

Toward an Eschatology of Restoration Theatre

By

Neil Kristian Scharnick

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Aparna Dharwadker, Professor, English and Theatre & Drama

Michael Peterson, Associate Professor, Theatre & Drama

Mary Trotter, Associate Professor, Theatre & Drama

Robert Glenn Howard, Professor, Communication Arts

Michael Vanden Heuvel, Professor, Theatre & Drama and Integrated Liberal
Studies

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Neil Kristian Scharnick
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Chapter One

“The end of all things sure is drawing nigh”: Restoration Eschatology and the Stage

Sure 'tis the end of all things! Fate has torn
 The Lock of Time off, and his head is now
 The gastly Ball of round Eternity!
 Call you these Peals of Thunder, but the yawn
 Of bellowing Clouds? By Jove, they seem to me
 The World's last groans; and those vast sheets of Flame
 Are its last Blaze! The tapers of the Gods,
 The Sun and Moon, run down like waxen-Globes;
 The shooting Stars end all in purple Gellies,
 And Chaos is at hand.

- From *Oedipus* (1678) by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee
 Act II scene 1

In short, there is an Embassy from the Court of Jesus in Heaven, to the
 Chief Court of Jesus on Earth. This Chief Court is the *British Court*, as I
 have in another Place proved.

- From *The Celestial Envoy: or, A Scene not yet Acted. Containing
 Some short NOTATIONS on the 10th Chapter of the Book of
 APOCALYPSE* (1713)

“Behold sights that may chill the fiery”

In Act II of Nathaniel Lee’s 1675 political tragedy *Sophonisba*, Maherbal enters his commander’s tent and announces to the play’s hero, the military legend Hannibal, the appearance of heavenly wonders and portents filling the sky over the battlefield. The play’s action is interrupted as he gives his report:

Come forth my Lord, hast from your Tent, behold
Sights that may chill the fiery, dant the bold;
Shrill Trumpets Eccho through the Arch of Heaven,
Battles proclaim’d, and bloody signals given:
Two Suns their gawdy Charriots Curtains furl,
And at each other brandish’d lightning hurl,
Red bolts, rush flaming through a bloody sky,
Wounding the Air, vast pointed splinters fly,
Immortal Spirits drop down, and seem to dye;
A Host of Heavenly Warriours bright, and gay
Appointed, stand, and ready for the fray:
In golden Armes their shining Chiefs appear,
Helmets, and Shields, of Diamonds they wear,
And Spears with Stars of value set, they bear (Lee 101).

Scholars have attempted to explain such supernatural intrusions in Restoration tragedies by several means, generally understanding them merely as grand and occasionally unsettling examples of spectacle and bombast. Richard Bevis effectively indexes these explanations in his book, *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1789*. He points out the enhanced potential and desire for spectacle in the new theatres of the Restoration, suggesting that one might best understand the mass violence and supernatural activity as the natural product of the stage’s new scenic capacities (104). He points to the influence of residual Jacobean sensibilities in dramatists and audiences, generating in Restoration tragedy graphically violent scenes and images like those for which Jacobean tragedy

is likewise notorious (16). He also offers the grandeur of the masque as a source of inspiration for spectacle on such a large scale (10). Eric Rothstein further asserts that this sensationalism in Nathaniel Lee's plays in particular is a reflection of (or compensation for) bad writing (95).

While such observations may have some value, they are inadequate to explain fully the numerous clear linkages between the language and spectacle in these plays and the apocalypticism they seem to reflect. This depiction of trumpets, bloody skies, and celestial battles calls to mind and largely conforms with biblical prophecies concerning the end of time. Hannibal responds accordingly: "The end of all things sure is drawing nigh" (101). The description of the battle generally conforms with imagery found in biblical apocalyptic prophetic writings, and the audience is seemingly unfazed by the fact that Hannibal's interpretation of this cosmic battle, foretold in the *Revelation of John*, is anachronistic when offered by a pre-Christian Carthaginian. Hannibal's understanding of these wonders aside, this End-Times imagery seems impossibly out-of-place when one considers that the play is set not in an apocalyptic future—the expected site for the final outpouring of God's wrath—or even in the present, but in the ancient past. Despite the seeming incongruity of them, such scenes were commonplace in the historical tragedies of the 1670s and 1680s.

Historical parallels were a commonplace of the Restoration stage, as the chapters that follow will demonstrate. The social and political crises of the day were transplanted, staged in exotic locales and the ancient past. Serious Restoration drama was in this way consistently engaging current events. But why transplant the

biblical apocalypse into exotic locales and the ancient past? Playwrights did so for much the same reason. The apocalypse was an event with social and political relevance—to many, it was believed to be a current event.

As the scene in Lee's play above progresses, to the great pleasure of the audience, the celestial battle described is suddenly and dramatically revealed. Lee's description of the revelation reads: "The SCENE is drawn, discovers a Heaven of blood, two Suns, Spirits in Battle, Arrows shot to and fro in the Air: Cryes of yielding Persons, &c. ..." (Lee 102). Clearly a celestial battle is playing out concurrently with the battle below, the details of which are extrapolated in large part from the descriptions of the Last Days found in the biblical *Revelation of John*. Or perhaps more precisely, the battle below is so profoundly significant and so closely intertwined with the workings of Providence that heavenly portents have filled the sky to mark the momentousness of the occasion.

This scene at first glance amounts to little more than a curious and spectacular bit of anachronism—Christian symbols and rhetoric concerning the end of the world operating uncomfortably in an historical tragedy set in a period that predates them—and predates Christianity itself—by centuries. What makes this moment especially noteworthy is the fact that such a scene is by no means the exception, but is much more nearly the rule. The serious drama of the Restoration stage very frequently utilizes Christian apocalyptic and millenarian language, images, and ideas without apparent regard for the setting of the play. These images and ideas had special currency in the Restoration and especially in the 1670s and

'80s for reasons that will be discussed at length below, so it is not surprising that they pervade the Restoration stage.

As further evidence that the inclusion of apocalyptic themes and ideas reveals far more than a growing reliance on spectacle, as has been commonly suggested, it should be noted that many of these scenes are only described, never staged. For example, in John Crowne's play, *Caligula: A Tragedy* (1698), the fall of Caligula is marked by the sudden collapse of his marble statue and a rainstorm of blood (Crowne 42). But these occurrences are only described by a messenger. Similarly, Troilus reports prophecies and supernatural omens (again including a rain of blood) surrounding the fall of Troy in John Banks' 1679 tragedy, *The Destruction of Troy* (16). None of these supernatural events are staged.

On one hand, the employment of these images on the Restoration stage should not be surprising. There is much about Christian apocalypticism that is inherently theatrical: the images are striking and grand in scale; the choices made by individuals at the end of the world are irrevocable, so mistakes are irreparable, creating or enhancing the tragic effect; and the fates of nations and individual eternal souls—not just private lives—hang in the balance. The prophecy concerning the End of Days, most often deliberately opaque, promises Christians a world's end full of wonders and surprises, mostly of a destructive and terrifying nature, unlike anything that preceded it. In the words of John Polkinghorne, "It is the element of discontinuity—the expectation of the unexpected—that distinguishes theological eschatology from a secular futurology" (xxiv). The presence of the apocalyptic

therefore prompts audiences as familiar with Christian apocalyptic imagery as Restoration audiences would likely be to expect the spectacular unexpected.

Among Restoration dramatists, Nathaniel Lee is unquestionably the playwright who most consistently and spectacularly dramatizes Christian apocalypticism and its distinctive language of crisis. Nearly every one of his works contains a scene in one of its middle acts similar to the one described above, and all in some way utilize the powerful symbols and rhetoric of Christian apocalypse. The dead rise from their graves, stars fall from the sky, dragons are spotted flying overhead, heavenly battles are waged, and sun and moon turn to blood. Other dramatists, though not always so spectacularly, likewise incorporate the language and signs of Christian apocalypse in their plays. Thomas Otway, John Crowne, John Dryden, Thomas Rymer, Elkanah Settle, Nahum Tate, Thomas Southerne, John Banks, and the other serious dramatists of the period employ this same apocalyptic and millennialist language and imagery, though in distinctive ways and for a variety of ends. Such scenes were in fact so prevalent in the plays of the late 1670s and 1680s that the notorious Earl of Rochester parodied them in his 1684 play, *Sodom, or, The Quintessence of Debauchery*. The account of Sodom's destruction at God's hand for utter sexual depravity proved the ideal source material for Rochester to lampoon the scenes of divinely appointed destruction being offered on stage by Lee and others.¹

¹ Rochester is clearly also lampooning the debauched court of Charles II. He is additionally most likely using the King of Sodom's legalization of "buggery" to comment on Charles' toleration of Catholicism. But it is noteworthy that the play utilizes an apocalyptic context and supernatural omens to achieve its aims – devices that would be very familiar to audiences of 1680s political tragedy.

As the heroic dramas and political tragedies of the 1670s and early 1680s increasingly give way to the affective, sentimental, or “she-” tragedies of the next several decades, Christian apocalypticism’s rhetoric of crisis is largely maintained. However, the literal manifestations of apocalypse on stage, popular with Lee and several of his contemporaries, give way to a figurative apocalypticism, transmuted into a desperate, “apocalyptic” language of love and loss. For example, in John Banks’ 1695 play *Cyrus the Great*, love and love lost are described as divine judgment, a world-ending plague, a tool of divine wrath, and a flame scorching the planet. Such residual rhetoric of apocalypse permeates English drama at the close of the Seventeenth Century. It is worth noting that Banks also includes in his play a scene in Act I in which, on the eve of a great battle, thunder rolls, the sky grows dark, “Swarms of hellish Insects” descend, and the dead rise from their graves—a late example of actual staged apocalypse (4). The pattern established by Lee is therefore maintained in which supernatural omens resembling those marking the biblical Last Days are described or manifested, endowing the events of the play with cosmic significance. At the same time, the rhetoric of apocalypticism is beginning to be repurposed toward a new end as the Eighteenth Century dawns: to heighten the desperate language of romantic love and loss.

Biblical prophecy concerning the End Times offers a wide assortment of images of global destruction, each of which obscurely promises a great deal of significance, though popular and authorized interpretations of most of these images have varied over time. The *Revelation of John* is especially replete with such imagery; this final book of the New Testament identifies itself as a unique and

original revelation of Jesus Christ given to the apostle John. In this open letter to the Church, John describes: God's throne and His "creature" attendants; a series of scrolls, bowls, and trumpets, each bringing new destruction to the Earth when opened, poured out, or blown; war, famine, and pestilence; celestial signs, including falling stars, a blood-red moon, thunder, lightning, and an earthquake; hail, fire, and voices from the sky; waters turned to poison and to blood; islands and mountains collapsing into the sea; the darkening of the heavenly bodies; swarms of unearthly creatures tormenting mankind; prophets with superhuman powers; the desecration and destruction of Jerusalem; the fall of Babylon; a dragon and a demonic horned beast; and a final battle between God's angels and the forces of Satan. This is far from being a comprehensive list of the images therein, but these key images, joined with the many additional images interpreted as prophecy regarding the Last Days scattered throughout both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, all find their way in turn onto the Restoration stage.

Treated semiotically, each of these images is loaded with meaning: the employment of any is among other things a shorthand articulation of the Christian's greatest hopes and fears for the end of time and the life to come. Examined phenomenologically—acknowledging that audiences are not being called upon to interpret these signs so much as to witness and experience them in the context of staged crisis in a live theatrical performance —these scenes would truly be wonders to behold. Never before was it possible for London audiences to experience firsthand such spectacular and convincing signs of the world's end—an end prayed for as part of every Sunday's Anglican service and one many believed to be close at

hand. In a cultural context in which the immanent end of the world is being so prominently and consistently heralded by conforming and nonconforming churchmen alike, such symbols and experiences not only carry religious significance but bear a great deal of cultural and political significance as well.

Restoration Eschatology

The study of historical attitudes toward last things is an eschatological study. *Eschatology* is the branch of theology concerned with last things: apocalypse and the world's end; death and the world/life to come; judgment and the resulting condemnation or reward; and whatever significance an understanding of these ends or their proximity ascribes to the past and present. The word eschatology, introduced into the English language in the nineteenth century, comes from the Greek *eschatos*, meaning "last." In seventeenth-century England, eschatology was not merely a source of idle speculation among scholars and clergy but rather polarized communities, effected state and local policy, and ultimately lent both cosmic and personal significance to local, national, and international affairs. It fueled the English Civil War, inscribed special meaning onto the otherwise senseless devastation of the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London, and intensified anti-Catholic hysteria. It generated prophets, pamphleteers, and self-proclaimed messiahs; it demanded of some unswerving allegiance to God's Regent the King in "these Last Days"; others it compelled to open rebellion and attempted regicide. It is not surprising therefore that evidences of this powerful cultural force found their way onto the London stage. Each of the following chapters is an examination of

serious dramatic authorship and production for the Restoration stage through the lens of Christian eschatology. Understanding the symbols and rhetorics of crisis it utilizes and generates may make it possible to understand and rightly value the largely ignored serious drama of the Restoration period.

Eschatology includes but is not limited to apocalypticism. In her study on Shakespearean eschatology, *Last Things and Last Plays* (1991), Cynthia Marshall offers as one simple definition of eschatology: “a way of viewing collectively what we each experience singly—death” (8). The world’s end is both a public and a private concern, and beliefs concerning the end of the world and attitudes concerning those beliefs are closely related to beliefs and attitudes concerning one’s own mortality. With this definition in mind, images and ideas concerning death and the afterlife, while not of themselves apocalyptic, still reside within the broader domain of eschatology.

Even within apocalyptic discourse, it must be noted that biblical prophecy, filled with images of God’s wrath and the ultimate destruction of the world, also offers to Christians the promise of Jesus Christ’s long-awaited return to oust the usurper Satan, free His “bride” the Church, and reclaim His rightful dominion over the Earth. This second set of symbols, tightly interwoven with the former, offers to the Christian who expects to see these prophecies fulfilled in her lifetime a profound sense of hope. Notably, these images of destruction, usurpation, and restored monarchy strongly resonated with Restoration audiences who had themselves only recently witnessed a monarchy restored in the wake of civil war, usurpation, and regicide. The use of such images on the London stage—images of usurpation and

recovery—is therefore multivalent, calling to mind, often deliberately, both current political events and the Christian expectation of the Second Coming of Christ.

The political potency of these symbols could not be denied. In the dedicatory epistle accompanying Nathaniel Lee's 1680 play *Lucius Junius Brutus*, Lee wrote, "The Poet must elevate his Fancy with the Mightiest Imagination, he must run back so many hundred Years, take a just Prospect of the Spirit of those Times *without the least thought of ours...*" (Womersley 431). However, the play that follows this claim is a political tragedy that so obviously parallels contemporary events, filled with usurpation, plots, and hysteria, and does so in a manner so truly unflattering to the monarchy, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that it was suppressed by the Lord Chamberlain for "very Scandalous Expressions & Reflections upon ye Government." Whatever Lee might claim concerning a poet's need for high-minded, creative detachment, Lee's plays, like those of nearly all Restoration dramatists, closely engaged and reflected contemporary cultural and political events. Most playwrights aligned themselves with the monarchy as unambiguously as they could in such ambiguous times: the theatres operated by royal patent, after all. Still, some could not manage to skirt the crown's disfavor, like Lee in the case of *Lucius Junius Brutus*, or like the virulently anti-Catholic Elkanah Settle throughout the majority of his embattled career.

The playhouse of the Restoration era was a lively center for political and cultural engagement, expressing, creating, reifying, and occasionally challenging

ideology.² The following chapters are concerned with the religious dimension of this ideology and the vital role Christian belief, doctrine, and practice play in shaping Restoration theatre and drama. More precisely, my assertion is that a mainstream, pervasive Christian eschatological concern—dictated by widely held beliefs and expectations regarding a coming apocalypse, the end of time, and the return of Christ—were regularly and effectively made manifest on the Restoration stage. Much of what is widely disparaged in the serious drama of the Restoration, including its bombastic language, its emphasis on spectacle, and its “unnaturalness,” can be better and more accurately understood (and its authors perhaps absolved) when examined through the lens of Christian eschatological concern. Seventeenth-century England was abuzz with apocalyptic speculation and millenarian unrest before, during, and after the Commonwealth era, and the distinctive symbols and rhetoric of Christian prophecy concerning the end of the world therefore carried a great deal of significance.

By enfolding the events of these plays into the imagery and rhetoric associated with the end of the world, the significance of death itself in these plays is altered. Each play becomes a study in *Ars Moriendi*, the “art of dying,” and “dying well” becomes more important to many of these characters than life itself. Finally, as the popularity of political tragedy waned and the opportunities for staging the apocalypse it afforded disappeared, the rhetoric of apocalypse lingered, transmuted into grandiloquence concerning love and rejection, equating romantic hopes and

² For a broader consideration of the relationship between Restoration ideology and the stage, see J. Douglas Canfield’s two foundational works: *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1979; and, more essential to this study, *Heroes & States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2000.

fears with religious ones. Separated lovers see in their plight a divine judgment or an infernal plague, while kisses are for the lovers rapturous foretastes of the world to come. In the moment when late heroic drama and political tragedy are beginning to give way to more sentimental modes of tragedy, the vivid language of apocalypse and judgment remains.

England and the End of Days, 1640-1700

Christian millennialism, the belief in a second coming of Jesus Christ to establish a kingdom and judge humanity, has been a central tenet of Christian eschatology from the days of the Early Church through the present day. The biblical writings attributed to John, Luke, Peter, and Paul among others clearly express this belief in the author and encourage readers to believe likewise. In chapter 21 of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is found speaking at length about his return and the signs that would herald his Second Coming. His disciples ask, "Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" His answer is fairly plain and succinct as such prophecies go, painting a powerful picture of chaos, destruction, and redemption:

But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake ... In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and

let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled ... And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh (Luke 21:9-12, 19-22, 25-28).³

While this is an excerpt from only one of hundreds of biblical passages in both Old and New Testaments interpreted by Christians as prophecy concerning the end of the world, this example includes all of the essential elements of such prophecies. First, it encourages readers to interpret national and global catastrophes as evidence of the approaching end of time. Second, it promises supernatural signs: some of which are familiar and “natural” (like famine, earthquakes, and persecution), others of which are wholly unique to the Last Days and clearly supernatural (like unique celestial omens, including the return of Jesus Christ from heaven). Third, it assures Christians that life on Earth will get worse before it gets better, urging patience in the face of catastrophe and persecution. Finally, it offers the promise of Christ’s return to redeem the faithful, though no clear timeline is given for this or for any of these events.

The belief that Jesus will return to judge and rule the Earth is called *millennialism*. The word millennialism derives from biblical Christian prophecies promising a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, a millennium of justice and peace, after Jesus returns. While belief that Christ’s return will be witnessed by the

³ All biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version, the authorized English translation of the Bible for Restoration England.

present generation ebbs and flows throughout history—often inspired by political discontent, natural disasters, moral decline, or conspicuous dates on the calendar—the basic assertion has stood largely unaltered in creedal Christianity. The world will end as it began: through the deliberate workings of the Creator God at the time and in the way he chooses. The universe will reach a cataclysmic termination, passing through a period of special tribulation, after which each woman and man will face final judgment, receiving an eternal punishment or reward. This basic structure has countless variations concerning its chronology and details, and disagreements among the various models' champions have yielded bitter feuds and schisms in the Christian Church; but the foundational belief in a preordained end has been a constant among orthodox Christian believers, as indicated by the plain assertion in the Apostle's Creed: "He will come again to judge the living and the dead."

The duration of one thousand years that gives millennialism its name is not essential to the tenet; what is essential is the belief that Jesus Christ will return and establish for himself an earthly kingdom. The dead will rise; the adversaries of God will be defeated; and time as we currently experience it will end with a final judgment. The faithful will be welcomed eternally into Christ's kingdom while the wicked are justly condemned to perdition.

The social implications of this belief have varied throughout the centuries. To the Christian facing persecution, the promise of Christ's ultimate return and victory offers comfort and, as a general principle, demands forbearance. (This seems to be the intended message of the passage quoted above: "In your patience

possess ye your souls.”) However, in times and places where large Christian factions came to believe in the immanence of Christ’s return, the enthusiasm this belief cultivates has prompted Christians to undertake strident political action or even to engage in violence on a small or large scale to accelerate or inaugurate the End of Days. This belief in the *immanent* return of Christ, a belief frequently demanding action rather than mere forbearance, is called *Christian apocalyptic millennialism* or *Christian millenarianism*.

From the decades leading up to the English Civil War through the first half of the eighteenth century, many in England believed themselves to be the generation that would finally witness the world’s last gasps and the prophesied triumphant return of Jesus. This belief was at times used to support radical and divisive political ideologies, but it was by no means held only by violent dissenters. Many Anglican clerics—perhaps most—joined the chorus of Quaker, Fifth Monarchist, Leveller, Digger, Ranter, Muggletonian, Baptist, and independent ministers, prophets, and visionaries in locating themselves in the last days of history. It was once the general view of historians that apocalyptic millennialism rapidly disappeared from England after the coronation of Charles II, not to return except in small, volatile fringe sects until the Great Awakening a century later. Thanks in large part to the work of Joseph Wittreich and Bernard Capp, scholarship over the last forty years has consistently shown this view to be insupportable. As Cynthia Marshall states, “The expectation that the end of the world was at hand seems to have been fairly ubiquitous: millenarians, Puritans, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics all shared a concern with last things” (xiii). In his essay “Queuing and Waiting: the Apocalypse

in England, 1660-1750," Paul J. Korshin demonstrates how prevalent it became for Biblical prophecy to be interpreted throughout the Restoration as a foretelling of specifically Seventeenth-Century affairs, and often of specifically English affairs. Looking for and seemingly finding signs in nature, in politics, and in decoded prophetic scriptures that the world had entered the Last Days could prove England's centrality in Christ's new kingdom. The Great Plague of London in 1665 and the London fire of 1666 (a conspicuously apocalyptic year) fueled an already well-established tradition.⁴ Such horrible and spectacular disasters reinforced a belief that had been soundly established and cultivated by John Foxe's profoundly influential *Book of Martyrs* and the militantly Protestant *Geneva Bible* a century earlier. These texts and the cloud of interpreters, prophets, and "messiahs" who followed bore witness to England's special significance in the End Times. *The State Martyrologie* (1660) added Charles I and other royalist victims of the English Civil War to the rolls of martyrs Foxe had begun, further asserting Restoration England's special significance in relation to the end of the world.

The persistence of apocalypticism and millenarianism after the English Civil War has been attested to more recently by the scholarship of Warren Johnston. In his essay, "The Patience of the Saints, the Apocalypse, and Moderate Nonconformity in Restoration England," Johnston describes a repurposing of apocalyptic rhetoric by moderate dissenting clergy after the Restoration. Maintaining their millennialist

⁴ For a closer look into the common theological response to the Great Plague, see Richard Kephale's treatise, *Medela pestilentiae : wherein is contained several theological queries concerning the plague ... humbly presented to the Right Honourable and Right Worshipful the lord mayor and sheriffs of the city of London*. London: 1665, available through *Early English Books Online*.

beliefs while opposing violent upheaval, moderate dissenters used apocalyptic speculation as “the language of estrangement from the government and ecclesiastical settlement of Restoration England.” In another essay, Johnston examines the prevalence of apocalyptic thought in the writings and sermons of Anglican ministers of the same period, demonstrating the ways in which apocalyptic ideas can be co-opted, being utilized to serve the very religious and political authorities they had previously been employed to oppose. Johnston’s work “confirms that apocalyptic thought was not simply a language of disaffection on the political and religious margins of society” (467), but was a mode of thought present among and familiar to the moderate conforming Christian mainstream. It also confirms that apocalyptic thought remained prevalent in virtually all Protestant factions in England long after the restoration of the monarchy.

Among the most striking apocalyptic tracts generated by the conformed clergy during the Restoration is Bishop Gryffith Williams’ *Ho Antichristos* (1660), in which the Antichrist is “proved to be neither Pope, nor Turk, nor any Single Person, nor the Succession of any One Monarch, or Tyrant in any Policie; but a collected Pack, or multitude of Hypocritical, Heretical, Blasphemous, and most scandalous wicked men, that have fulfilled all the Prophecies of the Scriptures, which have forespoken of the coming of the Great Antichrist...” (1) – namely the Presbyterians, together with the Independents, Baptists, and lay-preachers. Central to Bishop Williams’ assertion is his interpretation of the killing of Charles I and Archbishop William Laud during the Civil War. Williams identifies these two men as the “two

witnesses” from the *Revelation of John*, central figures in John’s apocalypse. The biblical passage to which he refers reads in part:

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man hurt them, he must be in this manner killed. ... And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified (Revelation 11:3-14).

What is most noteworthy here is not the fact that an Anglican bishop would vehemently oppose the teachings of the dissenters; what should be noted is that he associates them with the prophesied Antichrist and associates Laud and Charles I with two specific individuals from biblical prophecy. The correlation isn’t an obvious one—Charles was not known to wear sackcloth or breathe fire—but asserting and maintaining the correlation serves several ends. It polarizes the Civil War in absolute terms, placing the royalists squarely on God’s side. But most significantly, showing the deaths of the monarch and archbishop to be the fulfillment of apocalyptic biblical prophecy effectively trumpets the end of the world, declaring the current religious/political contest in England to be the world’s ultimate contest, clearly identifying the allies and enemies of Christ in “these last days.”

Dissenting factions largely identified the Pope as Antichrist and viewed the Church of England as little more than a minor branch of the Roman Catholic Church, as in Anna Trapnel’s 1654 “Report and Plea.” Trapnel, a Fifth Monarchist

prophetess, condemns the “Seers of ENGLAND, for strengthening *Baal’s* Priests, and upholding the Popes Dominion, and dressing the Scarlet Whore in new clothes, so as to blinde and deceive Cities and Countries, telling them, That it’s the true genuine fruit of the Womb of the Church, and Spouse of CHRIST...” (6). As Johnston asserts, Anglicans and dissenters alike found opportunities to identify each other as servants of Antichrist. In both camps, as political realities shift, belief in the near proximity of the End Times holds fast: only the interpretation of prophecy and the identity of the major players in the Apocalypse varies. For example, by the late 1670s, political conditions had altered in such a way as to convince the vast majority of Protestants, conformed and dissenting alike, to unite in identifying the Pope and the Catholic priesthood as Antichrist and his minions.

Religious beliefs are more easily reinforced than altered by shifting political realities; crises at home and abroad served to prove to many the close proximity of the world’s end after the Interregnum just as they had prior to the Civil War and Commonwealth. Two of England’s nearest neighbors and rivals, France and Spain, remained staunchly Catholic, creating in Protestant England the sense of being isolated and surrounded by “papists”—loudly declaimed by the Church of England and virtually all dissenting sects alike as followers of Antichrist. The Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis would in turn express and enhance mounting concern over Catholic influence within England’s borders and at the highest levels of state. Throughout this period of turmoil, nonconformists and many within the Church of England believed and proclaimed that England was on the verge of playing the principal role in the inauguration of Christ’s future and final reign.

For dissenting factions like the Fifth Monarchists, for example—a stridently millenarian, anti-monarchic sect well-represented during the Interregnum in Cromwell’s Nominated Assembly—this was the essential justification for King Charles I’s overthrow. Enthusiastic millenarianism would likewise prompt their assassination attempts on both Cromwell and Charles II in turn. The nation, many believed, was entering “the special place within the confines of salvation history to which God’s providence had appointed the church of England, and hence, the nation.... Just as the history of the English Church had been placed within the apocalyptic dimension of time, so the entire course of English history was now imbued with apocalyptic, eschatological significance” (Zakai 220-221). In the minds of those aligned with such radical sects, Charles I had been dethroned and beheaded because England needed to be purified, ushering in the Millennial Age. Christ alone was England’s true and rightful king, and the throne needed to be vacated before he could be expected to return. And he was unquestionably expected; for conformists or moderate dissenters, the regicide itself became evidence of the chaos into which the nation had descended in “these Last Days.”

And while the fervor of more violent and divisive sects would cool as the century rolled on and the Age of Reason dawned, scholars have come to terms with the fact that the Enlightenment by no means rooted out End-Times prophecy and belief. It’s true that conformed Anglican ministers grew wary of too-precise End-Times speculation after the Restoration and into the eighteenth century, clearly mindful of its power to fuel radicalism and dissent. At the same time, Anglican doctrine remained unaltered: it maintained the truth and canonicity of the

Apocalypse of John, and little could be done to stem the tide of popular biblical exegesis, especially in the face of the continued religio-political instability of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. Cambridge Platonist Henry More would assert in his *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1680) that the events described in John's revelation had already occurred, but other scientifically minded exegetes like Isaac Newton maintained with the majority that biblical apocalyptic texts were ultimately decipherable and communicated prophetically about future—now possibly current—events. In this way, enlightenment thinking had the capacity to increase rather than diminish eschatological speculation: it offered new tools for decoding and deciphering prophetic texts, and the challenge in doing so was alluring to Newton and many of his “enlightened” contemporaries.

By the 1720s, the English-speaking world would be swept up in the Great Awakening, driven to Christian revival in large part by the exuberant preaching of George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. The fear of judgment and damnation, always partnered with the promise of salvation for the penitent, would be called upon to inspire repentance from large and enthusiastic crowds both in the American colonies and across England. Jonathan Edwards' legendary sermon, “Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God,” remains emblematic of this new revivalism; its urgent, apocalyptic tone echoing that of English dissenters and their prophets throughout the preceding century. Immediate repentance was necessary because Christ could be expected to return at any moment. So while the popular belief that England was witnessing the Last Days almost certainly waned and waxed to a degree throughout the Restoration era, the general belief in a preordained end of the world and in its

near proximity appears to have been every bit as commonplace in the early- to mid-Eighteenth Century as it had been in the turbulent years surrounding the English Civil War. The entirety of the Restoration was influenced by Christian eschatological thought, and this influence clearly reached the boards of the Restoration stage.

Purpose and Methods

The chapters that follow explore the varied relationships between Christian apocalypticism and the language and spectacle of Restoration drama. It is important to note that these relationships are neither fixed nor monolithic. Each chapter therefore examines a distinct way or set of ways in which the stage engages Christian eschatological belief and the correlated political concerns of the moment. There are many factors that complicate this set of relationships. Shifts and developments in genre reflect political and ideological shifts, and each such shift alters the ways in which eschatological concerns manifest themselves on stage. Likewise, dramatists' changing political allegiances and perceived ideological inconsistencies modify the ways in which they engage in or express major religio-political matters (i.e. the relationship between monarchy and the Catholic Church—an issue richly invested with apocalyptic significance). Additionally, new political developments inscribe new meaning onto established religious and apocalyptic images. It is customary to interpret biblical apocalyptic scriptures in light of current world and national affairs; it is therefore not surprising that a theatre that reflects current events (as the Restoration theatre does) would embrace in turn a series of

distinct apocalyptic images and ideas as each comes to reflect themes and ideas current to life in late seventeenth-century London.

The Restoration witnesses a significant diversification of dramatic genres. Despite increased attention being paid to the neo-classical ideals for dramatic authorship—rules that tend to restrict innovation and experimentation where they hold sway—the demands of Restoration audiences and the desire of playwrights to stage plays that echo prevailing national narratives of the day necessitate formal experimentation. For example, in the wake of a restored monarchy, several hybrid tragicomic forms arise in which providentially ordained happy endings overwhelm tragedy and chaos. Heroic drama reasserts the recently contested right of kings, and, as the exaltation of the Restoration gives way to the turmoil of the 1670s and '80s, political tragedy gains a firm foothold. Each of these forms incorporates or reflects the analogous hopes and fears of apocalyptic expectation. The triumphal tragicomic plays, presenting rightful kings restored and usurpers vanquished, resonate strongly with the language and imagery of the Second Coming of Christ. In contrast, Restoration political tragedies, reflecting the tumult and anxiety of the day, fully embrace and utilize the harrowing images of supernatural destruction central to Christian apocalypticism.

Some of these correlations between the stage and Christian eschatology rely upon the spectacle unique to the stage, but many do not. One of the plays considered at length in Chapter Three, for example, William Bedloe's *The Excommunicated Prince*, was never staged and seems not to have been written for production. Many Restoration plays established themselves or extended their lives

chiefly through publication; when a run of three to five performances was considered a success, the reach and lasting impact of the published script could often exceed that of the production. And while *The Excommunicated Prince* was never staged, Bedloe took every opportunity to ensure that his readers read the document as they would read another play. The format of the script precisely replicates that of a stage play. The very title page, where one would expect to see the producing company named, reads, “The Excommunicated PRINCE: or, The False Relique. A TRAGEDY. As it was ACTED by His Holiness’s Servants. Being the Popish PLOT in a PLAY.” The double title, the name of the “company,” and the play’s identification as a tragedy all mirror the expected format for published dramatic works. While this play is unique in being the only closet drama considered here, the production histories of the other plays examined range widely enough that *The Excommunicated Prince* lies at one end of a long spectrum. Several of the plays examined would be known to a substantial audience principally as written texts. But the impact of a play as a written document was not inconsiderable, and plays with little or no stage success still warrant consideration.

Spectacle is certainly not the only way in which Christian eschatological ideas manifest themselves on the Restoration stage. Yes, the heavenly portents and supernatural omens of biblical apocalypse are present, especially in the serious drama of the 1670s and ‘80s. The desire to stage these grand spectacles seems to be a driving factor as English stagecraft advances, embracing new technologies to meet the demands of these spectacle-driven plays. Eschatology also guides or contours dramatic theory. Chapter Four will consider the fact that providentialism, a key

concept in the tragicomic dramaturgy of the early Restoration, is an essentially eschatological concept. Chapter Six will likewise show a correlation between eschatology and shifting theories of drama, asserting that the movement toward sentimentalism reflects, at least in the plays of Nicholas Rowe, a new emphasis on God's mercy at the Final Judgment rather than his providential care on earth. And of course, concern with "last things" can do a great deal to shape a play's plot or its theme. Arguably, tragedy itself, concerned as it is with human mortality and the end of human lives and legacies, is a vehicle perfectly suited to the purpose of eschatological reflection and exploration.

Interpreting the serious plays of the Restoration has long been complicated by the apparent shifting of political allegiances by dramatists, notably John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee. These shifts can frequently be understood as responses to the exigencies of a life reliant on the patronage of an unstable court: Dryden's "Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell" are swiftly and dutifully swept out of sight by "Astraea Redux," his poem commemorating the coronation of Charles II. Such a shift is readily understandable. Apparent shifts in allegiance that imperil the careers of dramatists rather than advancing them are more problematic; The strong anti-Catholic position seemingly advanced in Nathaniel Lee's plays at the height of the Exclusion Crisis are an example of this. With Parliament working to exclude Charles's Catholic brother and heir presumptive from the order of succession, a rigidly anti-Catholic position could be interpreted as anti-royalist. However, what appears as a dwindling royalism in Lee may reflect changes in the political situation far more than it reflects changes in the playwright. In the 1660s, a proud,

conforming Anglican could joyfully celebrate the restoration of the monarchy, ending a Puritan rule that was generally forgiving of religious non-conformity. Under Charles II, the Clarendon Code (1661-1665) would increasingly exclude religious dissenters from civic life. In the 1670s, the Test Act would serve a similar function for Catholics specifically, excluding them from virtually every public and military office. Clearly the experiences of the Civil War and Interregnum, reinforced by the hysteria surrounding the Popish Plot, demonstrate a constant popular and parliamentary tide of resistance against religious non-conformity. For an individual to support the Restoration in 1660 and then oppose Catholic influence at the highest levels of state in 1678 does not so much reflect a change in political allegiance as reveal a constant support for an autonomous and unified Church of England. If Lee seems to reclaim a solid “Tory” position with *The Duke of Guise*, the exigencies of life in a theatre operated by royal patent make this easy to comprehend.

As these observations demonstrate, throughout the Restoration there are several theatre audiences to consider, despite the relatively small and elite circle of which a Restoration audience is composed. The king is only one “audience,” though a particularly important one. As Chapter Three will examine, few positions have such widespread and vocal support in the late 1670s-’80s as anti-Catholicism, even if it is not the king’s position. Audiences support anti-Catholic plays as long as the crown will suffer them. Dramatist Elkanah Settle—never much favored by the crown—capitalizes on this enthusiasm outside of traditional theatrical circles, finding success by mounting Pope burnings. Settle does produce plays as well, some of them highly successful despite the fact that Dryden derides them publicly. But

clearly his successes demonstrate the presence of a significant audience that does not harmonize with the opinions of its monarch.

