ritual. For instance, Adam of Usk, a Welsh cleric who witnessed the accession of Pope Innocent VII in 1404, described the male verification rite.¹⁶ However, an account of the very next accession by Jacopo D'Angelo, a humanist who held posts within the Curia, described the events of the accession in greater detail and explicitly refuted the rite of verification. Instead, people mistook the coronation and reception of the papal staff and keys as the rite of verification.¹⁷

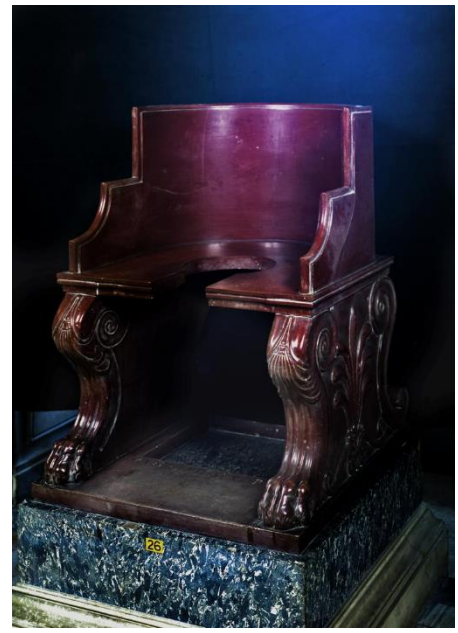


Fig. 1: Sedes porphyretrica

According to the Vatican website it is an ancient latrine. It dates back to the first half of the second century CE but between 1099 and 1513 it was customary for popes to sit on this chair after the election

¹³ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 2.

¹⁴ "Musei Vaticani Catalogo Online : Inventory : Sedes porphyretrica, antica latrina da un edificio imperiale, forse... [MV.818.0.0]," Musei Vaticani, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://catalogo.museivaticani.va/index.php/Detail/objects/MV.818.0.0>.

¹⁵ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 11.

¹⁶ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 13.

¹⁷ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 16-17.

Furthermore, since accounts of this verification rite report it occurred after the election, it would have happened after the moment when canon law stipulates that the new pope possesses full powers, too late to be effective. Therefore, this chair served neither as solid evidence for the rite of verification nor the reality of Pope Joan.

Similarly, the change in the papal parade route does not withstand scrutiny. The papal procession had the choice of turning right or left at a particular intersection. The road on one side is significantly narrower than the other, so in the twelfth century the procession began turning to the right, possibly because of an increased number of people in the procession.¹⁸ People took this to be public dislike for the road but it was likely just because the road was too narrow. Of course, refuting these two pieces of evidence does not conclusively demonstrate that Pope Joan was fictional and there have certainly been very creative theories about Joan, including one which proposes that Joan might have been intersex, but her reality seems highly unlikely.¹⁹

Although modern historical consensus concluded Pope Joan did not exist, the historical discussion of her reality held importance during the Protestant Reformation. Protestant writers realized her existence would be detrimental to the Catholic Church.²⁰ As Boureau mentions in his book, this myth begged fascinating questions such as “What happens when Peter, the rock and keystone of that central edifice, becomes Joan, and when divine election changes into human (and female) trickery?”²¹ The myth of Pope Joan brought into question apostolic succession and

¹⁸ Noble, “Why Pope Joan?”

¹⁹ Interestingly the hermaphrodite or intersex hypothesis is not new. As historian Rustici explains, this idea had been suggested as early as 1566. M I New and E S Kitzinger, “Pope Joan: A Recognizable Syndrome,” *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 76, no. 1 (January 1, 1993): 3–13, <https://doi.org/10.1210/jcem.76.1.8421098>; Craig M. Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan: Deploying the Popess Legend in Early Modern England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 85, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005247528>.

²⁰ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 223.

²¹ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 3.

the competence of the Catholic Church. There are texts contemporary to *The Female Prelate* which directly addressed this question of truth.²²

Nonetheless, Boureau makes a very good point in the introduction to his book *The Myth of Pope Joan*: if Joan had been real but simply ignored, her story would not have held lasting meaning.²³ The story itself generates meaning and the discussions held about her hold weight regardless of her existence. Personally, even though I was googling Pope Joan the second it was socially acceptable after seeing her in *Top Girls*, the mythical nature of the story did not diminish my interest. For an audience in 1680 likely unconcerned with the concept of “historical accuracy” and probably familiar with the myth through the practice of pope burning pageants, this distinction between oral history and myth was likely unimportant.²⁴ Even the playwright, Elkanah Settle, seemed unconcerned with the accuracy of the tale and more interested in showing the wrongdoings of the church. As his epistle dedicatory states

if any of my Critical Readers should tell me that I have laid more to the charge of my Petticoat-Pope than Story will warrant; if such an Objection be, I have onely this way to make my Excuse, and rectifie my Mistake; that is, by begging her Successors to share it amongst 'em: for there have been Birds enough of that Feather through all Ages, to challenge all the borrow'd Plumes I have given her, were they ten times as many as they are.²⁵

²² This title will be referred to as *A Present for a Papist*. Alexander Cooke, *A Present for a Papist, or, The Life and Death of Pope Joan Plainly Proving out of the Printed Copies and Manuscripts of Popish Writers and Others, That a Woman Called Joan Was Really Pope of Rome, and Was There Deliver'd of a Bastard Son in the Open Street, as She Went in Solemn Procession / by a Lover of Truth, Denying Human Infallibility*. (London, England, 1675), <http://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240962304/citation/A28E30FD9FBB499APQ/1>.

²³ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 2.

²⁴ Anonymous, *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon as It Was Acted with Great Applause, in the Poultry, London, on Wednesday Night, Being the Fifth of November Last, at Six of the Clock: With a Relation of Their Matchless, Develish, Gun-Powder-Plot, and Their Oath of Secrecy: Also the Priests and Jesuits Prayer for the Good Success of This Damnable Plot*. (London, England, 1673), <http://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240948283/citation/1EE093EE73484876PQ/1>.

²⁵ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, epistle dedicatory.

This cheeky statement indicates that Settle was unconcerned about adding new and terrible deeds to his telling of the Pope Joan story because popes throughout the ages perpetrated misdeeds ten times worse than what he recounted in his play. This epistle dedicatory also hints at the anti-Catholic message of *The Female Prelate*.

Current Scholarly Discussion

The anti-Catholic message of the story dominates the discussion of modern scholarly literature on Pope Joan. While some works discuss the veracity of the legend, those works tend to be sensationalistic or aimed towards a popular audience.²⁶ Instead, most scholarly literature focuses on how writers capitalized on the Pope Joan myth in particular time periods or works of literature.

First published in French in 1988 and translated into English in 1993, Boureau's *The Myth of Pope Joan* book has been a foundational piece of literature in the field of discussion of the myth. The book traces Pope Joan's origins back into the thirteenth century and discusses how the Pope Joan myth evolved since then. Still, despite the thoroughness of *The Myth of Pope Joan*, the book almost completely ignores *The Female Prelate* and fails to treat it in the section discussing the popess in literature.²⁷ Boureau's discussion skims over the early modern period. It states that between 1480 to 1777 the Pope Joan myth was relegated to the realm of controversy, specifically the controversy about the reality of her myth between Protestants and the Catholic

²⁶ John C. Moore, review of *Review of The Legend of Pope Joan: In Search of the Truth*, by Peter Stanford, *Speculum* 75, no. 3 (2000): 726-27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2903435>.

²⁷ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 259.

Church.²⁸ The book argues that since Joan's appearances in literature were "simple stories (Historia)" rather than dramatic elaborations, the literature was not true literature, just simple pamphlets which discussed controversies.²⁹

While *The Female Prelate* might at first glance appear to fall under a "history," it was not a simple retelling. Just the medium of *The Female Prelate*, theater, points towards dramatic elaboration. The dramatic form did not lend itself to the types of direct arguments made in the pamphlet literature at the time. Books debating Pope Joan's reality circulated in Restoration London, but *The Female Prelate* did not fall into that category of writing.³⁰ In addition, the content of the play quickly expands out of the confines of the myth. Settle added new characters, reworked Joan's history, and added dialogue which expanded the characterization of all characters but especially Joan. That in itself is reason enough to warrant further consideration of this play.

Historian Craig Rustici's book *The Afterlife of Pope Joan: Deploying the Popess Legend in Early Modern England* fills some of this gap.³¹ This book investigates Joan's legacy including topics such as comparisons in the early 1600s between Pope Joan and Queen Elizabeth, the hermaphrodite hypothesis, and even a chapter dedicated to Settle's play. The chapter on Settle's play discusses how *The Female Prelate* may have had a political function and how Settle

²⁸ See the section "Joan at the Stake: Fifteenth-Seventeenth Centuries" for a full discussion on Pope Joan's fall from Catholic favor. Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 221.

²⁹ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 259.

³⁰ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*; Anonymous, *The History of Pope Joan and the Whores of Rome* (London, England, 1687), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2248517113/citation/9914AABC20084CA8PQ/1>; Robert Ware, *Pope Joan, or, An Account Collected out of the Romish Authors Proved to Be of the Clergy and Members of That Church, before Luther Left Her Doctrine, and Also of Romish Authors, since Luther Departed from Rome: Testifying, That There Was a She-Pope, Who Sate in That See, and Ruled the Same*. (London, England, 1689), <http://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2264173119/citation/60C388B08DB64BB4PQ/1>.

³¹ Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*.

comments on Catholic traditions through the play. Past that, there is surprisingly little work done on the myth of Pope Joan during the Restoration or even the early modern period at all. As a 2019 paper on a 1630 Dutch treatise in defense of Pope Joan wrote, “Aside from Craig M. Rustici’s study of its legacy in England (Joan’s supposed country of origin), no monograph and few chapters and articles have been devoted specifically to the story’s reception during the Reformation era.”³² There is an article, “The Question of the Misogynistic Polemic in Elkanah Settle’s *The Female Prelate*” which discusses how Pope Joan’s characterization in *The Female Prelate* evoked similarities to Whig depictions of two of King Charles II’s mistresses.³³ This article, while interesting, specifically focuses on Settle’s depiction of Pope Joan, not delving in depth on the other characters. This thesis builds on some of the ideas presented by Rustici and integrates the dramatic, historical, and gender contexts of 1680 in order to further discuss how *The Female Prelate* might have functioned at that time. Additionally, this thesis analyzes a contemporary short book on Pope Joan, *A Present for a Papist*, in order to investigate how *The Female Prelate* differed from other media about Pope Joan.³⁴

The analysis of the narrative of this play within the context from which it emerged allows speculation on the question of why Pope Joan surfaced at this particular moment. Just as *Top Girls* is rooted in a contemporary topic of debate (feminism) and draws on an understanding of contemporary figures, so too does *The Female Prelate*. In order to examine possible answers to this question, I explore *The Female Prelate* from multiple viewpoints to both better understand this particular use of the Pope Joan myth and the moment in time which led to its adaptation.

³² Jan Machielsen, “When a Female Pope Meets a Biconfessional Town: Protestantism, Catholicism, and Popular Polemics in the 1630s,” *Early Modern Low Countries* 3, no. 1 (June 24, 2019): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.18352/emlc.88>.

³³ J. Christopher Warner, “The Question of Misogynistic Polemic in Elkanah Settle’s ‘The Female Prelate’ (1680 and 1689),” *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 25, no. 1 (2001): 19–34.

³⁴ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*.

Primary Sources

This thesis works with many different primary sources in order to investigate how the Pope Joan myth in *The Female Prelate* interacted with the social, political, and gender spheres of 1680. This focus on how *The Female Prelate* related to contemporary works in part distinguishes this thesis from other works in the field of Pope Joan. However, the primary sources varied widely in purpose and form resulting in unique challenges. This section describes the major primary sources and their related challenges.

I centered my analysis on a 1680 printing of Settle's play *The Female Prelate*.³⁵ Like any printed script, this work posed a challenge in interpretation. Theater is meant to be watched not read; thus, a printed script cannot capture the entirety of the play. The dialogue and stage directions of *The Female Prelate* were informative and form the basis of this discussion, however I still had to engage in informed speculation in order to further analysis. In moments where I utilized this imaginative speculation, I based my ideas on historical information about Restoration theater and the playwright, Elkanah Settle. Furthermore, comparing between *The Female Prelate* and contemporary works provided a greater understanding of the play.

Aside from *The Female Prelate*, I also dedicated time to a short book printed in 1675, entitled *A Present for a Papist*.³⁶ I chose to focus on this work because it preceded *The Female Prelate* by five years. It represented a drastically different form than *The Female Prelate* while still engaging with the same topic and many of the same contemporary social undercurrents. The length of the book, 160 pages, distinguished it from contemporary political pamphlet literature

³⁵ Settle, *The Female Prelate*.

³⁶ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*.

which made it difficult to deduce its audience, but the text provided ample material for discussion. *A Present for a Papist* described itself as a reworking of a previous text. This added to the intrigue of the book because it represented the continued debate on Pope Joan's reality.

Finally, I worked with and wove in many other primary sources which all roughly fall into two separate categories: pamphlet literature and plays. The Restoration saw a huge political pamphlet market and these texts often commented on contemporary issues and news. Often, I searched for a particular pamphlet and discovered six or seven other pamphlets which responded to the original pamphlet I wanted to read. Diving into the pamphlet literature felt akin to jumping into an argument from four hundred years ago. However, secondary sources about the political and historical context aided my understanding of these texts. Additionally, I restricted the pamphlets incorporated into this thesis to first prints rather than responses. Pamphlets discussed include: *The Character of a Popish Successor*, *Advice to the Men of Shaftesbury*, *Malice Defeated*, and *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon as it was Acted with Great Applause*.³⁷ On the other hand, plays presented the same issues to analysis as *The Female Prelate*. Nonetheless historians have dedicated a significant amount of analysis towards other Restoration plays. Therefore, I drew on this secondary literature to aid in my understanding of these plays and to deepen my analysis of *The Female Prelate*.

³⁷ Elkanah Settle, *The Character of a Popish Successor, and What England May Expect from Such a One Humbly Offered to the Consideration of Both Houses of Parliament, Appointed to Meet at Oxford, on the One and Twentieth of March, 1680/1*. (London, England, 1681), <http://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240855761/citation/4016C8C9E7C444C2PQ/2>; Anonymous, *Advice to the Men of Shaftesbury, or, A Letter to a Friend Concerning the Horrid Popish-Plot* (London, England, 1681), <http://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240918471/citation/46EBF17352514F14PQ/1>; Elizabeth Cellier, *Malice Defeated, or, A Brief Relation of the Accusation and Deliverance of Elizabeth Cellier Wherein Her Proceedings Both before and during Her Confinement Are Particularly Related and the Mystery of the Meal-Tub Fully Discovered : Together with an Abstract of Her Arraignment and Tryal, Written by Her Self, for the Satisfaction of All Lovers of Undisguised Truth*. (London, England, 1680), <http://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240899997/citation/B4183E015634485EPQ/8>; Anonymous, *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon*.

Organization

I organized this thesis into three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter focuses on the major question: Why did Settle choose to adapt the Pope Joan myth to the stage? I present three arguments. First, the Pope Joan myth contains an inherent anti-Catholicism which Settle wanted to utilize. Second, audiences may have been familiar with the Pope Joan myth through the 1675 book *A Present for a Papist* which would have been a draw for Settle. Third, the dramatic form provided new and different modes of analysis and a different more politically connected audience than *A Present for a Papist*.