Again, Restoration dramatists use the stage to discuss current events: comedies are reflective of the attitudes, tendencies, and foibles of their courtly audience, and tragedies utilize historical parallels to present and comment on England's current crises. These crises are consistently colored by apocalyptic speculation, as there was throughout the Seventeenth Century a parallel, mainstream conversation in which current events were read against apocalyptic biblical prophecy. This being the case, the Restoration stage was inexorably drawn into apocalyptic discourse.

Staging the End

The rhetoric and imagery of the apocalypse and Second Coming wield a great deal of symbolic power. Not surprisingly, Restoration dramatists, especially authors of tragedy, opera, and heroic drama, frequently employed and incorporated these images, drawing the stage into the apocalyptic millennialist discourse of the age. The Restoration stage, profoundly tied to current events and the concerns of the moment, could hardly ignore such a vital current in English thought. As the brief thrill of restored monarchy dwindled into new concerns through the 1660s, '70s, and '80s—concerns like the Anglo-Dutch Wars, the popish plot, the exclusion crisis, and the Glorious Revolution—the religio-political importance of eschatological concerns in England persisted.

Staging the apocalypse in a cultural moment so charged with apocalyptic millennialist belief achieves an assortment of ends. It is true that, in a Restoration political tragedy, millenarian rhetoric can be used strategically in order to comment on the aims of specific religious sects or factions familiar to the audience. Certain millenarian posturing could have been readily associated with the more radical dissenting factions of the Civil War era. However, it is worth bearing in mind Susan J. Owen's caution concerning political readings of serious Restoration drama. She identifies "a danger in seeing political reference exclusively or mainly in terms of dramatists taking sides, or making the kind of political allusions which we might expect to find in a modern context of clearly defined political allegiances" (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 28). This warning might be broadened to include millennialist and apocalyptic language being mistakenly associated exclusively with Cromwellians and radical dissenters. Apocalypticism can be and often is politicized, spurring on millenarian activity; but it is not inherently or primarily political. Referencing or showing the apocalypse on stage serves a number of dramatic functions. In a heroic drama or affective tragedy, for example, the near proximity of the world's final destruction can justify the most extraordinary actions or bombastic language, yielding great pathetic effect without succumbing to "unnaturalness." It may be argued that, in the face of the end of the world, there can be no exaggeration or excess.

But this is only one of several ways in which apocalypticism advances the aims of a Restoration dramatist. As the following chapters demonstrate, the potent imagery and rhetoric of apocalypse and the Second Coming, when familiar to an

audience, do much to lend gravity and urgency to a play. They also serve to add a sense of wonder or mystery and to suggest the inescapable activity of a divine will. Partnered with the ever-expanding technical capacities of the London stage, performed wonders, prodigies, and celestial signs could create an otherwise unachievable level of spectacle, bolstering and bolstered by a profound sense of mystery and awe. They reinforce a play's sense of finality, increasing the sting of tragic loss or defeat by making it irrevocable. In Restoration theatre, apocalypticism extends the boundaries of the natural world, locating the characters and action on the brink of global, catastrophic destruction, in a dangerous world where the highest possible stakes are in play.

The following chapters aim to cultivate an understanding of this language and imagery, their uses, and the historical context in which they are being utilized in order to encourage and enable scholars to reexamine and better comprehend the serious drama of the Restoration. When considered against the period's comedies, the heroic dramas, tragedies, and even tragicomedies of the Restoration have received relatively little critical attention, and very nearly none of them have been staged even once in the last two centuries. By contrast, the celebrated comedies of William Congreve, Aphra Behn, William Wycherley, George Farquhar and others have remained the constant objects of study and appreciation; and some are even remounted with regularity. Richard Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith are identified as clear inheritors of the Restoration comic tradition, as are the likes of Oscar Wilde and even Noël Coward. But Restoration tragedy has left no clearly identifiable legacy. The early tragicomic experiments of the period serve as little more than

material for a study in genre formation. The heroic dramas would disappear quickly as rhymed couplets fell from favor, and no lasting tradition of rhymed drama would ever again be established in the English language. The political tragedies and early affective tragedies of Thomas Otway and Nathaniel Lee have few admirers today; John Banks, John Crowne, Elkanah Settle, and Nahum Tate have even fewer.

Understanding the significance of Christian eschatological concern throughout the Restoration and acknowledging the ways in which the language and imagery of millennialism and apocalypse are being employed by dramatists offers the possibility of reinterpreting and revaluing these dramatists and their contributions to English drama.

The following is therefore an examination of serious Restoration drama through the lens of eschatology, scrutinizing especially the dramatists' frequent employment of eschatological language, imagery, and thought on the Restoration stage. It is an attempt to demonstrate and interpret the ways in which elements of Christian eschatology and the worldview it supports influence the imagery, themes, and structure of Restoration drama. And while there are passages within a few of the period's celebrated comedies that warrant examination, this study is concerned chiefly with the less frequently studied serious drama of the age. The arguments of each chapter will rely on close readings of one or two plays from the period, with supporting illustrations drawn from additional works. The chapters advance more-or-less chronologically, but each is chiefly topical and may therefore of necessity reach beyond its loose chronological confines to draw on earlier or later related examples and illustrations.

Chapter Two has as its subject the imagery of the daemonic usurper and restored righteous king especially prevalent in the tragedies and tragicomedies of the 1660s through the early 1670s. Nancy Maguire has demonstrated in her book *Regicide and Restoration* how these plays were written to reflect, parallel, and in their way “correct” the Puritan overthrow and execution of Charles I and the coronation of Charles II; but much about the plays’ language and construction—particularly the manner in which the two monarchs are conflated into one fallen and restored champion—deliberately parallels the story of the crucified, resurrected, and returning Christ. These plays cultivate the “holy martyr” myth concerning Charles I prevalent in the earliest years of the Restoration in particular. When dramatists mythologize the monarch in such a way as to blend the fallen monarch and restored sovereign into a single character, glossing over the eroded ideals and uncomfortable circumstances surrounding the Commonwealth’s end, the result is the creation of an especially Christ-like “holy martyr triumphant”—slain saint and savior returning as rightful and righteous king.

In order to demonstrate the extraordinary multivalence at work in the image of the returning king and how this complex symbol operates, chapter two examines the earliest serious plays of the Restoration, predominantly usurper tragicomedies crafted to demonize Cromwell and celebrate the reestablishment of the crown. The chapter also includes a close examination of John Dryden’s 1672 split-plot tragicomedy *Marriage a-la-Mode*. In that play, the young rightful monarch Leonidas, by suffering at the hands of the usurper, facing death, and ultimately claiming his throne, stands in for both Charles I and Charles II in the heroic plot. Assigning both

roles to a single character generates a clear Christ figure: subjected to abuses and sentenced to death for his bride and for his people, but ultimately vindicated and restored/"resurrected". Leonidas offers himself as a sacrifice and accepts his unjust death willingly in true Christ-like fashion. The serious plot's relationship to the parallel comic plot is complicated: the latter serves to reinforce this central theme of divine/royal love and self-sacrifice, generally by serving as a foil, while also parodying the heroic plot and the eagerness of the hero to sacrifice himself—an aspiration common among the tragic and tragicomic heroes of the early Restoration stage.

Chapter Three examines the popular view of the papacy in the 1670s and 1680s and the common opinion that the Pope was the Antichrist identified in apocalyptic scriptures. The belief was widely held in England and was the official position of the Church of England, but events in the last decades of the Seventeenth Century gave this belief new currency. As the reign of Charles II drew to an end without him having produced a legitimate heir, the order of succession dictated that the monarchy was to pass to his Catholic brother, James. Not only did this threaten the very existence of the English Church—a Protestant church placed directly under the authority of its monarch—but it also threatened to place England under the authority of Rome, identified in the *Revelation of John* as "Babylon, Mother of Harlots." The 1670s and 1680s were therefore shaped most significantly by two events: the Popish Plot, an alleged Jesuit conspiracy to assassinate King Charles and establish a Catholic England; and the Exclusion Crisis, an effort by Parliament and

prominent nobles to alter the line of succession so that Catholic James could not assume the throne.

With these controversies in mind, it is clear that Roman Catholicism was a source of boundless discussion, perturbation and distress in this period. Not surprisingly, that conversation and concern found its way onto the stage. They would appear in the form of narratives supporting the most virulent anti-Catholic rhetoric, reflecting Christian apocalyptic beliefs in identifying the Pope as the prophesied Antichrist. This not only inspired and encouraged anti-Catholic sentiment, but it did so by locating the current political struggle within apocalyptic time. The plays were therefore operating on the assumption that the end of the world loomed near.

Above all else, the anti-Catholic hysteria generated by Titus Oates and others throughout the “popish plot” of the late 1670s and early 1680s served to cultivate End-Times paranoia, most plainly manifested by this consistent identifying of the Pope as Antichrist—the embodiment of evil on earth in the end times in the *Revelation of John*. Christians who had survived the mid-seventeenth century had experienced much to reinforce their apocalyptic fears and millennialist beliefs. With this in mind, chapter three closely examines two anti-Catholic plays: William Bedloe’s *The Excommunicated Prince: or The False Relique* (1679) and Elkanah Settle’s *The Female Prelate: Being the History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan* (1680). Bedloe’s play is a closet drama that serves as an historical parallel of the Popish Plot, bringing to life on stage events that Bedloe swore under oath had happened in England; and Settle’s *Pope Joan*, written about the legendary female

Pope of the Middle Ages, is perhaps the most vicious and unapologetic anti-Catholic play in the history of the English stage.

But the presence of the Antichrist in these plays, like all the manifestations of Christian apocalypse on stage, does more than parallel the Popish Plot and call to mind the world's end. Another central element of Christian eschatology is the fundamental belief in a providentially ordered, meaningful sequence of events shaping human history. The presence of such evil, because its presence was *preordained* in scripture, lends to the plays a sense of providential will and control, even in the midst of scenes of chaos and destruction. Divine foreknowledge, like the supernatural interference in human affairs, bears witness to God's presence and will in the cataclysms unfolding on stage. Chapter Four is a study of the relationship between staged apocalypticism, rhetorics of crisis, and the Christian belief that time will reach (and is rapidly approaching) a preordained, meaningful end—*plenitudo temporis*, or the "fullness of time." Because the guiding hand of Providence is active throughout the Restoration across several genres, this chapter begins by returning to the 1660s to examine how tragicomic playwrights associate the positive reversals of fortune for their characters with the workings of Providence. This force closely resembles but is not identical to the concept of poetic justice, a rule developed during the Restoration to be a guiding imperative in English dramaturgy. While poetic justice insists that the wicked be punished and the virtuous rewarded to a degree commensurate with their actions, providentialism reveals the righteous hand of God using *all* things, good and evil, to fulfill his purpose. The providentialist therefore, unlike the advocate for poetic justice, is free to forgive and to redeem his

villains, showing how their actions bring about unexpected but providentially ordained blessings for all instead of a straightforward dispensation of rewards and punishments.

The chapter will then compare the providentialism of 1660s tragicomedy with the relatively fatalistic tragedies of the late 1670s and early 1680s. These plays utilize the supernatural to demonstrate a divine interest and investment in the play's events, but divine interest in no way guarantees a happy ending for the virtuous. Chapter four suggests that the escalating paranoia and disorder that shaped the late 70s and early 80s generate in the plays of the day a world under divine tribulation—the world as it appears under divine judgment in biblical prophecy in which Satan has been set loose. This is the world in which the millenarian Christian would expect to see the most extraordinary and terrible wonders as God reveals himself to the last wicked generation, leaving faithless mankind without excuse as it faces judgment. As a chief example of such supernatural portents and their relation to Christian providentialism, the chapter will include a close examination of the adaptation of *Oedipus* co-authored by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee in 1678.

Chapter Five is dedicated entirely to Nathaniel Lee, the Restoration's greatest dramatic poet of the "apocalyptic aesthetic." Though his plays are without exception set in ancient pagandom, they are nonetheless steeped in Christian eschatological concern, drawing heavily on the Christian language and imagery of apocalypse. Most of his plays chronicle the downfall of kings and nations on the brink of a providentially ordained destruction, including both of his most highly esteemed

works: *The Rival Queens* (1677) and *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1680). His characters' violent outbreaks and emotional excesses have led some scholars, following the lead of early Restoration theatre scholar Bonamy Dobrée, to dismiss his work as either the loftiest example of heroic drama—fully committed to an impossible ideal and therefore divorced from psychological reality—or the ravings of a madman. Indeed, Lee has generally been disparaged or ignored by scholars, representing to those familiar with his work all that is wrong with serious drama on the London stage after the Jacobean period.

Dobrée illustrates what he sees as Lee's greatest shortcoming effectively, citing some of the most spectacular and bombastic passages of the age from *Oedipus* (1678), *The Rival Queens*, and *Caesar Borgia* (1679). But closer consideration of the very passages he offers demands that Lee's "ravings" be reexamined through the lens of apocalyptic anxiety. From *Oedipus*, Dobrée draws the "world's last groans" passage cited at the onset of this chapter; from *Caesar Borgia* he quotes: "Where are our guards? Hark, I hear 'em coming; / Or is it dooms-day? Ha—by hell, it is; / And see, the heavens, and earth, and air are all / On fire ..." (119); from *The Rival Queens* he cites the "charming" song (sung by ghosts):

Is innocence so void of cares,
That it can undisturbed sleep
Amidst the noise of horrid wars,
That make immortal spirits weep?
No boding crows, nor raven come,
To warn her of approaching doom (Dobrée 117).

Such passages are not the ravings of mad characters, nor the scribblings of a lunatic playwright: they are clear and easily recognizable expressions of apocalyptic expectation and fear.

Dobrée (and fellow critic of Restoration drama Richard Bevis after him) can only marvel at Lee's assertion that his *Mithridates* (1678), full of "extravagant horrors," combines the "majesty and true Roman greatness" of Shakespeare with the "softness and passionate expressions" of Fletcher, refined for his age. What scholars have failed to acknowledge is that Lee's age is in fact defined in part by the prevalence of such "extravagant horrors" in everyday apocalyptic rhetoric, shaping the religious and political discourse of the moment. The sense of global chaos and urgency Lee's plays generate is a product and reflection of a panicking nation. If millenarianism is to be admitted as a contributing factor to Lee's work, Dobrée's description of Lee could be used in turn to describe many of the preachers and prophets of the day: "The fact is that Lee is most himself when he is dealing in superlatives, when no word can be too strong, no image too tremendous" (127). Because the end of the word cannot be overstated, demanding the liberal use of such superlatives, Lee's dramatic authorship may be understood and rightly gauged only when it is acknowledged to be in part an artful (if not often subtle) articulation of apocalyptic anxiety.

In this chapter, special attention is paid to Lee's 1680 political tragedy *Lucius Junius Brutus*; but many of his works, including his collaborations with John Dryden, will be shown to offer the richest examples of apocalypticism realized on the Restoration stage. An investigation into the way his plays have been received and

interpreted by critics throughout the centuries demonstrates a basic lack of understanding regarding millennialist and apocalyptic language and imagery, commonly resulting in Lee's dramaturgy being dismissed as grotesquely bombastic or simply marred by insanity. It is one of my greatest hopes for this study that it will result in a more judicious appraisal of Nathaniel Lee's powerful and unique contribution to the English stage.

The sixth chapter looks beyond the millennialist and apocalyptic dramatics of the first few decades of the Restoration to the more sentimental tragedy that would supplant it, beginning with Thomas Otway's groundbreaking play, *The Orphan* (1680). *The Orphan* is a very early example of "she-tragedy" or "weeping tragedy": a form that anticipates the sentimental drama of the next century and marks a major shift in dramatic theory and practice, anticipating the plays of Southerne, Banks, Rowe and others, along with the general trajectory of serious dramatists through the Eighteenth Century. In these plays, one rarely encounters the scenes of chaos and destruction that permeate the plays of their successors, including even the rest of Otway's early work. However, the rhetoric of apocalypse adheres throughout, despite the absence of many new literal manifestations of apocalypse on the London stage.

It may be that one of the reasons the serious drama of the Restoration has been largely neglected by scholars is the sense that there is no identifiable lineage between it and the theatre of sentiment and melodrama that will dominate the English stage for the next several centuries. By examining some early works that abandon the lofty political tragic mode of Lee, including John Banks' 1695

transitional work, *Cyrus the Great*, this chapter will demonstrate the lingering value of apocalyptic language and symbols in English drama beyond the limited lifespan of heroic drama and political tragedy. Recognizing the ways in which serious Restoration dramatists influenced their successors will again hopefully encourage scholars to reevaluate the work of Otway, Lee, Banks, and their contemporaries. While chapter six includes only a brief glance at the drama of the Eighteenth Century, it should ultimately come as no surprise that the drama produced through the years of the Great Awakening and the Age of Enlightenment—of Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741) and Newton's *Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (1733)—would continue to bear evidences of the strong eschatological concern that permeated Restoration thought and significantly shaped decades of serious Restoration drama. Establishing this link between the early serious drama of the Restoration and the sentimental tragedy and drama that would supplant it and dominate the Eighteenth Century will hopefully serve to locate serious Restoration dramatists on the map of English theatre history. Apocalyptic rhetoric serves as one vital link, central to the work of Restoration tragedians and continuing to help shape the changing serious drama of the following century and beyond.

To conclude, Chapter Seven serves as an epilogue, offering a brief look at the continuing legacy of apocalypticism on the English-speaking stage, especially in the years surrounding the turn of the millennium. As the year 2000 approached, evidences of apocalyptic concern surfaced throughout the world. Several of the images of apocalypse had been transmuted into new ones reflecting secular

concerns, anxiety over Antichrist and fire from the heavens being transmuted into new anxieties over a Y2K computer virus and a depleted ozone layer. Half a century earlier, concerns over Soviet Russia and nuclear holocaust shaped the apocalyptic discourse of the day. Biblical literalists—a percentage of the population that might seem shockingly large to many academics—interpret the day’s terrors through the lens of apocalyptic prophecies in scripture, as many Christians have done since the days of the early Church. Paul Boyer examines this phenomenon at length in his book, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*.

For those who do not view the world through the lens of biblical literalism, the apocalypse maintains power not through religious belief, but through its ability to locate us in a larger narrative, relating the “now” of an individual life to a universal beginning and end. As Frank Kermode asserts:

... fundamentally arbitrary chronological divisions ... are made to bear the weight of our anxieties and hopes; they are, as [Focillon] remarks, ‘intemporal,’ but we project them onto history, making it ‘a perpetual calendar of human anxiety.’ They help us to find ends and beginnings. They explain our senescence, our renovations; when we associate them with empire we are celebrating our desire for human kinds of order; when we find rational objections to them we indulge our powers of rational censorship in such matters; and when we refuse to be dejected by disconfirmed predictions we are only asserting a permanent need to live by the pattern rather than the fact, as indeed we must (11).

The end of the millennium was marked on the English stage by the arrival of Tony Kushner’s apocalyptic masterpiece, *Angels in America*. In the years preceding and closely following the year 2000, apocalypticism continued to prove its currency on stage. The relevance of staged catastrophes—supernatural, providential, or otherwise—was further influenced by the catastrophic events of September 11th,

2001 in New York City. With all this in mind, Chapter Seven will briefly examine Kushner's landmark play and will demonstrate how it serves as a model example of how the images and ideas of apocalypticism discussed throughout the first six chapters persist on the English stage.

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Chapter Two

“What our House to *Pompey* owes”: Tragicomedy, King, and the Second Coming, 1660-1672

Every black Cloud does not with Thunder swell,
Nor every symptom a Disease foretell.
Some storms blow over; though thy fate appear
Thus gloomy now, anon it may be clear.

...

All that we hear we are not to believe.

- From *The Mulberry-Garden* (1668) by Sir Charles Sedley
Act III scene 1

And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in
my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not
therefore after them.

- Luke 21:8, King James Version

“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever”

In 1660, when the Interregnum ended and Parliament invited the exiled son of England’s beheaded monarch to reestablish the monarchy, London’s theatres reopened through the issuance of two royal patents. In the first enthusiastic years of London’s resumed theatrical activity, the majority of new serious plays to take the stage were usurper tragicomedies. In these plays, rightful monarchs lose their kingdoms to cruel usurpers but ultimately see their rightful rule restored. That such plays would be popular at this moment in history is no surprise considering that the tribulations of the Interregnum are fresh in the memory of the populace in general and of the court in particular. Considering the historical backdrop behind life in London in 1660, it may not seem necessary to look for any significance in the image of a restored king in Restoration drama beyond its obvious and overtly political parallel—that of the coronation of Charles II and the restoration of England’s monarchy. Indeed, the very idea that a period so entirely committed to making a fresh start and pursuing the reestablishment of order through the restoration of monarchy would have anything to say about Last Things and the world’s end—the concerns of eschatology—at first seems unlikely. But it must be remembered that Christian eschatology is as replete with images of rebirth, new life, and a world put right after great distress in the last days of human history as it is with images of death, destruction, and tribulation. Indeed, the two are inexorably linked. The apocalyptic *Revelation of John*, after outlining a period of divinely appointed tribulation at the approach of the world’s end, describes the dawning of a restored kingdom:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful (Revelation 21:1-2, 5).

The overarching narrative of Christianity is neither comic nor tragic but tragicomic: atonement for sin and the making of “all things new” is effected through death; death gives way to resurrection, after which the fall of humanity is ultimately and eternally reversed by redemption through Jesus Christ. The study of Christian eschatology is therefore not merely the study of the violent end of the world described in biblical prophecy but also of the final resurrection, of redemption and reward for the faithful (and judgment for the unfaithful), and of Christ’s rightful reign restored. As the angel declares in John’s vision, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

The pattern of repeated fall and redemption/restoration is the essential pattern through which the relationship between God and humanity is understood in Christian scripture. The Old Testament narrative describes a series of fallings away from God by his chosen people, the Israelites—perhaps most vividly when Aaron and the Israelites construct a golden calf to worship while Moses speaks with God on the mountain. In each such instance, the people are restored to grace and relationship with their God by sacrifice, the intercession of judges and prophets, and a large-scale, national movement toward repentance. The first followers of Jesus would identify in this a pattern established by God to presage the life-giving power

of the death and resurrection of Christ by which God and humanity are finally reconciled once and for all. For example, according to the gospel writers, Jesus' atoning death is foreshadowed in the Passover lamb (Luke 22); his redeeming death on the cross is anticipated by the bronze "serpent in the wilderness" raised up on a staff to save the lives of Israelites who looked upon it (John 3:14); and his resurrection after three days is prefigured in Jonah's emergence from the whale after three days to call the city of Nineveh to repentance, saving them from destruction (Matthew 12:39). The death and resurrection of Jesus are seen as the ultimate culmination of this overarching pattern of fall and redemption, death and resurrection, revealed to humanity in scripture throughout the centuries. Paul identifies the beginning and end points in this pattern when he writes: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Transcending all of humanity's failings and redemptions is a single tragicomic super-narrative: the initial Fall of Man through Adam corrected in mankind's redemption through Jesus Christ.

This mode of interpreting Christian scriptures, while orthodox and in keeping with conformed seventeenth-century biblical exegesis, also resonates strongly with twentieth-century religious theorist Mircea Eliade. In his book, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade asserts that, in cultures adhering to a "traditional" religious model, "an object or an act becomes meaningful only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model in 'meaningless,' i.e., it

lacks reality” (34). In Eliade’s understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular, “history appears as a series of theophanies, negative or positive, each of which has its intrinsic value” (107). Each significant historical moment is given significance in two ways: it is a repetition of an archetype in addition to being a new assertion of God’s will in the world. Even the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are meaningful and efficacious only because they are echoes of the death and resurrection of Christ. Understood this way, the restoration of England’s monarchy bears not only political meaning but religious or “cosmic” meaning because a) the death and “rebirth” of the monarch is a repetition of Christianity’s essential mytho-heroic model, and b) the ultimate victory of the royalists in 1660 is “a new assertion of God’s will” for England. Just as Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the bronze serpent in the wilderness, and Jonah’s days in the fish all anticipate and give special meaning to the death and resurrection of Jesus, so too the death and resurrection of Jesus gives special meaning to Charles I’s death and the restored monarchy under Charles II. To use Eliade’s terminology, for the Christian, the event of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection is the cosmogonic center of time from which all meaning emanates.

The frequently recurring motif of fall from grace into sin and death and restoration to righteousness and a right relationship with God in Judeo-Christian scriptures anticipates, each time it appears, the ultimate resolution of humanity’s precarious relationship with the divine. This makes it a matter of eschatological interest as it concerns the fate of nations and individual souls beyond death and the end of the world. That said, it should be noted that the “End Times,” in the common

Christian conception of Seventeenth Century England, are already underway. This pattern of fall and redemption does not resolve itself at the Second Coming but has, in Christian theology, already been resolved, the end of world having been set irretrievably in motion by the great meaning-giving event: the death and resurrection of Jesus. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews articulates this, beginning his letter with an historical overview of God's relationship with humanity:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath *in these last days* spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ... But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom (Hebrews 1:1-3, 8, emphasis mine).

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, followed quickly by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus into Paul the apostle, initiated a new era in time identified throughout the New Testament and other Christian writings across the centuries (including the Restoration) as “these last days”—an expression that would find new currency in periods of special tribulation, persecution, and chaos in Christendom.⁵ What is most important to note is that 1) Christianity allows for all events after the resurrection of Christ to be interpreted as

⁵ The theological position that God has revealed himself to mankind by different methods in different historical periods, establishing a series of new or restructured “covenants,” is called *dispensationalism*. Methods for dividing history vary somewhat, but the principal was well established in Restoration England. Chapter VIII of the 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, entitled “Of God’s Covenant With Man,” articulates this as follows: “Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory; yet, in them, it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.”

happening “in these last days,” thereby endowing them with special eschatological significance; and 2) it ascribes special significance to historical events both before and after Christ that anticipate or reiterate the mythic, cosmogonic pattern of death and rebirth, fall and redemption, enacted by Jesus on the cross by which humanity’s relationship with God is ultimately expressed.

This biblical pattern of fall and redemption, death and resurrection is also identified in the Bible and by Christian theologians as a pattern of usurpation and restoration. In the Gospels, Jesus identifies Satan from whom he is reclaiming the earth as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31), and Paul refers to him in his epistles as “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). Satan’s earthly reign establishes the ultimate paradigm for usurpers, and Jesus is in turn the paradigmatic restored monarch, with a “sceptre of righteousness” in hand, enthroned “for ever and ever.” Jesus declares in the Gospel of John, “Now is the judgment on this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:31-32).

In the first years of the Restoration, Stuart mythographers linked their nation’s experience of Civil War, regicide, exile, and restoration to this overarching Christian narrative, thereby endowing the events with mythic, supernal significance and locating in the chaos in which the men and women of England were embroiled the guiding hand of divine providence. The anagogical correlation is a natural one: the restored king is Christian biblical prophecy’s central symbol in addition to being

the chief concern of the 1660s. This same symbol quite naturally becomes in turn the central symbol and motif of serious drama in Restoration London.

Poets capitalized on the ready-made anagogy between the restoration of the Stuart monarchy and the prophesied return of Christ. Drawing such a correlation was hardly novel: Christian millennialist expectation encourages one to examine history and current events for spiritual signs, and both Old and New Testament narratives assert that God's will is made known through both natural and political events. The lines of demarcation between the religious and political spheres in mid-seventeenth century London were blurry at best: the prevailing religious concerns of the day had strong political implications, and millennialist expectation, to the extent that it had with some frequency manifested itself in violent acts of millenarian unrest, could certainly prove to be political. For many in this period fraught with religious and specifically millenarian conflict, the central Christian image of Christ returning to judge and rule could in itself be a politicized image, calling to mind the prayers and prophecies of regicidal dissidents like the Fifth Monarchists.

But one need not look to the millenarian hopes of the radical dissenter to find eschatological significance in the image of the restored king. Royalists asserted that the restoration of the Stuart monarchy was itself a providential act, calling upon the Bible's essential meaning-making structure of death and resurrection, usurpation and restoration to ascribe religious significance to recent political events. The radical dissenter reads the regicide and the establishment of a Commonwealth as a cosmic inciting incident, purging England of its worldly ruler, preparing the nation

and setting in motion divinely appointed future events. The royalist by contrast associates these same political events with the biblical pattern in which such deaths and resurrections mark the culmination—not the inciting incident—of the narrative. Stated more plainly, dissenters saw the overthrow of the monarchy as a sign of Christ’s immanent return while loyalists interpreted the same events as evidence that England was entering the tribulations of the End Times, but both interpreted these events eschatologically.

On May 23rd, 1660, two weeks after Charles II is declared king, a document is published that identifies and honors fallen royalists—effectively an addendum to Fox’s *Book of Martyrs*—outlining the history of the past twelve years from a royalist perspective. It bears a remarkably theatrical title: *The State Martyrologie: Or, Innocent Blood Speaking its Mournfull Tragedy*. The document ends, “We are hopefully arrived at the reestablishment of our Lawes, Liberties, and Religion, under the Government of his most Excellent Majesty, CHARLES the 2^d, whom God long, and long preserve.” The title identifies these events as tragedy; but with the death and “resurrection” of the Stuart monarchy completed, order has been reestablished for the royalists and the tragedy of regicide and civil war has, in its final moments, been converted into tragicomedy.

This chapter is an examination of the usurper tragicomedies of roughly the first decade of the Restoration. Again, when London’s theatres reopened in 1660, most new serious plays to take the stage were usurper tragicomedies. (A handful of usurper tragedies were interspersed among these, but the usurper was ubiquitous and, notably, the term “tragedy” came to be used with less precision, at times

applied to plays that were in fact tragicomedies.) These plays, while varied to a degree in form and content, each served to celebrate and valorize the monarchy, condemning whatever forces might interfere with divinely ordained royal succession. As the decade rolls on, new tragicomic forms arise—most notably Dryden’s heroic drama and the divided plot tragicomedy. As representative examples of usurper tragicomedy’s varied forms, this chapter will closely examine two plays: Edmund Waller’s single plot tragicomedy and proto-heroic-drama *Pompey the Great* (1663), and John Dryden’s divided tragicomic masterpiece, *Marriage à la Mode* (1672). Both of these plays include usurpers and must therefore be read, at least to a degree, analogically in the wake of civil war and Restoration. But this motif may further be read anagogically—identifying in the restored king an additional layer of allegorical or spiritual meaning relating to the Second Coming of Christ. This chapter examines the ways in which this anagogy is reinforced by Restoration dramatists. In Waller’s *Pompey*,⁶ one finds a single-plot political tragicomedy of the sort that anticipates the heroic drama of Dryden. Surprisingly, one also encounters in this play an argument for the virtue and value of *all* great men, usurpers included, granting insight into the fractured sense of allegiance that troubled the Restoration era. The troubled efforts to redefine or reassert monarchy in the period will, as this chapter goes on to argue, enhance the tendency of royalists to associate the narrative surrounding Charles I and Charles II with that of the crucified, resurrected, and returning Christ.

⁶ The play is adapted from Cornielle anonymously by “Certain Persons of Honour.” It is in large part attributed to Waller, though Sir Charles Sedley and the Earl of Dorset have at times been identified as being among likely coauthors.

Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* is a divided tragicomedy that uses its unusual structure and sharp satire in novel ways—anticipated, perhaps, by other satirical split-plot tragicomedies like Sir Charles Sedley's *The Mulberry-Garden* (1668) but perfected by Dryden in 1672. The play serves as a useful case study of the complicated, multivalent use of Christian eschatological symbols and rhetoric in Restoration tragicomedy. The play's divided plot allows Dryden to utilize and to satirize simultaneously the heroic/romantic rhetoric of the period and the ways in which it is employed to equate king with Christ and the monarch's restoration with both resurrection and Christ's triumphant Second Coming.

Disparate and Changing Understandings of Tragicomedy and of Monarchy

Throughout the first half of the 1660s, the dramatic form utilized by nearly every English author of serious works for the stage is tragicomedy. This moniker means little without further classification as it has been used throughout the ages and indeed was used throughout the Restoration to identify several distinct dramatic forms. Sarup Singh traces the label's varied usage back through the Seventeenth Century in his book, *The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period*. He begins with the poet Guarini who, in his 1601 *Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry*, defends the hybrid form, writing, "he who makes a tragicomedy does not intend to compose separately either a tragedy or a comedy, but from the two a third thing that will be perfect in its kind" (Hackett 161). In Guarini's understanding, tragicomedy borrows elements from comedy and tragedy without rigidly conforming to either form, offering from tragedy "passions, moved but tempered: the delight not the

sadness; the danger not the death” and from comedy “laughter which is not dissolute, ... a happy reversal, and above all, the comic order” (*Literature Criticism* 21). So this early definition describes a form of tragicomedy created by fusing certain desired elements of comedy and of tragedy together, generally ignoring key accepted rules of each—especially the rule disallowing their coexistence in a single text.

In 1609, Fletcher writes, “A tragie-comedie is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is inough to make it no tragedie, yet brings some neere it, which is enough to make it no comedie” (Fletcher 497). Here Fletcher offers to the theater a slightly more exacting and restrictive definition of tragicomedy: not a free and liberal fusion of elements of mirth and matter but rather a gravely serious play with a happy ending. Fletcher’s work would briefly become a benchmark for English drama, generating a working definition of tragicomedy that largely held into the 1660s. However, the Restoration would in time give rise to a new preeminent form of serious drama ending well: heroic drama. This new form, championed by Dryden and first formally identified with his 1670 drama *The Conquest of Granada*,⁷ would, in keeping with Fletcher’s definition, contain serious matter, bringing characters near enough to death to make it no comedy; but all would end well for the virtuous, making it no tragedy. Serious drama ending well therefore had a new name, in addition to receiving a precise poetic form and a new

⁷ While the term “heroic drama” would not be introduced until 1670, it is consistently applied retrospectively by critics and by Dryden himself at least to his 1665 play *The Indian Emperor; or, the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards* and generally to *The Indian Queen* (1664), written with Sir Robert Howard.

governing ideology. With the birth of the name “heroic drama,” the name “tragicomedy” would come chiefly to adhere to a different object. “Tragicomedy” would come to refer principally to plays with divided plots in which a serious/heroic/romantic “high plot” and a comic “under-plot” are loosely joined by circumstance and perhaps by theme. This form would also find a champion in Dryden, whose *Marriage à la Mode* would arguably be the form’s finest example.⁸ Divided tragicomedies are not simply serious plays with happy endings but are in large part two plays: one serious or lofty and one comic, not tightly interconnected but interwoven in such a way as to allow one to amplify meaning or serve as a deliberate foil to the other.

Despite the popularity of both of these tragicomic forms throughout the 1660s and into the 1670s, dramatists and critics would frequently condemn the very notion of tragicomedy or find it necessary to apologize for its general popularity. In a 1665 preface, Robert Howard condemns the playwrights of his day for their liberal mixing of the comic and tragic. In 1690, when Dryden has generally abandoned heroic drama but is still clinging to divided-plot tragicomedy, he still finds it necessary to defend his continued mixture of comic elements with tragic. He blames the tastes of London audiences, writing in his preface to *Don Sebastian* that English audiences “will not bear a thorough tragedy.”

⁸ Divided tragicomedy is itself in fact comprised of several distinct forms, the full spectrum of which is most clearly described in J. Douglas Canfield’s essay, “The Ideology of Restoration Tragicomedy.” *ELH* vol. 51.3. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1984. pp. 447-464.

Nancy Klein Maguire suggests that tragicomedy is the dramatic model best suited to the social and political realities of Restoration culture. She writes of the early Restoration stage:

Within this uncertain and insecure culture, the crashing polarities of regicide and restoration, idealism and pragmatism, past and present, security and instability, demanded a genre which allowed multiple perspectives, which tolerated a sense of change and flux, and which encouraged experimentation. The single vision of tragedy no longer worked, and tragicomedy, mirroring the double vision and the ambiguity of the Restoration, inevitably contributed to the political method of the decade as well as becoming its instinctive mood (42).

This sense of “double vision” is most readily apparent in divided plot tragicomedy but is equally present in the conventional single plot tragicomedies as well. This becomes clear when one considers Maguire’s close examination of the tragicomic construction of monarchy in Restoration tragicomedy in her book, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671*. In it she makes this valuable assertion:

The Stuart apologists of necessity turned the ‘tragedy’ of Charles I into the tragicomedy of Charles I/Charles II. In order to construct a world which dramatized the post-Restoration regicide/restoration myth, they readily appropriated tragicomedy’s movement from a threatened environment to a stable one. One strategy was to underscore the glorious reward of Charles I, thus cutting the tragedy with a heavenly happy ending (40).

While religion is never Maguire’s principal focus and eschatology is never discussed as such, her observations nevertheless support an understanding of tragicomedy deeply rooted in Christian eschatology. Her book provides a pair of essential insights: first, Maguire perceives the diverse ways in which the guilt-plagued nation and its dramatists struggle to come to terms with their recent past and to make

peace with their new sovereign. Notably, the life of Charles I is thoroughly whitewashed, transmuting him into the Royalists' "holy martyr." The flaws of the new monarch, the "holy martyr's son," are likewise almost universally overlooked in the first honeymoon years of his ascendancy. In time, the distinction between the two monarchs would grow: while the myth of Charles I would remain untarnished, his son's life, a "profligate" life lived in full view of the court, would markedly alter the way in which monarchy would be understood and portrayed in literature and on stage.

As the decade advances, two very different images of kingship coexist: the sainted memory of the martyred king and the publicly wayward life of his son. This fracturing of the popular notion of kingship is reflected in a generic shift, as the popular tragicomic form of the 1660s, typically little different from Dryden's heroic drama, gives way to divided or split-plot tragicomedy. Where these plays divide into high and low plots, Maguire writes, "the divided kings in divided tragicomedy mirror the culture's conflicting experiences of kingship" (138). In this new form, best represented in Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode*, parallel high and low plots allow the loftier notion of kingship and a baser one to exist side-by-side, ultimately uniting in common purpose by the play's end.

It is important to note that the vision of the monarch as a holy martyr is never replaced or retracted, but is only added to, continuously made manifest alongside a more worldly portrayal of monarchy. It is this "holy martyr" myth and its persistence that is significant here: when utilized in the plays of the 1660s and 1670s, this myth serves to spiritualize/deify the monarch, generating by its use

strong resonances between king and Christ. The more godlike and misused the monarch is, the more Christ-like he is. And because the plots of the plays of the era consistently concerned the return of a rightful monarch to oust a villainous usurper and claim his throne and bride, resonances between the monarch and the prophesied returning Christ were only amplified. More precisely, the holy monarchs of the plays increasingly come to look not like Jesus of Nazareth—humble, misused, and ultimately self-sacrificial—but like the powerful and righteous returning Christ of biblical prophecy. And as stated earlier, the tragicomic structure of death and resurrection (or fall and restoration) is inherently meaningful within the Christian context, resonating with the Christ narrative from which ultimate meaning derives.

The second relevant observation made by Maguire is how the reigns of Charles I and Charles II are frequently rhetorically conflated so as to gloss over the Commonwealth era, saving the populace (if it were possible) from the pain and discomfiture of recollection. The very assertion that the king has been *restored* rather than succeeded by his heir serves to obfuscate the less pleasant and more accurate observation that the king was executed and the crown has in reality, after no small delay, passed to his long-exiled son. Thomas Forde's poem, "*Upon His Sacred Majesties most happy Return, on the 29th of May 1660*" (1661) expresses this brand of tragicomic reconstruction well: "And *God* vouchsafes what *men* deny. / After a twelve years suffering, / *Just* Heaven Proclaims Great *Charles* our King" (22). By calling the Restoration a "Return" and failing to make any distinction between the two monarchs, this verse expresses resurrection rather than restoration; and

the king being resurrected here is described by Forde as “A King so religious, so devout, that if all his subjects had been like the King, we might then indeed have had a Kingdom of Saints.” This reference to a “Kingdom of Saints” alludes to the prophesied future kingdom in which the saints will rule along with Christ, further encouraging the association of restored English monarch and returning Christ.

The usurper tragicomedies of the period often participate in the veiling of regicide’s harder truth, conjoining the wronged monarch and restored monarch into a single character, even where the new split-plot form allows or demands multiple protagonists. The plays do not always include the crime of regicide as part of the story or backstory, but there is very nearly always a usurper who has denied the heir his rights by force or intrigue. Without the background of the regicide, it is the restored monarch of the play who becomes the usurper’s greatest victim, thereby figuring in one character both victim/“martyr” and heir/son.

This merging of father and son amounts to an erasure of the Interregnum. In this act, the guilty citizens of the nation finds absolution for regicide by sainting their slain monarch on the one hand—by extension or conflation blessing the monarchy of the martyr’s son and reasserting his and his offspring’s divine right to govern—while inscribing a new restoration myth on the other, in which monarchy is seamless, only temporarily displaced by usurpation. Maguire writes:

Attempting to resurrect a seamless kingship, Stuart mythographers transferred the concept of the king’s two bodies [physical and political] unto Charles I and Charles II. ... [This] deifying metaphor displays the binary vision of early Restoration society: the King’s body natural and body politic, Charles I and Charles II, and regicide and restoration” (144).

Maguire observes how the very structure of divided tragicomedy mirrors this complex dual vision of monarchy, allowing disparate attitudes toward monarchy to exist in tension within the plot(s) of the play. More importantly, she acknowledges the “holy martyr” myth as a “deifying metaphor”: as the stage, operating under royal patent, serves to glorify the monarch, it increasingly cultivates an image of monarchy that approximates divinity. More precisely, the mythologized monarchy offered by dramatists emulates or parallels biblical prophetic images of the Second Coming of Christ. And by relating the restored monarch to the returning Christ, the writer translates the events of the Restoration into the Christian discourse concerning the end of time.

Making Peace with Usurper and King: Edmund Waller and Pompey the Great

The decade’s divided sense of monarchy is not solely the result of Stuart mythmaking around the lives of the two kings. Fluctuating allegiances between king, Cromwell, and king again further fractured the sense of monarchy as an immutable constant. Many of those attempting to make headway in the court of Charles II had offered their allegiance to Cromwell publicly and unreservedly, if only out of political necessity. Writers were not only attempting to reconcile the two myths of monarchy associated with the two Stuart monarchs; attempts to justify or explain away their momentary allegiance to Cromwell further ruptured the public understanding of monarchy as monolithic. Restoration dramatist Edmund Waller, for example, is as effusive in his praise for Cromwell during the Interregnum as he is for his monarch both before and after the Civil War. His 1642 royalist apologetic

work, *A Vindication of the King, with some Observations upon the two Houses*, would have marked him a steadfast ally of the crown were it not for the collection of poems he wrote on the occasion of Cromwell's funeral, published in 1659. One year later, his poem "To the King upon his Majesties Happy Return" asks pardon in turn for the nation's (and presumably his) willingness to accept Cromwell in the place of its sovereign. This expedient shift in allegiances is hardly unique to Waller, but his explanation for his lapse is unique. Significantly, "To the King" does not villainize Cromwell; instead, Waller maintains the position that while his allegiance was wrongly swayed from its proper object by another great (though lesser) object, the lesser object *was* great—like the moon eclipsing the sun—and his nation's error was understandable.

In his plays, Waller articulates this willingness to see both the king and his usurping rival honored. His play *Pompey the Great* (1664), for example, an adaptation from Corneille, tells the story of Ptolemy's decision to assassinate Pompey, Caesar's opponent in civil war. Ptolemy expects to be honored by Caesar for dispatching this mighty adversary, but news of the assassination yields Caesar's terrible wrath instead. Caesar condemns Ptolemy for the act, arguing that he should have offered his own throne to the noble Pompey rather than kill him. Pompey had proven a worthy adversary in the civil war he waged against Caesar and he therefore deserved the utmost respect and honor. An angry, lamenting Caesar proclaims:

Honour engag'd me my proud Foes to tame,
And then to pardon was my only aim,
The Fiercest Enemies I have o'rethrown,
For my Dear Friends and Confidants I own.

What publique Joy had our sad Warr ensu'd,
 If I and *Pompey* o're our former feud,
 Triumphant had in the same Chariot Rid?
 All which your narrow Policies forbid (26).

The significance of Caesar praising and posthumously pardoning Pompey could not be lost on courtly Restoration audiences. This was a clarion call for a general pardon of those who supported and endorsed the reign of Cromwell. It suggests that Cromwell deserves admiration and that a noble monarch will not fail to recognize the nobility and greatness of a worthy adversary.

Cleopatra, who owes her crown to Pompey and has given her heart to Caesar, perhaps expresses this dual love for monarch and rebel best:

Yes, I do Love, but must not let the flame
 Dazle me so as to neglect my Fame;
 My heart feels both its Duties, and by turns,
 It sighs for *Pompey*, and for *Caesar* burns:
 Nor shall the Victors passion make me lose
 The sense of what our House to *Pompey* owes (11).

This sense of divided allegiance—the theme and the source of conflict in Waller's play—reflects the fractured sense of monarchy and the multiplicity or mutability of allegiances in the Civil War and Restoration periods. The play flatly condemns regicide, a clear royalist position, but it does so by condemning the murder of Caesar's great adversary and would-be usurper, Pompey. It is Pompey the would-be usurper who is the victim, and the rightful monarch Caesar grieves. All great men should be treated nobly and deferentially, the play repeatedly suggests, and this includes even those great and terrible men whose ambitions and policies have become a threat to the monarchy.

Waller confesses in his poem commemorating the coronation of Charles II that he himself had been taken in by Cromwell's greatness; but he also explains why this should be easily understandable. The death of Cromwell, he explains, was reportedly marked by the portentous sign of a violent storm and a mighty sea swell. As future chapters will assert, this sort of ominous and portentous occurrence was believed to mark momentous occasions with cosmic significance. Such is the case in apocalyptic prophecy as well as Restoration tragedy. Waller was clearly affected by this powerful sign. His 1658 poem, "Upon the Late Storme, and of the Death of His Highnesse Ensuing the same," begins:

WE must resigne; Heaven His great Soul do's claime
 In stormes as loud, as His *Immortall Fame*;
 His dying *groanes*, his last *Breath* shakes our Isle,
 And Trees uncut fall for His *Funerall Pile*,
 About His Pallace their broad roots are tost
 Into the aire (1).

As the poem continues, the death of Cromwell, along with its accompanying natural/supernatural wonders, is compared to the deaths of other great statesmen. Waller writes of the chaos marking Hercules death, and also claims that when Romulus died, "New *Rome* in such a Tempest mis't her King, / And from *Obeying* fell to *Worshipping*" (1). Just as storms accompanying the death of Romulus caused the people of Rome to worship him, the storms accompanying Cromwell's death prompted awe and confirmed the admiration of Waller and the nation. The very next year, attempting to make peace with his new sovereign, Waller would recall this moment as he wrote to Charles II, "...the revolted Sea / Trembles to think she did your Foes obey" (Poems 242).

Considered in relation to the rest of his poetic output, Waller's *Pompey the Great* is just one more strong appeal for the merciful treatment of those who had compromised with Cromwell. Its surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of the fallen usurper Pompey encourages a similar attitude in Charles and his court, acknowledging even the Puritan usurper as a "great man" worthy of honor. Signs in nature are appealed to as evidence of his greatness and of Providence's hand at work throughout the Civil War, Interregnum, and Restoration. Such divine portents will be an essential attribute of the tragedies of the next few decades, and the eschatological significance of such omens will be examined at some length in future chapters. But prior to the rise of Restoration political tragedy with its spectacular supernatural wonders and apocalyptic visions, most serious Restoration drama will take one of several tragicomic forms. From 1660 to 1672,⁹ one of the most popular and innovative of these tragicomic forms is the divided plot or split-plot tragicomedy.

Dryden's Marriage à la Mode as Tragicomic Christian Anagoge

While Waller's *Pompey the Great* offers a generous but complicated understanding of the nation's right attitude toward monarchy and usurpation, The heroic plot of John Dryden's divided plot heroic drama/comedy *Marriage à la Mode* provides a relatively straightforward presentation of the restored king motif.

⁹ While split-plot tragicomedy will wane in popularity after Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* (1672), the form will be attempted at intervals through the end of the Seventeenth Century. The most successful late attempt is almost certainly Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* (1695), adapted for the stage from the popular proto-novel by Aphra Behn. The play is known to have been a success, and, in the words of the anonymous author of *A Comparison Between the Two Stages* (1702, likely Charles Gildon), "the Favourite of the Ladies."

Leonidas is the rightful king of Sicily, and Polydamas has usurped his throne. Leonidas, after bravely facing peril and experiencing terrible suffering at the usurper's hand is ultimately restored: union with his lover Palmyra is assured and a startlingly repentant Polydamas receives immediate and complete forgiveness. Leonidas is willing and able to offer the absolution that Caesar in Waller's play says he longed to bestow upon Pompey. There is, on the surface, a clear and simple parallel to be drawn between Leonidas and Charles II, between Polydamas and Oliver Cromwell (though the usurper's unqualified repentance and the monarch's absolute forgiveness in the play present an optimistic account of the Interregnum's end), and between Palmyra and the Kingdom of England. James Peck has observed the consistency with which, in these dramas of usurpation and restoration, a woman represents the English body politic (Peck 94). Her abuse at the hand of the usurper, typically in the form of a rape or attempted rape, metonymically represents his tyranny, and her union to the rightful king represents her liberation. Palmyra's function in Dryden's play can certainly be seen in this light.

However, the fundamental similarity of the usurper plot to the biblical narrative concerning the return of Christ to overthrow Satan's Antichrist and claim his throne and his Bride the Church complicates the symbol, producing the multivalence already discussed in each of the images utilized: Leonidas is both Charles II and Christ; Polydamas is Cromwell and Antichrist; and Palmyra is England and the English Church. This added layer of meaning might not be entirely unintended; it certainly would be well received, equating the king with divinity, Cromwell with the Devil, and the conforming English populace with the true Church

of Christ. Restoration royalists made strong affirmations concerning the divine right of kings, wishing to rehabilitate the monarchy and stave off future thoughts of regicide and usurpation. Serving as a foil to the kings' divinity, Cromwell was imagined to be essentially daemonic. As Maguire summarizes, "Cromwell became the mono-causal source of every evil in society" (147).

In fact, the points at which Dryden seems least interested in making Leonidas resemble Charles II (or his father, Charles I) are precisely those at which he most closely comes to resemble Christ. King Charles had spent the Interregnum on the continent, mingling with the courts of other European powers; Leonidas comes from the pastoral world—an idealized but indeterminate locale outside the reach of the court and its corrupting influence, defined in part by an almost prelapsarian innocence. When compared with England's monarch, Leonidas, it seems, comes straight from Paradise.

The parallels between Leonidas and Jesus are further reinforced after Leonidas's true identity is revealed. In Act V, Before he can reclaim his throne, Leonidas is submitted to a series of tortures. In the face of these, he offers up his life for his followers, declaring:

Make me the object of your hate and vengeance!
 Are these decrepit bodies worn to ruin,
 Just ready of themselves to fall asunder
 And to let drop the soul,
 Are these fit subjects for a rack of tortures?
 Where would you fasten any hold upon 'em?
 Place pains on me; united fix 'em here;
 I have both youth and strength and soul to bear 'em (V 419-26).

Though nothing in this selfless submission to torture bears any real similarity to the life of Charles II, it does call to mind the life and Passion of Jesus; and because a comparison being drawn between the two restored kings, Leonidas and Charles II, is inevitable, the resulting association between the English monarch and Christ is established in turn.

The resulting connection between Christ and the English king generates an important layer of significance. In the years surrounding the Commonwealth era, Biblical prophecy was increasingly interpreted as a foretelling of specifically English affairs. Looking for (and seemingly finding) signs in England that the world had entered the Last Days indicated England's centrality to Christ's new kingdom. As mentioned in Chapter One, the plague and the London fire reinforced a sentiment generated half a century earlier when John Foxe published his *Book of Martyrs*: the persecution of dissenters in England and the countless Protestant English martyrs under Queen Mary named in Foxe's book (it was an 1800-page tome) bore witness to England's significance in the approaching End Times. With Mary, the tribulation that would precede Christ's return began in England. Both nonconformists and many within the Church of England came to believe that England would now play a principal role in the inauguration of Christ's Millennium. For some of the most politically radical factions, this was the essential justification for King Charles I's overthrow: the nation was entering a new period of profound eschatological significance. From the vantage point of sects like the aforementioned Fifth Monarchists, Charles I was dethroned chiefly because England needed to be purified. Once this was accomplished, the prophesied Millennial Age could begin.

Christ alone was seen as Earth's rightful king, and England's throne needed to be vacated before he could be expected to return.

Satire and the Second Coming

Analyzing parallels in *Marriage à la Mode* in which king and Christ, England and Church, and Cromwell and the Antichrist are anagogically linked may at first suggest that one is to take the play's heroic plot seriously. Any interpretation of the play, its political significance, and its engagement with Christian millennialist imagery is largely reshaped and usefully problematized if one reads the play as satire. Such a reading is not without precedent: Bruce King's study of Dryden's major plays suggests that satire is a defining (but too frequently overlooked) attribute of Dryden's plays. King does not specifically consider *Marriage à la Mode's* heroic plotline; his analysis of the play is dedicated solely to the comic plot. However, his general interpretation of Dryden's heroic plays is that they "are a form of satire: that is, the values and sentiments of the characters are often humorous or ironic. Moreover, this irony reflects Dryden's attitudes towards many of the social, political, and intellectual ideas current in his time" (2). When considered this way, the heroic plot of *Marriage à la Mode* is quickly and easily reduced to satire—a satire made sharper by striking parallels between it and the comic plot.

Whether or not King's interpretation of Dryden's heroic plays is ultimately maintainable, divided plot tragicomedy proves especially well suited to generate satire. This proves consistently true, not just in Dryden's plays. In Sir Charles Sedley's 1668 tragicomedy *The Mulberry-Garden*, for instance, religious rhetoric is

subjected to parody through the interrelationship between the two plots. The juxtaposition of high and low plots naturally creates the sort of comparison upon which satire relies.

It is certainly possible that Dryden's great tragicomedy is a deliberate satire of his heroic drama and in turn of its tendency toward Christian anagogy. A year before *Marriage à la Mode*, *The Rehearsal*, Buckingham's inspired satire of Dryden and his sententious heroic drama, delighted audiences and rang the death knell for heroic drama. *Marriage à la Mode* demonstrates Dryden's extraordinary ability both to guide and to follow generic shifts, joining in the joke as author rather than subject of the satire while also crafting one of the most clever and entertaining divided tragicomedies the Restoration stage would see.

Both plots of Dryden's play satirize the tendency within heroic drama to capitalize upon religious rhetoric and symbols. One of the least subtle parallels between the high and low plots of *Marriage à la Mode* is the recurring rhetoric of martyrdom or sacrificial death for love. I have suggested that Leonidas's willingness to die for his followers enhances the symbolic correlation between him (and through him Charles II) and Christ. However, it is also possible to read his constant willingness, almost eagerness to die through the lens of parody. In Act III scene 1, Polydamas demands that Leonidas and Palmyra part forever—a demand to which Leonidas, will not submit:

Leo.	No; I'll die
In her defence.	
...	
Here, take it, Sir, and with it, pierce my heart:	
<i>Presenting his sword to his father upon his knees.</i>	
You have done more, in taking my <i>Palmyra</i> .	

You are my Father, therefore I submit.

Poly. Keep him from any thing he may design
Against his life.. whil'st the first fury lasts;
And now perform what I commanded you.

Leo. In vain; if sword and poison be deni'd me,
I'll hold my breath and die (40).

One can certainly imagine such a scene in performance being played for satiric effect. Leonidas' Christ-like submission to the will of his father and his near-eagerness to die are rendered ridiculous by Leonidas' threat to hold his breath—an act of childish petulance.

Though the desire for an honorable death in the name of love is by no means unusual in the heroic dramas or tragedies of the day, the extent to which the desire to die for love is mimicked in the comic plot accentuates the ridiculousness of such a passion. There are two significant occurrences of the rhetoric of self-sacrificial death utilized in the comic plot: the French song in Act IV scene 2 and Melantha's oft-repeated phrase "Let me die." Each significantly diminishes the potency of such rhetoric as it occurs in the heroic plot.

Melantha is a character committed to the mission of self-advancement, seeking entry into courtly circles chiefly through the adoption of the most modish fashion and vocabulary. This has led her to embrace French phrases and customs, and it is also likely responsible for her frequent use of the quaint phrase, "Let me die." These are her first words in the play: "Let me die but [Count Rhodophil]'s a fine man; he sings, and dances *en Francois*, and writes *Billets doux* to a miracle" (15-16). Melantha's repeated use of this phrase, "Let me die," a phrase presumably

adopted because of its popularity at court, trivializes Leonidas's declarations, turning them into nothing but empty words. Melantha too expresses her desire to die for love, but she clearly does not mean what she says.

Leonidas's intention to die sacrificially is further parodied in the song sung in Act IV scene 2. It takes advantage of the colloquial use of the word "die" to describe the experience of sexual climax. In the song, the nymph Cælia chides her shepherd lover, Alexis: "'Tis unkind to your Love and unfaithfully done, / To leave me behind you and die all alone" (57). Her lover then paces himself, leading her to declare in the next stanza, "Now my dear, now let us go, / Now die my Alexis, and I will die too" (57). This song, like Melantha's "Let me die," serves to trivialize and parody Leonidas's passionate and heroic offers to die for Palmyra in Act III and for his followers in Act V.

When both plots of *Marriage à la Mode* are examined together, it ceases to be clear whether King Charles II—or anyone, for that matter—would benefit from or appreciate being symbolically or rhetorically linked to Leonidas. If Leonidas is a hero, he is a hero supremely susceptible to parody. If in his story is also an anagoge of the image of Christ triumphant, returning to claim his kingdom and his bride, then that image too proves a surprisingly fitting object for parody. But as a very late example of split-plot tragicomedy, it is certainly possible that Dryden was satirizing his own now-abandoned heroic drama or the usurper tragicomedies of a decade earlier. There is a Christian anagoge satirized in this play because such anagogy is virtually ubiquitous in those plays.

There is one encounter in Act III in which the play's two plots very nearly collide. The low plot parodies the ubiquitous rape/near-rape scenes of heroic drama while the heroic plot continues to play on the phrase, "let me die," further establishing the correlation between the hero and Christ. This close juxtaposition of the two plots heightens the satire in each. First, Melantha enters, reading a letter from her would-be lover Rhodophil. Briefly left alone, she begins playacting the anticipated assignation:

Rhodophil, you'll wonder at my assurance to meet you here;--let me die, I am so out of breath with coming, that I can render you no reason of it.--Then he will make this repartee; Madam, I have no reason to accuse you for that which is so great a favour to me. Then I reply, But why have you drawn me to this solitary place? Let me die but I am apprehensive of some violence from you. Then, says he, Solitude, Madam, is most fit for Lovers; but by this fair hand – Nay, now I vow you're rude, Sir. O fie, fie, fie; I hope you'll be honourable? – You'd laugh at me if I should, Madam – What do you mean to throw me down thus? Ah me! ah, ah, ah. (37-38).

She acts out the violation that she anticipates—an event the audience too has come to anticipate as part of the formula. As Polydamas enters with Leonidas under guard, Melantha flees, exclaiming, "O *Venus!* the King and Court. Let me die, but I fear they have found my *foible*, and will turn me into *ridicule*" (38). As the scene continues, Polydamas announces that Palmyra, believed to be an unfit object for Leonidas' love, must die. He commands:

First, in her hand
There shall be plac'd a Player's painted Sceptre,
And, on her head, a gilded Pageant Crown;
Thus shall she go,
With all the Boys attending on her Triumph:
That done, be put alone into a Boat,
With bread and water onely for three days;
So on the Sea she shall be set adrift,

And who relieves her, dies (39).

This intended punishment, calling to mind the robe and crown in which Jesus was paraded before his crucifixion as well as his three days in the tomb, prompts both Palmyra and Leonidas to echo Melantha's "let me die." They respond in turn:

Palmyra: I onely beg that you would execute
The last part first: Let me be put to Sea;
The bread and water, for my three days life
I give you back, I would not live so long;
But let me scape the shame.

Leonidas: Look to me, Piety; and you, O Gods, look to my piety:
Keep me from saying that which misbecomes a son:
But let me die before I see this done (39).

Here Melantha's "Let me die," exclaimed both at the imagined hand of her "attacker" and in response to the threat of discovery and ridicule, is juxtaposed immediately against the same words spoken in earnest in the heroic plot. Melantha's words come only moments before virtually the same declaration ("I would not live so long," "let me die before I see this done") is made by both Palmyra and Polydamas. It appears as if, in 1672, such earnest, selfless declarations—a staple of heroic drama—are no longer tenable. But just as the existence of Rochester's satirical apocalyptic play *Sodom* demonstrates how common and familiar apocalypse had become to Restoration audiences, this comically Christ-like, self-sacrificial attitude in the characters of Dryden's late split-plot tragicomedy supports the notion that this drive toward martyrdom, rising out of the form's tendency toward Christian anagogy, had likewise become all too familiar to Restoration audiences.

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Chapter Three

“This Nest of Scarlet Tyrants”: Priest, Pope, and Antichrist on the Restoration Stage

Soon after Treachery, like Conqueror, reigns:
Kingdoms divided, on whose ruinous fall,
Rome hopes to build her Babel over all;
...
But God hath said, he never will desist,
Nor leave his Church to Pope and Antichrist.

- From *Mercurius Caelestis, Being an Almanack
For the Year of the Worlds Redemption 1682*
by John Partridge

I'll melt the Crown from the gilt Martyrs head
And ransack even his Tomb t'adorn my Bed.
I'll rifle Saints to make my Lovers shine,
And Steal from Heav'n to make the Joy divine.
Lovers, by *Lucifer*, I'll not want one day,
Whilst the rich Church shall both procure and pay.

- Pope Joan, from *The Female Prelate* (1680)
by Elkanah Settle

James II and Anti-Catholic Attitudes in Restoration England

The 1670s and 1680s witnessed what was perhaps the most virulent and destructive anti-Catholic hysteria in England's history. The nation had already witnessed more than a century of Protestant-Catholic struggles, beginning in earnest with the establishment of an independent Church of England by Henry VIII in 1534. His schism was overturned by his daughter Mary in 1555, placing the English Church under Rome's authority again and initiating a period of anti-Protestant violence that would earn her the moniker "Bloody Mary." In 1558, Queen Elizabeth would re-establish her father's independent Church of England, turning the sometimes-violent tide back against Catholics and forever dividing conformed English Christianity from Roman Catholicism.

Anti-Catholic sentiment was particularly high during the Restoration. In 1673, the Test Act required that all civil and military officials take an oath renouncing certain Catholic practices and beliefs and agree to receive Anglican Eucharist. Because Charles II had no legitimate heir, his successor to the throne would be his brother James, Charles I's second legitimate son, who was widely believed to be Catholic or at least pro-Catholic. James had at the very least become sympathetic to Catholicism while in France, probably receiving Catholic communion in 1668 or 1669. He refused to submit to the Test Act, instead agreeing to relinquish the post and title of Lord High Admiral. There were grave misgivings at all levels of English society about the possibility of another Catholic monarch assuming the English throne; the monarch is the head of the Church of England, and it was inconceivable for many that a Catholic could be allowed to head the Anglican

Church. But when James's daughter Mary married her Protestant cousin, William of Orange, in 1677, it seemed that at least the threat James's Catholicism posed would not be a lasting one. His heir and successor would be a Protestant.

However, in 1678, opposition to Catholicism and James's rule would re-escalate, reaching a fever pitch. Evidence of a Jesuit conspiracy to assassinate Charles II and forever establish England as a Catholic country under papal authority was presented to the monarch by clergyman Titus Oates. The entire conspiracy was later discovered to be Oates's own creation, but at least fifteen Jesuits were executed and many more suffered as a result of Oates's perjured accusations. The damage to Catholics in England was irreparable. James distanced himself from the court again at his brother's request. Prompted by fears that allowing Catholic James to take the throne would reinitiate the sort of religious violence that marred the reigns of the final three Tutor monarchs—or may even bring about another English Civil war—efforts were made to revise the order of succession or to draft legislation barring any Catholic from achieving the throne. A bill was drafted by which the order of succession would be altered so as to exclude the Catholic James. On the verge of passing in 1679, King Charles would go to extraordinary lengths to stop the Exclusion Bill, dissolving Parliament. He would need to do so again in 1680 and in 1681 to defend and uphold his brother's right to rule.

Attitudes toward James would briefly improve in 1683 as a result of the Rye House Plot—an alleged conspiracy to assassinate both Charles and James and establish a republican government. The conspirators included several prominent statesmen, including the Earl of Essex and Charles' illegitimate son, the Duke of

Monmouth and pretender to the throne. When the plot was discovered, Essex committed suicide, Monmouth fled to the continent, and James, now viewed as a victim of conspiracy rather than the chief threat to national security, was invited back into active service to his monarch brother and to his country.

Despite persistently hostile attitudes at court and Parliament's many efforts to the contrary, James would be crowned James II of England and Ireland (and later James VII of Scotland) in 1685. His reign would immediately be challenged by two rebellions—one led by Monmouth and another by the Earl of Argyll. Both rebellions were put down swiftly. In response to continued Catholic persecution across Britain, James would issue the Declaration of Indulgence in 1687, effectively abolishing all prohibitions and punishments for religious dissenters, importantly including Catholics. Resistance to the Declaration by the Archbishop of Canterbury and six other bishops led to their trials for seditious libel. James also attempted to repeal the Test Act and the correlating penal laws; but with opposition to Catholic influence in England still the majority position, strong resistance to James' efforts was inevitable.

When the king produced a son in 1688—a presumably Catholic heir—it was determined by a significant faction of the nobility that definite action needed to be taken to save England from being delivered, as they perceived it, into the hands of Catholic Rome. That year, a group of Protestant nobles invited William of Orange to invade England. James fled, and his flight was deemed by Parliament to be tantamount to abdication. This left the throne vacant, and William and his wife Mary, James' Protestant daughter, promptly filled it, being named co-regents and the

English throne's rightful successors. Thus was the threat of a Catholic monarchy ended without any official Parliamentary disruption to the established order of succession.

These events form the political backdrop for anti-Catholic sentiment in England in the 1670s and 1680s, but they do not adequately reveal the depth to which this sentiment reflected and rose out of Protestant eschatological beliefs. It was the clear and often-expressed position of the English Church's most prominent clergy that the Pope was the embodiment of anti-Christianity on earth—the prophesied Antichrist of biblical prophecy. As the following chapter reveals, anti-Catholic attitudes were not merely expressive of political beliefs: at their root was the firm belief that in “these Last Days”—an expression virtually ubiquitous in Anglican sermons and tracts of the period—the “True Church” of Christ was under attack by Antichrist through Catholic influences encroaching on English soil. It was therefore one's duty as both an Englishman and a Christian to oppose “popery” in all its forms and to be watchful against the plots and conspiracies attempting to undermine *true* Christianity: England's independent Protestantism.

When Catholicism was presented on stage, English dramatists found themselves in a complicated position. Virulently anti-Catholic plays in the time of the Exclusion Crisis could be seen as articulating the position that James should be excluded from the line of succession, a position unpopular with the monarchy. But to offer a play that appeared pro-Catholic, or even seemed generally sympathetic to Catholicism, would be wildly unpopular with the theatre's general audience, placing the playwright and his or her work in direct opposition to the religious beliefs of the

majority. While the graciousness of Catholic monarchs on the continent during the Interregnum had not been forgotten by Charles or his cavalier court, it seems clear that the stage, reliant on the support not only of its monarch patron but on the attendance and applause of a somewhat broader populace, could not support overtly pro-Catholic attitudes on stage. So while many playwrights wisely skirted the topic, one does find a series of sharply anti-Catholic plays being presented in spite of what they may be seen to express to King Charles concerning his Catholic brother and successor. And while attempts were sometimes made to shroud the plays' anti-popery in historical parallel, creating plausible deniability for the playwright who hoped to stay in the king's good graces, the anti-Catholic sentiment is undeniably present.

From the height of the Popish Plot to the aftermath of William of Orange's "Glorious Revolution," the stage joined in the larger conversation concerning these events and what was understood to be their clear eschatological significance. There are two plays that express the anti-Catholic sentiment of the late 1670s and early 1680s with particular clarity: William Bedloe's tragedy, *The Excommunicated Prince: or The False Relique* (1679), a parallel of the Popish Plot set in Teimuraz's Greek Orthodox kingdom of Georgia; and Elkanah Settle's *The Female Prelate: Being the History of the Life & Death of Pope Joan* (1680). Both are merciless in their assault on the papacy, and both move beyond a straightforward engagement with contemporary events to express the broader eschatological concerns undergirding the Popish Plot.

Neither Bedloe nor Settle is among the period's most celebrated dramatists; *The Excommunicated Prince*, Bedloe's only play, would never be produced, and Settle is best remembered for the utter disdain with which Dryden and Pope regarded him. But for the purposes of this study, the inadequacies of these men as dramatic poets hardly detract from the religio-political significance of their work. Bedloe's play was an important contribution to the Popish Plot debates, if not to the English drama. Settle's plays were successful—a fact that Dryden lamented—and from 1679 onward, no playwright so vociferously allied himself to the anti-papist cause. The opinion of twentieth-century scholarship has generally been that Settle's commercial success is the result of his "ability as a contriver of 'machinery' more than anything else" (Brown 79): but there is reason to conclude that his broad popularity in spite of his colleagues' disdain resulted in part from his uncommon willingness to express with vehemence the anti-papist attitude of the populace. It is true that his wildly popular 1673 play, *The Empress of Morocco* (the target of much of Dryden's ridicule) maintains a fairly moderate view of English Catholicism; but this production's success relied upon the cooperation of the monarchy and his agent the Lord Chamberlain. *The Empress of Morocco* aside, Settle was likely best known to the people of London as the coordinator and overseer of a 1679 pope-burning pageant—the largest event of its kind, attracting roughly 200,000 spectators. Settle's offstage productions mark his voice as the period's strongest anti-Catholic voice outside of the pulpit. In an era saturated in eschatological iconography, it may well be that Elkanah Settle capitalized on the unique and theatrical power of apocalyptic spectacle better than anyone else.

The Popish Plot and Antichrist

The events outlined above make clear the extent to which Catholicism was feared and opposed in Restoration England, but the reasons for that fear extend beyond concerns over sovereignty and political stability. It is true that Protestant-Catholic struggles had often resulted in violence in England's recent past, and that Restoration Englishmen and -women were all too aware of the upheaval religious conflict could generate. But the depth of opposition to Catholic rule went far beyond a fear of unrest: the clear and consistent majority view of both conformed and dissenting clergy across Restoration England was that the pope was the Antichrist of biblical prophecy—the leader who would rise up in the End Times and would lead countless souls away from the true Gospel of Christ, their deception resulting in their eternal damnation. And as Bernard Capp observes, “anti-popery was linked, almost inevitably, with millenarian excitement” (*Astrology* 250). The Popish Plot therefore brought eschatological beliefs and concerns regarding the Antichrist to the fore, revealing just how broadly and deeply these convictions were held.

Warren Johnston observes:

The application of apocalyptic explanations to the political crises surrounding the Popish Plot and succession during the final years of Charles II's reign depended on the continued certainty of its validity as a vehicle for understanding and interpreting the course of history in church and state. The profusion and vigour of apocalyptic expression through this time demonstrates the legacy of the previous decades in the endurance of apocalyptic thought, and its continued use as a means of political and religious commentary (152).

Anti-Papist apocalypticism, expressed not only in sermons but in widely circulated broadsides and larger theological treatises, only increased in the late 1670s and 1680s. On one hand, these beliefs are responsible in part for bringing about the false Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis; on the other, these beliefs are, if not created by, then at least deepened and strengthened by the fear, dissension, and tumult the Popish Plot generates.