The second chapter dives into the political and historical context of 1680 London. The chapter addresses how *The Female Prelate* functioned as Whig political rhetoric, beginning by setting up the connections between Settle and the Whig Political party. Then it describes the historical context of the Exclusion Crisis and the Popish Plot in order to prepare for an in-depth analysis of a particular character in *The Female Prelate*. By examining the character of the Duke of Saxony and how he related to the political situation, I elucidate how Settle's play functions as an argument against a Catholic monarch. This section concludes with an explanation of censorship in Restoration theater in order to demonstrate why *The Female Prelate* hid its arguments within the plot.

The third chapter investigates how Settle used gendered tropes and stereotypes as a mechanism to both further the political argument and comment on gender relations. It begins by highlighting the unique position of women in Restoration theater. Then I discuss each of the three female characters of *The Female Prelate* within the context of gendered tropes and stereotypes common to Restoration theater. Pope Joan fell into the archetype of monstrous

woman in order to serve as the villain who destroys the Catholic monarch, but her past added depth to the play. Angeline served as a foil to Joan and an example of a virtuous woman. Finally, Amiran, the female page, left the audience considering the morality of a woman forced into a difficult position.

Chapter 1

Why a Play about Pope Joan?

Pope Joan

The myth of Pope Joan is fascinating. Even so it was certainly not the only tale that Elkanah Settle could have adapted. *The Female Prelate* referenced a large number of Greek, Roman, Catholic, and even Assyrian myths and history. It begs the question, why did Settle adapt the myth of Pope Joan into a play? Settles motivation for adapting the myth of Pope Joan stemmed in part from the desire to develop a clear anti-Catholic message for his Restoration era audience. This anti-Catholicism served a political function, which is discussed in a later chapter. Still, the myth of Pope Joan served well for the purpose of creating a baseline anti-Catholic sentiment.

The myth of Pope Joan was a biting critique of the Catholic Church.³⁸ This was as true in 1680 as it is today. Settle made a strategic decision to adapt a story with preestablished anti-Catholic undercurrents, a tale which by its very nature questioned key tenants of the Catholic

³⁸ Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, 3.

faith including apostolic succession and the ability of the Catholic Church to govern the world.

The final scene of *The Female Prelate* demonstrates Settle's understanding of the damage this myth posed to the Catholic Church. In this scene two Cardinals discuss methods to prevent future women from becoming pope saying,

How shall we guard our Mother Churches Brightness
From new pollutions; fence her holy Throne
From new Impostors: from all future Sorceries?³⁹

The Cardinals' concern about future women infiltrating their ranks illustrated the severity of such a concept. By bringing the myth of Pope Joan to the stage, Settle capitalized on how the myth undermined the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, Settle enhanced the anti-Catholic nature of the myth by adding details to associate Pope Joan with other notorious women. Since the myth itself could be summarized in less than a paragraph, Settle had ample opportunity to adjust parts of the story to exploit worrying religious and political issues of the time. This included an entirely new character and set of plot lines, but Settle also made slight adjustments closely tied to the Pope Joan myth itself. For instance, Settle's Joan links herself with Semiramis, a Babylonian queen.⁴⁰ As Joan considers being selected as pope she says,

Yes, and serious too.
Could I but reach the Roman Diadem;
I'd sit within my Romes seven Hills as glorious
As once the fam'd Semiramis within
Her Babylonian Towers. Her Female Hand
Did the worlds Scepter guide, and why not mine?
A Kingly Soul her borrowed manhood wore;
Whilst like a God she sate within her Cloud,

³⁹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 71.

⁴⁰ She was a ninth century BCE Assyrian queen. However, her story became legendary. "Sammu-Ramat | Queen of Assyria | Britannica," July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sammu-ramat>.

And moved her world beneath her.⁴¹

With this line, Joan compared herself to another legendary female ruler who, she claims, wore “borrowed manhood” like herself. This historical allusion also had the added benefit of associating Joan with the sinfulness and corruption of Babylon. Moreover, *The Female Prelate* contained twelve references to Joan as “whore,” one case even involving Joan disguising herself as a prostitute. The dual connection to Babylon and “whore” allowed Settle to draw upon public experiences and memories of the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelations brought to life in England’s annual pope burning pageants.⁴² While previously in the late sixteenth century, the Pope Joan myth had been connected to Queen Elizabeth while Queen Elizabeth had been uncharitably compared to the Whore of Babylon, Settle directly associated Pope Joan with the Whore of Babylon.⁴³ The Whore of Babylon evoked the Christian revulsion of lust and other gross sins:

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.⁴⁴

Additionally, *The Female Prelate* associated both Joan and Rome with the color scarlet furthering the Whore of Babylon allusion. English audiences would have recognized the Whore of Babylon from biblical associations and pope burning pageants. This association furthered the

⁴¹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 6.

⁴²The Whore of Babylon first appeared in these pope burning pageants in 1673.

Craig M. Rustici, “Gender, Disguise, and Usurpation: ‘The Female Prelate’ and the Popish Successor,” *Modern Philology* 98, no. 2 (2000): 271; Anonymous, *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon*.

⁴³ Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*, 69.

⁴⁴ Rev. 17: 4-5 KJV

anti-Catholic message of the play because it implied the Catholic Church let a woman as bad as the Whore of Babylon onto the papal seat.

Specific allusions in the Pope Joan myth played up connections to well-known contemporary Catholic women. The final scene in *The Female Prelate* would remind audiences of Elizabeth Cellier, a Catholic midwife infamous for her part in a supposed Catholic conspiracy called the Meal Tub Plot.⁴⁵ At the end of the play, when the cardinals discussed how to prevent another woman from taking the papal seat, they say

Card. 1.

Thus then the Coronation Porphyry,
On which Romes installed Bishop, Heavens
Lieutenant takes his great Commission,
Shall thro' it have that subtle concave form'd
Thro' which a reverend Matrons hand —

Card. 2.

Now by yon Stars inspired by some good Angel▪
I guess thy glorious purpose.⁴⁶

This dialogue clearly referenced the perforated chair, seemingly credible evidence in the eyes of a Protestant public for the existence of Pope Joan even in 1680.⁴⁷ Additionally, the suggestion of a matron reaching through a perforated seat, which might resemble a birthing chair, would invoke the idea of a midwife such as Cellier. Of course, this dialogue also provided some much-needed humor at the end of this play, what with the “glorious purpose” and “thro’ which a reverend Matrons hand--” which simply begged to have an actor reach through the seat to make lewd gestures. However, a politically informed audience could read both the evidence for the truth of Pope Joan and the allusion to Elizabeth Cellier even while laughing.

⁴⁵ Rustici, “Gender, Disguise, and Usurpation,” 276.

⁴⁶ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 71.

⁴⁷ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, 19.

The Pope Joan myth also had the advantage of being both well-known and highly debated. The intrigue of having *The Female Prelate* be a “history” likely drew Settle to this myth. As mentioned in the introduction, the myth had circulated in popular prints and culture since the thirteenth century and was widely believed until the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ Between 1670-1690 at least four unique texts devoted to the myth of Pope Joan were published in London.⁴⁹ Of these texts, only Settle’s was a play. His audience may have been familiar with the myth through one of more of these publications. A general familiarity with the myth could have drawn audiences, a factor which Settle may have considered. Such audience members would have been excited to see such a salacious “history” staged and produced. The question of credulity was beside the point.

Benefits of a play

In order to understand what the dramatic form of *The Female Prelate* accomplished in 1680 let us compare Settle’s work with the other text circulating at the time, a short book entitled *A Present for a Papist, or, The Life and Death of Pope Joan Plainly Proving out of the Printed Copies and Manuscripts of Popish Writers and Others, that a Woman called Joan was Really Pope of Rome, and was there Deliver’d of a Bastard son in the Open Street, as She went in Solemn Procession* printed in London in 1675.⁵⁰ The text’s use of the vernacular English rather than Latin indicated it targeted a common, not scholarly, audience. Additionally, the printing

⁴⁸ Noble, “Why Pope Joan?”

⁴⁹ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*; Anonymous, *The History of Pope Joan and the Whores of Rome*; Ware, *Pope Joan, or, An Account Collected out of the Romish Authors Proved to Be of the Clergy and Members of That Church, before Luther Left Her Doctrine, and Also of Romish Authors, since Luther Departed from Rome*; Settle, *The Female Prelate*.

⁵⁰ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*.

information, “LONDON, Printed for T.D. and are to be sold at the Ship in St. Mary Axe, and by most Booksellers, 1675” suggests the author hoped it would circulate widely, though this text was much longer than the common pamphlet.⁵¹

While similar in source material and content, *A Present for a Papist* and *The Female Prelate* vary significantly in purpose and form. Still, both works aim to further anti-Catholic sentiment and some of the arguments made in *A Present for a Papist* are similar to the action which occurs in *The Female Prelate*. *A Present for a Papist* contended to be a revision of an earlier book published in 1602 described as, “Dialogue wise, between a Protestant and a Papist, wherein all the arguments that can be produced to prove the nullity of a Pope Joan, are fully and plainly answered.”⁵² According to the author, the exceeding scarcity of the original book motivated them to produce and print this reworking. However, *A Present for a Papist* was not a simple reprint. Instead, the author chose to “alter the method only, but not the matter,” presenting a series of arguments instead of a dialogue.⁵³ Additionally, *A Present for a Papist* included an account of the life of Pope Joan as translated from Platina’s work *Lives of the Popes*.⁵⁴ Despite the slight change in form, *A Present for a Papist* made its purpose abundantly clear in the full title, preface, and argument throughout: To prove Pope Joan existed.

⁵¹ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, front piece.

⁵² I was unable to find a 1602 printing of such a book, but this book printed in 1610 could be the source material. Alexander Cooke, *Pope Ioane A Dialogue Betveene a Protestant and a Papist. Manifestly Prouing, That a Woman Called Ioane Was Pope of Rome: Against the Surmises and Obiections Made to the Contrarie, by Robert Bellarmine and Cæsar Baronius Cardinals: Florimondus Ræmondus, N.D. and Other Popish Writers, Impudently Denying the Same. By Alexander Cooke.* - *Early English Books Online - ProQuest* (London, England, 1610), <http://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240864581/99844279/F1B258C496494374PQ/1?accountid=10598>.

⁵³ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, preface.

⁵⁴ There was another translation of *Lives of the Popes* printed in 1685 which also contained an account of John VIII, or rather Joan. Platina’s account indicates slight disbelief in the myth of Pope Joan. Platina, *The Lives of the Popes from the Time of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, to the Reign of Sixtus IV*, trans. Paul Rycout (London, England, 1685), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2240891103/citation/E9EDA5591B6F4C0CPQ/1>.

A Present for a Papist utilized a number of rhetorical strategies to pursue this goal. First, even though the author of *A Present for a Papist* wrote in the vernacular, *A Present for a Papist* employed techniques to convey itself as a well-researched, almost scholarly, argument for the historical reality of Pope Joan. For instance, when the author made a point which relied heavily on an account or direct quote from another text, he occasionally provided a printed note in the margin indicating where the quote could be found. Additionally, if the source material was in Latin, the quotes maintained the original language. Crucially however, English translations directly following the Latin quotations mitigated any Latin reading requirements for the audience. The author also coupled these translations with explanations of the relevance of the quotation to the argument. For example, when providing evidence for the existence of the perforated chair used to check the sex of the pope, it read

which is likewise testified by^[k] *Laonicus Chalcho condilas*; for upon relation of that story he thus proceeds, *Qua propter ne decipiantur iterum sed rem cognoscant neque ambigent Pontificis creati virilia tangunt & qui tangit acclamat: Mas nobis Dominus est*: that is, least they should be deceived again, they make proof of the Popes manhood by feeling, and he that feel-makes it known by crying our Lord and Master is a Man. And *Sabellinus* writing the same matter, says, *There is to be seen at this day in the Popes Pallace a Marble Chair wherein the new Pope presently upon his election is set down, that as he sits, the lowest Deacon may make trial of his humanity by touching or feeling.*⁵⁵

[k] De rebus Turcicis lib. 6. pag. 98.

This argument drew the reader in with the great number of sources, both English and Latin, which present Joan as real. The inclusion of a side note also gave the reader a sense that they could theoretically check the author on their quotation, thereby increasing its weight in the argument, even if such an exercise in quotation verification might not have been realistically possible. The question of literacy in Restoration England remains relatively opaque since most

⁵⁵ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, 19.

of the information current historians have surrounding reading habits necessarily takes the form of the written word, but reading may have been a more common skill than writing.⁵⁶ The inclusion of both Latin quotes and translations made this book more accessible to the public. However, it would be remiss to overstate the accessibility of this source as the length, 165 pages, likely kept it off the pamphlet market.

In addition to arguments which relied on scholarly sensibilities and credible sources, *A Present for a Papist* also aimed to reveal the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church in order to undermine the reliability of Catholic sources which provided evidence against the myth of Pope Joan. These points had a dual benefit of rationalizing how Joan may have entered the papacy and undermining the credibility of the Catholic Church in general. For example, the author addressed a letter which Pope Leo the 9th wrote to the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1020. This letter scolded the Patriarch for promoting eunuchs to the priesthood and, as a result, accidentally allowing a woman to become a Patriarch. According to the author, papists against Pope Joan contended that Pope Leo the 9th would have never written this type of letter if Pope Joan existed because the Patriarch could have turned around the admonishment. This argument supplied an opening for a five-page discourse on the vices and hypocrisy of the Catholic church. It wrote,

This argument is very weak in my judgment, for any to presume in this, that *Leo would never object that against Constantinople*, whereof *Rome* it self might be convinced; to prove this no unanswerable argument, it is usual for the Papists to object that against others, whereof they themselves stand most guilty; and with the Proverb, *cry Whore first*. How do they exclaim against the Clergy of *England* for want of Continency? and yet is it not well known, how their Priests, and Monks, like[g] fed horses, have neighed after their Neighbours Wives, and their Nuns have opened their feet (to use the[h] Prophets phrase when he speaketh of such like Light-skirts) to every one that passed by, and have multiplied their Whoredoms.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Gerald MacLean, "Literacy, Class, and Gender in Restoration England," *Text 7* (1994): 310–11.

⁵⁷ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, 131–32.

The Catholic Church called into question the sexual purity of the clergy of the Church of England, despite its own debauchery. By highlighting the sexual exploits of the Catholic clergy, this book underscored the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church. This argument had the added benefit of calling into question the general credibility of the Catholic Church. This quotation was the first in a long line of examples of the sexual vices of the Catholic Church. The author pulled from many other sources: writing that priests who do not commit such fornications are “made a laughing stock to the rest, and either called an Eunuch or a Sodomite,” and that “The Lay people are so convinced of the incontinence of all Priests, that, willingly they would not admit of a Parish Priest, unless he have a Whore of his own, that so they might preserve the Chastity of their own Wives; and yet fall short of their expectations, by reason of the lechery of the Priests.”⁵⁸ This section ends,

Again, they condemn us of ignorance, saying, we dare not dispute with them in matter of Religion, and if any of us are so confident, we are easily baffled, being not able to produce so many arguments in our own defence as our[m] Adversaries do for us, applauding themselves, and debasing us, and yet it is easy to prove that their Priests, and Monks are generally like the threescore thousand[n] *Ninivites*, who had not so much wit as to discern between their left hand, and their right.⁵⁹

Ostensibly, this section demonstrated the hypocrisy of the Catholic church to suggest that they would have reprimanded the Patriarch of Constantinople for female Patriarchs even if Pope Joan existed. However, it also laid out many issues of the Catholic Church and promoted anti-Catholicism based on the sinful fornication of the Catholic clergy. This section, much like the whole of *A Present for a Papist*, had a double purpose. The primary purpose was to prove Pope Joan existed but a second, equally important, purpose was to promote anti-Catholic sentiment.

⁵⁸ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, 133.

⁵⁹ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, 136.

The use of the myth of Pope Joan and deliberate anti-Catholicism connects *A Present for a Papist* and *The Female Prelate*. However, the differences between these two works highlight how *The Female Prelate* added to the discussion. Both of these pieces of work have an anti-Catholic slant, but their points utilized different rhetorical techniques. Where *A Present for a Papist* appealed to the logic of its audience, using a scholarly discussion of the veracity of Pope Joan to defame the Catholic Church, *The Female Prelate* does not even attempt to address the question of Pope Joan's reality. As discussed earlier, Settle specifically dismissed this question in his epistle dedicatory. For Settle, the myth need not be true. *The Female Prelate* branded itself as a history and a tragedy, implying a vague notion of truth with the word history but reserving dramatic liberty in the tragic form. This space allowed Settle to appeal to the audience's emotions by introducing new sympathetic characters and drawing connections to political issues. Additionally, Settle could have used the Roman ecclesiastical setting of his play to "show" the hypocrisy of the Catholic hierarchy. Through lavish set design and visual spectacle, Settle could imply the greed and corruption of the Catholic Church. While Settle also addressed some of these issues in dialogue, the setting could have created a more direct visual and emotional understanding of the Catholic Church's hypocrisy than a book, such as *A Present for a Papist*, ever could. Where *A Present for a Papist* gave citations for sexual depravity in the Catholic clergy, *The Female Prelate* simply showed Joan, disguised as a whore, bribing priests to allow her to pass freely. Where *A Present for a Papist* described the perforated seat, *The Female Prelate* presented a fictionalized discussion of its creation, emphasizing the absurdity and lewdness of such an item. These moments took advantage of the dramatic form to underscore similar points as those made in *A Present for a Papist* in a more concrete way.

Furthermore, the dramatic form of *The Female Prelate* likely gave the story a wider, more influential audience than *A Present for a Papist*. Even though 1680 marked a moment when theater, and specifically the Theater Royal Drury Lane, struggled, *The Female Prelate* enjoyed remarkable success.⁶⁰ Despite difficult times for the theater, The King's Company and its rival The Duke's Company merged just two years later, the success of *The Female Prelate* meant it likely benefited from a large audience.⁶¹ One can get an idea of the composition and size of the audience by the seating arrangements. Described in 1698 by Henri Mission, a visitor from France,

The Pit is an Amphitheater, fill'd with Benches without Backboards, and adorn'd and cover'd with green Cloth. Men of Quality, particularly the younger Sort, some Ladies of Reputation and Vertue, and abundance of Damsels that haunt for Prey, sit all together in this Place, Higgledy-piggledy, chatter toy, play, hear, hear not. Farther up, against the Wall under the first Gallery and just opposite to the Stage, rises another Amphitheater, which is taken up by Persons of the best Quality, among whom are generally very few Men. The Galleries, whereof there are only two Rows, are fill'd with none but ordinary People, particularly the Upper one.⁶²

While Mission wrote this description nearly thirty years after the production of *The Female Prelate*, it still indicates how the theater attracted people from many different social standings, both high and low. The size of the theater and attraction it held provided an ample and diverse audience for *The Female Prelate*.

⁶⁰ Don-John Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne and Nahum Tate," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 382, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663400.ch22>.

⁶¹ Walter Macqueen-Pope, *Theatre Royal, Drury Lane*. (London, England: Allen & Co, 1945), 65, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE001441395>; Brian Dobbs, *Drury Lane: Three Centuries of the Theatre Royal, 1663-1971* (London: Cassell, 1972), 60, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE000069981>.

⁶² A. M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History: Twenty-Five Centuries of Stage History in More than 300 Basic Documents and Other Primary Material*, Annotated edition (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), chap. VII The Restoration Theater, 8.

In addition to large numbers of people, The Theater Royal also attracted politically important and influential Londoners. The theater had close ties to the court. Due to laws put in place at the beginning of the Restoration, only The Duke's Theater and The Theater Royal had patents which allowed them to put on dramas such as *The Female Prelate*.⁶³ Other theaters in London were restricted to comedy, pantomime, and melodrama. Also, King Charles II directly engaged with the theater. Not only did he license the theaters when he came to power after the death of Cromwell, but Charles II had an interest in how theaters operated. He insisted female parts be played by women rather than boys.⁶⁴ Moreover Charles II, and many in his court, attended the theater often.⁶⁵ The interest of the king likely drew general popularity from amongst the politically and socially prominent. Other members of the court, including the Earl of Rochester and the Earl of Mulgrave, also supported the theater in the 1670s, both writing prologues for Settle's previous work and supporting other productions.⁶⁶ The interest of such prominent members of court likely drew audience members who, while willing to see an anti-Catholic play, might not have purchased a book on the matter. The written word was an important part of the political and public sphere as the great increase of wage earners resulted in more people living and working in the city. This meant that more people were able to purchase and consume the written word than just 60 years before.⁶⁷ However, a production at The Theater

⁶³ Deborah C. Payne, "Patronage and the Dramatic Marketplace under Charles I and II," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 143, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3508484>.

⁶⁴ Ronald Hutton, *Charles the Second: King of England, Scotland, and Ireland, Charles the Second* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 185, <http://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198229117.001.0001/acprof-9780198229117>.

⁶⁵ Payne, "Patronage and the Dramatic Marketplace under Charles I and II," 140.

⁶⁶ The Earl of Mulgrave was actually a patron to both Settle and Dryden at different times, despite the rivalry between the two playwrights. Paul Hammond, "Dryden, John (1631–1700), Poet, Playwright, and Critic," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, February 11, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8108>.

⁶⁷ Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 282, <https://doi.org/10.1086/499788>.

Royal addressed court attendees directly and a printing of the play entered into the wider printed literature market shortly afterwards.

The Female Prelate also drew interested theatergoers based on Settle's reputation for dramatic sets and spectacular staging. Settle's first big success in 1673, *The Empress of Morocco*, made its name through incredible staging with elaborate palace scenes, fleets of ships, and dramatic assassinations.⁶⁸ *The Female Prelate* would not have failed these high expectations. While the plot provided drama, the stage directions indicate incredible special effects and scenes as well. First, most of the play takes place in the private apartments of the pope, a court, and a prison. Both the private apartment of the pope and the court could have been lavishly decorated scenes, designed to give off an aura of opulence and greed. This sort of scene design could have served the dual purposes of emphasizing Catholic greed and keeping the audience interested in the play. While the prison lacked the opulent spectacle of a court or private chambers, it made up for its lack of opulence by having some of the most dramatic stage directions. For instance,

*The Ghost of the old Duke of Saxony rises with a burning Taper in his hand./Look, look!/ Here the Ghost with his Taper touches a train of fire above him, which immediately writes upon the Wall, in Capital letters in a bloody fire, the word MURDER; which continues burning some time.*⁶⁹

This would have undoubtedly been a sight to behold captivating an audience while also promoting anti-Catholic views.

Finally, when comparing *A Present for a Papist* and *The Female Prelate*, it is worth noting when these two pieces about Pope Joan were published and played. *A Present for a Papist* appeared in 1675 prior to when the building anti-Catholic sentiments in England came to a head

⁶⁸ Abigail Williams, "Settle, Elkanah (1648–1724), Playwright," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, October 4, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25128>.

⁶⁹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 50.

with the Exclusion Crisis in 1678. In contrast, The Theater Royal produced *The Female Prelate* at the height of the Exclusion Crisis. This is not to say that *A Present for a Papist* was not timely, the book took advantage of a resurgence in public concern surrounding Catholics ignited by the heir presumptive James admitting his Catholicism just two years before the book's publication. Still, while *A Present for a Papist* justified anti-Catholic sentiment and promoted itself with this sentiment, it does not appear to have a concerted political agenda. On the other hand, five years later when *The Female Prelate* was produced, the market for political statements had grown substantially. *The Female Prelate* capitalized on that market.

Chapter 2

The Female Prelate as Political Rhetoric

The Scene opens, and discovers a Stake and Faggots, with Priests with Lighted Torches to kindle the Fire, and the Rabble hurrying Saxony to the Fire.

Sax.

Burn at a Stake, doom'd like a Slave, a Traytor!
 Farewel thou Royal rank Church Whore, farewel,
 Live and reign on, yes hot Inchantress live
 Romes universal Teeming, Fruitful Prostitute:
 Brood on Romes cursed Chair, brood like a hatching Basilisk:
 Entail thy Lust t'a thousand Generations,
 And warm the Nest for all thy bloody Successors:
 May not that Beast of Prey, a Pope, succeed thee,
 But be thy Bastard, Not a Cell nor Cloyster
 But be thy Brothel.
 And not a fawning Cardinal but thy Bawd:
 And lest thy hopeful progeny shoul fail,
 Mix thy black Lust with some engendring Devil,
 And people thy curst Rome with Imps and Goblins.
 And to employ all Hells whole stock of Fire,
 May all thy race be Cardinals, Popes, Abbots,
 Monks, Friars, Priests and all be damn'd together.

Rabble.

Burn him, burn him. [Scene shuts.⁷⁰

From the climax of *The Female Prelate*:

⁷⁰ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 70.

Flames from lighted torches cast long shadows across the walls of the theater. The crowd drags a man towards the stake where he will be burned. They beat and batter a righteous man, a duke who is pursuing justice for the murder of his father. After all his torments in this play -- his father poisoned, his wife ravished and killed, unjust imprisonment and tricked into defiling his marriage bed -- he meets his reward: Death by fire. While the crowd at The Theater Royal in 1680 was a boisterous one, filled with many Londoners seeking pleasure and entertainment, this scene raised a pressing question for the onlookers: Is this the fate of a pious Catholic ruler?

In the context of England's succession crisis at the time, this question struck a worrisome chord. While theater in general, and Restoration theater in particular, was often informed by mainstream political views and major events, *The Female Prelate* expressed disguised political views in order to avoid censorship.⁷¹ In telling the story of Pope Joan, *The Female Prelate* commented subtly but critically on the political crisis facing the English crown. Additionally, connections between the playwright and the Earl of Shaftesbury, a leading figure in the newly emerging Whig Party, implied the political messages of this play were carefully crafted. In many ways, *The Female Prelate* acted as political rhetoric furthering the goals of the Whig Party, a party bent on preventing James, the Catholic heir to the throne, from succeeding his brother, King Charles II. Finally, as a work of drama, *The Female Prelate*, allowed the story to play skillfully upon the audience's emotions and draw sympathy for its political-religious message. Overall, Settle crafted an important piece of anti-Catholic Whig political rhetoric tailor made for audiences in the middle of the Exclusion Crisis.

⁷¹ Susan J. Owen, "Restoration Drama and Politics: An Overview," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 126, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663400.ch8>.

The Playwright

Who wrote this play? What political connections did he bring to bear? A brief look at Elkanah Settle and the epistle dedicatory of *The Female Prelate* allows one to draw immediate connections back to the Whig Party. Settle had become a commercially successful dramatist in the 1670s. He first rose to popularity in 1670 with his play *Cambyses* and almost immediately afterwards received patronage from significant courtiers including the Duchess of Monmouth and the Earl of Rochester. Settle continued successfully for a few years however by 1677 he lost the favor of the court and many of his courtly connections dissipated.⁷²

Likely as a result of this loss of favor, in 1679 Settle began to connect himself directly to the Whig Party. Using the spectacular mechanical effects for which he was known, he organized the Whig's popular annual anti-Catholic pope-burning pageant in November 1680.⁷³ Soon after in 1681, Settle wrote a Whig pamphlet which directly addressed "the character of a popish successor" and outlined difficulties which might arise from a Catholic king.⁷⁴ Settle also replied to John Dryden's famous attack on the Whigs, *Absalom and Achitophel*.⁷⁵ Even though Settle would not stay aligned with the Whigs, he changed his political allegiance just a few years later, he wrote the incredibly anti-Catholic play *The Female Prelate* while associated with the Whig Party.⁷⁶ Moreover, Settle tied *The Female Prelate* to the Whig Party through the epistle dedicatory.

⁷² Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne and Nahum Tate," 382.

⁷³ Rustici, "Gender, Disguise, and Usurpation," 271.

⁷⁴ Settle, *The Character of a Popish Successour, and What England May Expect from Such a One Humbly Offered to the Consideration of Both Houses of Parliament, Appointed to Meet at Oxford, on the One and Twentieth of March, 1680/1*.

⁷⁵ Williams, "Settle, Elkanah (1648–1724), Playwright."

⁷⁶ Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne and Nahum Tate," 382.

In writing the epistle dedicatory of *The Female Prelate*, Settle courted the favor and patronage of one of the most important leading figures of the newly developing Whig Party, the Earl of Shaftesbury. Starting in 1679, Shaftesbury emerged as a leading figure in the Whig Party. He also likely drove the production of political rhetoric in support of the Whig Party considering his communication with a number of Whig printers.⁷⁷ Additionally, even though in the epistle Settle professes to be “a Stranger to your Lordship,” playwrights often made deliberate decisions to dedicate their work to sponsors.⁷⁸ The dedication suggests at the very least a connection to the Earl of Shaftesbury and at the greatest some type of patronage. Considering Shaftesbury also employed Settle for the pope-burning pageant in 1680, one of the grandest on record costing 1000 pounds to produce, Settle likely wrote *The Female Prelate* with this Whig leader in mind.⁷⁹ Without even analyzing the text of the play, this important connection signals a political motivation sympathetic to the Whigs.

Timing and the Exclusion crisis

Written and performed in 1680, *The Female Prelate* appeared at the height of the Exclusion Crisis. The Exclusion Crisis began in 1678 and concluded five years later, sparking off public fears and even hysteria surrounding a possible Catholic successor.⁸⁰ A politically informed audience would have immediately received *The Female Prelate* as a lively but worrying exploration of the possibly calamitous consequences of a Catholic king subordinated to

⁷⁷ Tim Harris, “Cooper, Anthony Ashley, First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683), Politician,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6208>.

⁷⁸ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, epistle dedicatory.

⁷⁹ Williams, “Settle, Elkanah (1648–1724), Playwright.”

⁸⁰ *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683.*, 1.

the whims of Rome and the pope. At the time King Charles II had no legitimate children of his own, making his brother James the heir presumptive. Normally this succession from brother to brother would not cause an issue, but James had publicly confessed his Catholicism in 1673. This confession contributed to growing anti-Catholic, anti-popery sentiment present in England at the time. The fears manifested as concerns about Catholicism as an outside threat from resurgent foreign Catholic countries, France in particular. Protestants also feared the Catholic minority living in England.⁸¹

However, due to King Charles II's good health, the issue of a Catholic successor did not become a crisis until 1678. That year an assassination plot, called the "Popish Plot", brought concerns about the succession into the public eye.⁸² This plot specifically took advantage of the suspicion surrounding the Catholic minority. The scare resulted in numerous measures including a mobilization of militia to search Catholic homes, the arrest of many Jesuits, and the exile of Catholics from London. Five Catholic lords were imprisoned and one even sentenced to death. This scare also spurred the creation of the first Whig Party. The Whig Party was dedicated to the exclusion of James from the succession. They pursued this goal through the creation and popularization of the so-called Exclusion bills.⁸³ The Earl of Shaftesbury's right-hand man in the House of Commons, Lord Russel, introduced one of the exclusion bills into the lower house in 1679.⁸⁴ All of this hysteria, public fears, and political machination were set off by a fictitious plot.

⁸¹ Rustici, "Gender, Disguise, and Usurpation," 271.

⁸² Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 358.

⁸³ J. R. Jones, *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683.*, University of Durham Publications (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 4, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE001375057>.

⁸⁴ Harris, "Cooper, Anthony Ashley, First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-1683), Politician."