To see the certainty with which Pope and Antichrist are correlated in the years of the Popish Plot, one need not look beyond the widely-distributed religious tracts of the day, their authors voicing concern about the alleged Catholic conspiracy to overthrow the monarchy. One representative work is an anonymous 1679 document entitled, *The Antichristian Principle Fully Discovered, in a Brief and True Account of All Hellish Plots, Bloody Persecutions, Horrid Massacres, and the Most Inhumane Cruelties and Tortures, Exercised by the Papists, on the Persons of Protestant Dissenters From the Church of Rome*. Another widely circulated sheet argued that even the young children of English Catholics were “the spawn of the Romish Brood, nurtured by him, that they may be useful tools in the Service of the Antichristian Beast” (*The Character of a Church-Papist* 2). Dissenting Protestant clergy, uniting with their conformed brethren to confront their common enemy, often led the anti-Catholic assault. Baptist minister Hanserd Knollys described “this late bloody traiterous design of Popish Recusants, even this damnable and Hellish Plot contrived and still carrying on by them to Assassinate the King” as the work of “Myserie, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, that great WHORE, the Church of Rome, and her Head the Pope” (31). Nonconformist John Owen, while not quite

rising to the fiery rhetoric of his Baptist counterpart, nonetheless argued in 1682 that identifying the Pope as Antichrist was the chief principle of Protestant belief (7). Anglican William Bedloe, Oates's dishonest chief witness in the investigations into the Popish Plot (and playwright), wrote that he saw the plot in England as only one piece of a universal and daemonic effort by the "Ministers of Antichrist ... to make all the World slavishly to truckle to their Tripple Crown'd Idol at Rome" (*A Narrative and Impartial Discovery* 1); and Anglican minister John Hill published a sermon on Revelation 18:4 in 1680, again identifying conspirators in the Plot as "Ministers of Antichrist" (1).

These and countless other works bear witness not just to England's strong anti-Catholic stance at the time of the Popish Plot—something so pervasive and manifest that it hardly needs to be demonstrated here—but to the fact that the papacy was reviled for more than the fact that it threatened English sovereignty. It is clear from the works of conformed and nonconformist writers alike that the Pope was believed to be the earthly embodiment of anti-Christendom. Whether or not the Pope could be equated with the Antichrist of biblical prophecy was not in question among English Protestants; the only question that needed to be pursued—and this with some urgency—was whether or not this Antichrist was actively pursuing the assassination of Charles II and the total overthrow of the English monarchy. Belief in a Popish Plot was supported by the general belief already held by the masses that the Pope was fundamentally Antichristian; and by circular argument, the belief that the Pope was the daemonic enemy of "true" Christianity supported in turn the allegations of Oates.

Belief in a living and active Antichrist is an apocalyptic belief; biblical prophecies concerning the Antichrist are nearly all contained within prophecies interpreted throughout the Seventeenth Century and beyond as concerning humanity's final struggles at the approach of the world's end. The Popish Plot was therefore accepted as evidence of the Pope—the prophesied Antichrist—showing his true daemonic colors “in these Last Days.” As prophetess Anne Wentworth warned in 1679, “with the Nation God is exceeding wroth, / That the Vials of his wrath he will pour forth” (6)—another reference to biblical prophecy. She proclaimed that it had been revealed to her by Jesus Christ that the Popish Plot, despite having been discovered, could yet succeed, and that the king's assassination would precipitate the end of the world.

The Glorious Revolution did not cause such apocalypticism to abate. On the contrary, the ascendance of William and Mary to power only brought about further evidence of apocalyptic rhetoric's currency in Restoration England.¹⁰ In 1688, John Tillotson preached that the Glorious Revolution marked “the Glorious Deliverance of his Church from the Tyranny of Antichrist” (33). Royal chaplain William Wake, preaching before his new monarchs in 1689, likewise proclaimed that “the blessed time so long wrapped up in sacred Prophecy, is indeed now ready to be revealed” (20). These Anglican ministers—both of whom would later become Archbishop of Canterbury—set the tone for other ministers, expressing their delight that their

¹⁰ For a more extensive examination of apocalypticism in England between 1674 and 1689, see chapters 5 and 6 of Warren Johnston's book, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England*, cited above. Chapter 5 considers “The Popish Plot and Apocalyptic Expectation,” and Chapter 6 deals with “Apocalyptic Thought and the Revolution of 1688-89.”

worst fears concerning the monarchy of Catholic James II would not come to pass. As Johnston observes, under these new monarchs, “Anglican churchmen could be unabashed in their adherence to apocalyptic beliefs” (207). Where expression of apocalyptic views during the reigns of Charles II and James II could be problematic and potentially dangerous owing to the strong correlation consistently drawn between papists (James included) and ministers of Antichrist, this same system of belief could now be expressed through sanctioned and laudatory encomia to William and Mary, England’s great deliverers from the threat of Catholic/daemonic oppression. Though the mania of the Popish Plot was now in the past—ultimately proven to be a fatal piece of malicious slander—anti-Catholic sentiments resounding with apocalyptic rhetoric continued to be trumpeted loudly during the reign of William and Mary—now trumpeted with little fear of reprisal.

And of course, as Lisa Zunshine discusses in her essay, “The Politics of Eschatological Prophecy and Dryden’s 1700 ‘The Secular Masque,’” one could hardly escape the influence of apocalyptic expectation in Restoration London. As has been discussed in the first two chapters, that the world would end in 1666 was for many a proven certainty. Zunshine describes how, when the anticipated end did not come, eyes turned instead to the conspicuous year 1700. In the intervening years, the populace therefore demonstrates a strong tendency to imbue political events, natural disasters, foreign affairs, etc. with eschatological significance. It is through this same sharply apocalyptic lens through which Zunshine views Dryden’s final work that the plays below are here being viewed. *The Excommunicated Prince* and *The Female Prelate* powerfully express the anti-Catholic attitudes of their moment,

and they do so in a way that reveals the apocalyptic underpinnings of these prejudices.

The Excommunicated Prince (1679) and the “End of Mercy”

Captain William Bedloe wrote only one play, the 1679 tragicomedy (labeled by him a tragedy), *The Excommunicated Prince*. The play is dedicated to the Duke of Buckingham, praising him in the dedicatory epistle for his “constant encouraging the discovery of this late Damnable Popish Plot, which designed to cut off our *Sovraign*, and so our Church at one stroke.” It was this “damnable” Plot that made Bedloe famous: an unremarkable playwright, Bedloe is best known as the author of *A Narrative and Impartial Discovery of the horrid Popish Plot* that same year, and as a key witness in the trials of several Jesuits implicated by Titus Oates in the conspiracy.

Were Bedloe’s biographer to be believed, he could scarcely have had time in his short life to write more. The anonymous work, *The Life & Death of Captain William Bedloe*, is an exemplary work of rogue fiction, detailing Bedloe’s many daring and illicit exploits, from conning the Prince of Orange out of a large sum of money to disguising himself as a steward to the German ambassador—even dressing as a woman to gain access to a convent, where he proceeded to impregnate ten nuns. Most importantly, *The Life & Death of Captain William Bedloe* describes Bedloe’s penitential about-face after having collaborated with Catholic conspirators determined to assassinate the English king, raze London, and completely undermine the Church of England. The story of *The Excommunicated Prince*, an historical

parallel of the Popish Plot, is in large part a precursor to this fiction: it is essentially a celebration of the Plot's discovery by Oates and Tonge and of Bedloe's own key role in its ultimate failure.

Rogue fictions like Bedloe's biography were a commonplace of the period, and it is believed that the literate populace on the whole understood them to be fictions. However, as Kate Loveman has observed, "Rogue narratives featuring Popish Plot informers were designed as contributions to a debate of national importance" (Loveman 109). Such narratives could support or invalidate the claims of individuals involved in the broader religio-political debate. And few individuals featured more prominently in the events of the Popish Plot than William Bedloe. He added his voice to that of Titus Oates in denouncing as traitors many of England's most prominent Catholics and Catholic supporters; and he was likely employed directly by Oates to do so. Bedloe claimed to have worked for a group of Jesuits on occasion in the 1670s, so he was well-positioned to assume credibly the guise of a remorseful insider, offering up privileged information about a Catholic conspiracy, in which he had been a key collaborator, to assassinate King Charles II. Bedloe's assertions perfectly supported Oates's allegations. His expert testimony enabled him to rise quickly from his previous position of modest underworld notoriety to a place of some prominence in high political circles, setting himself up as a national hero. His death in 1680 at the age of thirty-one delivered him from the strong repercussions that would be endured by Oates and his other co-conspirators when their perjuries ultimately unraveled.

Bedloe's play follows a convention common to heroic drama and political tragedy, using an exotic historical parallel to comment on contemporary events. But while the employment of historical parallels generally "allowed playwrights to compellingly canvass *arcane imperii* in public and to do so with plausible deniability" (Bulman 316), Bedloe's agenda was certainly no secret. The play is set in the court of Teimuraz, an Eastern Orthodox monarch excommunicated by the Pope. The choice to set his play in early Seventeenth-Century Georgia is anything but random: the actual events surrounding the reign of Teimuraz (as his name is generally spelled) do bear a few striking parallels to the events surrounding the English Restoration and are easily reconstructed by Bedloe to include events that more precisely resemble the Popish Plot. The historical Teimuraz was invited by Georgian nobles to restore the Christian monarchy of his grandfather, Alexander II of Kakheti, after the latter was killed by his Muslim son and usurper (and Teimuraz's uncle), King Constantine I. Teimuraz's chief military adversary would be Iran; there would be many Muslim invasions and incursions into his kingdom, and his mother would be executed and his sons castrated at the hands of their Persian enemies. But Bedloe suggests in his play that these invasions had been instigated by Rome as part of a larger conspiracy, manipulating a Muslim army to destroy Georgia's Protestant Christian kingdom. This parallels the assertion, popular in the days of the Popish Plot, that the Catholic Church had been at work undermining English Protestantism for some time by cultivating the unrest between Anglicans and Protestant nonconformists that resulted in the English Civil War and the Puritan overthrow of Charles I.

The play's prologue is itself almost certainly an act of perjury in addition to being an assault on the Plot's skeptics. Spoken by the playwright, the prologue asserts that a Catholic Priest had the opportunity to bribe Bedloe and to suppress the play. It reads:

Had the Pope brib'd me well, I'd done so too,
 Not speak the truth so plain as now I do:
 Faith, I'd a friend propos'd it to a Priest,
 And did advise him that he'd grease my Fist.
 He did at the proposal smile, and say,
 That humour had more wit than all my Play.
 But he has found a cheaper way than that,
 He'l swear by all the Saints 'tis a meer cheat.
 Like the feign'd Book of Martyrs; and a blot,
 False as the story of the Powder-Plot (Prologue).

The implication here is that Catholics have no need to bribe those who would speak out against their conspiracy so long as they can convince the populace there's no truth to the allegations. By suggesting that Catholics have been succeeding in this effort by undermining belief in the generally more credible accounts of Catholic violence found in Foxe's *Book of Martyr's*—a book indexing Protestant deaths, chiefly at the hand of Catholics, viewed reverentially by English Protestants of all stripes—Bedloe makes an effort to validate his own claims, associating them and their veracity with an anti-Catholic book that even many of the Plot's skeptics hold dear. Similarly, having the priest in his prologue suggest that Catholics have been working to convince the nation that the Gunpowder Plot, or Jesuit Treason, was likewise a mere fabrication would further strengthen the claims of Oates and Bedloe by association. Though there were skeptics here too, a 1606 act of parliament had made certain that the Gunpowder Plot would be remembered and held as fact,

declaring that the Fifth of November should be observed with sermons and public events commemorating that alleged Catholic plot and its discovery. Belief in the authenticity of the Gunpowder Plot is evinced by the fact that, in the midst of the Popish Plot, the decision was made no longer to rent out the cellars beneath Parliament. They were to be searched annually the day before Parliament opened as well to eliminate the possibility of another such plot succeeding (Parkinson 118). Despite how seriously the Gunpowder Plot was taken by the English majority and by Parliament, there were in 1679 those who had come to believe that the Gunpowder Plot was orchestrated by Salisbury to discredit English Catholics—a position still maintained by some. Bedloe’s prologue doubly implicates Catholics: accusing them of committing the atrocities in the *Book of Martyrs* and the Gunpowder Plot they deny, and further suggesting that they have been actively and deliberately undermining belief in these accounts.

As the play begins, Bedloe himself appears as its ultimate hero, figured in the character Miletas. Miletas is a savvy and zealous defender of the truth, described thus in the list of *Dramatis Personae*: “At first one of the Conspirators, but travelling into *England*, was there converted to the Protestant Religion; and afterwards returning to *Georgia*, discovered the whole Conspiracy.” By writing himself into the story in the character of Miletas, Bedloe again both admits to and pardons himself for participation in the Plot. By the play’s end, not only is Bedloe presented as the savior of his nation through his character Miletas, but Miletas’s English Protestantism is offered as the one true faith that can deliver Teimuraz’s Georgia from papal tyranny.

Ironically, history tells us that Bedloe much more closely resembles the character of Polidorus—an opportunistic atheist who pretends to be a zealous Catholic in order to assume a position of leadership within the conspirators' ranks. In the play, he becomes the lover of the Queen Dowager; and it is her intention that he be placed on the throne when her son is overthrown. In light of Bedloe's feigned piety and the fame his perjuries won him, it is only with a sense of irony that one can read Polidorus's Act II soliloquy:

Sure Heav'ns Exchequer, must needs Banckrupt be;
 For all its Treasures are bestow'd on me.
 Its easie Pow'rs to my Desires submit,
 And seem to lay their Heaven at my Feet.
 And Rome it self, drest me in this Disguise,
 That undiscern'd, I might to Scepters rise.
 The Grecian-Churches Viz'rd, I must wear;
 And like an Imp of Hell, in Robes of Light appear.
 ...
 Then may Religious Fools securely pay
 Honours to Heaven, and Rewards to Me (6).

The role Bedloe seems actually to have played in the Plot—hired perjurer disguised as a zealous and faithful Anglican—much more closely resembles Polidorus, faithless power-seeker disguised as a zealous Protestant believer, than the devout hero Miletas.

There are two other characters, Morinus and Brizander, who are eager to defend their monarch and who try without success to convince him of the conspiracy against him. These characters, identified as "Friends of the Prince, and Zealous for the establish't Religion and Government," represent Titus Oates and Israel Tonge, co-authors of the Popish Plot narrative. The alleged Plot was first presented to Charles II by these two, but he, like Teimuraz in the play, initially

received their claims with skepticism. Charles did ultimately agree to have their allegations looked into by the Privy Council, and Oates would swear oaths before the magistrate Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, asserting their veracity. Shortly thereafter, Godfrey was murdered, and it was this authentic act of violence above all that caused England to descend into the anti-Catholic hysteria that followed, believing his murder to be the result of his investigations into the Popish Plot. Godfrey appears in Bedloe's play as the character Salvirius, earnestly urging the Prince to root out this Catholic conspiracy, until he is silenced, poisoned by the Jesuits.¹¹

There are several ways in which this play reveals and echoes the apocalyptic beliefs fueling much of the Popish Plot's hysteria. First, the essentially apocalyptic parallels commonly drawn between Pope and Antichrist and between Rome and Babylon are reasserted here. Second, the emphasis on Oates and Tonge together as England's prophetic deliverers, despite the relatively marginal role Tonge actually played, deliberately encourages a popular association between these men and the "two witnesses" of the Last Days described in the Book of Revelation. Third, the play supports popular but unsubstantiated allegations that Catholics were actually responsible for the London Fire of 1666, an event that charged the nation's millenarian enthusiasm and was in itself already loaded with apocalyptic significance.

Ultimately, despite the historical distance generated by locating the events of the play in Georgia, *The Excommunicated Prince* is little more than a dramatization

¹¹ Another murdered character, the Greek Orthodox Priest Piazer, may also suggest Godfrey; but it is the death of Salvirius, poisoned by the papist Zolazer, Governor of the Tower, that excites the populace in a way most comparable to the murder of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey.

of Oates's Popish Plot narrative. This is Bedloe's attempt to reiterate the Plot fiction—and with it the rogue-hero fiction of his own life—through the particularly public medium of theatre. On stage, the scheming and violence could be witnessed, not just described. Staging the events would give them substance and credibility, making real and visible events Bedloe asserted as true but about which historians remain dubious. The play offers up for its audience a presentation of what *could* have happened, raising support by proving the Plot at least to be feasible. The play's controversial politics made producing it difficult, but its publication would essentially add one more embellishing voice to the Plot narrative, one more witness against the crimes and abuses allegedly committed by papists against England. And while what we know about Bedloe offers little reason to insist that he was a true believer in the Plot or in any grand Catholic conspiracy—nor likely to give credence personally to the apocalyptic weight ascribed to the events by so many others—he was obviously sensible to the potency of such beliefs. His play therefore reflects the apocalyptic bent of the discourse surrounding the Popish Plot, not least of all by its firmly held position that the Pope is the Antichrist of apocalyptic prophetic scripture.

In Act II, a song is sung after the Prince's mother Ceteba, a conspirator against the crown, has been abducted by Persians. The first two stanzas comment on the unnatural hatred of the mother for her son. The six stanzas that follow are all concerned with the dangers of Roman Catholicism, upholding the assertion that the Pope is the Antichrist. They begin:

*Deny this, Jesuit, if you can;
Is your Religion any more,*

*Than a meer Politick Designe,
To Serve the Babylonian-Whore? (15).*

The “Babylonian-Whore,” mentioned here and in countless sermons and tracts of the period like those identified earlier in this chapter, is a reference to chapters 17 and 18 of the *Revelation of John*. Chapter 17 begins:

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 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 (Revelation 17:1-5).

The scripture’s author goes on to insist upon an association between the woman Babylon in the vision and the city of Rome. The angel explains to John, “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth” (Revelation 17:9b), referring to the seven hills on which Rome was built. While many early Christians understood this prophecy to refer to the Rome of Nero and similarly anti-Christian emperors, Protestants throughout history would frequently view the papacy as a spiritual continuation of Rome and its anti-Christian tyrannies, asserting that the Roman Catholic Church, not merely the pagan city or empire of Rome, is the “Mother of Harlots” described in the prophecy.

The association is reiterated in *The Excommunicated Prince* by the character Pedro, a servant of Miletas, recently returned from Rome. When asked why his master felt compelled to leave Rome in such haste, he describes the atrocities he saw there:

The first Thing I took notice of, was
 The Cruel Usage of a poor Country-man of ours,
 That was Banded and Blown up, on various Engins
 Of Fire-works:
 And only for saying, His Holyness was a Cuckold;
 Because the Church of *Rome*, which is call'd his Spouse,
 Is still Committing of Adultery.
 Whereas we in Georgia, make nothing of calling him,
 The *Horned Beast!* The *whore of Babylon!* *Anti-Christ!*
 And more such Names, than he pretends Right to Kingdoms (20-21).

Pedro makes clear that identifying the Pope as the Antichrist of biblical End-Times prophecy is commonplace in his country. This is the case in Restoration England, and the fact bears extraordinary implications, both political and religious. While religious and political spheres are inexorably interrelated throughout the Restoration, at the height of the Popish Plot they are utterly inseparable. The two-party system of Whigs and Tories that shaped English political discourse for centuries was borne out of the Exclusion Crisis, with the question of whether or not Catholic James could assume the throne dividing Parliament down the middle and proving to be the fundamental issue along which party lines were drawn. The role Catholicism might or might not be allowed to play in state affairs was the foremost political concern of the day. It is with this in mind that one acknowledges the political implications of the belief that the Pope is Antichrist and comprehends the full political significance of this belief expressed on stage.

Again, this association with Antichrist lent strength to the allegations regarding the Popish Plot, since a papacy that is not merely power-hungry but is in reality a daemonic force determined (and predetermined) to wage war against the True Church can readily be believed capable of any villainy, including the assassination of a Protestant monarch. It also makes clear that the temporal location of the play—and of the period of its authorship—is the “Last Days,” as these related prophecies were consistently interpreted as visions concerning the end of time. For this reason, the stakes of the conspiracy extend beyond the earthly kingdom of Teimurazez in the play, or of Charles II in England. The battle is cosmic and eternal in scope, being waged on behalf of the eternal Kingdom of God.

The character of Ceteba in Bedloe’s play, Teimurazez’s mother and Queen Dowager, also strengthens associations between the papacy and biblical End-Times prophecy and between the Pope and apocalyptic events in Restoration England. The play’s greatest weakness—and there are admittedly several in this work by an unpracticed dramatist—is perhaps Bedloe’s confused use of the character Ceteba. She is Teimurazez’s mother and “a great furtherer of the Conspiracy against her Son” (*Dramatis Personae*). By attempting as Bedloe does to merge the known history of Teimuraz’s mother, Ketevan the Martyr, with the image of the papacy as the “Mother of Harlots,” Bedloe turns Ceteba into someone at once comical and repulsive, a villain and a victim, a conspirator and a martyr. She wants to see her son killed so that her lover Polidorus can be crowned king and she his queen, but this will not be her fate: she is abducted, tortured, and executed by the Persians, a fate her son decorously laments. Perhaps it is only the need for decorum that

prompts Teimuraz to speak well of his mother; and perhaps Bedloe felt her death at the hands of the Persians—working in league with the Pope—would be a fitting example of poetic justice. But whatever the intention, Bedloe’s choice to turn Ceteba, in history one of Georgia’s most famous Greek Orthodox martyrs, into the most hateful and ridiculous of the co-conspirators fails dramatically. It only succeeds in one point: in that it serves to body forth Bedloe’s intended correlation between Catholicism and “harlotry.”

The play begins with Ceteba’s lover Polidorus explaining how desperately the queen is in love with him and how he has had to feign affection for her. He states,

Oh here she comes! whom I must gently sooth;
And with soft Praise, her Aged Wrinkles smooth:
But know not which the hardest Task will prove,
For me to feign, or she to hide her Love (1).

Polidorus makes it clear that being handed her son’s crown is the condition of his love. She tells him to “think the Business done” and declares how deeply she despises her son. She defends her unnatural hatred for her offspring on the grounds of his Protestant apostasy, showing Polidorus a letter of excommunication recently arrived from Rome. She equates her travestied motherhood to excommunication from the “Mother-Church,” arguing that, “Since by this Paper he’s condemn’d to Dye, / A Mother’s Love would Irreligious be” (2).

As Ceteba continues to express her unnatural hatred for her son and her lust for Polidorus, She praises Nero for his courageous act of burning Rome. This expression of admiration calls to mind both historical and “current” events: the persecutions of the “original” Antichrist, and the London Fire—a tragedy for which

Bedloe held Catholics responsible. Bedloe's *Narrative and Impartial Discovery of the horrid Popish Plot* is dedicated "to the Surviving Citizens of LONDON Ruined by FIRE." He writes in his dedicatory epistle:

The Authors and Promoters of All these Your deplorable Calamities have been no other than those Common *Bontefeu's* of Christendom, The general Disturbers of the Peace and Happiness of *Europe*, and Pests of human Society, I mean those subtle, active and most cruel Engineers of the *Roman Hierarchy*, who having long been Big with the Project of a *Fifth-Monarchy*, intending to make all the World slavishly to truckle to their *Tripple Crown'd Idolat Rome*, did merely in order thereunto contrive Your Destruction (Epistle).

To praise Nero is tantamount to praising those who razed London; and by invoking the name of Nero, Ceteba aligns herself with his anti-Christian tyranny.

By play's end, Ceteba has died at the hands of Persian invaders and all of the other conspirators have been imprisoned. Teimurazez faces the question of what should be done with the conspirators. And while all agree that the godless traitor Polidorus should be executed, there is some question as to whether or not those seemingly penitent accomplices should receive mercy. Teimurazez decides otherwise, declaring:

Mercy, that lazy Passion which so long
Sate Empress o're the rest, is now depos'd,
Startl'd to hear these Crimes, she drop'd her Scepter;
Which Justice now in its rough crimson hand
Bears as an Instrument of Death, and swears
These trait'rous Slaves shall be the first that feel it,
Lezdras and Sanco I've already sent
To mind 'em of the other world, and let 'em know
Their Sentence is not less irrevocable
Than Years, or Ages past (47).

In Christian eschatological thought, every day until the Final Judgment is an expression of divine mercy. The Second Epistle of Peter, addressing the fact that the

Second Coming of Christ had not yet occurred, reads, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Through Teimurazev’s declaration that mercy is now at its end, Bedloe proclaims the arrival of the Last Days and the dawning of an age in which perfect justice will supplant divine mercy, finally meted out against God’s enemies. In “these Last Days,” mercy, earthly or divine will no longer be available to those who have opposed the will of God, even for the penitent.

Elkanah Settle and the History of Pope Joan

Apocalyptic expectation and millenarian fervor penetrated virtually every corner of English life in the 1680s. John Partidge’s editions of the *Protestant Almanack*, which began publication in 1680, identified both its 1681 and 1682 editions as “Being an Almanack For the Year of the Worlds Redemption.” Needing to acknowledge that these claims were premature but still clearly locating current events in the tribulations of the Last Days, the sensational 1684 edition promises to relate “The Bloody Aspects, Fatal Oppositions, Diabolical Conjectures, Inhuman Revolutions, and Pernicious Designs of the *Papacy*, against the Lord’s Anointed.” Each almanac begins from a place of certainty that the world’s end is near and that the Pope is serving a diabolical role in the events of the Last Days, unequivocally identifying him as the Antichrist. A brief history of England is included in each edition of the almanac: by the time of the Glorious Revolution, England’s timeline would culminate with a series of entries marking the battle against Catholicism as

England's essential battle, imbued with cosmic significance. These entries include: "Our deliverance from Popery by Queen *Elizabeth*," "The horrid design of the Gun-Powder Plot," "The Burning of the City of *London*," and "Our miraculous Deliverance from Popery, by K. *William*." Because these events are crisis points in the cosmic battle being waged "in these Last Days," they are singled out as the most important events in English history. Pat Rogers points out "the insidious effect of such messages on the literate population, repeated as the onslaught was every single year" (125).¹²

Partridge also follows a practice common among Restoration biblical exegetes in his almanac by correlating papal Rome with Babylon and the papacy with the "Whore of Babylon" described in the *Revelation of John*. Revelation 17 is cited above; the relevant passage from chapter 18 reads:

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities; Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works; in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day,

¹² At least as late as 1732, the titles of Partridge's Protestant almanac will follow the format: *Merlinus liberatus: being an almanack for the year of our redemption 1732. It being bissextile, or leap-year. And from the creation of the world, according to the best of prophane history, 5681. And the 43 of our deliverance by K. William, from popery, and arbitrary government. But the 36 from the Horrid, Popish, High-Church, Jacobite Plot.*

death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her (Revelation 18:1-8).

To the English Protestant, this passage was viewed as a proclamation of destruction against Rome at the world's end and as a clear call for all true followers of Christ to "come out" from under her authority. The "Mother of Harlots" in Chapter 17—clearly Rome or the papacy—is destined to be punished for her "fornications" and "blasphemies."

Correlation being drawn between Babylon's "harlot" and the Pope was commonplace; the first Restoration pope burning, held in 1673, bore the title, "The Burning of the Whore of Babylon" (Rustici 274). But perhaps because the gender-crossing necessary to create an association between Pope and "whore" seemed unnatural or at least less than obvious to Restoration Protestants, the association was deepened by allusion to the legend of Pope Joan. This legend, believed in Seventeenth-Century England to be a matter of historical fact, tells of a female Pope who allegedly ruled briefly during the Middle Ages. Earliest accounts reveal that she achieved her lofty position by deception and "evil art." Her reign swiftly ends when she suddenly delivers (or in some accounts miscarries) her lover's child in the middle of a grand procession through Rome. It is clear that the tale was generally believed across Europe from the Thirteenth Century onward, and an anonymous 1675 book entitled, *A Present for a Papist: Or the Life and Death of Pope Joan*, put the already familiar story of Pope Joan into wider circulation in England.

Iconographically, the story of Pope Joan became representative of the papacy in general: it suggests that the papacy can be won by sinister and deceptive means

while also bringing to mind biblical End-Times prophecy describing Rome as “Mother of Harlots.”

The 1675 book would be among the primary sources for Elkanah Settle’s 1680 play, *The Female Prelate: Being the History of the Life and Death of POPE JOAN*, though Settle incorporates several additional complications. Like Bedloe, Settle makes no attempt in his play to disguise his political agenda. He locates his play deep in medieval history, but not for the purposes of generating an historical parallel to current events. For Settle, the story of Pope Joan highlights and explains the essential evil of the papacy and of Roman Catholicism, branding the Pope as the “Mother of Harlots” of biblical prophecy. As Craig Rustici observes in his essay, “Gender, Disguise, and Usurpation: The Female Prelate and the Popish Successor,” Settle’s Joanna invites the play’s audience to identify her with the scarlet seductress of Revelation 17, as she compares her own reign in Rome to the legendary exploits of the Assyrian Queen Semiramis, the “strumpet” who reportedly founded Babylon” (274). It is by no means exaggeration when William Bulman calls the arrival of *The Female Prelate* on stage “the most outrageously anti-popish theater event of the era” (317).

The Female Prelate begins with the Duke of Saxony complaining to his new bride Angeline that his father’s murderer, the old Duke’s priest and confessor, was never brought to justice. He presently spots John, Lord Cardinal of Rhemes, crossing the stage in holy procession, and recognizes the face of his father’s murderer. The Duke attempts to confront the murderer before the Council of Cardinals; but John, having long anticipated this event, is able to present falsified documents proving the

Duke's father to have taken part in a conspiracy to war against Rome. He argues, "But he / That strikes a Dagger to a Traitor's Heart, / Though ne'er so Princely born, does Heaven good service" (13). The Cardinal therefore confesses to the murder, but asserts that the stroke was justifiable—even a holy act of divine justice—as it was leveled in service to the Church. Speaking for the whole assembled Council, one Cardinal proclaims:

First, our whole Consistory votes her Thanks
To this illustrious Lord. Next as a monument
T'an Hereticks infamy; if the Boul that held
The sacred Drug can be by art or Gold
Recovered, we decree, that it be consecrated,
As an Eternal Relick to the Chappel at
Loretto: Lastly, that the sleeping Bones
Of the dead Saxon Heretick, unworthy
To mix with the untainted Royal Dust
Of his great Ancestors, be taken up,
Removed, and buried in unhallow'd Ground (19).

John's deed is lauded by the assembly of Cardinals as an act of heroism, for which he is swiftly elevated to the newly vacated papal seat. The Duke's efforts backfire gravely and completely: he has brought shame on his father and his name, and above all else, he has become the hated enemy of the most powerful individual in the world.

From this point onward, Settle's play describes the Duke's slow enlightenment concerning the villainies of the Roman Catholic Church. He had approached the Council of Cardinals because he believed divine justice (or at least a sincere attempt at human justice) could be found there. He was himself a committed Catholic. The discovery that such corruption and dishonesty could win the day even in the Vatican unnerves him. He rages:

Oh *Rome*, thou once great Mistress of the World:
 How much thy ancient Royal Capitol
 Exceeds th'adultrate Vatican; when Pagans
 And Infidels possess'd thee, they were honest.
 The blind Idolaters that kneel'd and prayed
 To their deaf, senseless, Molten Gods, were Saints
 To this Church Spawn; this Nest of Scarlet Tyrants (20).

But outwitting the Duke and thereby assuming the papal miter is not John's greatest deception; the audience discovers early on that John is in fact a woman named Joanna Anglica, the elder Duke's former lover. After being cast aside by him, Joanna takes on the disguise of a monk in order to gain intimate access to her former lover and to murder him. She succeeds and flees, of course; and her cunning, coupled with her scrupulousness, allows her to climb swiftly through the priestly ranks to their loftiest height.

As the young Duke is still sworn to avenge his father, the Pope imprisons both Saxony and his bride Angeline separately. The priests who escort him to the dungeons treat him poorly, and he exclaims, "Gods! am I seiz'd / And braved by Rascals?" The first priest responds, "Insolent Earth and Ashes, / Do you know who 'tis we are?" At this point it become clear to the Duke that the entire priesthood, not merely the Cardinals, is corrupt. He retorts:

Yes, Ruffians, wondrous well;
 The Popes Edge-tools, the Armour of the Beast;
 The scales and tail of that huge monstrous *Hydra*;
 And whensoere his boyling Venome hisses,
 You sting and kill: Ye rank infectious Limbs---
 But, Gods! that I should stoop and scold with Villains! (41).

The Duke has now grown to distrust the priesthood in its entirety. He expresses this distrust by evoking the name of the Beast, adopting here the common Protestant

position that the Pope is the biblically prophesied Antichrist and that the priests are his evil ministers. His conclusion at this point is that he has not been the victim of an uncommonly wicked Pope: he and all Catholics are the victims of an evil priesthood.

When the Pope instructs her lover Lorenzo to look after the Duke's wife Angeline, Lorenzo swiftly falls in love with her. The Pope, noting young Saxony's resemblance to his father, likewise falls in love with *her* prisoner, despite their mutual animosity. Lorenzo and Pope Joan concoct a plan: both Angeline and the Duke will be informed that they can receive nightly visits from the other under cover of darkness and silence. With this understanding in place, Lorenzo proceeds to visit Angeline while Joan visits the Duke. Here we see the Pope's crimes extend beyond "natural" villainy; the mistress-turned-murderess has descended further by committing an act of deceit and quasi-incestuous rape, taking as a lover the unwitting son of her former lover—a man who desires nothing but her death.

Their plan works for a time, disrupted finally when another group of prisoners, subjected daily to unspeakable tortures at the hands of their Catholic captors, sets the prisons ablaze. The fire is started during one of Pope Joan's conjugal midnight visits to the Duke. In fear for her life and suddenly needing to escape, Joan reveals herself as Pope and the murderer of the Duke's father (and the old Duke's former lover). Learning how wickedly he has been misused—and learning that his beloved has suffered under the same deception—the Duke sends word to Angeline describing all the unspeakable details of the affair. Shamed and dishonored, Angeline takes her own life. And in a scene clearly modeled after the

legend of the rape of Lucretia at the hand of the Roman Prince Sextus, the Duke carries Angeline's body through the streets of Rome, calling for the citizens to avenge her death by rebelling against their tyrant emperor. Though there is no justice to be found among the Catholic authorities, Saxony still believes the common Catholic people to be trustworthy, honest, and just.

The people of Rome are dubious of his incredible tale of papal seduction; and as before, Saxony is outwitted by Pope Joan. She denies his allegations, charging him with heresy and blasphemy. The people rally at the Pope's command, seizing him and preparing to burn him at the stake. The Duke's eyes are opened yet further: he once believed that his father's murderer was a vile exception in an otherwise virtuous priesthood; but he now sees that the whole "swarming brood" of Catholics to be an abomination and a plague. About to die, the Duke calls down curses on the Catholic Church in its entirety. His curse implicates all future Popes and every monk and priest in Pope Joan's crimes and sins:

Farewel thou Royal rank Church Whore, farewell,
 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 should 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 (70-71).

The play therefore functions to guide its audience members from whatever moderately sympathetic position they might hold concerning the Catholic Church to a position of hatred and distrust concerning all Catholics. By utilizing the legend of Pope Joan to do so, Settle connects the papacy of his day to the image of Rome as the “Mother of Harlots” contained in biblical prophecy, marking all Popes, priests, and Catholics as spiritual descendants of this singularly abominable Pope. Settle’s play, while ultimately no more subtle than the pope-burnings he devised, is far more crafty and insinuating, utilizing a sympathetic and initially Catholic protagonist to deliver his scathing anti-Catholic message to the audience. In the end, the most unthinkable horrors and injustices have been enacted upon the Duke, and all of Catholic Christendom is implicated in the crime.

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Chapter Four

“This Tempest comes from Heaven’s dispersive hand”: Prophecy, Providence, and Poetic Justice

¹⁶ But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

¹⁷ And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

¹⁸ And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

- Acts 2 16-18 (King James Version)

O plant me round
With your kind Bodies; blunt, if possible,
Heav’ns whetted vengeance, while I tell the vision.

- from *Mithridates* (1678) by Nathaniel Lee
Act IV scene 1

“Your young men shall see visions”

Throughout the Seventeenth Century, prophets and itinerant non-conforming lay preachers proliferated in London and throughout England. They rose out of a broad spectrum of dissenting sects, including Diggers and Ranters, Anabaptists and Fifth Monarchists, Muggletonians and Sabbatarians, Brownists and Behmenists. And while travelling lay-preachers might be expected to speak on any of a number of subjects—the love of Christ, the wrath of God, man’s duty to man—those who identified themselves specifically as prophets, urging listeners to hear and respond to their unique insights concerning England’s future, consistently offered a single urgent message: “The End is Near.” Preaching repentance and often condemning those holding rival beliefs, these prophets contributed a great deal to the fueling of apocalyptic fears and millenarian action. Their distinctive ministries both reflected and amplified End-Times beliefs throughout the Civil War, Commonwealth, and Restoration, keeping eschatological concerns on the forefront of public religious discourse. This contoured not only seventeenth-century doctrine and dogma but also the language, imagery, and overall aesthetic of seventeenth-century Christendom before, during, and after the Cromwellian Interregnum.

With this context in mind, the first half of this chapter is a consideration of a selection of representative appearances of prophets/prophecy in the plays of the Restoration. In these plays, one sees prophecy operate in at least two distinctive modes. In one instance, the skeptical and dismissive attitude towards prophetic ministry that may have dominated among conforming royalist audiences prevails. Where this is the case, “prophets” can be villains and hucksters or they can be

generally harmless simpletons, but they are in either case inauthentic and self-serving. At other times, the distinctively apocalyptic resonance of prophetic utterance is employed earnestly, lending the events of the play, and especially the presaged events, a cosmic significance and a sense of inescapability. Such prophecy also serves a set of significant dramatic functions, most notably by offering key revelations or serving as foreshadowing.

An example of the former class of prophet—the disingenuous con artist—is found in Robert Stapylton’s 1663 divided plot tragicomedy, *The Step-Mother*. In Stapylton’s play, audiences are told that a great “Bard” or “Witchmaker” has come to live in a nearby wood who has the gift of prophecy. The audience knows his prophecies to be a scam from the onset, but the prophet is nonetheless presented as generally harmless. In this play, his actions are in fact well-intentioned, ultimately serving the “cause of love” and of the rightful monarch. Generally dismissive of claims to authentic prophetic knowledge, the play thereby reflects one possible attitude toward the lay preachers and prophets of the age: they are misguided, but more to be laughed at than feared.

The next play to be examined in this chapter offers an example of the other class of prophet: the character with an authentic vision of the future. In Nathaniel Lee’s 1678 tragedy *Mithridates*, it is the protagonist himself who sees his own future by way of a troubling dream that, by play’s end, proves to have been prophetic. Far from harmless, prophecy in Lee’s plays anticipates destruction. With London in the throes of the Popish Plot and on the brink of the Exclusion Crisis, Lee’s tragedies consistently reverberate with a far more sincere apocalyptic terror than is offered

by any playwright at the dawn of the Restoration—reflecting a set of beliefs concerning the End Times that historians now acknowledge to have been prevalent among even the conformed Anglican majority through the late Restoration era (especially during the Popish Plot) and into the Eighteenth Century.

While continuing to disregard or even punish those claiming to be prophets within the non-conformists' ranks, *biblical* End-Times prophecies receive an extraordinary amount of attention from Anglican clerics throughout this period. Prominent churchmen and many notable scholars of the Restoration and Enlightenment sought out and found within the cryptic, often troubling, apocalyptic biblical prophecies much to suggest that these passages were, through divine inspiration, describing events and expressing ideas well in advance of their occurrence: events and ideas relating to now-current events in England and across the globe.

As a third significant play to consider, Thomas Crowne's political tragedy *The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian* (1677) offers in tension both cynical and earnest portrayals of prophecy. There are religious con men, but they are neither innocuous nor well-intentioned. Instead, Crowne's "prophets" are a mix of dishonest zealots and violent malcontents attempting to undermine Rome's hold on Jerusalem. But there are also "true" omens and prophecies given concerning the immanent destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem, and the world—prophecies that are ignored to the listener's peril. These prophecies operate similarly to those in *Mithridates*: they foreshadow the play's tragic conclusion and portend apocalyptic destruction on a cosmic scale. The location of the play—in Jerusalem at the time of

the destruction of the temple—is particularly significant for two reasons: first, the city of Jerusalem and the temple it contains feature prominently in biblical prophecy; second, one of few prophecies attributed to Jesus that manifestly has come true concerns the temple’s destruction. The play therefore presents prophecies as part of the larger dramatic action (not simply diversionary spectacle) and calls to mind important, familiar prophecy from the Bible. To this end both *The Destruction of Jerusalem* and *Mithridates* utilize omens and the ominous—evoking what might be called *prophecy proper* while also presenting a more general sense or knowledge of impending doom.

The second half of this chapter considers a closely related subject: providentialism and its eschatological significance. Like prophecy, evidences of the guiding hand of Providence in the plays of the Restoration call the audience to examine the play in relation to God’s supreme, inescapable, and benevolent will and purpose for humankind. Even before attempts are made to establish the rule of poetic justice as a strict rule and guide for the London stage, a belief in Providence and an insistence upon its moral superiority to fatalism shapes Restoration drama—especially in tragicomedy where good is allowed to prevail through serious hardship.

This second half of the chapter will again consider Stapylton’s *The Step-Mother*, along with Edward Howard’s celebrated (and long thought lost) 1667 play, *The Change of Crownes*. In each of these plays, the playwright ends with his characters explicitly praising Providence for its role in bringing about a satisfactory conclusion for all parties, whether they are truly virtuous or merely redeemable.

The virtuous are rewarded, and unlike the cluster of plays governed by the rule of poetic justice a decade later, the wicked are frequently *not* punished but are instead forced to confront the error of their ways, coming to repentance. The chapter will also consider Dryden's retelling of the tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra, *All for Love* (1677). In the play, his characters are keenly aware of their dubious position in relationship to the dictates of poetic justice but continue pursuing their "improvident" love, considering the "World Well Lost."

Throughout both sets of plays, where prophecies occur and where providentialism governs, a transcendent force is understood to be directing events toward a preordained end. But the nature of the relationship between this supreme force and humanity is uncertain, and these plays highlight one of Christian eschatology's foundational binaries: judgment and grace. Because of the correlation between prophecy and the most vivid and terrible apocalyptic language, prophecy serves to evoke pity and fear in the face of God's judgment while the concept of Christian providentialism, in direct contrast, insists upon God's supreme beneficence—a goodness that reaches out for and embraces even the wicked, the murderous, and the treasonous. As the reliance on providentialism as a governing principle gives ground to the rule of "poetic justice," the punishment of the wicked is asserted by some (critic John Dennis in particular) to be a fundamental and necessary moral attribute of English drama. Considered theologically, this emphasis on justice is not merely an intensification of the providentialism that governed the stage but an inversion of it: a stage abounding in mercy and grace was supplanted by one in which the punishment of the wicked was insisted upon. In Dennis's view,

failing to present such strict poetic justice was “a scandalous and pernicious Libel upon the Government of the World” (Dennis 1:200).

Part I: Prophecy

Prophecy, Eschatology, and the Stage

At the heart of Christian millennialist expectation and apocalypticism is a foundational reliance on the veracity of divine prophecy. The scriptural passages that serve to fuel End-Times speculations are prophetic in the most general sense of the word: they contain divinely inspired meaning (or are interpreted as if they contain such meaning) concerning events that are yet to come.¹³ While there were many self-styled prophets writing and operating in seventeenth-century England, they risked a charge of heresy if their prophetic utterances were found to stand in opposition to the prophecies in the Bible. The conformed Church of England generally treated as authentic and authoritative only the prophetic revelations found *within* canonized scripture. Any new claim to prophecy was received with skepticism and was tested against orthodox interpretations of scripture. Even in relation to such scriptures there was often a dubious hesitancy when it came to developing official authoritative interpretations, building a doctrinal stance upon revelatory prophecy, or attempting to identify the precise dates and times for the presaged events.

¹³ This is not to suggest that the identification of passages as future-oriented prophecy is wholly arbitrary; it is frequently the stated intention of the passage that it be interpreted as such. For example, Habakkuk 2:2-3, reads, “And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

Conforming ministers in Restoration England might be expected to shy away from such speculation, finding End-Times conjecture fruitless for anything but fermenting hostile division and generating unrest. But surprisingly, ministers *didn't* shy away from preaching about the prophecies found in scripture or speculating at length about their precise meanings. With dissenting factions offering incendiary interpretations of scripture intended to stir up millenarian action, it was necessary for Anglican clergy to offer counter-interpretations. Dissenters aside, biblical End-Times prophecies could not realistically be ignored without removing several books of the Bible and radically rewriting *The Book of Common Prayer*. Indeed, a modified prayer book *was* introduced and adopted in 1662; but while it eliminated and altered several rituals and ceremonies of the Church deemed non-essential (and perhaps too Catholic), the new *Book* demonstrates no meaningful effort on the part of its authors to hide or downplay scriptural references to the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming, or the Final Judgment.¹⁴ As has been acknowledged in previous chapters, it was a fairly common practice for even conformed ministers during the Restoration to interpret End-Times prophecy in relation to high-profile current events, to identify specific individuals as the major players in the biblical apocalypse account (especially the Pope), and to describe the present as “these Last Days.”

¹⁴ The removal of several ceremonies in 1662 suggests a growing Puritan or Presbyterian influence in the workings of the Anglican Church, meaningfully altering popular attitudes toward high ceremony and the practices dissenters would deem “popish”. The preface to the *1662 Book* states: “And whereas in this our time, the minds of men are so diverse, that some think it a great matter of Conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their Ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs: and again on the other side, some be so newfangled, that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old, that nothing can like them, but that is new” (11). The changes in the new book are clearly something of a concession to these new voices—not in opposition to the Church, but within it.

Two of the first significant apocalyptic tracts of the Restoration are *The key of prophecie* (1660) and *The mystery of prophecies revealed* (1660), both anonymous and both profoundly royalist. They interpret biblical prophecy in such a way as to demonstrate the divine right/authority of Charles II and to align nonconformists (Puritans, Presbyterians, Catholics, etc.) with Antichrist. Shortly after the publication of these works, Abraham Nelson would contribute another such tract, *A perfect description of Antichrist, and his false prophet* (1660), in which Cromwell is identified as Antichrist and all noteworthy opponents of the Church of England are specifically and individually identified as agents of the devil. But foremost among conformed Restoration exegetes is Thomas More. More does little to support such associations; some recent scholarship, focused on the political aspects of his writings, has suggested that it functions to counter radical millenarian interpretations of scripture by projecting the events described in biblical prophecy into the distant future. But the translation of the apocalypse out of current events is not consistently his strategy, nor is it his primary objective. More's principal aim is not to negate the urgency or the essential truth claims regarding biblical prophecy in relation to the present day. As Warren Johnston observes,

More not only sought to curtail inflammatory applications of Revelation's prophecies, he also proposed an alternative understanding in their place. It is true that he was particularly troubled by the disorders brought about by radical millenarian beliefs, which he most often characterized as 'enthusiastic' and 'fanatic', and he did seek to refute subversive applications of apocalyptic Scripture. But his intent was to legitimise the secular magistrate and the English Church and to harmonise his understanding of millennial prophecy with a validation of earthly political rule, repudiating the supposition that it was necessary to overthrow temporal government in order to bring about Christ's reign. More's emphasis was not on postponement of apocalyptic

events but, rather, on the continuation of monarchical government and the purity of the Church of England, both during his own time and in the coming millennium" (*Anglican Apocalypse* 475).

There is little in More's writings that discourages his reader from considering the global and personal significance of apocalyptic prophecy in the light of current events, nor does it suggest that the Book of Revelation should be dismissed as indecipherable or irrelevant. On the contrary, More argued, "there is not any book in the World that makes more for the establishment of the Crown and Church of England than this Holy Book of the Apocalyps" (*Anglican Apocalypse* 478). Because More believed England's church and state to be "both the instruments and the results of millennial achievement," Johnston observes, "there was no need to delay or fear expectations of its approach (482).

As common as exegesis of prophetic scripture proves to be among Anglican ministers, the numerous individuals in Restoration society who identified *themselves* as prophets were, as a rule, outside of the conformed Church. Active interpretation of biblical prophecy, so long as it didn't result in unrest and upheld the rights of the monarch, was accepted; claiming the authority to offer *new* prophecies that may or may not conform with scripture and an established, orthodox interpretation thereof met stiff opposition from the crown and the majority. On the far end of what might be considered an orthodoxy spectrum, members of several radical dissenting groups had individuals within their membership (or operating wholly independently) who claimed to be prophets themselves. Such individuals would interpret or add to previously recorded prophecy through new prophetic writing or utterance, and the influence they

wielded in their congregations as afforded them by this ability could be great. Lodowicke Muggleton, for example, co-founder of the Muggletonian sect, worked actively as a prophet and religious leader, shaping doctrine and cursing unbelievers from 1651 until his death in 1698. He and his cousin John Reeve (1608 – 1658) were identified by their followers as the two aforementioned prophets from chapter 11 of the *Revelation of John*, clearly associating their ministry with biblical End-Times prophecy. Such associations were typical and were necessary to validate new prophecy.

But again, such associations were popular and politically viable only within non-conforming sects. As Amanda Eubanks Winkler observes, “such mystical practices had lost their luster” by the time of the Restoration, because “radical Protestant sects, enemies of the monarchy and the Church of England, incorporated the idea of inspiration into their personal experience of God” (309). Their prophecies frequently “questioned social hierarchies and justified rebellion;” and even when they didn’t, they operated as divine directives superseding or circumventing the authority of the crown. Winkler continues:

As it became increasingly apparent that the monarchy would be restored, such sectarian practices drew fire from members of the Church of England, who sought to discredit the prophecies that they believed had contributed to dissension, regicide, revolution, and the suppression of their Church (309).

A significant percentage of these seventeenth-century lay-prophets were women. In an essay on prophetess Jane Leade (1624 – 1704), Catherine F. Smith observes, “As some of them (or their advocates) argued, God’s wisdom had been directly revealed to them, who were among the weakest vessels. This was evidence

that the millennium was near, when history's divine plan would be revealed to all" (55). Not only were these prophecies commonly apocalyptic in nature, but the significant increase in prophetic activity was in itself received as evidence of the world's immanent end. In the second chapter of Acts—a passage of special significance to eager millenarian groups—Peter quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel, declaring:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:17-21).

This passage—apocalyptic, prophetic, and concerned with prophecy at the time of the apocalypse—is recorded as the first prophetic utterance by a follower of Jesus after his death. Here Peter prophesies a future in which prophecy is commonplace: this profusion of prophecy is itself seen as the fulfillment of an earlier prophecy and is here identified as the first of several spectacular signs of the world's hastily approaching end.

The Benign Prophet of Robert Stapylton's The Step-Mother

It comes as no surprise to find Restoration playwrights incorporating prophets and prophecy into their plots: they are a part of seventeenth-century English life. It is likewise to be expected that the function and significance of these

theatre prophets varies across genres and across decades. Many of the political tragedies of the late 1670s and 1680s utilize prophecy in the unfolding of catastrophic events, reflecting that era's ethos of unrest. But even before those turbulent years, prophecy found its way onto the stage, if less frequently. Robert Stapylton's 1664 tragicomedy, *The Step-Mother*, is an example of such a play. The play is set in ancient Verulam, or Roman Britain, in the period when the Roman Empire is receding and direct rule is at long last reverting to the Briton king, Sylvanus. The king has been blessed with a legitimate heir, Filamor, and a daughter, Violinda, by his first wife. His queen and second wife is Pontia, the princess of Malden, who has a son and daughter of her own—Adolph and Caesarina. The serious plot concerns Pontia's treachery on behalf of her son Adolph. She attempts to deceive and murder her son-in-law so that her own son might inherit the kingdom.

The comic underplot is more closely interconnected with the serious plot throughout the play than is sometimes the case in divided-plot tragicomedy. In it, the prince's tutor Fromund and the king's surly companion Tetrick impersonate a witch and a conjurer in an attempt to draw a confession of conspiracy out of the queen. The queen, under the impression that a "Bard, or Witch-Maker" has come to the wood outside Verulam, wishes to have her future divined. The two men find in their assumed role as diviners that they can serve their king by deceiving Pontia. As an added boon, Fromund is able to use his disguise and his feigned power to woo the lady he loves.

Clearly the connection between this sort of prophecy and the use of biblical apocalyptic language is tenuous. One would not expect to see prophecy utilizing the rhetoric and imagery of apocalypse described as witchcraft to begin with. Nor are the prophecies offered here concerned with the world's end. But as this and other chapters will reveal, the Restoration plays utilizing apocalyptic or millennialist rhetoric, including prophecy, are generally concerned not with the end of the world directly but with the fall of nations and of great men. Such is the case here; the prophecy sought from these men by the queen concerns the collapse of Verulam's monarchy.

Such obviously inauthentic prophets as appear in this play are less common later on the Restoration stage. That these con men are almost entirely harmless and seek in fact to serve the king is perhaps evidence of a generous and conciliatory attitude in the play's author, like that endorsed by many early Restoration playwrights as described in chapter two. Because the shame of regicide had polluted the entire nation, many writers, themselves arguably complicit in the treasonous deed, used their platform as writers to encourage mercy over vengeance, writing about worlds peopled with penitent usurpers and uniformly forgiving regents.

But if an association is to be made between Stapylton's prophesying bard and the independent prophets of the nonconforming sects, it may not be to generate a spirit of reconciliation. Another possible explanation for his presence in the play can be found in the traitorous queen's desire to consult him. While Fromund and Tetrick are only impersonating a witch and a conjurer, it is suggested that such

people *do* exist elsewhere in the wood; they get the idea to impersonate these diviners from reports about an actual “Witch-Maker” in the vicinity. And the queen’s desire to consult him suggests that such men are on the side of the wicked and can be trusted to conspire with a usurper. Clearly the queen expects this itinerant prophet to be no friend of the monarchy and assumes he would be willing to enter into a plot against the throne. The queen’s willingness to associate with such a presumably wicked man is what makes her wickedness manifest even to her two children. They describe the queen’s deviation from religious orthodoxy as follows:

- Caesarina: My Mother us’d to give us better Precepts,
 Adolph: She was good-natur’d, and had sense of Honour,
 Caesarina: And of Religion; but now she leaves
 The Temple of the Gods, to consult Witches,
 As Brianella tells me; I suppose
 The General must go with her, she knows we
 Are for no such black Voyages, tis strange
 The General should, for he’s a man of Honour.
 Adolph: Was not our Mother once as strict as he
 In point of Honour, but she’s chang’d (Stapylton 15-16).

The queen’s willingness to consult with this Witch—an abandonment of the sound religious precepts that once guided her—is emblematic of her diminishing good nature, honor, and sense.

It is noteworthy that the Witch-Maker does not come to the city of Verulam itself but must be sought in the nearby wood. Such a marginal status for a diviner would have been familiar when Stapylton’s play was written and produced, not just for a “witch” but for any prominent religious non-conformist; the Clarendon Code

was just being enacted, restricting the free practice of religion by nonconformists. This controversial set of penal laws was passed in the early years of the Restoration, beginning with the Corporation Act of 1661, requiring all municipal officers to receive communion within the Anglican Church. This effectively excluded all nonconformists from public office. It was followed by the Act of Uniformity (1662), requiring the use of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in all religious services. In 1664, the Conventicle Act forbade groups of five or more people from different households to gather for worship, effectively rendering all nonconforming religious assembly illegal. Finally, in 1665, the Five Mile Act forbade dissenting ministers from coming within five miles of any incorporated town, banishing them, like Stapylton's witch-maker, to distant woods and fields. So while Stapylton's witch-maker may not immediately call to mind the non-conforming prophets and ministers of the day, his situation would have been familiar to Restoration audiences as that of a dissenter—one with whom you could not freely or safely associate. The fact that the queen's children view her choice to consult this man as an abandonment of her honor and religion further supports the association with non-conforming ministers or prophets.

"Every Nerve Thin as a Spider's Thred": Prophecy in Nathaniel Lee's Mithridates

Nathaniel Lee's 1678 tragedy *Mithridates* incorporates prophecy much differently than Stapylton's play does. First, it may be argued that the grave and mystical nature of prophetic utterance itself serves as the conscious model for Lee's authorship. The character of Pharnaces in the play makes this point, correlating the

Disorders unexpected, to foreshow
 The Gods are much offended at the Marriage.
 How this may work with one of mighty Faith
 In holy Fables, one of various humor ...
 ... Be you the judge (298).

Pelopidas and Pharnaces, aware of the importance of such omens to Mithridates' reign, know they can manipulate his behavior through the contrivance of false omens.

Additionally, the characters in *Mithridates* are directed to an extraordinary degree not only by visible omens but also by the ominous: the invisible, unnamable force of humanly insupportable certainty—vague prophecies or supernatural foreboding. As each character speaks and acts, he is confronted by the overwhelming sense that his actions only draw him nearer to a preordained fate. Invisible omens—a vague but potent sense of foreboding or doom—haunt Lee's play as unquestionably as visible omens, turning those who experience such feelings into prophets after the model of the oracle of Delphi described above. Semandra, for example, loves the prince Ziphares and the two are about to marry—and yet she weeps. When asked to explain her incongruous behavior, she attributes her tears to a profound sense of foreboding:

First then, I must complain of my hard Stars,
 That did not dart kind Lustre on my Birth;
 For tho at present, while your young Blood boyls,
 Your Reason cannot get the Rein of Passion,
 Yet it will come, when long possession cloyes you,
 Then you will think what Queens you might have had,
 With Kingdoms for their Dower... (301).

On their wedding night, Semandra, feeling herself to be the victim of her “hard Stars,” prophesies the resentment and loss of passion for her that Ziphares will eventually experience despite his passionate love for her at present. Assured by him of his undying affection, Semandra can only answer, “Spight of ill-boding Dreams, unlucky Omens, / You must, you shall, you ought to be believ’d.” Determined to love and to be happy, the couple plans a midnight assignation, but the scene ends with Semandra’s father again cautioning the young and eager couple: “Fate yet may put a bar betwixt our hopes” (302).

Throughout *Mithridates*, every significant action is undertaken *because of or in spite of* the numerous prophetic signs and speeches that permeate the play. To underscore the most significant prophecies, Lee can be relied upon to utilize the Restoration stage’s capacity for spectacle. This play is no exception: Act IV begins with Mithridates experiencing a troubling prophetic dream. Having been fooled by the false omens his son devised not to marry Monima, the king determines instead to steal Semandra, the love of his son. The gods respond to this with catastrophic signs of their displeasure: fire and earthquakes. Then Act IV begins with the stage direction, “Mithridates incompass’d with the Ghosts of his Sons, who set Daggers to his Breast, and vanish” (338). This is not just a nightmare, but another prophetic dream; and a horrified Mithridates knows beyond a doubt that the destruction it promises will prove true.

Thus in Lee’s play, prophecy permeates every scene, every action. The characters act in response to visible omens, prophetic dreams, and vague but inescapable portents of doom; prophecies are reinforced through powerful signs in

the natural world; and the entire play assumes the urgent, furious, and fatalistic tone of prophetic utterance.

Prophecy Reviled in Thomas Crowne's The Destruction of Jerusalem

In Thomas Crowne's ten-act tragedy, *The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian*, pts. 1 and 2 (1677), prophecy and zealotry go hand-in-hand, and both are flatly condemned. The anti-religious position of the protagonist, the Parthian king Phraartes, drew such harsh criticism that Crowne found it necessary to defend himself at length in an epistle to the reader. Crowne contends, "He makes not one argument against Religion, and only evades those that are made for it; as any one of ordinary capacity may easily discover" (a1). But this is untrue: within the first few scenes he calls religious ceremony "gay, splendid follies" (1); he disregard oracles and rejects the efficacy of prayer (3); and he denies the existence of "Heav'n and Powers above" (12). Phraartes relies entirely on himself and his own valor, and he looks scornfully on those who devote themselves zealously to any purely religious cause.

In this Phraartes seems to prove wise; for in the play, a band of Pharisees and other zealots—all of whom are revealed to be self-serving rather than pious—conspire in a hopeless rebellion against Rome. But curiously, Crowne uses authentic prophecy and omens to counter their lies—and to make clear that this failed rebellion is not the result of poor policy or martial incompetence but is preordained. In Act III of Part 1, high priest Matthias, his deputy Sagan, and Phineas, a member of

the Sanhedrim, are disturbed in their priestly duties by a celestial battle shaking the temple. Their description of what they witness begins:

Matthias: An Army in the Air.

Sagan: I saw it move.

Phineas: And round the Skye Troops of Iron Chariots drove.

Sagan: Through all the Air they scattered Rays so bright,
As if their prancing Steeds were shod with Light (21).

As the description continues, the priests proceed to describe a series of possibly natural but certainly portentous wonders: raging winds, violent storms, and arcs of lightning. Matthias believes these occurrences to be prophetic and asks:

This Tempest comes from Heaven's dispensive hand,
These Divine Riddles who can understand?
What means that fiery Sword's mysterious Ray,
Which o're our shaking Towers night and day,
In Heaven's bright Canopy does proudly shine,
As brandisht by the Majesty Divine? (23).

His musings end as the storm resolves to an equally unsettling hush, after which an earthquake rattles the city.

After these portents cease, a prophet is found sleeping next to the altar in the temple. At such a moment, when the sky teems with omens no one can understand, one might expect the presence of this prophet to be a welcome discovery. But the priests abuse the prophet, declaring him a liar and accusing him of consorting with an Egyptian god. Sagan asks, "What pow'rful Demon has convey'd him there?", to which Phineas replies,

The Spirit of *Ob*, that in the Wizard cries,
From whence he has his lying Prophecies.

Seize on the shrieking Owl; shall he alone
Have rest, that let's *Jerusalem* have none? (24)

Despite being surrounded by such powerful, uninterpreted omens, the men despise and refuse to listen to the prophet, questioning his honesty and believing him capable only of stirring up panic and dissent.

In the wake of these supernatural omens, Crowne's prophet then utters the play's sole instance of direct prophetic speech:

From the bright dwellings of the rising Sun,
And from his resting place when day is done,
From the four winds and the Earth's hollow womb
A Voice, a Voice---a dreadful Voice is come;
A Voice against our Elders, Priests, and Scribes,
Our City, Temple, and our holy Tribes;
Against the Bridegroom, and the joyful Bride,
And all that in *Jerusalem* reside.
Woe, woe, woe--- (24).

Phineas calls the prophet a witch and insists that he be silenced. But Matthias contests that the man should be handled with care:

Hold! let him pass secure,
His raving Soul does pain enough endure.
And his unconquer'd flesh no torment lacks,
H'as weary'd Torturers and torn the Racks;
As if unsoul'd, and acted by some Power
That sent him here, as Fate's Ambassador (24).

This description calls to mind that of the prophetess in *Mithridates*, where the "bounded Deity" "shoots out," "draws every nerve thin as a Spider's Thred," and "beats the skin out like expanded Gold." The prophet's endurance of anguish serves as evidence of his calling. Matthias says to the prophet, "Begone, poor wretch, and seek thy own repose, / And Heaven prepare us for these threaten'd

Woes (25). The pack of priests despises the prophet for the bad news he brings, but Matthias at least recognizes the authenticity of his speech and pities him for the difficult life he must endure.

Part II

Restoration Providentialism and Poetic Justice

For English dramatists of the late seventeenth century, a play's meaning is to be found principally in how it *ends*. This is by no means unique to the Restoration; the classical designations "comedy" and "tragedy" are themselves defined principally by how plays end. The weddings or deaths demanded respectively by these forms as the desired or "natural" conclusions to the events preceding them demonstrate how the conclusion of events assigns and measures the significance of the events that precede it. Aristotle's influential definition of tragedy demonstrates a concern with endings both for the characters and for the audience: the hero experiences a reversal of fortune from good to bad, and the audience, through the empathetic responses of pity and fear, experiences catharsis. The classical description of tragedy, distilled chiefly from Aristotle and Horace into a short list of rules, would result in the establishment of the neoclassical ideals for dramatic authorship, guiding and shaping nearly all serious drama of the Restoration.

It is true that the Restoration would also see a great deal of formal experimentation, moving beyond the strict limits of tragedy and comedy with newly conceived forms such as heroic drama and several new tragicomic structures. Yet these innovations still demonstrate a general preoccupation with endings: these

varied forms are the product of a newfound (or rediscovered) need for serious matter *ending* happily. The recent experiences of civil war, regicide, exile, and Puritan rule, followed ultimately by the fall of the Cromwellian regime, the reestablishment of monarchy, and the official renewal of English theatrical practice would demand a new framework for newly-minted narratives borne out of tragic circumstances but refusing to end as such. Existing forms would need to be modified to conform with new literary and political ideologies, and a range of experimental forms would be concocted where existing theatrical models could not otherwise be made to reflect political realities or prevailing theatrical/theoretical ideals.

These shifts and expansions in genre are described and explained in Eric Rothstein's book, *Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change*. Rothstein has attributed the broad generic shifts in serious Restoration drama—most especially from the heroic/political tragedies of the early Restoration to the sentimental/affective tragedies of the Eighteenth Century—to a guiding concern over endings. He asserts that the “fabulist” theoretical models that governed serious dramatic authorship in the first decades of the Restoration were later replaced by “affective” models. While earlier fabulist writers believed tragedies must ultimately show the workings of Providence or be otherwise morally instructive, later affective dramatists sought principally to generate powerful emotional responses. Those in support of the fabulist model would of necessity write plays that conform to the audience's understanding of morality and the divine nature; that is to say, even the most profound suffering would be permissible in the play so long as God's unflinching

justice, mercy, power, or grace in and through these sufferings would be made evident by the play's conclusion. Thus the fabulist model, committed to promoting an edifying, didactic function for the stage, is essentially rooted in a belief in the guiding hand of Providence in all things. An affective theoretical model by contrast would not only allow for every kind of spectacle—profound, unjust, possibly senseless suffering included—but would operate under the belief that generating a strong emotional response to such spectacle is a valid end in itself. This would mark a significant shift in thinking, radically reshaping the stories told on the London stage and how they are told; and that shift would revolve around how the stories should *end*: especially as concerns the perceived presence or absence of the all-powerful and benevolent governing hand of Providence.

The belief that a story's moral and meaning are chiefly the product of the story's ending is echoed in the providentialism consistently present in Christian eschatological thought, Anglican and dissenting alike. Human existence is vested with significance by the knowledge that the universe and every human to inhabit it is being used by God to advance his will—"general" providence—and that each individual will reach a meaningful and just end, foreknown by God. As theologian John Polkinghorne writes:

If the universe really is God's creation, the ambiguity of its past history and present prospects will have to be resolved in its final end.... The reason that eschatology is such an indispensable element in theological thinking is that it responds to the question of the total meaningfulness of the present creation, a meaning that can only finally be found beyond science's extrapolation of contemporary history" (140).

Providentialism, the belief that the divine will is present and active in all occurrences, interrelates closely with the rule of *poetic justice*—another fabulist

ideal roughly abstracted from Aristotle. The rule of poetic justice, strictly interpreted as it would be by Restoration critic John Dennis—asserts that the wicked must be punished and the virtuous rewarded in a manner and degree commensurate with both logic and morality. This is clearly not a convenient rule for writers of tragedy, a form in which things must (by classical definition) end unhappily for the principally virtuous protagonist.

As one might expect in a context governed by either the rule of poetic justice or of providentialism, many Restoration dramatists abandon the strictly tragic for one of several tragicomic forms—some even attempting to revise Shakespeare's tragedies into tragicomedies so that they might better conform to this rule. The principals of poetic justice or providentialism can be made to operate in any of tragicomedy's subgenres with relative ease. Despite the hardship and suffering characters endure throughout these plays, tragicomedy allows that all may end well—for the virtuous or for everyone. The same is hardly possible in neo-classical tragedy.

But the term "poetic justice" as defined here would not be coined until 1678; the fabulist plays of the 1660s and early 1670s would be governed not by the rule of poetic justice but simply by a firm belief in the guiding hand of Providence. *Poetic justice* is a rule committed to making visible on stage the unerring justice of the divine nature for the purpose of moral edification and to generate a pleasing symmetry. Its advocates assert that the audience benefits from seeing virtue rewarded and vice punished, thereby encouraging the former and cautioning against the latter.

Providentialism likewise serves the purpose of providing moral instruction to audiences when adopted as a guide for dramatists; but the message it offers, considered eschatologically, often stands directly at odds with the message generated by unwavering adherence to the rule of poetic justice. Both fabulist approaches celebrate and reward the virtuous, but their treatments of the wicked are substantively different. While poetic justice highlights the judgment certain to befall the wicked, providentialism asserts that the mercy and beneficence of God will prevail in all things. The dramatists of the Restoration's first decade, utterly dependant on the forgiveness of a wronged monarchy, not surprisingly developed a dramatic mode that accentuates the necessity for mercy. But by the late 1670s and early 1680s, a period of extraordinary religious and political divisiveness and panic shaped in large part by the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, the argument for mercy and toleration has lost favor. In its place is found instead the notion that justice, not mercy, must prevail. In plays shaped by the providentialist dramaturgy of the 1660s, it is frequently the case that the ending—happier even than any of the heroes could have reasonably expected or desired—comes not in spite of but *because of* the hardship endured by the play's virtuous characters. This is not necessary for the neo-classical rule of poetic justice to hold, but it is necessary if the play is to reflect the workings of Providence, by which even the villain's acts, intended for evil, work out for good.

When a tragicomic playwright moves beyond simply rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked to crafting a story in which *all* acts, righteous or wicked, conspire together to generate a happy ending for all but the most irretrievably

wicked—the playwright is not being governed by the rule of poetic justice but by providentialism. This essentially optimistic aspect of Christian eschatology is most simply articulated by Paul in his letter to the Romans: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).¹⁵

Such providentialism is by no means original to New Testament/Christian thought, but is pervasive throughout the biblical narrative, commonly modeled in the stories of the Israelites throughout the Old Testament as well. For example, when Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, he rises to a position of power and authority in Egypt, ultimately saving countless lives—including those of his family members—through wise management of Egypt’s resources in a period of famine. Confronting his repentant brothers years later, Joseph says, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph was inclined to be merciful to his brothers because he saw the way their wickedness was used to advanced the will of God.

Providentialism is not merely present in Christian eschatological thought but is at the heart of its central narrative. It is through this same providentialist lens that Christianity views and comprehends the crucifixion of Jesus, believing that the unjust death of the sinless Christ was necessary to bring about the redemption and salvation of humanity. Such a belief asserts two things: 1) God uses the wickedness

¹⁵ It should be acknowledged that this passage does not promise good for the wicked but only “to them that love God.” It is cited here as biblical support for the doctrine of Providentialism nonetheless because a) it has long been used to do so, and b) Paul’s assertion here that “*all things* work together for good” seems to include even acts intended for evil.

of humanity to bring about the good he desires, and 2) God's mercy extends even to the wicked. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans,

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

At the heart of Christianity is the belief that the execution of Jesus by crucifixion—at the hands of the Jewish leaders who wished him dead and of their despised Roman oppressors—is the single greatest act of divine love and mercy in history by which humanity is reconciled to God.

This manner of providentialism, in which evil is not simply punished per the dictates of poetic justice but results in a far greater good than might otherwise have been achieved, is frequently seen in early Restoration tragicomedy. The tragicomedies of the 1660s, authored prior to the term “poetic justice” being coined by Thomas Rymer in 1678, utilize providentialism as their governing moral rule. As an example, one can again consider Robert Stapylton's 1663 divided plot tragicomedy, *The Step-Mother*. Pontia, the king's domineering second wife, seeks to assassinate her husband and her step-son Filamor, claiming the crown of Verulam for her son Adolph. She sets a trap for Filamor, but Adolph, aware of the plot and determined to save the life of his step-brother, arrives first. Mistaking her son Adolph for her step-son, Pontia stabs Adolph, seriously wounding him. Were he to die, this would be a clear example of poetic justice: Pontia's evil act would have killed the very son for whom she was seeking to secure a crown.