Popish Plot

Settle utilized the same concerns in *The Female Prelate* which made the Popish Plot believable and triggered the Exclusion Crisis to push a Whig agenda. What was the Popish Plot? The Popish Plot-- a rumor elevated to public prominence-- was an alleged conspiracy by a group of Jesuits to assassinate Charles II and foment rebellion in England, Scotland, and Wales with the help of the French. Titus Oates, the informant and manufacturer of the Popish Plot, had a record for perjury and inconsistent accusations.⁸⁵ Despite this reputation, he convinced the Privy Council and the public of the truth of the Plot by taking advantage of anti-Catholic sentiment. Charles II did not believe Oates due to his inability to describe people he claimed to know, but the Privy Council and then later the Parliament took it seriously.⁸⁶ The immediate investigations with little explanation unfortunately increased public concern. Further into the Exclusion Crisis, the House of Commons believed another unreliable witness. When the Catholic Lords were imprisoned, they could not be tried for treason because British law required two witnesses. When William Bedloe, “self-confessed scoundrel,” stepped up, the House of Commons hailed him as a hero and allowed the trial to go forward.⁸⁷ Additionally, even though Titus Oates completely exonerated heir presumptive James from the Popish Plot, the Whigs saw James as a threat because of his religion. Many believed that James’ Catholicism motivated the Jesuits to form the (fictitious) plot because it would result in a Catholic king and possibly force the return of the English Church to Catholicism.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Alan Marshal, “Oates, Titus (1649–1705), Informer,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, January 3, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20437>.

⁸⁶ Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 359.

⁸⁷ Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 362.

⁸⁸ Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 361.

Despite evidence against the reality of the Popish Plot as presented by Titus Oates and then William Bedloe, many still considered the plot a credible threat to the monarch. Why? First, the Anglican majority of England feared the country's Catholic minority, the fear stirred repeatedly since the Counter Reformation and exacerbated anew in the 1670s. Second, historical plots by Catholic dissidents were well-known and a new source of anxiety with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Third, the Whig Party cleverly manipulated both of these facts and public opinion to keep the public at a fever pitch in order to further the exclusion agenda.

Anti-Catholic Sentiment and a Bevy of Plots

Well into the late seventeenth century the resilient Catholic minority in England aroused a general fear in the political class and public. The fear of a popish plot, any Catholic plot to derail the English government, had been fairly constant since the formation of the Anglican Church.⁸⁹ Multiple aggressive actions on the part of the Catholic Church contributed to this sentiment in the late 16th and early 17th century. Actions such as the papal excommunication of Elizabeth I in 1570, the assassination of the French King Henri III by a Catholic fanatic in 1589, and the gunpowder plot of 1605 all made the fear of popery particularly intense.⁹⁰ The Catholic Reformations around the same time also presented a threat to the English. While many of these Catholic Reformations were ongoing and not directly tied to the Protestant Reformation the Catholic Church enacted some measures to counter Protestantism and return lands to

⁸⁹ Newton E. Key and Joseph P. Ward, "Divided into Parties': Exclusion Crisis Origins in Monmouth," *The English Historical Review* 115, no. 464 (2000): 1166.

⁹⁰ Jacqueline Rose, "Robert Brady's Intellectual History and Royalist Antipopery in Restoration England on JSTOR," accessed April 20, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20108305>.

Catholicism.⁹¹ For instance, the Catholic Church attempted to return other non-Catholic territories to Catholicism during the period of the Thirty Years War which ended in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia.⁹² Therefore the English were alert to any attempts to convert the country back to Catholicism.

Political concerns aroused by religious minority status was not confined to just Catholics. The creation of the Anglican Church further intertwined religion and politics in a society where they were already closely tied. Furthermore, since the Restoration included the restoration of the Anglican Church, religious affiliation indicated loyalty to the state.⁹³ Dissenters or nonconformists, people of any denomination who refused to conform to the Anglican religion, concerned the state because they might cause another civil war. This worry also applied to Protestant denominations, especially Presbyterians.⁹⁴

Still, such fears about Catholic recusants were actively revived in the mid-1670s. Wales seemed particularly vulnerable to Catholic plots as the Catholic minority in certain towns reached about 6 percent.⁹⁵ This was sufficiently high that certain Welsh politicians claimed their county was “half papist.”⁹⁶ Welsh leaders feared the Catholic minority would rise up against the

⁹¹ Adriano Prospero and Robert E. Shillenn, “Catholic Reformation,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford University Press, 1996), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195064933.001.0001/acref-9780195064933-e-0254>.

⁹² Mark U. Edwards and Jr, “Reformation,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford University Press, 1996), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195064933.001.0001/acref-9780195064933-e-1172>.

⁹³ Chris Petrakos, “‘Those Times Can Tell The Story’: The Anglican Reformation, Henry VIII’s Succession Statutes, and England’s Exclusion Crisis, 1679-1681,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 84, no. 4 (2015): 395.

⁹⁴ Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation, and Reform, 1660–1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese, Restoration, Reformation, and Reform, 1660–1828* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 183, <http://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198208303.001.0001/acprof-9780198208303>.

⁹⁵The towns referenced were Monmouth and Abergavenny. Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536-1990* (London ; New York : Longman, 1992., 1992), 115, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE000968640>.

⁹⁶ Sir Trevor Williams claimed Monmouth was half papist in 1671. Key and Ward, “‘Divided into Parties,’” 1166.

Protestant majority. Catholics might have had motivation for these sorts of actions given the Test Acts. The Test Acts, including the 1673 “Act for preventing Dangers which may happen from Popish Recusant” effectively prevented Catholics from holding public office.⁹⁷ This fear of unsatisfied Catholics taking deadly action was so great that in 1676 a newsletter writer, Mr. Coleman, dedicated much of a letter to “the world of stories of popish plots” in an attempt to demonstrate the ludicrous nature of the fear of a popish plot.⁹⁸ Titus Oates’ claim that the Jesuits would poison the king and the Catholics of London would murder the Protestants played on both the concerns about a large Catholic minority and the general fear of popish plots.⁹⁹

In addition to playing on the widespread fear of a popish plot, Titus Oates' claims seemed plausible due to a history of Catholic plots against the English government ever since the Gunpowder Plot. In 1605 a group of Catholic men attempted to kill the king, the House of Commons, and the House of Lords by setting up an explosion during the ceremonial opening of parliament. Named for the 36 barrels (approximately 1 ton) of gunpowder the conspirators planted in a cellar beneath parliament, the Gunpowder Plot centered on returning England to Catholicism.¹⁰⁰ The rationale behind this plot, given by the conspirators, was that the Spanish would not support the English Catholics’ goal to restore Catholicism and a Catholic monarch. Therefore, the plotters needed to personally make a move. In addition to literally blowing up the seat of government while occupied, the plot also had a secondary aspect: a Catholic uprising in

⁹⁷This act required those who would hold public office to say oaths against transubstantiation and receive the sacrament from the Church of England, both of which would not be possible for Catholics.

John Raithby, ed., “Charles II, 1672: An Act for Preventing Dangers Which May Happen from Popish Recusants. | British History Online,” in *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-80* (Great Britain Record Commission, 1819), <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp782-785>.

⁹⁸ Mr. Coleman was likely Edward Coleman, the secretary to the Duke and Duchess of York. He was seized and executed in 1678 in the popish plot hysteria.

Key and Ward, “Divided into Parties,” 1166.

⁹⁹ Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Nicholls, “Fawkes, Guy (Bap. 1570, d. 1606), Conspirator,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/9230>.

the midlands. The plot nearly succeeded, only discovered by the court due to an anonymous letter sent to Lord Monteaule, warning him against the opening of parliament.

Parliament considered this plot so dangerous that they instituted the “Observance of 5th November Act 1605,” also known as the “Thanksgiving Act,” to annually commemorate the thwarting of the plot.¹⁰¹ It ordered that special church services be held on the 5th of November and that the Act be read out as a reminder of the plot. Not repealed until 1859, this act remained central to the observances right through the 1670s. Indeed, Londoners celebrated the victory over Catholic traitors through bonfires, burning effigies, and recounting the story of the Gunpowder Plot. A pamphlet from 1673, *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon* includes a retelling of the gunpowder plot and its discovery. It also included a description of how many celebrated on the previous November the fifth with the bonfires being so numerous in London that it was, “as if they had been but one Hearth, and the Fire-works flying in such numbers, that the Serpents flew like Bees through the Ayre, and could scarce have room for one another to pass.”¹⁰² The 1673 celebration had a new addition, an effigy of the Whore of Babylon. The combination of the Act and the yearly bonfires resulted in widespread knowledge of the Gunpowder Plot even 74 years after it occurred. In comparison to the Gunpowder Plot the Popish Plot might seem of relatively small scope, but the assassination of a monarch nevertheless concerned many.

The Popish Plot also led to the “discovery” of more alleged plots, only fueling the credibility of a wider threat to the monarchy. Thomas Dangerfield invented evidence of the so-called Meal Tub Plot, a Presbyterian plot which implicated the Earl of Shaftesbury in plans to

¹⁰¹ “Thanksgiving Act,” 1606, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/parliamentaryauthority/the-gunpowder-plot-of-1605/collections/thanksgiving-act/>.

¹⁰² Anonymous, *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon*.

overthrow Charles II.¹⁰³ Catholic midwife Elizabeth Cellier met Dangerfield and realized this evidence could be used in support of the Catholic cause. Cellier connected Dangerfield to her sponsor Lady Powis who then gave him access to the king. However, once Dangerfield had an audience, he changed his story to accuse the Catholics of fabricating the Presbyterian plot to hide a real Catholic plot to assassinate the king. The evidence? Papers found in Elizabeth Cellier's meal tub that Dangerfield had forged and given to her himself.¹⁰⁴ Like Titus Oates, Dangerfield capitalized on the fear of Catholic plots. Dangerfield got what he wanted: a pension and a pardon. However, when Cellier was taken to court for the plot she showed Dangerfield was an unreliable witness and was quickly acquitted.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Cellier then published her account of the Meal Tub Plot in *Malice Defeated*.¹⁰⁶ This swiftly got her many responses in the form of pamphlets and another trial, this time for libel. Cellier's publication of *Malice Defeated* and the many pamphlet responses widely publicized the Meal Tub Plot. This plot, which sprung up in the wake of the Popish Plot, only increased the public concern surrounding plots.

Just the general anti-Catholicism and fear of plots would be enough to convince the public and many in power of the truth of the Popish Plot, but it required help to lead to a crisis. The newly formed Whig Party spurred on this process by taking advantage of these sentiments to push the exclusion agenda. Some of those already in government stood to gain from the exclusion of James or were politically in favor. For instance, the Duke of Monmouth possibly

¹⁰³Whether this was of his own volition or rather after being prompted by the Catholic group is unclear. *The First Whigs* suggests that Cellier was actually looking for someone to fill this role of informant such a Catholic counterattack against the Whigs. Jones, *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683.*, 109; Helen King, "Cellier, Elizabeth (Fl. 1668–1688), Midwife," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4990>.

¹⁰⁴ Alan Marshal, "Dangerfield, Thomas (1654–1685), Informer," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7109>.

¹⁰⁵It was also revealed that the earlier pardon for Dangerfield did not cover his previous felonies. King, "Cellier, Elizabeth (Fl. 1668–1688), Midwife."

¹⁰⁶ Cellier, *Malice Defeated*.

stood to gain a spot in the succession, being the popular favorite for heir if the exclusion bills succeeded.¹⁰⁷ A different section of the Whigs, the ‘country opposition’, were instead more generally disillusioned with the current royal court and were also concerned for “the Defence of the Protestant religion.”¹⁰⁸ Shaftesbury organized these factions to push the exclusion agenda. Even though the Whig Party at this time lacked cohesion by modern standards they still developed focused efforts to utilize the anti-Catholic sentiment to influence public opinion.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned earlier, Shaftesbury had contacts with printers in order to push pamphlets.

The Whig Party often relied on public support to help the exclusion agenda. They had to be careful about their agenda because it could very easily be considered anti-royalist.¹¹⁰ King Charles II had a relatively sympathetic view of Catholics, or at least his brother, and stood with the Tory Party. Charles II did not want his brother removed from the succession and, while he did not protect Catholics in London from measures to exile them from London, he protected his brother. Some historians argue the Exclusion Crisis was specifically exacerbated by King Charles II’s poor handling of the situation, but nonetheless the Whig Party had invested interest in expanding the public concern specifically because they opposed the king.¹¹¹ Keeping public concern at a fever pitch meant that when the King countered them the Whigs could organize petitions and public support. For instance, they used the Meal Tub Plot as an excuse to criticize the king for refusing to allow the newly elected Parliament to meet.¹¹² If the Whigs could

¹⁰⁷It is important to note that even with Monmouth’s claims to legitimacy the Whigs didn’t necessarily intend to place him on the throne.

Jones, *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683.*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683.*, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis*, 115.

¹¹⁰ This was recognized at the time, with some primary sources comparing the Whigs to those in parliament in 1640 who opposed the king and led to the English civil war. Anonymous, *Advice to the Men of Shaftesbury, or, A Letter to a Friend Concerning the Horrid Popish-Plot.*

¹¹¹ Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 361.

¹¹² They argued that no meeting of parliament meant that there could not be a thorough investigation of the plot. Jones, *The First Whigs; the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1683.*, 115.

maintain public concern, perhaps through a popular anti-Catholic play, they had better chances to continue pushing their agenda. With the connection between Shaftesbury, *The Female Prelate*, and the Whig Party's attempts to influence public support, it is reasonable to suspect that *The Female Prelate* holds a political agenda past simply retelling the myth of Pope Joan. This suspicion of a Whig agenda is only furthered upon analysis of the text itself.

Textual analysis of *The Female Prelate* from a Political point of view

The main Whig message of *The Female Prelate* lies not with the titular character of Pope Joan, but rather with a character which Settle created, the Duke of Saxony. Settle created this character, described in the dramatis personae as "at present a Guest in Rome, brought thither for the love of a beautiful Roman Lady called Angeline, to whom he is newly married," to inspire audience sympathy.¹¹³ The story revolved around this pious, capable Duke of Saxony falling victim to the intrigues and deceits of Rome and Pope Joan. While Pope Joan was a fascinating character and there are portions of her story which allude back to the political situation described, the inclusion of the Duke of Saxony and his part in the story results in a very distinct and deliberate message: A Catholic ruler is subject to the whims of the profoundly corrupt Catholic Church.

¹¹³ Settle, *The Female Prelate*.

A Duke on Trial, a Dangerous Affair

Right from the opening scene, the play makes it clear that audience sympathy lies not with Pope Joan, but with the victim of her machinations: the pious Duke of Saxony. The play opens on a scene of the Duke of Saxony and his wife, Angeline, newlywed and incredibly happy. Just one fact mars the happiness of Saxony: he saw Cardinal John (who is actually the titular character, Joan) and recognized Joan as his father's poisoner.¹¹⁴ The first act of the play centers around Saxony forcing a trial of Joan, a trial which highlights the Duke of Saxony's precarious position. Joan does not attempt to prevent the trial; indeed, she takes on a 'holier than thou' guise,

Lastly, I am a Church-man,
And should disgrace the Sacred Robe I wear,
Should I attempt to stop the course of Justice,
Or make the groaning Ghost of Saxony
Unsatisfied.¹¹⁵

However, it quickly becomes clear the Catholic church will not convict one of their own, even when guilty of murder. While Joan does go on trial, the tone shifts as soon as she reveals forged letters between an arch-heretic (Damasus) and the former Duke of Saxony. These letters implicate the former Duke of Saxony in raising an army and planning an attack on the "Gates of Rome, and lay the Scarlet prostitute in Ashes."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ For the duration of this discussion, I will be referring to the character that corresponds to the myth of Pope Joan as Joan and using she/her pronouns. Even though at separate points in the play Joan goes by cardinal John as part of her disguise, alternating between John and Joan can quickly become confusing.