But the play ends quite differently. Pontia is shaken by having wounded her son, prompting moral reform. When captured, she expresses her penitence, but no one believes her. This disbelief is understandable and would be expected in a period where the moral predilection of a dramatic character was expected to be fixed. Shakespeare and Johnson were roundly condemned by Restoration neoclassicists precisely because of the mutability of their characters. When Pontia escapes her captors, she remounts her efforts to overthrow her husband's monarchy. It therefore seems that her remorse has in fact been feigned. But Pontia's transformation is in actuality sincere; and when she succeeds in conquering Verulam with the army she's raised, she surprises the assembled royals and the audience alike by proving her newfound virtue. She begins with the ominous declaration, "So, now I'm all that I can wish to be; / O 'tis the Queen of all Felicities / To have full pow'r to reward and revenge" (91). To the astonishment of all, she sets aside her "power to revenge" and uses instead her "power to reward," uniting the play's young lovers—including giving her daughter Caesarina to her step-son Filamor. She then re-submits herself to the authority of King Sylvanus her husband and concludes the play with the words, "*Let us all thank Providence, that directs / Bad Causes to produce such good Effects*" (92). With the exception of two irretrievably wicked Roman mercenaries left to die, every character, regardless of his or her morally dubious actions throughout the play, makes a final decision on the side of virtue and is rewarded by play's end. The unlikely way in which even the most hateful actions—including attempted murder and a plot to commit regicide—conspire together for the universal good serves to bear witness to Providence's

goodness and to God's active, beneficent engagement in both personal and national affairs.

This moral position reflects the political and religious milieu out of which these plays arise, not just Christian understandings of divine justice and mercy. Using the stage to encourage mercy rather than justice encourages the monarch and his agents to act mercifully rather than to pursue strict justice in response to the recent usurpation and regicide. Allowing Pontia, the would-be usurper, to bring about the play's happy ending may have been politically daring, but doing so communicates a powerful and relevant message: righteousness prevails in the end, the divine will advancing in this world even through treachery. And with much of the English population believing themselves to be living in the Last Days, this optimist view of divine judgment was surely gratifying.

Another play that demonstrates this usage and function of providentialism in 1660s tragicomedy is Edward Howard's finest play, *The Change of Crownes* (1667). Despite being banned by the king due to an assortment of scandalous gags added to the underplot by Mr. Lacy in the role of Asinello,¹⁶ the play is known to have been otherwise very well received. Samuel Pepys reports that the house was so full he was "forced to stand all the while close to the very door till I took cold, and many people went away for want of room" (273). Despite his discomfort, Pepys reported that the play was "the best that ever I saw at that house, being a great play and

¹⁶ Samuel Pepys's praises for Howard's play are undermined by the unfortunate performance of Mr. Lacy, who "did act the country-gentleman come up to Court, who do abuse the Court with all the imaginable wit and plainness about selling of places, and doing everything for money" (273). Pepys goes on to recall, "Knipp tells me the King was so angry at the liberty taken by Lacy's part to abuse him to his face, that he commanded they should act no more, till Moone [Michael Mohun] went and got leave for them to act again, but not this play. The King mighty angry; and it was bitter indeed, but very true and witty" (273-274).

upholds a belief in providentialism, using the lovers' hardship to bring about a greater good for the citizens of Verona.

Providentialism, Poetic Justice, and Christian Suffering

James Howard's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* would be among the first of several such adaptations by Restoration dramatists, Nahum Tate's 1681 revision of *King Lear* in which Cordelia survives perhaps being the most notorious. Because Shakespeare's tragedies do little to demonstrate the final victory of either divine mercy or divine justice, the early champions of providentialism and the later proponents of poetic justice would agree in their dissatisfaction with Shakespeare. The universally held expectation that a play would offer moral instruction prompted tragedians throughout the Restoration to abandon or revise plots in which the virtuous suffer beyond what they perceive to be necessity or justice. Tate's play would premiere at the height of the chaos in the early 1680s, a fact acknowledged in the play's prologue. It concludes:

Morals were alwaies proper for the Stage,
But ev'n necessary in this Age.
Poets must take the Churches Teaching Trade,
Since Priests their Province of Intrigue Invade;
But We the worst in this Exchange have got,
In vain our Poets Preach, whilst Church-men Plot (prologue).

The necessity that the stage offer a moral—one conforming with prevailing ethical and religious understanding—did a great deal to shape the serious drama of the Restoration stage. Specifically, it would be asserted by some critics that a moral lesson could not be properly taught without strictly adhering to the rule of “poetic

justice” an ideal loosely derived from Aristotle by Thomas Rymer in 1678 and influenced much of the serious drama of his day. The rule of poetic justice relies upon the supposition that a playwright is obliged to instruct audiences by presenting them with examples of exemplary conduct and perfect justice. Any moral ambiguity in the conduct of the virtuous characters is therefore perceived as a flaw in the writing, while any traces of fatalism or divine indifference concerning the events of the play are identified by the rule’s proponents as marks of religious skepticism.

But Rymer’s understanding of poetic justice was principally limited to the general notion that the playwright should present to his audience a proportionate distribution of punishments and rewards. John Dennis pushed the concept further, insisting that a moral theatre must demand that its playwrights clearly punish vice and reward goodness without exception, believing that failure to do so supported the notion of a godless universe and was tantamount to blasphemy. Dennis, one of poetic justice’s staunchest advocates, wrote in his 1713 *Remarks upon Cato* that “’Tis certainly the Duty of every Tragick Poet, by an exact Distribution of Poetical Justice, to imitate the Divine Dispensation” (Dennis 2:49). Joseph Addison would ultimately lead the charge against this rule, but his argument would not be made on theological grounds. He would defend Dennis’s understanding of how Providence operates in history and would agree with his fabulist model for the stage in general, so long as

the tragic responses of pity and terror are not diminished and are allowed to operate on the audience per the dictates of Aristotle.¹⁷

But however providentialism and poetic justice are made to operate on stage, their result is a redirection of focus from the life lived to the Final Judgment at which the virtuous and faithful will receive their reward. Christian providentialism serves to explain or counterbalance hardship, persecution, and even martyrdom in the present world with the promise of future peace and joy. From the earliest days of the Church, the endurance of persecutions, trials, temptations, and hardships stood as evidence of true faith. Experiences of suffering among the New Testament authors and the early Church were not only to be expected but were celebrated. Such is a recurring theme in the Pauline epistles in particular, in which Paul's sufferings throughout his missionary journeys are occasionally offered as evidence of his unique apostolic authority. He articulates this at length in a letter to the church at Corinth:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. ... If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities (2 Corinthians 11:24-27, 30).

¹⁷ Aristotle, it should be noted, did not insist upon a providentialist view of the world. In fact, he asserts that the principle distinction between poetry and history is that history presents only facts—the world as it *is*—while poetry presents the world as it ought to be. This distinction directly opposes the insistence by Dennis that poetic justice must be maintained on stage not for aesthetic, artistic, or structural reasons but because one must do so to present accurately the providentially ordered workings of the natural world.

Paul says he is hesitant to boast, but the need to assert his true authority as an apostle of God in the face of opposition prompts him to cite the suffering he has endured for the gospel of Christ. It is noteworthy that the record of Paul's missionary journeys in the book of Acts includes accounts of miraculous healings, deliverances from prison, and many other such evidences of God's supernatural care. And yet, when new leadership threatens to undermine his apostleship in Corinth, Paul's sufferings—not supernatural acts of divine provision—are offered as the strongest available testimony concerning his authority. He concludes, "Therefore I take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

It is uniformly agreed upon by the New Testament authors that such suffering should be expected of *all* true followers of Christ in "these last days," not just apostles. Paul likewise asserts: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). The epistle of James likewise begins, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). The Beatitudes, perhaps the most famous words attributed to Jesus, carry a similar theme:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs in the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matthew 5:10-12).

In John's gospel, Jesus also states, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b).

Beyond explaining or justifying temporal sufferings, biblical promises and prophecies concerning the End of Days make it clear that the faithful Christian should expect hardship—and only *increased* hardship as the "Day of the Lord" approaches. The end comes only after a prolonged period of political turmoil, harsh persecution, and supernatural catastrophe. The Revelation of John, the apocalyptic final book of the New Testament and the most bountiful source of apocalyptic Christian imagery and rhetoric, describes a future (or perhaps present) world in large part already conquered by Antichrist and his prophets and followers. Plague, famine, war, and supernatural disasters repeatedly decimate the human population until the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, at which time Satan and the Antichrist are forever defeated, cast into a Lake of Fire. Suffering and persecution therefore serve not only as proof that a Christian is a true and faithful follower of Christ; an *increase* in persecution and suffering by Christians on a national or global scale further serves to demonstrate the rapid approach and near proximity of the End of Days.

Providentialism and Fatalism

The unlikely course of events on the Restoration stage are regularly interpreted as bearing witness to the guidance of Providence throughout. By

rewarding the virtuous and either actively punishing or generously pardoning the wicked, the playwright offers to his or her audience a world governed for its ultimate good by a power that transcends it. Rymer, Denis, and other advocates of a fabulist model for the stage would each endorse such a structure wholeheartedly; and even Addison, the first great opponent to poetic justice as the theatre's guiding rule, would support such a worldview in the theatre so long as it didn't in any way impede the play's ability to evoke pity and fear in accordance with the formula delineated by Aristotle.

As the 1660s give way to the increasingly turbulent 70s and 80s, the essentially optimistic reliance on providentialism and poetic justice appears to give way to a less hopeful fatalism. It is this shift that Dennis so vehemently opposes, insisting, as was previously quoted, that an unjust play is "either an empty Amusement, or a scandalous and pernicious Libel upon the Government of the World" (1:200). One play that receives Dennis's unqualified disapproval is Dryden's *All for Love*, described by Dennis as "immoral" and even "criminal" (2:163). But it is not Dryden's intention to overturn the morally and religiously edifying fabulist model. As Scott Shershow observes in his essay, "'Higlety, Piglety, Right or Wrong': Providence and Poetic Justice in Rymer, Dryden and Tate," "the interrelated religious and critical issues [of providentialism and poetic justice] are woven deeply into Dryden's text" (22).

In *All for Love*, Anthony is a vocal believer in the principle of providential justice. Believing Cleopatra false and devastated by the idea, Anthony expresses his

expectation that heaven will devise equally devastating punishments for her. He states:

Heav'n should be ingenious
 In punishing such crimes. The rowling Stone,
 And gnawing Vulture, were slight pains, invented
 When *Jove* was young, and no examples known
 Of mighty ills; but you have ripen'd sin
 To such a monstrous growth, 'twill pose the Gods
 To find an equal Torture (419).

Anthony expects the law of poetic justice to govern affairs. Later, aware that he had been misled to believe her untrue, he find himself deceived again, this time into believing her dead. In response to this blow, Anthony exclaims, “But Innocence and Death! / This shows not well above” (424). Here again Anthony articulates his expectation that Providence should prevail.¹⁸

In Restoration tragedy, the tragic circumstances frequently lead characters to question God, the gods, or their stars, not seeing in the midst of their trials how their sufferings could be allowed within the confines of Heaven’s general Providence. But where Dennis interprets such exclamations as profanity, they in fact serve to highlight the overwhelming preoccupation with and insistence upon the workings of Providence within the dramatic narrative. *All for Love* does not challenge the insistence upon poetic justice and Providential design: what it does—and what prompts Dennis to call the play “criminal”—is present “a pattern of unlawful love”

¹⁸ Shershow’s thoughtful examination of poetic justice in *All for Love* looks deeper, including even the epistle dedicatory. He observes how Dryden praises his patron, Thomas, Earl of Danby, who “like God at the creation, restored the Royal Treasury from its ‘confusion of a Chaos’” (22). Dryden also notes how Danby “wrought out of [himself] a way to Glory, by those very means that were design’d for [his] Destruction,” which Shershow observes to be “itself an instance of providential (and poetic) justice” (22). And finally, writing of Danby’s father’s “memorable constancy... for the Royal Cause,” Dryden concludes that “so unhappy an occasion of manifesting your own Zeal in suffering for his present Majesty, the Providence of God, and the Prudence of your Administration, will, I hope, prevent.”

for which the lovers lose their lives, but for whom the audience *still laments*.

Dryden's tale of the "World Well Lost" raises an objection from Dennis because it challenges the notion that the suffering of the wicked, like the reward of the virtuous, should please the audience. Dennis's insistence is not that of a critic chiefly interested in discovering the most effective dramaturgy; it is the insistence of a Christian, echoing the objections of Puritan Jeremy Collier, that the stage reflect the providential workings of a benevolent God in "these last days."

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Chapter Five
“A tearing Thund’ring age”:
Nathaniel Lee’s Uncompromising Apocalyptic Aesthetic

LELIUS: Ha! What unwonted Charm your Soul enchains,
 Is your high blood congealed within your veins,
 That from the dusty Field you thus retire,
 And seek cool shades, when all the World’s on fire?

- From *Sophonisba* (1675) by Nathaniel Lee
 Act I

PHILIP ‘Tis said that many prodigies were seen
 This Morn, but none so horrible as this.

POLYPERCHON What can you fear? though the Earth yawn’d so wide
 That all the labours of the deep were seen,
 And Alexander stood on th’ other side,
 I’d leap the burning Ditch to give him death,
 Or sink myself forever.

- From *The Rival Queens* (1677) by Nathaniel Lee
 Act II scene 1

No playwright more perfectly and consistently demonstrates the ways in which Restoration tragedy reflects and employs seventeenth-century eschatological discourse than Nathaniel Lee. His rhetoric drips with apocalypse and his stage brims with supernatural spectacle. Many of Lee's characters, filled with something approximating millenarian fervor, work to usher in a new world, overturning the prevailing systems of tyranny and injustice. They are torn between overwhelming moral obligations, as is typical of plays operating in the heroic mode, and failure to live up to either obligation is unthinkable. Lee's characters confront a world on the brink of collapse, escalating the stakes and the scope of their already difficult situations until the characters seem to teeter on the brink of madness, adding to Lee's plays an air of comingled fatalism and chaos.

Despite his being one of the most popular and widely acclaimed serious playwrights of his age, admired for the strength if not the delicacy of his verse, Lee's plays fell from popularity relatively quickly at the end of his career. His body of work has been widely dismissed as either representing the charred end of heroic drama—asserting an ideal for drama that no longer resonates shortly after his historical moment—or as the febrile, bombastic conjurations of a seriously unbalanced dramatist. This latter view of Lee is founded in part on the seemingly unbridled madness of a fair number of his characters, beginning with Nero in his first play. This opinion of his work is further reinforced by the fact that his career as a playwright was tragically cut short by a lengthy period of incarceration at Bedlam Asylum, after which Lee would never again find courtly favor or renew his dramatic career.

The correlation between Lee's insanity and his playwriting was swiftly drawn; the first clear mention of Lee's failing mental health can be found in a diary entry by Anthony Wood dated 30 September, 1684—the year after Lee's last extant play premiered: "Nathaniel Lee the playmaker endeavouring to reach high in expression in his plays broke his head and fell distracted" (Stroup 16). Less than two months later, Lee would reside in Bedlam, where he would remain until April 1688. While plays written during or after his institutionalization were rumored, no trace of any such work remains.

This chapter is dedicated exclusively to the plays of Nathaniel Lee. It differs from previous chapters in that it is not a consideration of a single genre or of the usage of a single apocalyptic, millennialist, or millenarian concept within Restoration drama. Instead, this chapter is dedicated to the authorship of a single extraordinary playwright in whose work can be seen nearly all of the previously mentioned eschatological images and themes. The chapter utilizes the tools cultivated in previous chapters, allowing for a broadly eschatological reading of Lee, while also addressing the ways in which Lee's particular brand of apocalyptic theatre has been misunderstood and therefore perhaps underappreciated. Having at this point examined several of the ways in which Restoration playwrights utilize images and rhetoric of the Christian apocalypse in their works, one can readily observe how Lee employs nearly all of them while also developing still more unique uses for the apocalyptic on stage. In a single Lee play one encounters virtually all of the means by which Restoration dramatists engage the eschatological and apocalyptic in one text, and he deploys them in some of the most dramatic ways. To

demonstrate this, this chapter will include brief close readings of three plays spanning Lee's full career: *Nero* (1674), Lee's first play; *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1680), his politically controversial masterpiece; and *Constantine the Great* (1683), the last play in Lee's brief career. By considering scenes, images, and moments from several of his plays and focusing close attention on these three, this chapter serves to demonstrate Lee's particular place as the model apocalyptic dramatist of the Restoration. Lee's plays utilize prophets, presentiments, and celestial visions (real and counterfeit), and rely heavily on the audience's familiarity with biblical apocalyptic texts. His plays make use of a carefully cultivated End-Times atmosphere: emotions are unrelentingly charged, the stakes are impossibly high, and individuals must ultimately and irrevocably choose sides. These culminate in what is overall a distinctly "apocalyptic aesthetic."

But one aspect of Lee's dramaturgy distinguishes his work from nearly all of his contemporaries: while working almost entirely within the limiting strictures of tragedy, Lee nonetheless manages to shape plays that anticipate a brighter future, even when offering a stage rife with villainies and unmatched chaos. The sacrifices of his heroes and the misdeeds of his villains are rarely without cosmic purpose. No matter how absolute the wreckage and suffering of the play may seem, Lee almost never fails to acknowledge the larger purpose being served. The universe of his plays is unmistakably guided by a generally benevolent cosmic hand—and that hand utilizes natural forces like love, reason, desire, and the behaviors they prompt, as well as supernatural forces, to achieve its desired end. J.M. Armistead writes, "Lee assumes that psychology, behavior, and philosophy ultimately become part of some

suprarational cosmic design” (152)—Lee’s unique brand of providentialism. As in the biblically prophesied apocalypse, the chaos and destruction in Lee’s plays are tools advancing a just cause, even when vile misdeeds or devastating cosmic forces are the means to that end.

This feature in Lee’s dramaturgy is at the heart of his apocalyptic aesthetic: as with the biblical images from which he often borrows, the chaos and destruction of his plays are anticipatory, looking ahead (as eschatological works necessarily do), even in the height of chaos and peril, to a brighter, if yet faint, horizon. While considering the plays eschatologically does in one sense encourage the reader to think of the plays as grand *endings*, the historical contexts in which Lee locates his plays—from the *Tragedy of Nero* at the advent of Lee’s career to *Constantine the Great* at the end—are moments just as easily defined as *beginnings*. The life of Nero is inexorably linked to the deaths of some of the earliest Christian martyrs but also to the difficult dawning of the Church; and the reign of Constantine may mark the end of an underground faith movement but it also marks the political beginnings of the official Church Age. This heightens the already strong associations between the supernatural upheaval in Lee’s plays and the biblical apocalypse: both are periods of trial that serve to usher in a new and more glorious world. Striving through trials to help usher in a pre-ordained, new and better reality is in essence the definition of Christian millenarianism.

But even if the endings offer hope, the hardships contained in Lee’s plays are vivid and real. One finds that mankind is susceptible to the basest, most cruel and subhuman desires, often bringing upon itself swift and terrible consequences. But

the supernal force that brings these consequences is not nearly so cruel as Man himself. It is assuredly not the case that Lee is strictly advocating poetic justice—in his plays, the cruelty of men can bring about truly troubling, unjust ends. But the supernatural chaos his plays offer is only a reflection or resulting effect of earthly chaos; and even murder and treason, contemptible in the perpetrator, can be used by God, fate, or the gods to bring about their desired ends. Like the millennialist, Lee's characters might not expect the world to be made right in their lifetimes; but the supernatural interference in events and the premonitory tone these forces establish suggest that the longed-for new world may be close at hand. The villainies and corruption that define Lee's plays are always on the verge of giving way to something better.

Critical Considerations of Lee's Heroic Tragedy, A History

Because relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the serious drama of the Restoration in the twentieth century and beyond, and as these plays have inspired virtually no modern productions, the dramatic works of Nathaniel Lee have faded into general obscurity. Scholarly inquiry into the period has consistently privileged the luminous wit comedies of the day, and this imbalance has been exacerbated by the well-deserved interest in the long-overlooked female playwrights of the period, nearly all of whom were principally comic dramatists. But several of Lee's tragedies were considered poetic and theatrical triumphs in their day, including most notably *The Rival Queens*, *Oedipus* (co-authored with

Dryden), and Lee's ill-fated *Lucius Junius Brutus*—the short theatrical life of which was the result of a ban from the stage on political grounds.

This is not to say that Lee's plays have been ignored entirely in the last century. There has been twentieth-century scholarship on Lee and the other serious dramatists of the Restoration, effectively beginning with two works: Allardyce Nicoll's comprehensive *History of English Drama: 1660 – 1900*, volume one of which (*A History of Restoration Drama 1660 – 1700*) was published in 1923; and Bonamy Dobrée's *Restoration Tragedy 1660 – 1720* (1929). A survey of the related scholarship of the eighty years that follow makes it clear that these works remain foundational, the essential starting point from which a number of other scholars have ventured. Many of these two authors' basic assumptions and observations concerning the period have remained largely unchallenged, with J.M. Armistead making by far the greatest effort to that end.

As one might expect, Nicoll's book on Restoration theatre privileges comedy: less than one fourth of his book is dedicated to the combined topics of "The Rimed Heroic Tragedy," "Other Types of Tragedy," and "Tragedy and Opera." His three short pages dedicated exclusively to Lee acknowledge in the playwright dazzling moments but generally dismiss him as the finest poet in a largely forgettable moment in serious English theatre. Nicoll begins with an acknowledgement of Lee's mental condition, immediately correlating Lee's madness with that of his characters. Considering *The Tragedy of Nero*—Lee's first play, authored long before his incarceration in Bedlam—Nicoll writes, "Probably the finest scenes in it are those where Britannicus runs mad—an early sign of a fatal bent in Lee's own mind" (112).

Nicoll's general opinion of Lee and of his tragedian contemporaries is perhaps best captured in the following criticism, focusing particularly on the apparent disconnect between the tragedies of the period and authentic human psychology and behavior:

These exaggerated emotions, as we have abundantly seen, led to a falsification of all psychology. Not one of the heroes, heroines or villains of the exalted tragedy acts rightly. Their psychology is hopelessly wrong. Whether it is love or war or death their actions and their words are the actions and the words of unreality. Their declarations ring hollow (119).

Nicoll, like so many of his followers, proceeds to attribute the violence of the period in general to a residual Jacobean influence, though he makes no attempt to explain why it surfaces so vividly more than a decade into the Restoration and in such sharp opposition to French influence (where violence is generally offstage and reported by messenger), otherwise so readily apparent in the lofty English tragedies of the 1670s.

Published shortly after Nicoll's *History of Restoration Drama*, Bonamy Dobrée's book would be the century's first book-length study of Restoration tragedy specifically; and Dobrée would choose to focus exclusively on just four of the periods most noteworthy dramatists: John Dryden, Thomas Otway, Nicholas Rowe, and Nathaniel Lee. In his introduction, Dobrée defends his interest in these nearly forgotten tragedies (clearly aware that such an interest needs defending) by considering the function of tragedy against the distinct social functions of other dramatic forms and genres. He writes:

In literature we may, for instance, try to define the lyric as the form in which man explores his impulses, and often his revolt; the epic, that

where he investigates his sense of adventure, physical or spiritual.... Tragedy, which perhaps has a wider span than any other form, might be described as the realm where man explores his daring against the overwhelming odds of life, and tests the depth of his acceptance.... Tragedy, we may say, is man's trial of his individual strength, a trial becoming increasingly unpopular, indeed incomprehensible, with the advance of democracy....

Tragedy, from the spectator's point of view, is the most personal of literary forms.... The tragedy of an age always seems to be the surest indication of its temper, so far as such can be said to exist (9).

But while Restoration tragedy clearly does pit the individual "against the overwhelming odds of life," testing "the depth of his acceptance," Dobrée quickly owns that Restoration tragedy appears to fall short of this lofty ideal in ways that cannot be ignored. Echoing Nicoll's comments, Dobrée writes, "The aspect which first strikes every reader of Restoration tragedy is its unreality—not of plot or of homely detail... but in the flagrant unreality of the emotions involved" (13). This detachment from emotional truth, he suggests, generates in Restoration tragedy a kind of impersonality incongruous with tragedy's central function as the most "personal" of forms. "We identify ourselves with the persons of tragedy as we watch it," Dobrée asserts. "We are Orestes, or Macbeth, or John Gabriel Borkmann; but we are not Philocleon, or Tartuffe, or Lady Wishfort" (9). The difficulty we experience when we encounter Restoration tragedy, Dobrée suggests, is that we decidedly are not Otway's Jaffeir or Lee's Lucius Junius Brutus either: their emotions are too excessive and unreal.

When Dobrée seeks to explain this unreality, he does not start with Lee's madness or with Jacobean influence as Nicoll does. He more fruitfully begins by considering the Restoration's heroic ideal for the stage, setting up idealized heroes

as objects for our admiration rather than offering conventional tragic heroes as empathetic vessels for our pity and fear. “Thus, in this tragedy we find man, not so much exploring his daring and measuring his acceptance, as reaching for the absolute, trying to establish something definite in opposition to the unsatisfactory compromises of life” (21). Such compromise, it might be noted, is not only present but generally defines the characters and relationships of Restoration *comedy*, contentedly pursuing love through negotiations and provisos. But in the heroic tragedy of the Restoration—and certainly in the plays of Nathaniel Lee—anything short of the heroic ideal is perceived by the heroes as monumental failure; and every compromise leads inevitably to suffering and destruction.

This unbending idealism and abhorrence of compromise is the hallmark of heroic tragedy. Initially championed by Dryden, heroic drama is deliberately crafted *not* to show audiences themselves, but to show the very best to which humanity might aspire. The characters are superhuman and know themselves to be so. They hold resolutely to their principles, and their struggles rise out of the conflict between two irreconcilable ideals: typically love and duty. By asserting heroic drama as the optimal form for English drama, Dryden and the dramatists who adopt it, including Lee, fight back the mounting uncertainties and instabilities of English life. If the split-plot forms of the early Restoration work to reconcile divergent images of England and the English monarchy and to make peace with the new monarch, heroic drama attempts to shout down compromise and assert an unbending, typically royalist ideal. The form seems to be at odds with the real world because it refuses to settle for the real world. Everything about it, from its

exceptional characters to the rhymed verse Dryden and others urged upon it, works to differentiate the world of heroic drama from the prosaic world of lived experience.

J.M. Armistead's 1979 study of Lee is the only book-length study of the author to date.¹⁹ In it, Armistead does not apologize for Lee's spectacle and bombast. On the contrary, he identifies in Lee a playwright particularly well-tuned to the instability and uncertainties of the age, expressing the "unique synthesis of 'modern' and Renaissance perspectives" (30) on which the Restoration stage was built. Armistead examines each of Lee's plays in turn, and of Lee's authorship in general he asserts:

Lee represents moral depravity, melancholy, and madness—the source of conflict in all his plays—as functions of Man's Fall from Grace. With his Renaissance forebears, he assumes that this catastrophe is made psychologically manifest in man's tendency to yield to bestial appetites, pride, and passion, instead of conducting himself according to reason in the service of charity and social harmony (30).

Man's animal nature has been subjected to "evil influences," inclining him toward "mental and moral disturbances." Armistead suggests that Lee's plays are an attempt to analyze dramatically the "aberrant behavior" these disturbances yield within a strictly Christian metaphysical framework.

In doing so, [Lee] uses all his resources to coordinate the changing psychological condition of each protagonist not only with the temporal condition of court and state, but also with the eternal cosmic drama involving heaven and the underworld (31).

¹⁹ R.G. Ham authored a book-length biographical study of both Otway and Lee in 1931 (*Otway and Lee: Biography from a Baroque Age*, Yale University Press). *The Works of Nathaniel Lee*, vols. 1 & 2 (1954-5), edited by Thomas B. Stroup and Arthur L. Cooke, also contain a great deal of useful introductory matter and insight but are chiefly collections of Lee's plays.

Lee's plays, then, are concerned with the "eternal cosmic drama" that shapes the relationship between fallen individuals—prone to animal violence, overwhelming passions, and madness—and their divine judge. Locating his plays in apocalyptic time and amidst apocalyptic wonders heightens this concern for Lee's characters as the day of judgment is manifestly so near.

While Nathaniel Lee has not received the scholarly attention of some of his contemporaries, there has been some continued scholarship on his individual plays. And while these essays do not generate a consensus regarding the interpretation of Lee's authorship in general, there are ways in which Armistead's interpretation above echoes through them. For example, in Robert D. Hume's essay, "The Satiric Design of Nat. Lee's *The Princess of Cleve*" (1976), he argues that the play's double plot is "a brilliantly designed satiric debunking of both the libertine ethos of Carolean sex comedy and the heroic and *précieuse* conventions of contemporary tragedy" (118). Hume's understanding is therefore not unlike Armistead's: the chief difference is that the former considers Lee's criticism of "aberrant behavior" in terms of genre (Lee is satirizing libertine comedy and the excesses of heroic drama) while the latter views Lee's play in moral and religious terms (Lee is criticizing libertinism and the excesses of the court).

Due to the political instabilities defining Lee's moment in history, most critics have understandably interpreted Lee's plays as a response to or reflection of the matters of greatest national importance in his day: chiefly the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. Anna Battigelli's 2012 essay, "Two Dramas of the Return of the

Repressed: Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus* and the Popish Plot" is a recent example of this, correlating *Oedipus* and the Plot narrative. J. Douglas Canfield sees the political tragedy of Lee and Otway as an extension of heroic drama's effort at royalist mythmaking,²⁰ while Sue Owen's criticism of *Lucius Junius Brutus*, as a counter example, asserts that the play must be read as an essentially radical anti-royalist work.²¹ Several other scholars have entered into this debate, but only Armistead consistently acknowledges the centrality of seventeenth-century English Protestantism and its underlying apocalypticism as an influence on Lee's dramaturgy. For Armistead, the political chaos of Lee's plays and of Lee's age both result from this apocalyptic belief: Lee's is an age awash with wild, desperate, eschatological hopes and fears, likewise prompting wild and desperate measures in private and public life and a theatre that reflects them.

Nathaniel Lee and the Heroic Ideal in Context

By the time Lee's first play was produced, the partially rhymed heroic tragedy *The Tragedy of Nero, Emperour of Rome* (1674), the compromises that brought about the uneasy reestablishment of the throne had given way to a state of affairs more akin to panic. After the Great Plague of 1665 took the lives of roughly 68,000 Londoners and the Great Fire of 1666 turned most of London's homes, businesses, and St. Paul's Cathedral to rubble, a Dutch fleet sailed straight up the

²⁰ See Canfield's essay, "Royalism's Last Stand: English Political Tragedy, 1679-89." *Studies in Philology* 82:2 (1985): 234-263.

²¹ Owen, Sue. "'Partial Tyrants' and 'Freeborn People' in *Lucius Junius Brutus*." *Studies in English Literature* 31 (1991): 464-82.

Midway in 1667 and towed off the *Royal Charles*—flagship of the English navy and symbol of its power. Charles II clearly was not winning his war against the Dutch. This series of devastating blows to the nation's sense of order and welfare seems to have cultivated two very different intellectual structures in order to cope with and comprehend this new and troubling universe—be it chaotic, hostile, adrift, or simply unhinged. These modes of thought would shape the Restoration world as it is understood today. J.M. Armistead, author of the only book-length study of the works of Nathaniel Lee, considers these opposing modes of thought and the sets of thinkers who best illustrate them. He describes the emergence of one of the sets as follows:

... skeptics and builders emerged, and with them came a new kind of literary artistry to describe and assess both the damage and the reconstruction. Among the skeptics were those young courtiers whose moral nihilism has been unjustly exaggerated into a type of Restoration culture in general. ...young blades like the Earls of Rochester, Dorset, and Mulgrave; the Duke of Buckingham, Sir George Etherege, and Sir Charles Sedley... Agreeing that life has no compelling spiritual dimension and that reason, therefore, is made to serve animal appetites, they divided their time between the king's silken courtesans and the brothels of Covent Garden, between masquerade balls and theaters, aristocratic dinner parties and democratic tavern life. They brawled, duelled, cuckolded acquaintances, seduced young virgins, exchanged obscene lyrics, publicly performed indecent acts, and generally scandalized the citizenry (27).

This is the group responsible for what is often considered the Restoration sensibility. But to call the attitudes of this relatively small but influential group the defining attitudes of the age is overstating. Clearly these men could hardly be responsible for cultivating an idealized theatrical mode like heroic drama, for instance. Far more interested in libertine comedies endorsing or modeled after

their own Epicureanism, these men offered only one of the possible responses to the disorder, unrest, and disaster that shaped their world. Espousing sensuality and libertinism in the face of chaos, they clustered around their king and gladly embraced every privilege courtly life afforded them. As Armistead observes, this society, blazing brightly and serving for many to define the essential Restoration outlook for centuries to follow, can scarcely be said to have lasted more than fifteen years.

In opposition to these men and the worldview they represent, Armistead writes, "...graver minds sought more permanent ways to meet the challenges to traditional thought" (28). He identifies a disparate group of members as belonging to this opposing camp, beginning with religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faith communities, both conforming and dissenting: Anglicans like Isaac Barrow and Edward Stillingfleet along with dissenters like Richard Baxter, George Fox, and William Penn. Armistead then considers political innovators, pioneering mathematicians and economists, practical-minded inventors, and historians—all interested in locating their experience of Restoration life in a more complete, meaningful narrative of humankind. Writers like John Bunyan and John Milton "created vast narrative symbols which comprehended basic human behavior as part of an eternally valid Christian myth" (29). In summary, a second faction existed, seeking to oppose the world's chaos rather than succumbing to it or allowing it to define the world as a whole. It is squarely in this camp that Nathaniel Lee and the other authors of heroic drama reside—a form that forcefully posits an unbending ideal against a world in chaos. It cannot be denied that Lee's plays offer to their

audiences worlds defined by war, villainy, political upheaval, and destruction, not unlike the world of the 1680s. In them, the hand of Providence is striving against exquisite evils. The Emperor Nero in his first play is an embodiment of that evil. But most of Lee's characters, far from embracing the chaos at hand, oppose it with such vigor that the effort destroys them. Britannicus, transported through history into Nero's court to represent England's striving against tyranny, chaos, and licentiousness, is such a character, destroyed in his attempt to oppose this overwhelming force.

It should further be noted that this uncompromising idealism reflects a common religious temperament during the Restoration. As has been discussed, most of the rapidly proliferating, diverse, independent Christian factions were established through schism, with individual sects defining themselves through sharp polarization against all others, identifying their members as the one and only "True Church" and branding all other modes of Christian worship travesties or heresies. And while taking this sort of puritanical, oppositional stance was the essential defining attribute of some sects, no sect, conforming or not, was entirely free from this type of dogmatic posturing. The world was nearing its end, it seemed, and it could never be more essential to distinguish with certainty the saints from the sinners, the heroes from the villains. It is no surprise then that the tragedies of the period, reflecting this particular ideological bent of the day, would offer up heroes insisting upon absolute allegiance to that which they believe. The stakes could not be higher, leaving no quarter for anything less than absolute adherence to a cause and the total, unbending rejection of whatever opposes it.

Expressing a similar idea, Bonamy Dobrée describes heroic forms of drama as “absolutist,” and he acknowledges that Nathaniel Lee is an “absolutist” tragic playwright of the first order. But despite acknowledging this attribute in Lee’s works, he still finds Lee’s bombastic language lamentable. Even when he admires its power he can make no sense of it. He writes, “Judged by any standard of reality it would be monstrous enough, but it never comes near enough reality to be judged by such a standard ... It is Gothic building run mad, but it retains the virtues of Gothic, being held up by terrific stresses, and towering up above the mundane street” (114).

What Dobrée, Nicoll, and Armistead all fail to identify is the intrinsic connection between Lee’s heightened language and the high-stakes idealism inherent to apocalyptic writing. The worlds Lee creates for his plays are coming to an explosive end—a fact often overtly stated and always implied. It is true that one can scarcely imagine Lee’s characters living out their lives anywhere in our “mundane” reality; but if one grants the possibility of an apocalyptic reality—a real world in which already difficult choices between love and duty are heightened exponentially by the looming threat of universal destruction—Lee’s characters find a fitting home. Positioning his heroes at a crucial moment in history—particularly one that can be viewed as a universal terminus—serves for Lee to justify even the most extraordinary language and incredible actions. Failure to recognize this locus renders his characters’ violent outbreaks and emotional excesses largely incomprehensible—yielding only declarations “ringing hollow” as Nicoll suggests and the “flagrant unreality” Bonamy Dobrée describes.