¹¹⁵ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 14.

Notably, this forged letter supposedly sent by the arch-heretic associated the former Duke of Saxony with Protestantism. The rationale presented for attacking Rome within the letter reflected continued Anglican rejection of Roman primacy. The letter reads,

Continue still to believe, that Romes usurpt Supremacy, as it began by the grand Rebel Phocas, as it commenced by a Traitor, so it is maintained by an Impostor, whilst that very ground that falsly stiles it self the sacred Sheep-fold, is now made the publick Mart of Souls, the Royal Exchange for a Trade into Heaven, where Religion toils at the Mint, and Holiness sits at the Receipt of Custom, whilst the broad Seal for everlasting pardons is stampd in Gold¹¹⁷

This letter took issue with indulgences, pardons for sins sold by the Catholic Church. Protestants saw indulgences as facilitators of corruption in the Catholic Church and used the practice of indulgences as a justification for separating from the Catholic Church. Additionally, the Duke's homeland, Saxony, furthered his association with Protestantism. Saxony held connections not only to England's Saxon past, but also to Martin Luther.¹¹⁸ Martin Luther, the author of the Ninety-Five Theses and the instigator of the Protestant Reformation, was born and lived much of his life in Saxony.¹¹⁹

However, within the play and to the Catholic Church, these arguments pointed to an utterly corrupt papacy animated only by power, an unacceptable conclusion. Joan uses the letters to justify her murder of the former Duke of Saxony. At first the cardinals are surprised and horrified by the letters, asking, "bold Defendant, speak, how do you prove/ These monstrous Libels true; this League; these Letters Received by *Saxony*, and writ by *Damasus*."¹²⁰ Joan brings in witnesses, former servants to Damasus, to verify the letters. The young Duke of Saxony

¹¹⁷ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Rustici argues that the Duke of Saxony's resistance to popery and his transition to becoming a dissident to popery throughout the play projects both back to a "primitive Christian purity" and forward to "a cleansing northern Reformation." Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*, 143.

¹¹⁹ Matt Forster, "Martin Luther," Biography Reference Center, August 1, 2017.

¹²⁰ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 15.

attempts to defend his father, but is powerless to do so. Despite the young Duke of Saxony's protests and the convenient lack of letters from the former Duke of Saxony --Damasus had burned them-- the cardinals considered the letters sufficient evidence to acquit Joan. Furthermore, this flimsy evidence leads the court of cardinals to declare Joan a hero. They beckon for her to be embraced. This assassination promotes Joan in the eyes of the cardinals and leads to her election as pope.

To a London audience convinced of the Popish Plot and considering the prospect of a Catholic king in James, this depiction of a Catholic trial would have aroused concern. The play implied Rome could subject Catholic rulers to judgement at any moment. In the play a solo plotter murdered the former Duke of Saxony and, as a result, received both support and acclaim for the act. While the Catholic Church in the play did not suggest this murder, it certainly supported the perpetrator. This would have reminded audiences of the Popish plot and the Gunpowder Plot. While the Catholic Church did not involve itself with these plots, the English public assumed their support for plots which aimed to destroy the English Protestant government and reconvert England. Past this, the forged letter's references to indulgences evoked the sense that the Catholic Church condoned the murder of the former Duke because he espoused pseudo-Protestant beliefs. This played upon the English fear of Catholics targeting England or English monarchs due to their Protestant beliefs. Even though the audience later discovers Joan forged the letters, having written to Damasus during her time as the former Duke's private secretary, the idea that Catholics considered Protestant beliefs sufficient to warrant the murder of public officials and leaders scared the English public. These types of thoughts led to the widespread belief of popish plots. This situation invited the audience to make connections between the successful murder plot in this play and the widely believed Popish Plot and Meal Tub Plot.

Specific details in the play also furthered these connections. For instance, Joan's former role as the secretary and confessor of the former Duke of Saxony invoked reminders to Edward Coleman. Titus Oates directly implicated Edward Coleman, the former secretary to James the heir presumptive, in the Popish Plot. During the immediate reaction to the Popish Plot, the Privy Council ordered Coleman's house searched. His house contained letters written by Coleman in the mid-1670s to the confessor of the French King Louis XIV. The letters described details of intrigues Coleman attempted in order to advance the Catholic faith. While the letters revealed "nothing more than that James's former secretary was a self-important fool," they were treasonable.¹²¹ Coleman had also burned the more recent letters, which made it appear as if he had been part of the recent plot. Coleman hanged on December 3rd, 1678.¹²² Joan's former position as secretary in the play and burned letters reminded the audience of Coleman's treason. These forged letters would also be reminiscent of the forged correspondence in the Meal Tub Plot.¹²³ Overall, this trial implied that a solo plotter, a solo secretary, a solo priest can pass judgement on the king and take deadly action with little issue. It described a situation in which a traitorous plotter could take a treasonous action, easily escape repercussions, and even be rewarded.

Using Saxony as a voice for the concerned English man, Settle's play highlights the injustice of this Roman Catholic system of governance. Just after the verdict is given the young Duke of Saxony elaborates,

¹²¹ Hutton, *Charles the Second*, 360.

¹²² Andrew Barclay, "Colman [Coleman], Edward (1636-1678), Courtier," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5871>.

¹²³ Rustici argues that the fabricated evidence of a Whig Conspiracy from the meal tub plot would have directly offered a precedent for that which Joanna uses in the play. For audiences, both connections would probably stand out.

Rustici, "Gender, Disguise, and Usurpation," 275.

Sax.

Is this your Doom! Churchmen you call your selves;
 Is this a Church Reward for murder'd Majesty?
 Oh I could rave! but Lords, I'll reason calmly.
 Grant those false Libellers, and this poysoner honest.
 Yes, grant my Father that lewd thing they paint him:
 Nay more, suppose th'Almighty Rome has power
 To judge a King, and doom a Sovereign Head.

Card.

1. Suppose it, Saxon!¹²⁴

This interaction underscored the fact that this trial required a king to be judged by the Catholic Church. Therefore, Catholic kings cannot be truly sovereign. A Catholic king will always be subject to the whims of a corrupt church. This message in support of the Whigs cleverly avoided directly defaming the heir presumptive James.¹²⁵ Instead it implied the Catholic Church would use its power to make James, and thereby England, helpless. This tactic must have been effective because Settle used it again a year later in his pamphlet *The Character of a Popish successor, and what England may expect from such a one.*¹²⁶ In that piece Settle focused directly on the moral conundrums which would inevitably arise for a Catholic English monarch tasked with protecting the Church of England.

The Female Prelate never questioned the morality of the young Duke at all. Instead the play framed the Catholic Church as a direct threat to the monarchy. This posed a danger to Protestant monarchs, as indicated by the former Duke's murder, but the threat loomed larger for Catholic monarchs. Continuing in the play, the young Duke raises the next question on every one's mind. Why was there no public trial?

¹²⁴ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 17.

¹²⁵ Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*, 136.

¹²⁶ Settle, *The Character of a Popish Successour, and What England May Expect from Such a One Humbly Offered to the Consideration of Both Houses of Parliament, Appointed to Meet at Oxford, on the One and Twentieth of March, 1680/1.*

Sax.

Yes, suppose it, Priest.
 Were he a Criminal, why were not all
 Those intercepted Letters sent to Rome,
 And he as an Offender fairly tried¹²⁷

The answer: a public trial would have resulted in war and martyrs. Instead, the unnamed cardinal references the biblical story of David and Goliath, declaring,

The Churches strength
 Lies not in Spear, or Launce, or ponderous Steel.
 A Pebble slung from out a righteous hand
 May strike a Giant dead.¹²⁸

This directly implied what many already suspected, the Catholic Church condoned secret plots, including assassination, to advance their goals. This point further fueled the credibility of the Popish Plot and other conspiracies like it. This scene in *The Female Prelate* simply provided more evidence that the Catholic Church encouraged such a plot.

The Real Main Character

However, Whigs did not argue for the truth of an alleged Popish Plot. Instead, they argued that the threat of a popish plot warranted the removal of a Catholic heir from the succession. Where Act 1 of *The Female Prelate* brought to mind the Popish Plot and other assassination attempts, Act 2 goes further focusing on the dire circumstances of a Catholic ruler forced to disobey the Church. Joan imprisons the young Duke for blasphemy based on his defense of his father during the trial, the same dialogue which voiced the questions burning in the audience's mind. The young Duke's attempts to pursue justice within an unjust and corrupt

¹²⁷ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 17.

¹²⁸ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 18.

Church led not only to his own imprisonment but also to another outrageous outcome: the glorification of the murderer. This injustice sets him up for further abuses, including his death and that of his wife. If we consider the young Duke as an allegory for James and the former Duke of Saxony as an allegory for King Charles II, the picture becomes incredibly bleak. Had the Popish Plot been true and successful, Catholics would have murdered King Charles II, placing James on the throne. Then, following the implications of *The Female Prelate*, the Catholic Church would take advantage of James' religion and horribly misuse him. The play provided a dismal end to this scenario. A righteous ruler, virtuous and just, destroyed by his own religion. An avoidable scenario, if only the English parliament excluded James from the throne like the Whigs proposed.

This argument in the plot worked well because the tragedy in *The Female Prelate* relied primarily on the audience's sympathy with the young Duke of Saxony. While the Pope Joan myth allowed Settle to tap into a well-known myth and play with tropes and gender dynamics as I discuss below, the Duke of Saxony is the focal point of this play. Whereas moments of audience sympathy for Pope Joan were few and far between, the young Duke of Saxony and his wife Angeline evoke sympathy throughout. Moreover, the major plot points revolved around this young couple. The play both opened and climaxed with the young Duke of Saxony: starting with a loving scene between the young Duke and his wife and climaxing with his death, being burned as a heretic. If this play were solely about Joan, her death would have taken center stage. There could have been a fantastical papal procession punctuated with Joan's labor pains and closed by her brutal murder courtesy the Roman citizens. Settle's history of fantastical theater mechanics would have guaranteed a dazzling spectacle. Instead, the young Duke's immolation by "Monks,

Friars, Priests and all be damn'd together," holds pride of place in the climax.¹²⁹ Joan's death only warranted a short conversation between cardinals. This final conversation did occur in the closing scene, but only so it could drive home a key point in the message of the play: the Catholic Church was incapable of change.

This implication of an inability of the Catholic Church to change brought the entire argument of the play from its medieval setting into the Restoration context. When the cardinals discussed the corruption and taint Pope Joan brought upon the papal seat, their concern hinged on Joan's sex. Their focus was not directed to the terrible crimes Joan committed- the bribery, the forgery, the poisoning, the corruption- no, their focus was on her sex. Every terrible action Joan committed, including the murder of a monarch, would have been acceptable for a male Catholic. The young Duke of Saxony revealed all of Joan's crimes to both the public and the cardinals, but the cardinals responded by dismissing those crimes. The Catholic Church in this play dismissed all of the corruption Settle highlighted in order to agitate the English public. Only Joan's pregnancy caused her downfall. While corruption and treachery could be rooted out, the cardinals in the play chose to ignore it. They ignored systemic issues in favor of blaming an individual and her sex. Given that the Pope Joan myth was situated in the ninth century, this implied that the Catholic Church had a chance to correct the systemic issues addressed in this play and instead chose to perpetuate the corruption. This implied that, regardless of the time period, the Catholic Church held a huge amount of power over those within it and contained an ideology which prevented adjustments. Driving home the idea that the Catholic Church in 1680 was as corrupt, as violent, as terrible as the Catholic Church represented in the play. Considering

¹²⁹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 70.

the Exclusion Crisis revolved around the fear of a King beholden to such a church, that scenario would be terrifying indeed.

Why not Directly Comment on the Political Situation?

The Female Prelate effectively argued against a Catholic king; however, the argument lurks just beneath the surface of the play. This provides a question: Why not directly comment on the political situation? If Settle wanted to emphasize the peril of James' succession, why didn't he write directly about James? Or possibly make a mockery of the other political party, the Tories? Settle likely avoided this commentary for two main reasons. First, censorship posed a large issue for plays during the Exclusion Crisis. Second, the Whig goal of exclusion could very easily be seen as anti-royalist and even treasonous.

With the Exclusion Crisis came political unease and a hyper sensitivity towards any hint of sedition creeping into plays. According to *Drury Lane*, "Lee, Tate, and Crowne all had plays banned for their possible parallels with contemporary politics. And Dryden and Lee's *The Duke of Guise*, as loyal a work as could be wished, was delayed for months by the Lord Chamberlain suspicious that there were 'great persons' depicted in it."¹³⁰ Censorship was particularly effective at this point because there were only two major theaters to censor; as mentioned earlier, The King's Company and The Duke's Company had exclusive patents on dramas.¹³¹ Even though censorship affected many plays, the overall effect was that Whig plays were banned while Tory plays could go on. Censorship led to harder times for the theaters because Whigs could only

¹³⁰ Dobbs, *Drury Lane*, 57-58.

¹³¹ Payne, "Patronage and the Dramatic Marketplace under Charles I and II," 140.

respond to the plays by registering their “audible resentment.”¹³² So in addition to being one of the more anti-Catholic plays of the time period, *The Female Prelate* was also one of the few Whig plays to make it through censorship. Other Whig plays made it to the stage, but often with little success. For instance, Nathaniel Lee’s play *Lucius Junius Brutus* made it to the stage of The Duke’s Theater and was a theatrical success, but it got banned 6 days into the production for “very Scandalous Expressions and Reflections upon ye Government.”¹³³ Perhaps *The Female Prelate* succeeded in avoiding that fate because its entire message is wrapped up in allusions, connections, and implications. *The Female Prelate* also had the advantage of being played at the Theater Royal Drury Lane. Charles Killigrew, the Master of Revels and court censor in 1680, also happened to be the manager of The King’s Company which played at Drury Lane.¹³⁴ Given the monetary struggles of The King’s Company, a new play from a formerly popular playwright known for huge spectacle probably seemed like a good opportunity, even if the message slanted towards the Whigs.

Settle did not address the crisis directly because he needed to avoid censorship. This required Settle to trust his audience to have the sophistication necessary to read past his allegory. Moreover, Settle needed to be careful about what he wrote because the Whig message could, in radical cases, be seen as treasonous. The main goal of the party involved preventing an heir from being in the line of succession against the will of the king. This inherently limited royal power. This was abundantly clear to people at the time, especially since similar limits were discussed in

¹³² “At times in 1681, the company had to dismiss the audience and return their money because there were too few receipts to justify a performance.”
Dobbs, *Drury Lane*, 58.

¹³³ Susan J. Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 245,
<http://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198183877.001.0001/acprof-9780198183877>.

¹³⁴ R. O. Bucholz, “Killigrew, Charles (1655–1724/5), Theatre Manager and Master of the Revels,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, October 3, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15532>.

the build up to the Wars of the Three Kingdoms and the execution of Charles I in 1649. Tory writers utilized this in their writing. For instance, John Caryll, a Catholic nobleman imprisoned during the Popish Plot trials, wrote a satiric poem, “The Hypocrite,” directed at Shaftesbury implying that the Whig cries of popery served to allow Shaftesbury to defy the kings laws with impunity.¹³⁵ Another example, a 1681 pamphlet entitled *Advice to the men of Shaftesbury, or, A letter to a friend concerning the horrid Popish-Plot* specifically made parallels between the sentiments of the Whig Party and that of the Parliament involved in inciting English Civil War.

An excerpt,

these zealous Reformers say, they designed nothing but to make our King great; so did they in 40. They complain not against the King, but against his Evil Counsellors; so did they in 40. They would be content with Reformation; so said they in 40. But they will tell you, they mean now as they say; but how shall we know it?¹³⁶

This pamphlet indicated that Whigs could easily be represented as anti-royalist, or even as pushing the country towards a civil war. Settle certainly would have wanted to avoid these dangerous associations. A plot about the mistreatment of a Catholic ruler at the hands of the evil Catholic Church avoided anti-royalist associations much more effectively than any direct commentary ever could, while still supporting the Whig agenda. *The Female Prelate* gave arguments for exclusion of James without ever directly referencing the topic.

¹³⁵ The poem was not published until much later, in 1716, but it was written in 1679. S. J. Michael F. Suarez, “A Crisis in English Public Life: The Popish Plot, Naboth’s Vineyard (1679), and Mock-Biblical Satire’s Exemplary Redress,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2004): 530, <https://doi.org/10.1525/hlq.2004.67.4.529>.

¹³⁶ Anonymous, *Advice to the Men of Shaftesbury, or, A Letter to a Friend Concerning the Horrid Popish-Plot*.

Chapter 3

Female Roles and Gender Weaponized

The Female Prelate deliberately used the Pope Joan myth to comment on the political moment, but the myth inherently posed questions about gender as well. What happens when a woman assumes public power? How does she wield power over with those around her? By utilizing common theater gender tropes and stereotypes of the day, Settle used Pope Joan and the two other major female characters in *The Female Prelate* to answer these questions in a way that would disturb a contemporary audience. Furthermore, the skillful use of these conventional tropes and stereotypes helped Settle sharpen his political arguments.

Effective use of female characters on the Restoration stage relied upon a significant and recent change to theater: The introduction of actresses. The Restoration saw women on the English stage for the first time. Prior to the Restoration, boys and adolescent men played the female characters. However, in a demonstration of his involvement in theater, Charles II changed the law to allow women to act because he saw actresses during his exile in France and preferred

the style.¹³⁷ Possibly as early as December 1660, Restoration audiences witnessed women on the stage.¹³⁸ This introduction of women to the stage offered numerous different possibilities for the theater companies, the playwrights, and even the actresses themselves. From casting of women in female roles for Shakespeare rewrites to male roles written for women, the inclusion of women on the stage allowed playwrights and theater companies to play with the notions of gender and sexual desire in innovative ways. Moreover, the role of women on stage necessarily reflected and interacted with the gender norm. These historical currents presented themselves in the women of *The Female Prelate*.

Historical Context of Women in the Theater

The very presence of women on the Restoration stage opened up new possibilities for the interactions between the women on stage, the women in the audience, and the playwrights. The actresses occupied a non-traditional and even subversive role. They attracted much attention, drawing the eyes of theater goers of all classes. Both actresses and actors attracted the interest of nobles. For example, the actress Nell Gwynne became a mistress to King Charles II by 1669, only 6 years after she began her acting career. Her relationships were infamous, prior to her relationship with the King she engaged in an affair with Lord Buckhurst where he promised her 100 pounds a year, though it did not last long.¹³⁹ Still, her relationship with Charles II survived

¹³⁷ Raquel Serrano González and Laura Martínez-García, "How to Represent Female Identity on the Restoration Stage: Actresses (Self) Fashioning," *International Studies; Łódź* 16, no. 1 (2014): 99, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.2478/ipcj-2014-0007>.

¹³⁸ Deborah Payne Fisk, "The Restoration Actress," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2013), 73, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663400.ch5>.

¹³⁹ S. M. Wynne, "Gwyn, Eleanor [Nell] (1651?-1687), Actress and Royal Mistress," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 1, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11816>.

longer and appeared to have been quite deep. Gwynne had two children by Charles II and, while on his deathbed, Charles II supposedly told James, “Don’t let poor Nelly starve.”¹⁴⁰ There is no way to confirm this rumor, but James II paid her pension and supported her until her death two years after Charles II.¹⁴¹ Most actresses did not capture the attention of the king, but Nell’s exceptional experiences indicate that actresses held a prominent role often having visible and relatively public affairs with nobility.

These affairs of the heart were not limited to women. Male actors also drew public attention by pursuing relationships with nobility. Cardell Goodman, also known as “Scum,” had a notorious affair with the former mistress of Charles II, the Duchess of Cleveland.¹⁴² However, actresses presented a more glaring threat to the traditional gender roles of the time. Many assumed that actresses were also prostitutes or mistresses. Even married actresses, such as Mary Sanderson, wife of Thomas Betterton, another actor, were presumed to be unfaithful.¹⁴³

In addition to their associations with promiscuous moral conduct, actresses could influence certain trends in popular culture. Returning to the example of Nell Gwynne, one history of the Theater Royal Drury Lane went as far as to say, “she [Nell] made a delightful boy and looked so attractive in male attire that she started a fashion, for the fine ladies of Whitehall took to wearing it. Probably Nell was the first actress to influence female fashion.”¹⁴⁴ This statement may be overblown, but it shows one example of how actresses affected material aspects of culture. Their close connection with nobility occasionally allowed them to directly interact with politics. For instance, Nell Gwynne had a close enough relationship with both the

¹⁴⁰ Macqueen-Pope, *Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.*, 53.

¹⁴¹ Wynne, “Gwyn, Eleanor [Nell] (1651?”

¹⁴² Dobbs, *Drury Lane*, 55.

¹⁴³ Dobbs, *Drury Lane*, 59.

¹⁴⁴ Macqueen-Pope, *Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.*, 50.

Duke of Monmouth and King Charles II that she attempted to reconcile them in 1679 at the height of the Exclusion Crisis.¹⁴⁵ Though this occurred a few years after Gwynne left the stage, it exhibits her prominent social standing. Gwynne likely fell on the Whig side of the Exclusion Crisis. The public also liked Gwynne; there is a well-known, though unconfirmed, story that in 1681 an angry mob mistook her carriage for that of Charles II's Catholic mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and surrounded her carriage. Reportedly Gwynne stuck her head out of the carriage, said, "Pray good people be silent, I am the Protestant whore," and the people let her through. This story suggests she was well-known and well-liked.

Furthermore, spectatrix, the female audience, likely related more closely to female characters played by women. The historian Laura J. Rosenthal suggests the presence of an important interplay between the female spectacle of actresses and that of the spectatrix.¹⁴⁶ Women watching plays occasionally took part in the spectacle of the theater through the use of fashionable masks which concealed their identities. These masks often held connotations of prostitution and sexual availability even though women of various social positions wore them. This inclusion of the spectatrix shines through when we consider that playwrights sometimes directly addressed women in prologues and epilogues. Certain plays even directly referred to the spectatrix as masks, drawing attention to the whole group of women through an object associated with anonymity and their position as watcher.¹⁴⁷

In addition to the women on and off the stage, women played influential roles behind the scenes. The two most notable were Lady Davenant and Aphra Behn. At The Duke's Company,

¹⁴⁵ Wynne, "Gwyn, Eleanor [Nell] (1651?"

¹⁴⁶ Laura J. Rosenthal, "Reading Masks: The Actress and the Spectatrix in Restoration Shakespeare," in *Broken Boundaries*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 201.

¹⁴⁷ Rosenthal, 207.

rival theater to The Kings Company which played *The Female Prelate*, Lady Davenant took over a large amount of managerial control in 1668 upon the death of her husband. While some histories suggest managerial control went directly to two leading actors, as the widow of the former manager there is evidence Lady Davenant held significant control. During a lawsuit in 1677, Lady Davenant testified she, “had, used or exercised Sole Governance of the theaters.”¹⁴⁸ The Duke’s Company also put on plays by the influential female playwright Aphra Behn. Aphra Behn, like many playwrights at the time, did not confine herself to solely writing plays but also wrote other political writings. Behn wrote royalist Tory plays and did not shy away from using gender and sexuality in her plays, with some of her plays being particularly bawdy for the time. Aphra Behn may have also been a spy at the end of the Interregnum and into the beginning of the Restoration prior to her prolific career as a playwright.¹⁴⁹

These women, on, off, and behind the stage, toed or openly crossed the boundary of conventional moral behavior for women. And theater did the same. Playwrights had no issue addressing issues surrounding gender and female sexuality. Theater was a space for play; where societal anxieties, worries, aspirations, and hopes could be played. Spectacle and drama pervaded on the Restoration stage. As previously discussed, political matters permeated into theater quite intentionally even while political plays were subject to censure during the Exclusion Crisis.¹⁵⁰ The same was true for gender; the debate about women’s agency and the place of women in society spilled onto the stage.

¹⁴⁸ Gilli Bush-Bailey, Kate Dorney, and Maggie B. Gale, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2006), 28, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=1069690>.

¹⁴⁹ Janet Todd, “Behn, Aphra [Aphara] (1640?–1689), Writer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1961>.

¹⁵⁰ Dobbs, *Drury Lane*, 57.

The three women of *The Female Prelate* each demonstrate a different, nuanced portrayal of women and female desire. These portrayals relied upon certain common roles and tropes within Restoration theater, but the characters of Joan, Angeline, and Amiran are all developed past these roles. All three women helped further the political agenda of *The Female Prelate*, however since each woman served a different function, I will discuss them separately. Joan personified the monstrous woman, Angeline was the perfect wife, and Amiran defied more simple characterization.

Joan: The Monstrous Woman with a Checkered Past

The character of Pope Joan effectively helped further the political agenda of *The Female Prelate* because, at first glance, she represented the trope of the monstrous woman. The use of this trope provided a suitably terrible antagonist for the sympathetic young Duke of Saxony. Pope Joan first appeared towards the end of the first scene when the young Duke points her out to Angeline as the poisoner of his father. Through this scene, Saxony introduces us to the idea that Joan is “a Monster” and “a Villian,” even before her first line. By the time Joan speaks in Scene 2 the audience should already view her as a villain. Settle also made Joan’s sex clear within her first couple lines in a scene which also served to demonstrate her ambitions. At this point in the play, Joan is simply a cardinal, not yet the pope. However, she aspires to hold the power of the pope. When the Duke of Saxony enters to accuse her of poisoning his father, Joan seizes the moment to strike and begins her plan. She gives Saxony what he wants, a trial, but she plans to manipulate it to her favor:

How I could laugh at this poor Animal.
Do; hunt me close: and scent thy Father's Blood.

But know, hot fool, I have the Priest to play yet;
 A Roman Dance to lead you. I could hug my self
 For my rare Mischiefs. Oh my fertile Brain!
 Why was not I the first created Woman?
 'Sdeath, I'd have met the subtle plotting Serpent,
 And by my Arts blown up the shallow Fiend:
 Thus from its doom the threatned world recall;
 And countermine the lost Creations fall.¹⁵¹

With this monologue, Joan directly connects herself to Eve, the first woman, original sin, and the downfall of humanity. Furthermore, this monologue gave the audience a larger sense of Joan's hubris. She contends her powers of manipulation are superior to those of the serpent who tempted Eve in the bible story.¹⁵² In a way, this made her more devious than the serpent.

Later, when Joan does reach her goal and becomes Pope Joan, she succumbs to another common trope: power corrupts. The Restoration audience would have been familiar with this trope and it would have held significant weight with female actresses. For instance, William Davenant rewrote and produced the Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth* in 1674.¹⁵³ *Macbeth* also ran at the same time as *The Female Prelate*.¹⁵⁴ Davenant's rewrite included alterations to add spectacle and increase the time on stage for the actresses, but, importantly, Lady Macbeth's descent into madness and suicide stayed. The pursuit of power destroyed Lady Macbeth by attacking her sanity. While Pope Joan neither loses her sanity nor feels remorse for her actions, upon gaining the papacy she also gains a "monstrous lust" for the young Duke of Saxony. This lust causes her downfall. Her pregnancy and delivery on the street reveal her and leads to her

¹⁵¹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 9.

¹⁵² Gen. 3: 1-24

¹⁵³ William Davenant and William Shakespeare, *Macbeth a Tragædy: With All the Alterations, Amendments, Additions, and New Songs: As It's Now Acted at the Dukes Theatre*. (London, England, 1674), <http://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2248580895/A317FD64DC4149FDPQ/5?accountid=10598>.

¹⁵⁴The Newdigate Newsletters reported that the "Duchess of Portsmouth to disoblige Mr Settle the Poet carried all the Court with her to the Duke's house to see *Macbeth*." The Duchess of Portsmouth was a Catholic mistress to Charles II and was offended by *The Female Prelate*. Retrieved from Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne and Nahum Tate," 382.

murder during a papal procession. The cardinals who discuss her death in the final scene also imply that the child born was that of the young Duke. This meant the “monstrous lust” resulted in her downfall rather than her ongoing affair with her henchman, Lorenzo.

While Pope Joan’s lust played into the monstrous woman stereotype, not all lustful female characters fit into this role. Society saw female characters, and even women off the stage, as incredibly lustful even when actively refusing suitors. The idea of coyness and the trope of insincere resistance abounds in Restoration comedy in particular.¹⁵⁵ This trope relied on the misogynistic view that women contained secret hidden lust, a desire assumed even during sincere refusals. This trope informs us that female lust, while usually not acceptable to display, was considered exceedingly common.

Additionally, Tory plays utilized female lust as a tool to portray the Whig men as impotent.¹⁵⁶ Restoration plays such as Edward Ravenscroft’s *The London Cuckolds* (1681), Aphra Ben’s *The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause* (1681), Thomas D’Urfey *The Royalist*, and *City Politiques* all relied upon a trope called cit-cuckolding.¹⁵⁷ Cit-cuckolding portrayed Cits as impotent Whigs who could not prevent their witty, attractive, and sexually active wives from being attracted to the potent Tory cavaliers. The lustful women of these plays deliberately committed adultery on their husbands. However, in these plays the female lust and cit-

¹⁵⁵ Peggy Thompson, *Coyness and Crime in Restoration Comedy: Women’s Desire, Deception, and Agency* (Lanham, Md.: Bucknell University Press, 2011), chap. 1: Coyness, Conduct, and She Would if She Could, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008488766>.

¹⁵⁶ Anita Pacheco, “Reading Toryism in Aphra Behn’s Cit-Cuckolding Comedies,” *The Review of English Studies* 55, no. 222 (2004): 690–708.

¹⁵⁷ From Tapping your rival’s woman J Douglas Canfield. The plays and dates come from this article which reported that they were retrieved from *The London Stage*. J Douglas Canfield, “Tapping Your Rival’s Women: Cit-Cuckolding as Class Warfare in Restoration Comedy,” in *Broken Boundaries*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 115; newspapers and theatrical diaries of the period Compiled from the playbills, *The London Stage, 1660-1800; a Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment.*, [1st ed.] (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-68 [v. 1, 1965], 1968), <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE001377666>.

cuckolding served a political function. The women's lust and agency are secondary to the Whig men's impotence. The women, while lustful, were unimportant.

Still, playwrights often portrayed female lust as threatening. The Restoration genre of comedy of manners portrayed fallen females, or women subject to lust, as most unnatural when their lust served as a tool in pursuit of power or money. When women used lust to deceive, betray, or entrap it became particularly dangerous.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, in other genres of theater, some plays used a new role, the so-called "trouser role," to comment on the dangers of female sexuality. A trouser role involved a male character scripted as and played by an actress.¹⁵⁹ These roles are also sometimes referred to as a breeches role or pants role. Only made possible by the inclusion of women on the Restoration stage, they served as both an attraction for theatergoers and a mode through which playwrights could indirectly comment on female sexuality in a way distinct from female roles.¹⁶⁰ For example, Dryden and Davenant's rewrite of *The Tempest* in 1667 included a new character named Hippolito. This character, a trouser role played by an actress, was a young man incapable of comprehending the idea of monogamy. He follows a lecherous path until Ferdinand, the hero of the play, challenges him to a duel and nearly kills him. Since an actress plays Hippolito, this duel served as both a dramatic battle between men over women and a symbolic defeat over inappropriate female desire. The uncontained desires of a man played by a woman caused the play's only near-fatal violent act.¹⁶¹ Female lust could kill.