This becomes clear when one considers Lee's plays at any length—even when taking as a starting point the specific examples of excess Dobrée offers his reader. One quickly notices a commonality that has gone unnoticed by Dobrée: the excerpts are nearly all overtly apocalyptic in nature. For example, from *Oedipus* he quotes:

Haemon: Sure, 'tis the end of all things! Fate has torn
 The lock of Time off, and his head is now
 The ghastly ball of round eternity!
 Call you these peals of thunder but the yawn
 Of bellowing clouds? By Jove, they seem to me
 The world's last groans; and those vast sheets of flame
 Are all its blaze! The tapers of the Gods,
 The sun and moon, run down like waxen globes;
 The shooting stars end all in purple jellies,
 And chaos is at hand (116).

Dobrée never acknowledges the significance of this as apocalyptic imagery, dismissing the passage instead as an example of Lee's "extremity of passion"—evidence that "his fancy is ever at full gallop, and there is no judgment to lay hold upon the reins."

But this is not the case. The line does not bear witness to Lee's uncontrollable excesses, nor is Lee attempting to show us Haemon's excesses or his madness. As the scene progresses, characters come forward to echo and support Haemon's impression that the thunder is in fact evidence of divine wrath:

Pyracmon: 'Tis Midnight, yet there's not a Theban sleeps,
 But such as ne're must wake. All crow'd about
 The Palace, and implore, as from a God,
 Help of the King; who, from the Battlement,
 By the red Lightning's glare, descry'd afar,
 Atones the angry powers. [Thunder, &c.

Lee has escalated the gods' response to Oedipus's crimes beyond what one finds in Sophocles' play; the plague was only the beginning. Rather than striking Thebes with plague, the wrath the city encounters specifically aligns with the stark images of Christian apocalypticism. Such a change allows the play to resonate more directly with Restoration audiences, in addition to capitalizing on the stage's new capacities for grand spectacle. Instead of merely filling the stage with a Theban populace suffering the plague and crying out for help, Lee fills the sky over Thebes with spectacular omens and wonders. The scene continues:

Haemon:	Ha! Pyracmon, look; Behold, Alcander, from yon West of Heav'n, The perfect Figures of a Man and Woman: A Scepter bright with Gems in each right hand, Their flowing robes of dazzling Purple made, Distinctly yonder in that point they stand, Just West: a bloody red stains all the place: And see, their faces are quite hid in Clouds. ... Did ever day or night show out like this? (393)
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Both Pyracmon and Alcander witness these omens, as does the rest of Thebes. More significantly, the audience does as well. The next stage direction reads, "Thunders again. The Scene draws, and discovers the Prodigies. Enter Oedipus, Jocasta, Eurydice, Adrastus, all coming forward with amazement" (393).

Lee's plays are not populated with madmen who think the world is ending; Lee's plays are in fact located in the midst of an apocalypse not unlike that described in biblical prophecies. The fact that most of the plays are also set in specific historical moments from pre-Christian antiquity does not deter Lee from investing them with eschatological significance. On the contrary: historical parallels in drama

could be relied upon to reflect current attitudes and events, with the sense of distance and detachment generated by historicization only serving to clarify the play's relevant message.

One final worthwhile consideration of Dobrée might be to respond to his observation, "The fact is that Lee is most himself when he is dealing in superlatives, when no word can be too strong, no image too tremendous" (127). This is unquestionably true, as it is unquestionably true of apocalyptic writing in general. Dobrée, seeking to illustrate this point, proceeds to quote from Lee:

Far from the guilt of palaces, oh send me!
Drive me, oh drive me from the traitor man.
So I might 'scape that monster, let me dwell
In lions' haunts or in some tiger's den;
Place me on some steep, craggy, ruined rock,
That bellies out, just dropping on the ocean;
Bury me in the hollow of its womb,
Where starving on my cold and flinty bed
I may from far, with giddy apprehension,
See infinite fathoms down the rumbling deep;
Yet not ev'n there, in that vast whirl of death,
Can there be found so terrible a ruin
As man, false man, smiling destructive man" (127)

While the image drawn here is certainly striking, reading it through the lens of apocalyptic anxiety makes it less extraordinary and almost familiar. It's sentiment and the images it utilizes resonate strongly with passages of biblical end-times imagery. For example:

The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (Revelation 6:15-17).

Lee's image of a man attempting to escape the guilt of humanity by fleeing into a remote den and praying to be buried in it may be too strong and forceful for mundane conversation; but it creates precisely the effect Lee intends. This close correlation to established Christian apocalyptic imagery demands that his plays be considered eschatologically. Doing so makes sense of Lee's extraordinary language and imagery, always reflecting the worlds of his plays: worlds on the brink of destruction and—in most cases—a painful rebirth.

"The World's eternal, and its Monarch, I": The Tragedy of Nero, Emperour of Rome

Nathaniel Lee's distinctive style was apparent from the beginning of his career, identified in the very prologue to his first play, *The Tragedy of Nero, Emperour of Rome*. The prologue, intended to be spoken by a comic actor of some reputation named 'Haines', reads:

A bloody fatal Play you'l see tonight,
I vow to God, 'thas put me in a fright.
The meanest waiter huffs, looks Big, and struts,
Gives brest a blow, then hand on hilt he puts;
'Tis a fine age, a tearing Thund'ring age,
Pray Heav'n, this Thund'ring does not crack the Stage (Stroup 25).

Clearly Lee's reputation for bombast, well-suited to this "tearing Thund'ring age," preceded and served to frame even his first play.

By the time the prologue draws to a close, it seems to have served its typical purpose: the men of the pit have been censured as harsh critics and the women have

been flattered and appealed to, as was customary. But as the prologue concludes, the play (and Lee's career) is launched dubiously and in uncertain terms:

This play I like not now ---
 And yet for ought I know, it may be good.
 But still I hate the fighting wounds, and blood,
 Why, what the devil have I to do with honour,
 Let Heroes court her, I cry, Pox upon her;
 All Tragedies i'Gad to me sound odly,
 I can no more be serious, than you Godly (25).

The theme that here concludes the prologue proves startlingly relevant to the play that follows: the play concerns Britannicus's attempts to maintain his virtue—to “be Godly”—in the face of Nero's unbounded evil. The attempt drives him mad, and ultimately, as Armistead expresses it, he “speaks the truths that in a mad world only mad men know: ‘Honour is stabb'd, and all the Virtues bleed’” (42).

It may be surprising at first glance that a play about a cruel and depraved emperor losing his sanity and setting his city ablaze apparently did not encounter any resistance from the monarchy or his Lord Chamberlain. With Charles' reputation suffering, due in part (but certainly not entirely) to his mistresses and the libertine behavior of his court—and as London still showed countless signs of its recent destruction by fire, including the torching of its fleets by the Dutch—it is impossible to read Lee's *Nero* without considering the ways in which it reflects upon the world from whence it came—and specifically the monarchy of Charles II. The play's very modest success may have saved Lee from censure: a greater success would likely have received closer scrutiny. Importantly, perhaps, Lee also helps his cause by pointing out in his play that Nero was a usurper, not Rome's rightful monarch. This distinction would hopefully encourage audiences to associate

Charles with Vespasian if with any character, not Nero; though this small distinction does little to distract from the all-too-obvious comparison. Indeed, if Lee *is* actually suggesting a comparison between Charles and Nero, he is not alone in doing it. For example, an anonymous work entitled “The Fourth Advice to a Painter” (1667) equates Nero’s “fiddling” while Rome burned with the popular allegation that Charles was “at supper with his mistress” while the Dutch set his ships ablaze. It reads:

As Nero once, with harp in hand, survey’d
 His flaming Rome and, as that burned, he play’d,
 So our great Prince, when the Dutch fleet arriv’d,
 Saw his ships burn’d and, as they burn’d, he swiv’d.
 So kind he was in our extremest need,
 He would those flames extinguish with his seed (Chambers 119).

Correlation being drawn by this play’s audience between Nero and Charles II seems inevitable. But looking beyond contemporary events, Lee’s choice of Nero as his subject also has profound eschatological significance. Christians from the days of Nero onward associated him most closely of any single individual in history with the prophesied Antichrist. His cruelty to Christians is legendary, having subjected those he captured to the most barbaric public executions he could devise—throwing them to dogs, burning them alive, and nailing them to crosses. His deviant sexual proclivities were legendary, attested to by his alleged incestuous relationship with his mother. The execution of his mother, in addition to the executions of both of Christianity’s great founding leaders, Peter and Paul, are all attributed to Nero. Belief in his significance as the earthly embodiment of the daemonic did not end with his suicide: Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus both report a popular

belief that either his suicide was faked or that he would be resurrected, but that he would in either case return. In the years following his death, at least three individuals claimed to be *Nero redivivus* and each generated at least a modest following.

Early Christian writings provide several examples of Nero being declared the Antichrist. Several prophecies from the *Pseudo-Sybilline Oracles*, for example, dates ranging from the Second to Sixth Centuries, foretell Nero's return. Another early Christian pseudepigraph, the *Testament of Hezekiah*, clearly has Nero in mind when it describes the rise of Antichrist in the Last Days:

And after it [the world] has been brought to completion, Beliar will descend, the great angel, the king of this world, which he has ruled ever since it existed. He will descend from his firmament in the form of a man, *a king of iniquity, a murderer of his mother*—this is the king of the world—and will persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the Beloved will have planted; *some of the twelve will be given into his hand. This angel, Beliar, will come in the form of that king*, and with him will come all the powers of this world, and they will obey him in every wish....And he will do everything he wishes in the world; he will act and speak like the Beloved, and will say, 'I am the Lord, and before me there was no one.' And all men in the world will believe in him (Charlesworth 161, emphasis mine).

Even in the biblical *Revelation of John*, there are passages that have been widely interpreted as allusions to Nero, including the “number of the beast” mentioned in chapter 13: 666. This number can be calculated as the sum of either the Latin or the Greek name for Nero when transliterated into Hebrew.²²

²² The complex numerology surrounding Nero's name and the evidences that the number 666 is best understood as a reference to him are laid out most clearly and convincingly in W.C. Watt's book, *666*. (Irvine, CA: UC-Irvine Press, 1989)

As the centuries passed, the belief that Nero would literally return as Antichrist waned and was replaced by a more figurative understanding of the selfsame belief. Just as the gospel writers express their understanding that John the Baptist, while not a literal reincarnation of Isaiah, fulfilled the Old-Testament prophecy that Isaiah would return, so later Christians believed that the world would end when another Nero rose—a tyrant whose reign would likewise be defined by ungodliness, sexual immorality, and the persecution of Christians. For Protestant non-conformists with a millenarian bent, this description sounded like King Charles II. To suggest that Charles was another Nero was to support the dangerous opinion that Charles was (or, as a Catholic sympathizer, was in league with) Antichrist; and to suggest that the Antichrist had risen was to assert an eschatological interpretation to current political events.

Thomas Stroup points out the extraordinary irony of the play's epistle dedicatory, made to the Earl of Rochester. This dedication is nearly (but not quite) enough to encourage one to read the play as a celebration of Nero's debaucheries. Despite beginning with an encomium to Rochester, Lee's history-altering inclusion of Britannicus in the plot—the son and rightful heir of Claudius who actually died before his fourteenth birthday and only a few months into Nero's reign—makes it impossible to imagine Nero to be the intended hero. The very name Britannicus demands the sympathies of Lee's audience. Stroup continues, "The debauched character of Nero and the license of his court suggest the character of Charles II and of his court. Nero's seduction of Poppea, his impulsiveness, and his neglect of affairs of state in his pursuit of his pleasures, all might easily recall similar weaknesses of

Charles" (22). Yet the play is known to have been performed before the monarch in 1674, and there is no record of it earning censure. The play would return to the stage several times the year of its premiere, and apparently received occasional revival throughout the next half century.

"A Thing That's All O'fire": Millenarianism Parodied in Lucius Junius Brutus

Nathaniel Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* both invites and defies political interpretation. It is an inventive retelling of the story of the rape of Lucretia at the hand of Sextus Tarquin and the revolution that follows, resulting in the birth of the Roman Republic. In it monarchist and parliamentary rhetoric seems to exist side-by-side; the hero (if the title character is indeed the hero) is also an unrelenting and tyrannical father, and pathos and empathy are consistently undercut by hypocrisy on all sides. As has already been mentioned, scholarly interpretations vary significantly: John Loftis and Sue Owen are among many who ultimately offer a Whiggish interpretation of the play, finding Brutus's anti-royalist rhetoric convincing. Joyce MacDonald—in the face of general opposition—argues that the play's strong assertion of sovereign masculinity makes it essentially monarchist (231). And Richard E. Brown, acknowledging contradictory interpretations, claims that "the play charts a nearly evenhanded course between Whig and Tory positions" (*Nathaniel Lee's Political Drama* 41). Only David M. Vieth seems content to sidestep the play's political implications, focusing instead on its general darkness and pessimism. But no matter how the play is related to political events, Lee's use of apocalyptic images clearly introduces the play into the broader apocalyptic

discourse, both deploying recognizable images and subjecting them in turn to cynical scrutiny.

In Lee's play, Brutus claims to fill the roles of archangel and prophet, both functioning as the heavenly scourge of the gods and declaring their divine will for humanity's future. His angelic function is suggested to his son Titus in Act I when word of Sextus's crime first reaches him, before Lucretia's impassioned plea for revenge. Brutus commands his awestruck son:

Look on my face, view my eyes flame, and tell me
If ought thou seest but Glory and Revenge,
A blood-shot Anger, and a burst of Fury,
When but I think of *Tarquin*. Damn the Monster;
Fetch him, you Judges of th'eternal Deep,
Arraign him, Chain him, plunge him in double fires (330).

These lines clearly echo Revelation 20:1-3a, a passage describing the conclusion of the Christ's final and decisive battle against the Beast, marking the beginning of his millennial reign:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the
bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil,
and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal
upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the
thousand years should be fulfilled.

The "monster" Tarquin is equated with the dragon of the End Times—an image vividly reinforced throughout the play. Brutus claims to have a vision of a "monstrous Dragon" bearing the name "Tarquin" on its forehead "vomiting" lightning (332), and Vinditius acknowledges the vision as well, mentioning

specifically the “Mark in his forehead” (332), an allusion to the Mark of the Beast in Revelation chapter 13. Brutus sees himself as the angelic instrument of revenge by which the “Dragon” Tarquin will ultimately be cast down.

Brutus’s function as a prophet is named just as explicitly, first asserted in his address to the assembled Roman people in Act II:

Patricians, People, Friends, and Romans all,
Had not th’inspiring Gods by wonder brought me
From clouded Sence, to this full Day of Reason,
Whence, with a Prophets prospect, I behold
The State of Rome, and Danger of the World ... (339).

Brutus’s claim to possess the gift of prophecy (a claim not uncommon among the leaders of several prominent dissenting factions throughout the Civil War, Commonwealth, and Restoration periods) is undercut by the audience’s knowledge that Brutus was only ever feigning madness. This “miraculous” restoration of his reason is only an act, ending a charade initiated years earlier and patiently maintained through mounting frustration with Tarquin’s tyrannical rule. Like Hamlet, Brutus refers in Act I to his “Vizor of madness” and to his need “To act deformity in thousand shapes, / to please the greater Monster of the two, / That cries, bring forth the Beast, and let him tumble” (327). Brutus’s deliverance from madness would be the greatest evidence of his divine calling; but with the knowledge that his madness has been feigned all along, the audience can hardly be expected to take his supernatural transformation seriously.

This undercutting of Brutus’s claim to prophetic knowledge—a claim frequently utilized by leading Fifth Monarchists and others among the most radical of religious dissenters—is only one instance among many. Apocalyptic rhetoric

continues to be co-opted and utilized for satirical effect throughout the play. For example, in Act I, Brutus claims to see a dragon bearing the name of Tarquin on its forehead setting Rome ablaze. At first, only Brutus sees this spectacular vision: Vinditius laughs at him and one citizen from the crowd calls Brutus the “King’s Jester”—a title he had crafted for himself during his pretended madness. Brutus maintains his claim, however, and Vinditius, recognizing the political expediency of such a vision, changes his tune:

Nay, like enough; the Gods are very angry;
I know they are, they told me so themselves;
For look you Neighbors, I for my own part
Have seen to day fourscore and nineteen Prodigies and a half (332).

Taking Brutus’s cue and joining in the con as a fellow “prophet,” Vinditius begins describing the “Prodigy” of the dragon Brutus claims to see in greater detail to the plebeians gathered around them:

O Neighbours, look, look, look, on his filthy Nostrils!
‘T has eyes like flaming Saucers; and a Belly
Like a burning Caldron: with such a swinging Tail!
And O, a thing, a thing that’s all o’fire! (332).

One can almost hear him, like the cunning con artists in the tale of the Emperor’s New Clothes,” willing the crowd to see this vision in his repeated “look, look, look.” Of course, the final image, “a thing that’s all o’fire,” calling attention to the Dragon’s burning genitals, reflects the sexual depravity of Tarquin’s son and also that of Charles and his court. Crudely and directly acknowledging the monster’s flaming “thing” may have generated a chuckle, but the greater significance of the image of flaming genitalia is not likely to have been missed.

It is important to note that, unlike similar moments in *Oedipus*, *Caesar Borgia*, or virtually any other Nathaniel Lee play in which characters refer to celestial omens, there is no stage direction here indicating that these portents should be revealed to the audience. The dragon Brutus and Vinditius claim to see simply is not there; it has been fabricated in an attempt to rally the already enraged throng against Tarquin. As proved true for several influential non-conforming English prophets of the seventeenth century, claiming to receive heavenly visions does a great deal to bolster Brutus' cause: it grants him divine authority independent of and not answerable to any earthy power; it marks him as specially "called," set apart for a purpose with cosmic significance; and it authorizes him to identify "true followers," distinguishing those who share his vision from those who do not and therefore can have no part in his noble and glorious cause.

By line 333, all but one of the citizens claims to have seen the apparition. The one citizen lacking the imagination or political zeal to see the image in line 334 is threatened with physical violence. His story changes very quickly, and in line 336, when asked again whether or not he too saw the beast, he exclaims, "Mercy: I did, I did; a huge monstrous Dragon." If one wished to construct a royalist interpretation of this play—something few recent scholars other than Joyce MacDonald have attempted to do despite Lee's clearly articulated Toryism elsewhere—this would be a place to start: despite utilizing apocalyptic images throughout his plays to generate his distinct aesthetic, Lee ridicules the politicized use of radical apocalyptic rhetoric and visionary prophetic claims as propagandic tools for self-promotion in opposition to the monarchy.

A similar exchange takes place in Act IV when Titus, racked with guilt for having just betrayed his father, describes a dark and portentous occurrence he has recently witnessed. The great difference is that this is a true account, not a fabrication. He states:

Dark as it seems, I tell thee that the Gods
 Look through a Day of Lightning on our City:
 The Heav'n's on Fire; and from the flaming Vault
 Portentous blood pours like a Torrent down.

...

Just now I saw three Romans stand amaz'd
 Before a Flaming Sword, then dropt down dead,
 My self untouch'd: while through the blazing Air
 A Fleeting head, like a full riding Moon,
 Glanc'd by, and cry'd, Titus, I am Egeria;
 Repent, repent, or certain death attends thee;
 Treason and Tyranny shall not prevail:
 Kingdom shall be no more; Egeria sayes it:

...

'Tis Ripe, 'tis Perfect, and is doom'd to stand (364-5).

This speech is offered in earnest, and—unlike Brutus's dragon—is understood by the audience to be an accurate report of events in the world of the play. Such a vision calls to mind not only biblical prophecies concerning the apocalypse, but also the many widely-circulating reports of heavenly portents seen throughout the country in seventeenth-century England. There are many examples of such reports, and the extent to which they circulated demonstrates the seriousness with which such reports were received by at least a considerable percentage of the populace. An anonymous pamphlet bearing the title, *Signes from heaven: or Severall apparitions seene and heard in the ayre, in the counties of Cambridge and Norfolke, on the 21 day of May last past in the afternoone, 1646*, is a prime and widely circulated pre-Restoration example. It describes (in summary):

Near Newmarket: “three men in the Ayre striving, struggling, and tugging together, one of them having a drawn Sword in his hand”;

Between Newmarket and Thetford: “A pillar or a cloud” surrounded by the “bright hilts of a sword” ascending and descending in “the form of a Pike or Lance,” engaged with another similar formation for “about an houre and a halfe”;

At Sopham: “a ball of wild fire fell upon the earth, which burnt up and spoyled about an Acre of Grane,” leaving “a most sulphurous stinck behind it”;

At Camberton: another “Spyre Steeple in the Skye, with divers swords set round about it”;

At Brandon, County Norfolk: the same again, along with “a Navie or Fleet of Ships in the ayre, swiftly pulling under sayle,” with flags and sails “ready to give an encounter”;

In Marshland, County Norfolk, in Suffolk, and elsewhere: “a whole Regiment of Drums beating a call with perfect notes and stops,” heard in the thunder by several military men of credit. The drum call was “much admired of all that heard it.”

Paul Christianson’s book, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions From the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War*, documents how very common such accounts were prior to the Restoration. The failure of the Puritan government of the Commonwealth to usher in a new and perfect age in which Christ reigns may have cast suspicion on such accounts, but it did not stop sectarian religious leaders from maintaining such claims and arguing their authenticity throughout the Restoration and beyond.

In Lee’s play, Brutus and Vinditius use such visions to draw followers and to deepen their resolve. Titus’s vision, despite its authenticity, is offered up to a less receptive audience than his father had; and there is no one there to champion it as Vinditius did Brutus’s vision. Titus’s claim is therefore flatly dismissed. The priest

dismisses it as “the Fantoms of an ill digestion,” and Titus in turn confesses that his sighting may have been a hallucination rooted in “the horror of my Treason” (365). So while Brutus’s claims to prophetic and angelic authority are embraced by the crowd, despite being undercut by the audience’s knowledge of Brutus’s duplicitousness, Titus’s authentic account of heavenly omens is dismissed as a mere series of vivid hallucinations, despite the fact that the audience has no reason to doubt it. Apocalyptic claims and events abound throughout Lee’s play, but they are in every instance undermined or emptied of their significance by the obvious agendas of those who utilize them or by the cynical reception they encounter. Portents are accepted or rejected based not on evidence but on the basis of the particular political aims they support.

In a study of Blake developed in Steven Goldsmith’s 1993 book, *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation*, Goldsmith makes an observation about Blake that may serve to develop an understanding of Lee *Lucius Junius Brutus*—and perhaps his other plays as well. Goldsmith writes, “What deconstructive readings have helped us see, then, is that Blake’s representational forms, with all the seeming inadequacies that make them incompatible with the universalizing transcendentalism of apocalypse, are as central to the artist’s political ends as apocalypse would seem to be” (138). And while I am hesitant to make any strong claims concerning Lee’s intended political ends, there is an aspect of the idea that his message is conveyed through the correlation of incompatible images that is relevant here. There can be no doubt that the two principal instances of apocalypticism in *Lucius Junius Brutus* threaten to enact a sort of mutual negation.

The first, false vision is constructed by the character reporting it while the second, a seemingly authentic vision, is ignored or explained away. So if Lee is expressing his politics through these visions, his message perhaps has less to do with the visions themselves and more to do with the misuse of rhetoric both political and prophetic—an idea supported by Victoria Hayne’s essay, “All Language Then is Vile’: The Theatrical Critique of Political Rhetoric in Nathaniel Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus*.”

The play dramatizes two very different responses to apocalyptic beliefs in Restoration England. The first is political millenarianism, actively pursuing divinely sponsored political goals with all the urgency and devotion that the world’s end inspires. The second is very nearly the opposite: a separationist worldview and detachment from earthly concerns with the promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth looming on the horizon. Either position is problematic: actions motivated by political millenarianism are suspect because of the potential worldly benefits they offer, and separationist resignation offers no benefits at all beyond the hope of isolation from a portion of the world’s hardships and disappointments. And as the play demonstrates, those who make prophetic claims and those who dismiss such claims both do so in pursuit of political ends.

“’Tis not by halves, that we will worship Heaven”: Constantine the Great

Lee’s final play begins with a heavenly chorus visiting Emperor Constantine in a dream. They prophesy, and their prophecies contain both a warning and a promise. One angel sings, “For alas! ‘tis decreed by the Heavenly Doom, / To purge thy past Crimes, there’s a Torment to come.” As the song concludes, the heavenly

choir sings a blessing: “And still thy Handmaid Victory, / Where er’e thou go’st, shall wait on thee; / And all shall end in Harmony” (487). This message goes beyond the traditional image of the cross and “*In hoc signo vince*” that legend reports Constantine saw and heard. But this revised message announces the overarching theme of Lee’s last play, *Constantine the Great*—a play ultimately about the divine charge to each Christian to take up his or her cross and follow after Jesus. Hardship is part of the providential order, beyond human comprehension, by which the Christian seeks salvation.

What little critical attention the play has received has not been kind. Thomas B. Stroup and Arthur L. Cooke’s editorial edition of Lee’s complete works (1968) offers the last half century’s only scholarly commentary on the play, and the most generous words Stroup can find to offer are that, “Generally, the production and publication seem to have been accomplished in some haste” (480). He dismisses an earlier critic’s assertion that the play must have been written early in Lee’s career, finding little evidence for the argument that the play is too closely rooted in the heroic drama of the 1670s to have been composed so late. The only real evidence of this, it seems, is that the play, despite its title, is not truly a tragedy but an heroic drama, suggesting that it could have been written when heroic drama was nearer the height of its popularity. More significant for the purposes of dating the play is the way *Constantine the Great* mirrors political events of 1683, with the sensational Rye-House Plot being closely paralleled in the play’s action. As Stroup observes, the characters of Arius, Dalmatius, Lycinius, and Crispus would be instantly recognized as Shaftesbury, the Duke of York, Algernon Sidney, and Monmouth respectively

when the play premiered in 1684. This is the basis of Stroup's counter-argument that the play was not an early work but rather was written in haste: a political play is most likely to communicate its message to an audience when the events that inspired it are fresh in the audience's memory, so Lee likely wanted to get it before the public as quickly as possible.

But the play does not need as much defending as it has received. It is true that the characters are more thinly sketched than in his best works, and that the verse never reaches the loftiest heights Lee was known to have achieved; but the plot, described by more than one early critic as "confused," actually finds at least thematic coherence when interpreted as a study in the Christian need to replicate in his or her own life the pattern of suffering, death and rebirth established by Jesus. And while it is difficult to imagine that Lee could have known the play to be his last, this play bears the common and recognizable hallmarks of a writer's *alterswerk*—confronting mortality and the life-to-come head on, with all of their companion hopes and fears.

Constantine the Great is perhaps the most optimistic of Lee's plays, a fact most clearly manifested by the survival of its hero. Constantine is promised victory through the cross; and Lee interprets the prophecy to mean not only that Constantine would achieve martial success after conversion to Christianity, but also the Constantine would bear a proverbial cross, pass through hell, and—like the Christ—rise triumphant. Chapter Two examined how, in Christian thought, history and all human activity that constitutes it derives significance by anticipating or repeating, symbolically or anagogically, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The narratives of the Old Testament presage the life and death of Jesus, and its prophecies and poetry anticipate Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and return. Old Testament poetry is read as Christian prophecy: even the erotic Song of Solomon is deemed sacred because it is an anagoge for Christ's love of his bride the Church. Similarly, the Christian sacraments becomes the means by which humanity recollects, reenacts, and "enters into" Jesus' death and resurrection—the cosmogonic center of all creation.

This conscious repetition of Jesus' death and resurrection lies at the heart of Christian soteriology, the field of study concerned with how the individual attains salvation. A companion field to Christian eschatology, soteriology is the attempt to understand a) how the death of Jesus makes eternal life and redemption from sin possible for the Christian, and b) what the Christian must do to earn or accept this redemption. One relevant biblical passage, relevant also to Lee's play, is found in words spoken by Jesus in Luke's gospel:

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels (Luke 9:23-26).

Nathaniel Lee's Constantine can only find salvation—seen here as deliverance from evil counselors, pagan influences, and his own selfish passions—by taking up his cross. Only by the cross can he conquer.

As J.M. Armistead has observed, Lee's first five plays are concerned with pagan subjects and settings, while for five of his last six (*Lucius Junius Brutus* being the only exception), "the religious scaffolding is overtly Christian" (178). He continues: "As infernal powers become more clearly defined, the hand of Providence also comes into better focus. ... More and more, Lee shows that patterns of depravity and madness are episodes in a providential history whose greater contours, humanly incomprehensible, can only be pointed to by prodigies and the vocabulary of devil-possession" (178). In this way, the destructive, pagan lunacy of Nero in Lee's first play can be read against Constantine's deliverance from paganism and madness by the cross in Lee's final play, supporting a Christian providentialist worldview.

Armistead likewise notes that Lee's plays are overtly topical, with his last several serving as clear parallels to the major sociopolitical concerns of the day: the Popish Plot, the Exclusion Crisis, and the Rye House Plot in particular. Considered together, these facts suggest a playwright not content to submit or succumb to the madness of his age, offering audiences cause for optimism and hope in the throes of chaos and disorder in "these last days." The pattern may be too complex for human comprehension, but there exists behind the madness and disorder a providential design. Supernatural omens and wonders, as disturbing as they might appear, are in fact offered by the divine author of this supreme order as reminders of its activity in the world.

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Chapter Six
“Hell! Hell! Have I Not Cause to Rage and Rave?”:
Toward an Eschatology of Early “Sentimental” Drama

Though all the Curtains of the Skie be drawn,
And the Stars wink, young Ammon shall go on;
While my Statira shines, I cannot stray,
Love lifts his Torch to light me on the way,
And her bright Eyes create another Day.

- From *The Rival Queens* (1677) by Nathaniel Lee
Act II scene 1

Behold the universal works of nature,
Where life still springs from death. To us the sun
Dies ev'ry night, and ev'ry morn revives:
The flow'rs, which Winter's icy hand destroy'd,
Lift their fair heads, and live again in Spring.

- From *Lady Jane Gray* (1715) by Nicholas Rowe
Act IV

"O how I love destruction with a Method"

As the Eighteenth Century approached, the English stage underwent a series of aesthetic and ideological shifts. By the 1680s, the hard comedies of the Restoration's first two decades, distinguished by their bawdiness as much as their wit, had given way in large part to less bawdy fare, which would in turn give way to a pronouncedly more moral and moralizing stage. The tragicomedies of usurpation and restoration had also largely vanished. By the 1690s, political tragedies like those written by Nathaniel Lee had likewise clearly diminished in popularity, the political instability they reflected giving way to a new relative stability after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.²³ Contributing to their disappearance from the stage is of course the death of Otway in 1685 shortly after the career-ending institutionalization of Lee. Occasional efforts at what might still be called heroic drama were finding little support: though the rhymed couplets of the form had all but vanished, abandoned in the 1670s even by the form's staunch advocate, Dryden, serious plays about powerful and passionate heroes torn between obligations, forming and overthrowing governments, persisted. What would gradually come to take their place has been broadly identified as "sentimental drama," the dominant theatrical mode of the Eighteenth-Century London stage. Sentimental drama, though hardly monolithic, is generally recognizable by a few attributes: its commitment to modeling virtuous behavior; its portrayals of domestic life and

²³ While the perceived threat of a Catholic monarch had virtually ended with the Glorious Revolution, there was still a series of violent disputes over the throne. Most notably, the son and grandson of the deposed King James II, pretenders James "III" and Charles "III," would each lead invasions, attempting to reclaim the monarchy for the Stuarts. It would not be until the Battle of Culloden in 1746 that attempts to restore the Jacobite line of succession would effectively end.

increasingly of bourgeois life rather than courtly misbehavior or political struggles; and its emphasis on sincere deep feeling/bathos. Sentimental drama is also noteworthy for its far more frequent adoption of female protagonists—in part because of what was understood to be the actress's special capacity to evoke the audience's pity and to exhibit sorrow, the key emotions required and the desired audience responses for sentimental dramatists. The shift towards sentimentalism in both comedy and tragedy would forever change the face of English theatre.

This chapter is an examination of the ways in which eschatological themes, images, and concerns continue to manifest themselves on the English stage in the decades of sentimentalism's rise at the end of the Seventeenth Century and the beginning of the Eighteenth Century. To begin this analysis, it is important to note first that while the difference between sentimental drama and earlier Restoration forms can appear stark, not everything about sentimental drama is antithetical to that which precedes it. Not unlike the plays of Nathaniel Lee and Thomas Otway in the 1670s and 1680s, these early sentimental tragedies are marked by extraordinarily strong emotion and a correspondingly heightened rhetoric. But the plays of these earlier dramatists manifest in part the distinctive political ideology of heroic drama, while sentimentalists by contrast will show little interest in royalist politics or in the grand political struggles ubiquitous in earlier decades. Because they are disinterested in stories of conquest, siege, and political upheaval, later sentimental plays are not filled with the supernatural apocalyptic wonders that marked plays set in these historic moments of victory or defeat. But rhetoric relating to Christian eschatological concerns persists: as sentimental drama claims

the stage, the apocalyptic context for the political tragedies of the 1680s wanes and the rhetoric of apocalypse, judgment, and universal renewal is transmuted into a language for expressing other high-stakes concerns, especially the life-or-death stakes of romantic love. To face separation from one's love is to face the end of the world; and to be rejected in love is to be eternally damned. This type of rhetorical allusion to the apocalypse appears in the political tragedies of the 1670s and 1680s for which apocalyptic cataclysm served as the backdrop; it also permeates the rising sentimental drama of the 1690s at least through the 1710s, especially in the so-called "she-tragedies" that serve to bridge the gap between the political tragedies that predate the Glorious Revolution and the upswell of a more bourgeois sentimental drama. The dominance of this new drama will be well-established by the time of the Licensing Act of 1737, by which Robert Walpole would clamp down on all unlicensed theatrical production and impose rigorous censorship against plays with politically questionable content. After seeing himself frequently ridiculed from the stage, most notably perhaps in John Gay's wildly popular political satire, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), Walpole made it difficult for political tragedies and satirical political comedies to reach the stage. Despite fierce opposition by a cluster of London wits, censorship and sentiment won the day: the English stage would soon belong to plays more like George Lillo's moralizing merchant-class tragedy, *The London Merchant* (1731); and such plays would more-or-less hold the stage through much of the Nineteenth Century.

Walpole's efforts to censor political content on stage would be one late cause among many for the gradual shift toward sentimentalism. Others would include: the

institutionalization and death of Lee and Otway in 1684 and 1685 respectively (and the death of Dryden in 1700), leaving serious heroic and political forms of drama with few champions; the rise of the new, reform-minded court of William and Mary in 1688; Jeremy Collier's influential Puritan attack on the stage in 1698; periods of religious revivalism across Great Britain (and America), increasing in scale and impact through the "Great Awakening"; and a waxing influence of what seems to be a more religious merchant class. These are but a few among many likely causes for the slow ideological shift toward sentimentalism over wit or heroics. The first part of this chapter will consider several of these causes while tracing the continued presence of eschatological themes and apocalyptic rhetoric throughout the late Restoration period.

The remainder of this chapter will be an examination of the work of the playwright who is almost certainly the late Restoration's finest tragic dramatist, Nicholas Rowe. Guided by the insights of J. Douglas Canfield and his book, *Nicholas Rowe and Christian Tragedy* (1977), the chapter concludes with an examination of providentialism in his work and of the ways in which, contrary to Eric Rothstein's earlier assessment of the period, the fabulist model for serious drama persists well into the Eighteenth Century in Rowe's plays. Additionally, the neo-classical approach to tragedy is modified by Rowe, replacing classical categories of *hamartia* and *catharsis* with Christian counterparts: sin and divine judgment or mercy.²⁴

Rowe was criticized for failing to adhere to the rules of poetic justice or

²⁴ It may be worth noting that the field of study concerned with sin and its effects in Christian theology is called *Hamartiology*. *Hamartia*, the word Aristotle uses in his *Poetics* to describe the tragic flaw or error of the protagonist in Greek tragedy, has been adopted by Christian theologians as a synonym for sin.

providentialism; but as this chapter will demonstrate, Rowe's virtuous characters believe in and allow for divine retribution and reward to be meted out by God in the afterlife. They therefore do not expect (and generally do not receive) justice in this life. Rowe's plays, called "impious" by critics, simply reflect a more authentic Christian eschatology than the neo-classical ideals allow: the innocent sufferers in Rowe's plays hold fast to virtue in the face of villainy, trusting in the Christian promise of divine vindication after death.