¹⁵⁸ Pat Gill, "Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521582156.012>.

¹⁵⁹ Fisk, "The Restoration Actress," 81.

¹⁶⁰ Women in breeches attracted audiences because it gave a glimpse of female legs

¹⁶¹ Rosenthal, "Reading Masks: The Actress and the Spectatrix in Restoration Shakespeare," 210.

Though Pope Joan does not fit in with Hipolito as a trouser role since Settle made Joan's sex clear from the outset, her lust does fall into the category of fatal lust. Pope Joan's former connection with the former Duke of Saxony added an incestuous facet to the monstrosity of her lust for the young Duke of Saxony. When recounting her history, Joan explained she had been mistress to the former Duke prior to entering the church and poisoning him. This made her lust for the young Duke feel vaguely incestuous.

Additionally, Joan's lust drove her to use both disguise and the "bed trick" which resulted in the destruction of both the young Duke of Saxony and Angeline. A common trope, the bed trick signifies when a character disguises themselves as someone else in order to have sex with an unsuspecting partner. Pope Joan and her henchman Lorenzo perform a double bed trick impersonating Angeline and the Duke of Saxony respectively so they could each have sex with one member of the young couple. *The Female Prelate* did not create this trope, in fact it goes as far back in western culture as the Bible.¹⁶² Closer in date to *The Female Prelate*, Shakespeare's tragicomedies *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well* utilized this trope as well.¹⁶³ Interestingly, the bed trick trope does not hold inherently negative connotations. In many cases, characters using the bed trick aim to right a wrong. For instance, in *Measure for Measure* female characters use the bed trick to ensnare a man who planned on abandoning his fiancé. Their marriage post bed trick contributed to the (questionably) happy ending.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Wendy Doniger, *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade*, Worlds of Desire (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE002794142>.

¹⁶³ William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/all-well-that-ends-well/>; William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/measure-for-measure/>.

¹⁶⁴ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

Additionally, female disguise could also be portrayed in a positive light. Aphra Behn's 1677 play *The Rover* portrayed female deceit and disguise as occasionally positive. Hellena, the main female character of *The Rover* uses roguish tactics, including disguise and deceit, to "carve out a youthful space" where she could alter her "patriarchal predetermined path" and be married instead of being confined to a convent.¹⁶⁵ Hellena in *The Rover* exemplified a relatively new trope: the female rogue. The female rogue, and indeed early modern rogues, represented a trope of social mobility, change, and adaptation.¹⁶⁶ Pope Joan fits some of the characterization of the trope with her wits, disguises, and goal of rising in station. However, where Hellena used these same qualities to gain a husband, Pope Joan sought power and used the bed trick to act out her lust thereby destroying a healthy and loving marriage. Historian Craig Rustici even described her use of the bed trick as sadistic, as Joan imagines herself and her lover/henchman Lorenzo as "ravishers."¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the priests guarding the young Duke of Saxony actively enabled the bed trick. This made the corrupt Catholic Church complicit and possibly even participatory in the destruction of Angeline.

Even though Joan played into the role of a fallen woman, her history in *The Female Prelate* attached her to the trope of the female rogue. Additionally, her past placed fault on her lack of desire for marriage, the actions of the former Duke of Saxony, and her ability to pursue evil courses of action within the framework of the Catholic Church.

¹⁶⁵ Sarah Morris, "A Roving Woman: The Rover, Part I and Hellena's Self-Creation of Youth," in *The Youth of Early Modern Women*, ed. Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv8pzd5z.5>.

¹⁶⁶ Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, eds., *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 1, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=3414660>.

¹⁶⁷ Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*, 145.

Even though the female rogue figure often begins with a lower-class character, Pope Joan embodied the three most important traits of a female rogue: wit, cunning, and guile (through the use of disguises). Even in her youth, when Joan reported traveling for learning, she had already started building up these skills.

So far I fadom'd into Books, Men, Manners,
Reasons, Religions; I could take all Forms:
The perfect Christian, or complete Philosopher;
Could give the Earth and the Heavens first Foundation
To Nature, or to Natures God at pleasure:
Dispute on both sides, and on both sides vanquish.
So fair I stood for the world's awful Thunderer,
Wits Goddess from my Brain already born.¹⁶⁸

In this passage Pope Joan emphasizes her wit and intelligence, but she also flaunts her ability to disguise herself. At this point, only the connection to Pope Joan makes these traits negative. However, even in this relatively normal state, Joan refused marriage. Unlike Hellena, who actively pursued marriage and therefore a return to the patriarchal structure, Joan's avoidance of marriage represented a threat to the patriarchal order. In fact, Pope Joan specifically rejected the idea of marriage in her youth,

I past through Italy, Spain, France, Germany.
Thus far I kept my Virgin Whiteness fair.
Not but I had all
That high Spring Tide within my youthful Veins
That bursts the Adamantine Walls of Honour,
And makes that Breach where Love and Ruine enter.
But 'twas my pride preserved my guarded Innocence.
Who yields to Love, makes but vain man her Lord:
And I who had studied all the greater Globe.
Scorn'd to be Vassal to the lesser world.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 25.

¹⁶⁹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 26.

These views prevented Joan from fitting in with the heroic female rogues, or even the heroines of comedies of manners, because without marriage she could never be respectable. Successful heroines circumvented illicit lures and perhaps even used wit and cunning, but they reserved themselves for marriage in the last act.¹⁷⁰ Pope Joan's decision to reject marriage sets her apart from heroines of other plays. This rejection also plays a large part in her path towards becoming a monstrous woman. Settle's deliberate decision to make young Joan celibate, instead of traveling with a lover as in other retellings of the myth of Pope Joan, reflected the Anglican and Protestant suspicion towards Catholic celibacy. This suspicion of clerical celibacy shone through in the short 1675 book *A Present for a Papist* in the rumors detailing the fornication of supposedly celibate Catholic priests.¹⁷¹ Additionally, Joan's downfall into lust after attempting celibacy represented a vindication of these suspicions of religious celibacy.¹⁷²

Joan's celibacy set her up for a relationship with the former Duke of Saxony. However, the former Duke played an important role in Joan's descent into monstrosity. The former Duke forcibly took Joan as his mistress and then discarded her when he lost interest. Joan's decision to enter into the Church and poison the former Duke hinged on this relationship and its subsequent breakdown. Their relationship was catalyzed through violence. Pope Joan described it,

The Fort was storm'd, and my proud Heart surrender'd.
My Virgin-Spoils were the great Duke of Saxony's.¹⁷³

This description reads as rape. Even though Pope Joan did not portray it as such, going on to describe her love for the former Duke of Saxony and how he scorned her, this addition to the

¹⁷⁰ Gill, "Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage," 194.

¹⁷¹ Cooke, *A Present for a Papist*, 131–36.

¹⁷² Rustici, *The Afterlife of Pope Joan*, 144.

¹⁷³ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 27.

myth of Pope Joan could be a criticism of monarchs taking mistresses.¹⁷⁴ King Charles II had many mistresses, including Nell Gwynne and the Duchess of Portsmouth whom we have already encountered. The former Duke neglecting Joan for another mistress caused her to decide to enter the clergy.

This description of the beginning of the relationship between Joan and the former Duke of Saxony could have also been a criticism of rape. The Restoration stage often depicted female refusal of consent as unimportant. Many Restoration comedies included insincere female refusal where “forceful responses from men were not only exonerated; but encouraged and eroticized.”¹⁷⁵ Still, characters frowned upon outright rape due to the link between tyranny and violent lust.¹⁷⁶ One of the few other Whig leaning plays of the time, Nathaniel Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus*, utilized the association between tyranny and rape as an inciting event.¹⁷⁷ Lee’s *Brutus* hinges upon the rape of Lucretia and Brutus’s actions in resistance to that tyrannical act.¹⁷⁸

While Pope Joan glossed over her rape in her retelling of her history, that event could be read as the former Duke of Saxony setting off his eventual downfall. The former Duke’s forceful actions took part in creating the corrupt sexual desires which destroyed the young Duke of Saxony later in the play. The former Duke’s loss of interest in Joan led her to exit his court and enter into the church. Then the Catholic Church enabled and encouraged her schemes. Joan’s actions still make her terrible but the Catholic Church provided the opportunity she needed to use

¹⁷⁴ Warner, “The Question of Misogynistic Polemic in Elkanah Settle’s ‘The Female Prelate’ (1680 and 1689),” 20.

¹⁷⁵ Thompson, *Coyness and Crime in Restoration Comedy*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Julia Rudolph, “Rape and Resistance: Women and Consent in Seventeenth-Century English Legal and Political Thought,” *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 2 (2000): 158.

¹⁷⁷ Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, 254.

¹⁷⁸ Rudolph, “Rape and Resistance,” 158.

her machinations to commit horrendous deeds. She disguised herself as a man, then the Catholic Church ignored and even praised her manipulation, traps, and lust. The structure of the Catholic Church allowed her to get close to the former Duke of Saxony. When the young Duke of Saxony brought this to light, Joan used her schemes to dupe the Catholic Church and convince them of her heroism. Settle's Pope Joan served well in the political message of the play not simply because she fits the archetype of a fallen, monstrous woman, but because the history Settle devised for her implicated the Catholic Church in her actions. Joan functioned as a monstrous woman but her past implied a level of responsibility on the part of the Catholic Church for providing her a space to grow into her deceit and on the former Duke of Saxony for his violence and disregard for women.

Angeline: A Virtuous Woman and Perfect Wife

Where Pope Joan flaunted her ability to trick and deceive as a warning against monstrous women in power, Angeline provided an example of a virtuous woman and perfect wife. Angeline, the Duchess of Saxony, served as a foil to Pope Joan in order to highlight Pope Joan's vices and the tragedy of the play. Angeline's reaction to the reveal of the bed trick provided an example of how a virtuous woman should react to a stain against her honor. Additionally, Angeline's misuse and death stemmed directly from Pope Joan.

Angeline begins the play newly-married to the young Duke of Saxony. The play opens on them the morning after their wedding night. They present a scene of marital bliss, with the young Duke waxing poetic about the joys of the night before and Angeline being "too young in love to

talk” and letting her “blushes speak the rest.”¹⁷⁹ Even as a married woman Angeline’s reluctance to talk about sex demonstrates her virtue. However, the young Duke of Saxony, almost immediately pulls Angeline into the tragic drama of the play. The scene shifts to focus on the Duke’s obsession with finding his father’s murderer. Angeline supports the Duke throughout his trial and imprisonment, but unfortunately her fiery support of him combined with her beauty attracts the attention of Lorenzo, Pope Joan’s lover/henchman. Lorenzo’s lust for Angeline allows Pope Joan to manipulate him and opens up the possibility of the bed trick. The bed trick succeeds the first night, but it fails on the second leading Pope Joan to order Amiran, Joan’s page, to poison both the young Duke of Saxony and Angeline. Even though Amiran refuses to poison the young Duke, she does not hesitate to poison Angeline. In Angeline’s last scene, she reunites with the Duke before dying dramatically in his arms.

In contrast to Joan’s characteristics of cunning and wit, Angeline embodied trust and support. Angeline held a reactive role, where she reacted to the actions taken by the Duke of Saxony and the Catholic Church but avoided machinations of her own. She only voiced criticisms of the cardinals in response to prompts from the Duke of Saxony. Angeline steadfastly supported her husband and served as a voice of reason for him. When the Duke of Saxony first brought up his father’s murder, she counselled patience and tried to steer him away from the dangerous topic. Later, after Pope Joan’s trial and subsequent glorification, Angeline recognized the danger of the young Duke’s rage saying,

Calm your untimely rage; when Ills are past
Redressing, and all other hope forsakes us,
Patience is then the wise man's last companion.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 20.

However, when the Catholic Church seized the young Duke and demanded he ask for pardon for accusing Pope Joan, Angeline supported his rights as a leader, urging him to,

Remember you're the Sovereign Duke of Saxony,
Move not one step below your Princely Honour
To save ten thousand lives.¹⁸¹

Angeline knew when to calm her husband and when to support him. Angeline exemplified a perfect wife, perfectly supportive of her husband while also providing a level head.

Tragically, Angeline's fiery defense of her husband attracted the attention and lust of Lorenzo. Just after Angeline began her defense of her husband, Lorenzo commented on how he would like to enjoy her. Much like in other tragedies on the Restoration stage, Angeline's virtue attracted the unwelcome attention of a villain. In tragedies, acts of virtue and then acts of resistance often inspired the desire to defile in villains. The Restoration saw a large increase in both rape and general violence against female characters likely tied to the introduction of women to the stage.¹⁸² This is particularly evident in Shakespeare rewrites such as *The Taming of the Shrew* and *King Lear* where the Restoration version can be compared to the originals.¹⁸³ But this trend also applied to many newly written tragedies as well. The inherent voyeuristic nature of theater tied rape on the Restoration stage to the objectification of the female victim. While productions usually did not depict the act of rape on stage, scenes afterwards often alluded to the act through actresses' loose hair, bare shoulders, and disordered dress.¹⁸⁴ These markers,

¹⁸¹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 22.

¹⁸² Jean I. Marsden, "Rape, Voyeurism, and the Restoration Stage," in *Broken Boundaries*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 185.

¹⁸³ Rosenthal, "Reading Masks: The Actress and the Spectatrix in Restoration Shakespeare," 204.

¹⁸⁴ For more on this see, Ann Marie Stewart, *Ravishing Restoration: Aphra Behn, Violence, and Comedy* (Selinsgrove, United States: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), chap. 1: Restoration Dramatists: Representing Ravishment and Rape, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=3115928>.

accompanied by lines which directed the audience towards actresses' bodies, invited the audience to take a voyeuristic position and were an integral part of the representation of rape.

Angeline's situation differed from the common situation of raped women in Restoration theater. While never described as rape, the bed trick involved Lorenzo taking the place of the Duke of Saxony without Angeline's knowledge or consent. Therefore, this act of sexual violence robbed Angeline of both her honor and agency. However, the text of *The Female Prelate* does not indicate that Angeline's rape was meant to be played for voyeuristic intent. The only description of Angeline after the bed trick came from Amiran and focused on Angeline's blush, perhaps as a perverse reference back to the first scene where her blushes signified the innocence which the bed trick violated. Still, the text did not indicate that the bed trick took place on stage and Amiran's description lacked the visual effects that often accompanied a more violent rape.

However, Angeline's response to the events once she gains knowledge of what occurred resembles that of other ravished women in Restoration drama. During her death scene she described herself as a "ruin'd thing," "a sullied bloated thing," "a polluted Monster," and "a wretch."¹⁸⁵ Additionally, since she knew she was poisoned, she looks forward to her death saying,

Oh my dear Love, I die.
 Now take me, take me to thy dearest arms:
 You need not be afraid t'embrace me now,
 For I shall die, and be all white agin,
 And you may love me then without a sin.
 In this warm Bed a spotless Martyr lay,
 For Death's kind hand wipes all my stains away.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 63.

¹⁸⁶ Settle, 63.

Since Lorenzo stole her honor, she cannot bear to live. Also, while Amiran hesitated to kill the Duke, she never attempted to prevent Angeline's death. The audience expected that if a virtuous woman was raped in a tragedy such as this one, she would either be killed or kill herself.

When we compare Angeline's situation to the most similar example in contemporary theater, we discover that her situation sent the message that the unchecked desire of immoral women destroys virtuous women. Angeline's situation resembled that of Lady Fulbank in Aphra Behn's comedy *The Lucky Chance*.¹⁸⁷ In that play a male character won a night with Lady Fulbank from her husband through gambling. He then impersonated her husband, through a bed trick, to have sex with her.¹⁸⁸ In *The Lucky Chance*, Lady Fulbank's rape served as a reminder that women did not control their own sexuality. Instead, men who could and would trade them, controlled their bodies. On the other hand, in *The Female Prelate* Lorenzo and Pope Joan designed the bed trick which destroyed Angeline. Pope Joan, a woman, took an active part in setting up this rape as well as that of the Duke (though his ravishment is certainly not described in the same terms as Angeline's). In fact, Pope Joan rejoiced in Lorenzo's lust for Angeline because she could leverage it to have him aid her in satisfying her own desire for the young Duke. Pope Joan's perverse sexual desire for the young Duke of Saxony resulted in not only her own destruction but the destruction of the only woman in the play who could be described as virtuous. This sends a message; the unchecked desire of immoral women will destroy the few virtuous women who exist.

Finally, Angeline serves as a foil to Pope Joan. Angeline held a similar rank to Pope Joan prior to Pope Joan entering the Catholic Church. Angeline demonstrated what Pope Joan could

¹⁸⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Lucky Chance* (London, England, 1686).

¹⁸⁸ This type of rape does also happen in other plays outside these two, most notably Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* and John Dryden's *Amphitryon*. Marsden, "Rape, Voyeurism, and the Restoration Stage," 185.

have been if she had willingly submitted to marriage rather than preferring her own freedom. In contrast Angeline submits to death after her rape, while Pope Joan became a mistress to her rapist and then proceeded to kill him when he lost interest in her. While the social role of mistress was historically available, Restoration theater expected virtuous women to kill themselves or be killed when such an event took place.

Amiran: The Woman who Lives

The last woman to consider in *The Female Prelate* presents a difficult challenge. Described as “Amiran, a woman in the habit of a Page, a sworn Confident to the Intrigue of Lorenzo and Rhemes,” she stays in male attire for the entire play.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, she observes and aids Pope Joan’s deceptions and schemes. Amiran speaks little in the first half of the play but the stage directions indicate her presence for nearly all of the scenes which include Pope Joan in her private quarters. Amiran’s silence makes her difficult to interpret. The actress who played Amiran could have used body language to portray any number of emotions during these scenes. Also, the few lines Amiran speaks in the second half of the play have the same ambiguity. Differences in the actresses' inflection and expression could change the meaning of her lines. This problem in interpretation existed for the other characters, but the other characters presented their motivations early in the play making their actions and dialogue easier to interpret. Despite these issues, Amiran’s actions, specifically her betrayal of Pope Joan and Lorenzo, inadvertently set in motion the climactic scene of the death of the young Duke of Saxony.

¹⁸⁹ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 1.

Amiran's crossdressing presented questions to the audience. Why did Amiran cross-dress? How did she get there? One of the most interesting characteristics of Amiran is her crossdressing because she is never explicitly shown wearing female dress, despite clearly being a female character. The audience is never given a clear answer as to how Amiran got into this situation. Pope Joan explained her rationale for crossdressing, as a means to gain both an education and revenge, but Amiran's history and motivation remains undiscussed. The audience received a hint in Amiran's introduction, when Pope Joan describes herself, Lorenzo, and Amiran as "I thy kind Juno, thou [Lorenzo] my faithful Jove, / And our sworn Loyal Ganimede."¹⁹⁰ This description contained large amounts of irony as Roman myth characterized Juno for her jealousy, Jove for his adultery, and Ganimede for his kidnap.¹⁹¹ However Amiran's association with Ganimede hints she may be an unwilling participant. Still, despite the implication that Pope Joan and Lorenzo may have kidnapped Amiran, Amiran obeyed Pope Joan up until she was commanded to kill the young Duke of Saxony.

Settle gave the audience another hint towards Amiran's past in Act three while Pope Joan talks about her history but interpretation changes the meaning of the line. After Pope Joan explains how she entered into a monastery to become a monk after the former Duke of Saxony lost interest in her, Amiran asks

But why a Monk? why not t'a Nunnery?
That last retreat of all distressed Sinners.
Where the poor Nymph flies her false Shepherd's Arms,
Mourns her neglected Sighs, and fading charms.
To a Church Anthem tunes her tender Cries;

¹⁹⁰ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 5.

¹⁹¹ Ganimede was a beautiful trojan boy who was kidnapped by Jove in eagle form to become a cupbearer for the gods. Interestingly enough, in Shakespeare's time Ganimede was also a slang term for the younger man in a homosexual relationship. By 1694 it was also being used to mean both a male prostitute or literally a cupbearer. "Ganymede, n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed October 11, 2020, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/76653>.

Whilst like th'expiring Swan she sings and dies.¹⁹²

No character refers to Amiran as a woman until later in this act so at this point in the play the audience may not be aware of Amiran's sex. With this in mind, Settle used the dialogue to insert leading questions for Pope Joan to answer. Lorenzo also asks questions in this vein. However, this line is Amiran's only line during Pope Joan's description of her history. Furthermore, this line takes on additional significance given that Amiran, a female character in cross-dress, said it. Here interpretation poses an issue because we do not know how the actress performed this line. Different inflections could drastically change the meaning. If Amiran delivered the line sarcastically it pokes fun at the Catholic institution of convents and makes a joke about the use of nunnery as a slang term for brothel.¹⁹³ On the other hand, if Amiran delivered the line wistfully or inquisitively, it hints that Amiran would prefer life in a convent over disguising as a page while simultaneously suggesting that scorned women usually entered convents. This second interpretation would place space between Amiran and Pope Joan which fits with the subsequent betrayal in Act five.

Amiran's betrayal of Pope Joan hinged on gender and the concept of what women are capable of doing. Amiran agreed to and partook in many theatrical tropes traditionally associated with subversive female characters. While not obviously engaged in a romantic or sexual relationship of her own based on the text of the play, Amiran disguises herself as a page, helps Pope Joan maintain her cross-dress, bribes priests, and even plays an active role in arranging the bed trick. However, Settle portrayed Amiran as discontent with certain aspects of her role, especially when Pope Joan tasked her with manipulating the young Duke of Saxony. For

¹⁹² Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 27.

¹⁹³ "Nunnery, n.," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/129209>.

instance, after Pope Joan sentenced the young Duke of Saxony to jail, she asked Amiran what she thought of the young Duke's defiance. Amiran replies,

Bolder and braver than a dying Saint,
 And no less constant. So th'undaunted Martyr
 Smiles at the Stake, and triumphs in the Fire,
 Whilst his high Cause does his great Soul inspire.
 If I may speak my thoughts of him,
 I like Him better than his Fate.¹⁹⁴

Amiran obviously admired the Duke of Saxony's bravery in the face of Pope Joan's anger.

Amiran's sympathy for the Duke of Saxony likely reflected how Settle wanted the audience to feel. Especially given that Amiran witnessed the same scenes as the audience and knew the truth of the accusations the young Duke of Saxony leveled at Joan. In addition, Pope Joan's lustful desire for the young Duke horrified Amiran. The scene continues,

Pope.

Oh Girl, thou hast touch'd me to the very heart.
 His Father's Courage, Form, his Father all;
 Those very eyes that stabb'd my Virgin Soul.
 Oh Amiran, thy Mistress is undone.
 I kill'd the Father, and now love the Son.

Page.

How Madam!

Pope.

Gorged with the Fountain, for the Stream I thirst.
 And teeming with th'unnatural Monster burst.

Exit.

Page.

Where will this end! If she goes on, this strange
 And monstrous Feaver can't but end in Ruine.
 Oh Saxony, if thou hast such powerful Charms,
 Thy Eyes thy Father's Vengeance will pursue,
 And act what thy weak Arm could never do.

*Exit.*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 32.

¹⁹⁵ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 32.

This scene foreshadowed the tragic end of the play. Importantly, this marked the first time in the play where Amiran was referred to as “girl” rather than as “page,” either revealing or highlighting this aspect of her character. By revealing her sex, Settle placed her reaction in contrast to Joan. While Amiran admired the young Duke of Saxony, she found Pope Joan’s lust monstrous. Despite her reaction, Amiran still helped with the bed trick.

Amiran faithfully carried out her role until Joan asked her to kill the young Duke of Saxony. In addition to setting up the climactic scene, this refusal also built more sympathy for the Duke. In some of her longest lines yet, Amiran explains to the audience,

Amir.

Hither I come to bring a Sovereign head,
 A Sovereign Cure, a sober sleeping Pill;
 I, that's the word.
 Poor Saxony! thy Royal Father murder'd,
 Thy dearest Princess ravisht, and to make up
 The most unnatural monstrous mass of Cruelty,
 Thy Fathers Poysoner, and thy Fathers Whore,
 Lodged in thy Bed. Oh thou'rt a true Original
 Of unexampled Misery: No Tragedy
 Ere equall'd thine. Yet after all, this most
 Wrong'd Prince must bleed, and I must be his murderer.
 Oh my faint Arm! Oh my Barbarian Mistriss!
 Well, I remember I have served thy Lust,
 My breast the Cabinet to all thy Whoredoms;
 Nay, like an Usurer to the Trust thou hast lent me,
 I've play'd the Bawd t'increase 'em. All these Ills
 I never trembled at; but oh, there's something
 In Murder so beyond a Female Villain,
 As my Soul startles at the thought. But why,
 Why do I play the foolish Crocodile,
 And mourn where I must kill?¹⁹⁶

Amiran showed remorse for the Duke of Saxony’s plight and disgust for her previous actions. However, Amiran drew the line at regicide. While she claimed that female villains took issue

¹⁹⁶ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 57.

with murder this generalization does not hold up even within the frame of this play. Pope Joan had no issue poisoning the former Duke of Saxony. However, the line itself highlights expectations held for female characters and women in general. Pope Joan poisoned the former Duke of Saxony in response to being jilted. Amiran refused to poison the young Duke of Saxony despite loyalty. Also, Amiran specifically took issue with the concept of regicide, important given that Settle likely wanted to avoid anti-Royalist overtones.

In the end, Pope Joan's request for Amiran to help poison the young Duke of Saxony drove Amiran to betray Pope Joan. Amiran orchestrated the final confrontation between the young Duke of Saxony and Pope Joan by releasing him. She explains the horror of his situation and lets him escape. After that, Amiran disappears. Settle did not give her any more lines and left her out of the stage direction. Her story line remains surprisingly unresolved. In the absence of a clear death, the play implied she survives. Perhaps Amiran's plot line demonstrated an opportunity for the redemption of subversive women. Despite her crossdressing and actions throughout the play, Amiran made the morally correct decision in the end. In her interaction with the young Duke of Saxony he even offers her a chance for absolution,

Amir.

Yes, do, Sir, and I'll thank you for the kindness;
 For if I speak, I must kill you: and trust me,
 I have that sense of your unhappy sufferings,
 That I had rather die my self than be
 Your Murderer.

Sax.

And art thou then in earnest?
 Come, prithee speak; I was to blame to chide thee:
 Be not afraid; speak but the fatal truth,
 And by my hopes of Heav'n I will forgive thee.
 Out with it, come; now wouldst thou tell me all,
 But art ashamed to own thy self a Bawd:
 'Las, that might be thy Fathers fault, not thine.
 Perhaps some honest humble Cottage bred thee,

And thy ambitious Parents poorly proud,
 For a gay Coat made thee a Page at Court,
 And for a plume of Feathers sold thy Soul;
 But 'tis not yet, not yet too late to save it.

Amir.

Oh my sad heart!

Sax.

Come, prithee speak; let but
 A true confession plead thy penitence,
 And Heav'n will then forgive thee as I do.¹⁹⁷

By explaining the situation and giving the young Duke of Saxony a way out and a chance for a righteous death, Amiran achieved absolution. Even though the young Duke of Saxony did not know Amiran's crossdressing situation, the entire audience did so this point implied that women in bad situations could achieve redemption by aiding men to reestablish the common order. However, *The Female Prelate* never concluded this line of thought as Amiran's end is unclear.

In all, *The Female Prelate* portrayed dismal options for the role of women. There is the obvious villain: Pope Joan plays the monstrous woman, who uses disguise to trick her way into power, has unnatural desires, and is violently killed. There is Angeline, the Duchess of Saxony, the ideal woman who is too pure for this tragic world, misused and murdered. Finally, there is Amiran, an unwilling accomplice to the engine of tragedy, who makes the moral decision at the end of the play only to be forgotten. A villain, a sacrifice, or forgotten.

¹⁹⁷ Settle, *The Female Prelate*, 57.

Conclusion

Overall, *The Female Prelate* acted as a public performance of political rhetoric for the Whig Party during the Exclusion Crisis. Moreover, the way in which *The Female Prelate* developed its arguments provided interesting insight into the concerns of the time and how theater was used as a means to influence the political sphere. Through the analysis of a different contemporary book on Pope Joan in comparison to *The Female Prelate*, we saw how theater often used and elaborated on popular stories in order to bring them to a new audience. The dramatic form of the play also engaged the audiences in a way that a book might not, drawing them into the story through the use of spectacle.

Settle's inclusion of the character of the young Duke of Saxony forced the audience to consider the precarious nature of Catholic monarchs. The analysis of this plot line also allowed us to better understand the anxieties brought up by the Exclusion Crisis. It was not simply a question of a change in monarch but rather a perceived threat to the sovereignty of England. By touching on the practice of censorship and Tory views of Whig exclusionists, we observed how *The Female Prelate* was relatively unique on the Restoration stage and how its arguments were potentially dangerous for Settle and for the Whig Party overall.

Finally, the discussion on female characters in *The Female Prelate* demonstrated how Settle deployed gendered tropes and archetypes on the stage to emphasize his political arguments. Even though the complexity of the female characters meant they defied simple explanation, this simply acted to further the political arguments and give us insight into the expectations for and idealization of women in the 1680s. These points together in concert with the historical body of research on the Exclusion Crisis and Restoration theater, allows us to better understand the questions and anxieties of the theater going public of the time. It showed us how political theater operated even in a moment fraught with censorship, struggling plays, and political strife. It showed us how new retellings of well-known myths contain new content which is directly relevant to the historical and popular context of the retelling. This is a trend which continues today.

Years afterward

Despite Whig attempts to influence public opinion through means such as *The Female Prelate*, the Whigs were not able to successfully exclude James. In 1681 the Earl of Shaftesbury was imprisoned to be put on trial for treason. Even though the charges were dropped, in 1682 the Earl of Shaftesbury fled England. This flight of a sponsor led Settle to switch sides and write Tory propaganda. Settle even wrote *An Heroick Poem on the Coronation of James II* in 1685 when James II became king.¹⁹⁸ In all it seemed like a complete failure for the Whigs.

However, 1688 marked the Glorious Revolution, a bloodless deposition of King James II just a few years after the Exclusion Crisis. This event was influenced by the birth of a male heir

¹⁹⁸ Williams, "Settle, Elkanah (1648-1724), Playwright."

who would presumably be baptized Catholic.¹⁹⁹ While there were many reasons for the Glorious Revolution, perhaps the questions and concerns raised by *The Female Prelate* and other works like it during the Exclusion Crisis played a role in the minds of those considering not just one Catholic ruler, but a dynasty. Either way, at least publishers considered it significant, because *The Female Prelate* was reprinted in 1689. While the effects of theatrical political rhetoric, such as *The Female Prelate*, often do not immediately appear and can be quite subtle, these productions helped develop mindsets which had lasting implications.

¹⁹⁹ "Glorious Revolution | Summary, Significance, Causes, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Glorious-Revolution>.

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