Love in the Time of Prodigies

The use of apocalyptic language to describe feelings of love and desire in Restoration plays does not so much replace scenes of apocalyptic prophecy and destruction as grow up alongside them, a natural outgrowth of the playwrights' attempts to raise the stakes and the emotions of their plays' extraordinary romantic complications to impossible heights. Tragedies from the 1670s and 1680s in which supernatural scenes occur and in which the heightened rhetoric of apocalypse is already present often create rhetorical parallels between the portentous events on stage and the play's principal conflicts, including the star-crossed romances in the plays. This rhetoric is employed when describing the hopes and trials of the lovers, and allusions to heaven and hell, death and destruction, and divine wrath prove to be particularly well suited to the context—used to describe strong emotional responses to love and loss articulated in the midst of literal scenes of destruction and chaos presaging the world's end.

As has so often been the case in this study, the drama of Nathaniel Lee provides particularly useful illustrations. *The Rival Queens, or Alexander the Great* (1677) is especially rife with supernatural end-times spectacle and rhetoric relating to actual omens. At the same time, the apocalyptic language of crisis is extended metaphorically to the characters' relationships. For example, Act I scene i includes a visit from the ghost of the recently slain king. The witnesses respond to this visitation as follows:

Philip: 'Tis said that many Prodigies were seen
This Morn, but none so horrible as this.

Poly: What can you fear? though the Earth yawn'd so wide
That all the labours of the deep were seen,
And Alexander stood on th' other side,
I'd leap the burning Ditch to give him death,
Or sink my self for ever (234).

Polyperchon, hell-bent on the destruction of Alexander the Great, all but dismisses the reported appearance of the spectral king. Rather than discuss the vision or attempt to discern its meaning, the visitation prompts in him only a bold declaration against Alexander—one that employs apocalyptic language equal to the moment. A vast chasm into hell would not suffice to deter him from his planned assassination; surely the appearance of one ghost is of little concern. Unlike the ghost of King Hamlet—or even the ghost of King Laius in Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*—no attempt is made to speak with the ghost or to learn the reason for his visit. His presence *is* his message: supernatural occurrences reveal the engagement of God/the gods in moments of great political upheaval and change. So Polyperchon, far from being

daunted by the specter, assumes that its appearance points to Alexander's immanent downfall.

The spiritual disturbances escalate in Act II, which begins with the following description of the action on stage:

Noises of Trumpets sounding far off.

The scene draws, and discovers a Battel of Crows, or Ravens, in the Air; an Eagle and a Dragon meet and fight; the Eagle drops down with all the rest of the Birds, and the Dragon flies away (238).

Polyperchon and the rest of the conspirators interpret this as a sure omen of Alexander's imminent ruin, and proceed to report several other such wonders.

Cassander relates again about King Philip's ghost, marveling that it has unexpectedly remained on earth well past sunrise. He then tells his colleagues of another strange encounter:

I met a monstrous Child, that with his Hands
Held to his Face, which seem'd all over Eyes,
A Silver Bowle, and wept it full of Blood.
But having spy'd me, like a Cockatrice,
He glar'd a while; then with a shriek so shrill
As all the Winds had whistled from his Mouth,
He dashed me with the Gore he held, and vanished (238).²⁵

²⁵ While the celestial battle foretelling Alexander's death seems to be essentially Lee's creation, the series of visions that follows relies heavily on recognizable imagery from the *Revelation of John*: John encounters four beasts "full of eyes" in chapter 4, and these are the creatures that "gave unto the seven angels golden vials full of the wrath of God" in chapter 15—the bowls of God's wrath poured out over the earth in the last days. In chapter 16, The third and fourth bowls both turned vast bodies of water to blood. As the portents in *The Rival Queens* continue, Lee seems to be referencing the seventh and final bowl, which brought with it "voices, and thunders and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath." The setting for *The Rival Queens* is Babylon, and all of these signs come to pass in the course of the play.

This chilling description initiates a long and strange series of reports concerning supernatural wonders, growing stranger and stranger as the scene progresses. Cassander relishes them all, believing that this string of unearthly portents must mark the end of Alexander's reign, ensuring their conspiracy's success. He marvels aloud:

O how I love destruction with a Method
Which none discern, but those that weave the Plot:
Like Silk-worms we are hid in our own Weft,
But we shall burst at last through all the strings;
And when time calls, come forth in a new Form:
Not Insects, to be trod, but Dragons wing'd (238-239).

When these and other portents are finally reported to Alexander by a cluster of his loyal commanders—portents that include thunder and hail, celestial battles, ghosts and resurrections, and even blood rain—he greets the news with a mix of fatalism and relish. “If Babylon must fall, what is't to me?” he asks. “’Tis great to fall the envy of the stars” (242).

This lack of concern over political upheaval reflects the fact that Lee's play is not chiefly a political play. It is not principally about the fall of Babylon, nor does it use the fall of the great city or the great man chiefly to reflect or respond to contemporary Restoration events. Primary emphasis is placed on the play's romantic complications; and if one considers other celebrated political tragedies of the age like Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* or Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, one quickly sees by contrast how *The Rival Queens* fails to interrelate the romantic complications and the political struggles. *Lucius Junius Brutus* is clearly about the birth of the Roman Republic: Titus's romantic entanglement with Teraminta, daughter of the emperor,

is therefore a political complication inextricably linked to his wavering political allegiances. Likewise Jaffier's relationship with Belvidera, daughter of a Venetian senator, directly complicates his participation in a revolution against the Senate. By contrast, in *The Rival Queens*, the romantic complications are not a byproduct of the political upheaval; instead, the spectacular political and supernatural upheaval serves chiefly as a dramatic backdrop for the romantic complications, heightening the sense of loss and doom surrounding Alexander's relationships to Roxana and Statira. When Alexander's commander Meleager finishes recounting all the omens his men have witnessed (having accentuated the importance of the moment by elevating his speech to heroic couplets), Alexander makes plain that it is his beloved queen—not the city of Babylon—that is his chief priority. He answers these divine omens directly:

Be witness for me, all ye Powers Divine,
 If ye be angry, 'tis no fault of mine;
 Therefore let Furies face me, with a Band
 From Hell, my Virtue shall not make a stand;
 Though all the Curtains of the Skie be drawn,
 And the Stars wink, young Ammon shall go on;
 While my Statira shines, I cannot stray,
 Love lifts his Torch to light me on my way,
 And her bright Eyes create another Day (243).

Alexander is not interested in the fate of Babylon. The dramatic conflict is not between his love and his duty to his state: it is between his two loves. And it is in his love for Statira, not in supernatural omens, that he sees the promise of a new world to come.

Alexander's rhetoric parallels that of the millenarian rebel who sees chaos and wonders at providentially ordained signs of the immanent dawning of a new

and better world: Alexander's rhetoric expresses the belief that apocalypse is not an end but a beginning—destruction allowing for renewal, followed in turn by a better world. But for Alexander the Great, this new world is not found in a new political order established through rebellion: as ruler of most of the known world, meaningful upheaval could only bring about his downfall. For Alexander, this new and better world, “another Day,” is created through the life-sustaining and -renewing love of his Statira. While the conspirators and Alexander's commanders alike interpret the wonders as signs of the great man's impending downfall, the passionate Alexander sees in them only a metaphor for his renewed romantic relationship with Statira. It is in such passages that the use of apocalyptic language to describe romantic love becomes commonplace on the English stage. As apocalyptic political tragedies fall from favor, passing through she-tragedy to give rise to an infant sentimental theatre, the powerful descriptions of romantic love that they generated in this way will persist.

Jeremy Collier and the Rise of Sentimentalism

Many reasons have been suggested here and by others for the slow rise of sentimental drama at the end of the Seventeenth Century. One cause frequently credited (or more often blamed) for the shift in ideology is the extraordinary influence of Jeremy Collier and his faction—a tide of Puritan resistance led initially by Collier against a stage he perceived to be morally bankrupt. Collier insisted that the stage should abandon its licentiousness and adopt moral instruction as its chief aim—a charge most clearly and directly voiced

in Collier's 1698 attack on the Restoration stage's principal dramatists, *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*. Whether Collier's words sharply influenced opinion or simply marked him as the most strident mouthpiece for a movement already well underway is not entirely clear. Certainly the charge to establish a "moral" stage can be seen from the very beginning of the Restoration, even if this stated goal was not taken very seriously in the Restoration's first decades. For evidence of this, one need look no further than the original patent by which Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant were first authorized to renew English theatrical practice in 1660. Their patent reads in part:

We do hereby straightly charge and command and enjoin that from henceforth no new play shall be acted by either of the said companies containing any passages offensive to the piety and good manners, nor any old or revived play containing any such offensive passages as aforesaid, until the same shall be corrected and purged by the said masters or governors of the said respective companies from all such offensive and scandalous passages, as aforesaid. And we do likewise permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women, so long as these recreations, which by reason of the abuses aforesaid were scandalous and offensive, may by such reformation be esteemed not only harmless delights but useful and constructive representations of humane life (Hanford 165-166).

It was therefore at least the stated intention of Restoration theatre from its inception to be an instrument of moral reform, offering "useful and constructive representations of humane life." In fact, this final sentence quoted above is in effect a more concise version of the assertion with which Collier begins his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*:

The business of Plays is to recomend Virtue, and discountenance Vice; To shew the Uncertainty of Humane Greatness, the suddain Turns of Fate, and the Unhappy Conclusions of Violence and Injustice: 'Tis to

expose the Singularities of Pride and Fancy, to make Folly and Falsehood contemptible, and to bring every Thing that is Ill Under Infamy, and Neglect (1).

Language like that found in the patent and in Collier is common enough throughout the Restoration and into the Eighteenth Century, and the official position of the monarchy was generally one calling for reform. But the call was so infrequently heeded that one can only assume the “official” position of the crown bore little relation to reality. While censorship did actually exist in London theatre in the form of Charles Killigrew, Master of Revels from 1677 to 1725, he appears to have exercised his power chiefly to suppress politically sensitive rather than morally offensive material—and that often only after an approved play has sparked controversy.

Collier is neither the first nor the last to object to theatre on moral grounds or to long for its reformation, arguing that the stage should serve an essentially edifying function. Ancient examples aside, theatre was unquestionably challenged by vocal Puritan detractors throughout the Restoration despite the strong and consistent advocacy of Charles II; and the Puritan antipathy toward theatre can hardly be said to have begun with Collier. Merely considering the fact that the Puritans had ridded London of all sanctioned theatrical activity during the Interregnum makes this abundantly clear. Additionally, Collier’s lament over the state of theatre echoes elements of Rymer’s own lament in his 1693 *Short View of Tragedy*. So while it may in part be true that the rise of sentimentalism demonstrates that the stage’s moralist detractors were winning the day, it is more likely that the shift in moral tone reflects changing attitudes more broadly, including

the shift from one monarch's court to the next: James was much less enthusiastic a patron of the theatre than Charles had been, and William and Mary would in turn demonstrate a clear and consistent inclination towards moral reform. So while the direct impact of Collier and his tracts is not entirely clear, what is clear is that it reflected a general attitude with increasing popularity and support: hard comedy and any mode of tragedy or tragicomedy reflecting a less conventional, conservative morality would have difficulty reaching an audience in the Eighteenth Century. William Congreve, after seeming to lose his public battle with Collier, gave way to Susannah Centlivre as the preeminent comic dramatist after 1700, and the celebrated libertine wit comedies that thrived under Charles II's reign would be forever supplanted by often-charming but far less bawdy, increasingly moral and moralizing fare. The age of sentiment was underway.

It is clear that the Collierite influence alone cannot explain adequately the shift from wit comedy to sentimental comedy, nor from the heroic political tragedy of the 1680s to what would be called "sentimental tragedies," "weeping tragedies," or "she-tragedies" as the Seventeenth Century waned. (In fact, Collier was particularly strident in his opposition to these early she-tragedies for their "profaneness," as will be examined below.) When one considers the political turmoil defining 1670s and 1680s London—the Exclusion Crisis, the Popish Plot, and the Glorious Revolution in particular—it is not surprising that the tragedies of those decades communicate a strong sense of political urgency, instability, and unease. That that urgency wanes in the plays of the decades that follow may suggest first and foremost that the sense of panic permeating nearly every aspect of political

life at the end of Charles II's reign and throughout James II's brief, contentious monarchy had significantly waned as well. If audiences were no longer consumed by the socio-political concerns that dominated these decades, it would only be expected that the dramatists of the age would turn their attention to new matters as well.

But even as the stage's focus on political turmoil gives way to domestic drama, the eschatological concerns manifest in Restoration political tragedy continue to find a place in the sentimental tragedy that rises to replace it at the century's end. Apocalypticism and millenarian fervor disappear, having no consistent place for expression in these domestic dramas. What takes the place of these events is a kind of "rhetorical apocalypticism" like that of *The Rival Queens* examined above: the language of judgment and damnation, redemption and reward, heaven and hell, and apocalyptic destruction persists as metaphor describing emotional heights and depths, most frequently associated with courtship, lust, or romantic love. Despite being flatly condemned by Collier as profanity, this apocalyptic romantic rhetoric will remain common in the early Eighteenth Century before ultimately being overruled by the stricter sentimentalism of plays like Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) and Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731). Ultimately—after the publication of his *Short View*—Collier's broad complaint against profaneness and immorality on the English stage will be supplanted by the more reasonable but equally moralist argument and example of Steele; and even the sort of residual "profanity" that apocalyptic rhetoric amounts to will eventually disappear.

Profane Romance, Profaned Redemption

The end of the Seventeenth Century brings about a new ideal for the morality of the English stage, manifested in the rise of sentimentalism—consciously reformed, moralist dramatic writing that emphasizes strong emotional response, especially pity and sympathy. But Jeremy Collier’s puritan attack on the English stage is not principally responsible for this reform. He clearly considered the dramatists of the late Seventeenth Century incorrigible and his work inefficacious, writing in 1700, “I almost despair of doing them and Service” (“To the Reader,” *Second Defense*). The clearest of all evidences that Collier’s direct influence cannot be the impetus for the rise of sentimentalism is his vocal opposition to several of the form’s most successful early plays on the grounds that they’re steeped in profanity, treating subjects of religious devotion and concern with either trivializing disregard or a profound disrespect. If the playwrights writing these earliest sentimental/proto-sentimental plays were being influenced by Puritan views of the stage in general or by Collier’s *Short View* in particular, one would not expect to find in their plays this sort of general disregard for his condemnation of profanity.²⁶ And as a perusal of Arthur Bedford’s essays of 1706 (*The Evil and Danger of Stage-Plays*)

²⁶ For an overview of critical attitudes and opinions concerning Collier, see Robert D. Hume’s essay, “Jeremy Collier and the Future of the London Theatre in 1698” (1999). Hume offers an overview of critics’ responses to Collier spanning from Collier’s contemporaries to the end of the Twentieth Century and assesses the man’s actual influence on the course of English theatre history. The idea that Collier’s *Short View* caused the shift to sentimentalism was effectively dismissed as early as 1924, he notes, but the idea that Collier somehow “succeeded” persists, especially in the popular/textbook tradition. While Hume joins in the critical dismissal of Collier as an agent of generic reform, he observes that the furor raised among playwrights by Collier’s assault can only be explained by supposing, “Either the playwrights feared that the theaters could be suppressed (or harshly regulated), or they were suffering from guilty consciences” (496). Hume proceeds to dismiss the idea that closing the theatres was ever seriously considered, thereby suggesting that, if Collier’s attack reveals anything, it offers a peek into the dominant moral or religious attitudes of the age and the marginal position of the theatre at the end of the century.

and 1719 (*A Serious Remonstrance in Behalf of the Christian Religion, against the Horrid Blasphemies and Impieties which are still used in the English Play-houses*) reveals, that which Collier identified as profanity certainly does persist.

In chapter two of his *Short View*, “The Profaness of the Stage,” one of the first plays scrutinized by Collier is Thomas Otway’s successful and influential play, *The Orphan* (1680), widely considered to be the prototype for she-tragedy and a precursor to the sentimentalism of the Eighteenth Century. The play was written at the height of political tragedy’s brief heyday; and, like the other tragedies of the era, it is set in a time of political upheaval. Where it differs from other plays of its moment is that political turmoil is merely a background triviality: the play tells the story of a retired nobleman, Acasto, and his family, residing far from the front of a great war. Acasto has left the court and retired to the country, and has dissuaded his sons from going off to join the battle. The play’s conflict is therefore centered around the home rather than the court or the battlefield, and Acasto’s lovely young ward Monimia—a role written by Otway for Elizabeth Barry—stands at the center of the conflict. Both of Acasto’s young sons desire Monimia, but Castalio, the firstborn, asserts the first claim by virtue of birthright. He marries her; but his younger brother Polydore, under cover of darkness, steals into Monimia’s bedchamber on his brother’s wedding night and consummates his brother’s marriage to Monimia without her comprehension or consent.

Collier condemns the play for the depravity of its principal characters. He also condemns the profanation of things sacred and the deification of things profane in the play, beginning with how “Castalio Complements his Mistress to Adoration”

(62), citing the passage, “No Tongue my Pleasure and my Pain can tell: / ‘Tis Heaven to have thee, and without thee Hell” (20). But even more troubling to Collier is the beginning of the scene in which Polydore deceives Monimia into sleeping with him.

Collier writes:

Polydor when upon the attempt to debauch *Monimia*, puts up this ejaculation.

Blessed Heaven assist me but in this dear Hour:

Thus the *Stage* worships the true God in Blasphemy, as the *Lindians* did *Hercules* by Cursing and throwing stones” (62).

Condemnation of such instances of profanity forms a significant portion of Collier’s general argument in his *Short View*. And because such instances of profanity permeate the sentimental drama that *The Orphan* anticipates, it can hardly be said that Collier’s arguments against profaneness and immorality can in any way amount to an endorsement of these new plays or the direction they suggest for the stage’s future. Early sentimental dramas, as precursors to the most popular serious form of drama throughout the following century and beyond, are clearly not meaningfully more virtuous or edifying by Collier’s standards than the earlier Restoration forms that they supplanted. On the contrary: a distaste for such profanity of speech is clearly at the very heart of Collier’s attack. What is perhaps most remarkable here then is not how early sentimental drama reflects Collier’s attitudes, but the very opposite: dawning sentimental drama persists in the use of sacred rhetoric in profane circumstances in spite of very sharp opposition from Collier and what appears to be a strong Puritan tide of opposition to this sort of profane speech on stage.

When Castalio announces of Monimia, “’Tis Heaven to have thee, and without thee Hell,” he is expressing his desire in a manner that not only profanes essential Christian concepts, but specifically profanes the same eschatological concepts that permeated other Restoration plays of the period. When Castalio equates life with Monimia to Heaven and life without her to Hell, he transcribes conventional Christian concepts of eternal reward or punishment onto his romantic desires. Because sentimental drama does not have as its primary subject battles, sieges, conquests, or usurpations, there is little room for literal portrayals of cosmic struggles, the dead resurrected, supernatural omens concerning the fate of nations, or other such manifestations of a providentially ordained end of the world. But essential end-of-time and end-of-life concepts still find their way into the plays, employed rhetorically to express otherwise overwhelming and inexpressible passions and desires. Due to its grand spectacle and emotional potency, the language of Christian eschatological belief has by the late Seventeenth Century become a staple and mainstay of theatrical language; and shifting tastes and ideologies prove insufficient to eliminate it for several decades. To maintain the heightened emotions of the previous age—a hallmark of the waning heroic drama and of sentimental drama alike—romantic love adopts the rhetoric of judgment and reward, damnation and salvation, and the destruction and renewal of creation. Because of their eternal, universal stakes, eschatological concerns are necessarily of the greatest importance and carry the greatest urgency. For those who have in common an essential belief system and vocabulary concerning the afterlife and the end of the world, this vocabulary can be called upon to generate a strong audience

response. On a stage where romantic love is increasingly the preeminent concern, the language of endings, eternity, and apocalypse is frequently redeployed, most often in the name of the characters' new chief concern: the passions of romantic love and desire. The world has survived the chaos and disorder of the 1660s, '70s, and 80s; but the language employed suggests that, for those unlucky in love, the stakes remain just as high and the end is still near.

John Banks' 1695 play *Cyrus the Great*, mentioned briefly in Chapter One, is in part one of the century's last political tragedies; but it also includes instances of this same sort of apocalypticism profaned in the name of romantic love. Modeled after the tragedies of the previous decade, the play includes supernatural omens and wonders. As has been prevalent in the previous two decades, Banks immediately establishes for his play a context of cosmic significance and impossibly high stakes through a series of portents drawn from Christian apocalyptic writings. In Act I scene i, King Cyaxares and his friend Artabasus are surveying a battlefield where war has just been waged over the great city of Babylon (again), a city at the center of much Christian apocalyptic writing. As they reflect upon the gruesome scene, lightning strikes and the world descends into terror and chaos:

Thunder and Lightning, Darkness seems to cover the Field.

Cyax. Hearn, heark---A horrid Thunder sounds at distance.

Arta. Now here it answers with a Force as dreadful---
A sudden Darkness seems to spread the Field---
There you may see that cloudy Curtain drawn,
Whilst Lightning rushes from the parting Heav'ns,
And to my wond'ring Eyes discovers Swarms
Of hellish Insects flying in the Air.

Cyax. The Gods are sportive sure, and seem to mock
At what bold Cyrus has perform'd below.

Arta. The Scene of Horrour yet discloses further---
My Sight deceives me if I do not see
Spirits descend into their Humane Forms
Again, and the dead Bodies slain by Cyrus
Begin to move (4).

As the scene continues, a risen carcass prophesies the downfall of Cyaxares and the preordained rise of Cyrus. Such scenes have of course been commonplace in the Restoration tragedy of the previous two decades, though they are far less frequent in the 1690s and after. Celestial signs, plagues, and resurrected bodies, all biblical indicators of the swiftly approaching end of the world, bear witness to supernatural involvement in earthly affairs. They endow the characters' actions with the utmost urgency, and they invest all actions with a sense of irrevocability and doom. What is done cannot be undone and what is happening cannot be stopped, because the events portrayed are happening within a fixed, providentially ordained order. This scene locates Banks' play in apocalyptic space and time. It also locates the play squarely in the tradition of political tragedy, a genre that thrived in the 1680s but is unquestionably waning by the time this play reaches the stage.

But like *The Rival Queens*, *Cyrus the Great* contains other references to judgment and reward, Heaven and Hell—metaphorical references like the one Collier quotes from *The Orphan*. Lausaria, hopeful that she will be allowed to marry the man she loves, exclaims:

I see my Life or Death writ in those Eyes,
There is no Mean betwixt my Heav'n or Hell,
I'm to be rais'd this Moment to the Skies,
Or flung into the bottom of Despair (23).

This sentiment, articulated here through the language of damnation and salvation, will persist well after Restoration tragedy's staged apocalypses disappear.

A similar example can be found in Congreve's only tragedy, *The Mourning Bride* (1697). The tragic hero Osmyn expresses his profound anguish at the loss of his beloved to a rival thus:

My All of Bliss, my everlasting Life,
Soul of my Soul, and End of all my Wishes,
Why dost thou thus unman me with thy Words,
And melt me down to mingle with thy Weepings?
...
Hell! Hell! have I not Cause to rage and rave?
What are all Racks, and Wheels, and Whips to this?
Are they not soothing Softness, sinking Ease,
And wasting Air to this? O my Almeria,
What do the Damn'd endure, but to despair,
But knowing Heav'n, to know it lost for ever? (35-36).

Again, romantic love is here expressed as “everlasting Life,” with separation from one's beloved being equated to the sufferings of eternal damnation. *The Mourning Bride* lacks the literal scenes of apocalypse present in *Cyrus the Great* two years earlier, but the stakes of romantic love continue to be expressed in Christian eschatological language associated with divine judgment.

It is true, certainly, that the “heaven” of this passage is not the same as the “heaven” desired by Castalio or desired by Polydor in *The Orphan*. Here “heaven” is a long-awaited, long-thwarted marriage between two passionate and well-matched lovers rather than the “heaven” of illicit sexual conquest and quasi-incestuous betrayal in Otway's play. A moral shift does seem to be underway; one might therefore expect Collier not to object to Congreve's play—or at least to find that his

objection is less strident. But Collier clearly does not distinguish between profanities: his analysis of this passage from *The Mourning Bride* reads in part, “Had *Osmyn* parted with *Almeria* as civilly as these Two met, it had been much better. That Rant of smut and profainness might have been spared” (32). The difference between Polydor’s incestuous debauchery and Osmyn’s desperate desire to marry his beloved Almeria is overlooked by Collier, though it perhaps reveals that the shift toward sentimental ideology is underway with or without his guidance. Collier is losing his hard-fought battle against profanity on the stage, even as the stage is embracing moral reform more broadly: the sort of rhetoric he identifies as profanity clearly persists, even in those plays that in other ways reflect early evidence of sentimental ideology gaining ground over the heroics of earlier decades. That the morality of the stage is changing is clear; but the language of apocalypse is too potent to be abandoned, even where its usage is deemed profane.

Because Collier’s objection to profanity was indiscriminate and universal, his *Short View* provides several useful examples to illustrate how the use of religious language to describe romantic love and desire was likewise becoming nearly universal in the last decade of the Seventeenth Century. *The Orphan* offers the first example of this sort of profanity cited and objected to by Collier. And while it clearly is not novel to equate the earthly passions of romantic love to the loftier passions of religious devotion—consider, for an earlier, famous Elizabethan example, Act I scene v of *Romeo and Juliet*²⁷—the metaphor is established as a standard and

²⁷ Romeo first greets Juliet as follows:

If I profane with my unwortheiest hand

expected mode of discourse between lovers late in the Restoration, carrying the language of Christian eschatological concern forward beyond the instances of staged apocalypse common in earlier decades.

Collier's remarks concerning Thomas D'Urfey's *Don Quixote* (1694), one of only three plays to which he dedicates an entire section of his *Short View*, illustrate a related way in which Christian eschatological concepts find their way into the plays of the 1690s and later. In his analysis, Collier begins by citing the second of three songs in Part I of the play—a song which he identifies as “a bold *Song* against Providence”:

*Providence that formed the Fair
In such a charming Skin
Their Outside made his only care,
And never look'd within* (20).

Collier calls this “direct blaspheming [of] the Creation, and a Satir upon God Almighty” (197). But while this passage concerns Providence, a concept related to eschatological concerns considered at some length in chapter four, the song considered here is a “blasphemy” of the *beginning* of humanity at creation rather than the end of human striving at the world's end. Where the song enters more directly into eschatological discourse is in the second stanza: its raillery against

This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss (I.v. 93-96).

It is noteworthy, perhaps, that Romeo acknowledges the categorical concept of profanity from the very beginning of his speech. Though Elizabethan theatre is outside the purview of this research, this passage may suggest, as Collier's claims also do, that “profanity” of this nature was less common and less widely accepted prior to the Restoration.

feminine beauty ends and it turns its attention to the wronged young man, who seeks a freedom from beauty's tyranny that can only be found in death. The verse ends, "Sleep and indulge thy self with Rest, / Nor dream thou e're shalt rise again" (20). While this brief verse may not seem worthy of a Collierite attack, Collier identifies it as an example of profanity as well, calling the passage D'Urfey's attempt to "droll upon the Resurrection":

In this and the following page, the Redemption of the World is treated with the same respect with the Creation. The word Redeemer, which among Christians is appropriated to our Blessed Saviour, and like the Jewish Tetragrammaton peculiarly reserv'd to the Deity; This adorable Name (Redeemer and Dear Redeemer,) is applied to the ridiculous Don Quixote. These Insolencies are too big for the Correction of a Pen, and therefore I shall leave them (198).

Clearly Collier objects strongly to allusions to the world's end and to mankind's redemption—even to the very use of the word "Redeemer"—in this profane context and without appropriate reverence.

It is surprising that Collier's forceful objection to *Don Quixote's* second song ends here—though he does make it clear that he objects to "this and the following page." The chorus that follows the verse above not only expresses deep skepticism concerning a future resurrection (as the verse above does), articulating a preference for eternal rest instead, but also describes the end of life and the end of the world itself as nothing more than the end of a great farce and folly:

*Past is thy fear or future Doubt,
The Sun is from the Dial gone,
The Sands are sunk, the Glass is out,
The Folly of the Farce is done* (21).

Collier was especially vocal in his disdain for such passages of skepticism concerning God's providential care for humanity—to his mind they are height of profanity. Again: the fact that they persist with such constancy beyond the end of the century bears witness to the fact that Collier's argument is not the principal cause for the generic shift of the late Seventeenth Century. Collier and his attack have become a metonym for the shifting morality of the English stage at the dawn of the Eighteenth Century, but he is by no means its chief agent.

Nicholas Rowe: Providentialism v. Sentimentality

Shortly after Collier's *Short View* was published, a new playwright began his career and swiftly established himself the early Eighteenth Century's most celebrated tragic dramatist. Nicholas Rowe, best known for his plays *Tamerlane*, *Lady Jane Gray*, *The Fair Penitent*, and *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, would be among the first to demonstrate the ability to cultivate a tragic form that was both acceptable to Collierites and popular with London audiences. His plays are commonly identified either as the bridge to eighteenth-century sentimentalism or, if *The Orphan* was the bridge, the first examples of a new full-fledged sentimental tragedy. Indeed, the categorical designation "she-tragedy," applied retrospectively to *The Orphan*, seems to have been introduced by Nicholas Rowe in or around 1714, first appearing in print in his epilogue to *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*. The passage reads:

If the reforming stage should fall to shaming
 Ill-nature, pride, hypocrisy, and gaming,
 The poets frequently might move compassion,
 And with she-tragedies o'errun the nation.

Then judge the fair offender, with good nature;
And let your fellow-feeling curb your satire (74).

But despite the traditional position of scholars, Rowe's plays, rightly considered, have as much in common with the fabulist tragicomedies of the early Restoration as with the sentimental and bourgeois drama that follows him. Like those early works, Rowe's plays would rely heavily and invariably on the activity of Providence. But where earlier fabulist plays employed the concepts of Providentialism and poetic justice as prescribed features of their form, the invisible role of Providence is essential to Rowe's plays both formally and as the central dramatic question: do the protagonists suffer in vain, or is virtue rewarded? In effect, Rowe asks, "Could deism, atheism, Epicureanism, etc. be the appropriate response to chaos and trial, or does God honor, exalt, and deliver the faithful?" For Rowe, the answer is clear: a reliance on divine justice is always sound, even when the faithful and virtuous suffer and die.

J. Douglas Canfield examines the ways in which Rowe's plays express a profound confidence in Providence in his book, *Nicholas Rowe and Christian Tragedy*. All of Rowe's plays, he asserts, argue for a steadfast confidence in Providence even in the direst of circumstances. In *Tamerlane* and *Ulysses*, Rowe's heroes are agents of God, bringing about Providentially-ordained justice. In other plays, his heroes, Christian martyrs rather than tragic heroes classically conceived, cling to their virtue and to the promises of Providence. All the while, the villains scoff and rail against the heroes' assertions on behalf of divine justice in spite of tribulations. And in his late plays, in which his heroes are less perfect models of Christian virtue, Rowe's protagonists assert their repentance and rely not on justice

but on divine mercy. In all cases, belief in an ordered universe is maintained—a universe in which all things ultimately work toward the fulfillment of God’s perfect will. But unlike some earlier tragicomic works in which poetic justice necessitated that evil schemes backfire and virtue wins the day by play’s end, Rowe’s plays allow for the death of the virtuous and the seeming triumph of evil. This is because Rowe’s plays, more than those of any other playwright of his age, overtly insist upon a greater, ordered metaphysical reality, allowing that it may only be at the Final Judgment when things are set right. His dramaturgical sensibility, free from neo-classical sentiment, calls to mind the Christian’s honor and regard for the martyr: In Rowe’s plays, as in Christian theology, God does not always deliver the righteous from death; but he can be relied upon to reward the martyr and condemn the wicked in the life to come.

Canfield’s claim (and my own) that Rowe’s plays are supremely devoted to expressing Christian providentialism is not without detractors. In Eric Rothstein’s *Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change* (1967), Rothstein writes of Nicholas Rowe’s dramatic work: “All conduct in these plays proceeds from an ethical rather than a religious... basis” (131). This is, of course, antithetical to the claim that Rowe’s providentialism is profoundly Christian. But Rothstein’s insistence may derive from the aims of his book: in it, he attempts to chart the path from early fabulist theories of drama through the sensationalism of Otway and Lee to the Eighteenth Century, not allowing for such a clear image of Providence to reach the stage after 1700 as Rowe offers. Rothstein summarizes the state of English theatre at the dawn of the Eighteenth Century as follows:

To be persuasive, pleasure had to be deeply satisfying; to be satisfying, it demanded sensationalism; and sensationalism, in turn, bludgeoned the sense of a providential whole out of recognition. For although logically the fabulist theory was tenable even after the older assumptions about tragic pleasure had shrunk in prominence, playgoers accustomed to looking for a succession of sensations rather than for overall order must have found it difficult to perceive a continuing and exact Providence animating the whole (8-9).

The opinions of Rowe's contemporary, Charles Gildon, support Rothstein's view of late Restoration drama. Gildon finds it difficult to recognize the workings of Providence in Rowe's plays at all. The conclusion of Rowe's *The Ambitious Stepmother* was, in his estimation, "contrary to Poetic Justice, and the Rules of Providence" (52) He continues:

The Deaths of *Cleone*, *Amestris*, and *Artaxerxes*, provoke our Indignation, as having done nothing at all to deserve those Incredible Misfortunes; so that instead of *Fear* and *Pity*, the true aim of all Tragical Action, it moves only Horror and Satisfaction; and indeed every where endeavours to abolish the Notion of a particular Providence, and so is Impious (52).

It is in opposition to Rothstein's claim, as well as Gildon's and many others like it, that Douglas Canfield begins his study of Rowe's essentially Christian dramaturgy. Certainly Rothstein's claim has support: even Dobrée wrote that for Rowe's plays, one essential part of tragedy, the metaphysical sense was missing. But as Canfield points out, Rowe's first biographer, James Welwood, offers a very different description of Rowe and an interpretation of his plays that rejects Gildon's objections. Of Rowe he writes:

He had a good Taste in Philosophy, and having a firm Impression of Religion upon his Mind, he took great delight in Divinity and Ecclesiastical History, in both which he made great Advances in the times he retir'd into the Country, which were frequent. He exprest on

all Occasions his full Perswasion of the Truth of Reveal'd Religion
(xxiv).

And of Rowe's plays:

...it may be justly said of them all, that never Poet painted *Virtue* or *Religion* in a more charming Dress on the Stage, nor were ever *Vice* and *Impiety* better expos'd to Contempt and Hatred. There runs through every one of them an Air of Religion and Virtue, attended with all the Social Duties of Life, and a constant untainted Love to his Country (xx).

Canfield's study of Rowe, harmonizing with Rowe's biographer, demonstrates how essential an understanding of this religious aspect of Rowe's work is to a fuller understanding of his plays. His thesis is that Rowe's tragedies, contrary to the general impression generated by critical scholarship, are beyond question "*Christian tragedies*":

That is, the solution which they dramatically proffer to the problems of suffering and sin and concomitant metaphysical doubt is the traditional Christian solution, that man must above all avoid the nihilistic sin of despair and must trust implicitly in the Providence of God—in His justice and in His mercy (3).

To the extent that the Christian solution to the problems of sin and suffering is a confidence in providential care and the perfectly just distribution of punishments and rewards to the wicked and virtuous after death, Rowe's Christian tragedy directly engages Christian eschatological concerns. If Gildon cannot see the Hand of Providence in Rowe's plays, it is merely because his uncommonly strict definition of poetic justice cannot allow for the deaths of the innocent. Because Restoration Christendom was deeply aware of the role of martyrs in establishing and shaping the English Church—not to mention the unmistakable centrality of martyrdom to

Christian faith in general—Rowe’s plays are in fact arguably more “Christian” and “pious” than plays that, strictly adhering to the law of poetic justice or of providentialism as previously conceived, suggest otherwise.

Canfield divides Rowe’s dramatic output into two categories, each of which has the demonstration of divine justice or divine mercy as its principal aim. They are all of them “theodicies”—attempts to answer the question why God permits the existence of evil. The first set of plays examined, described by Canfield as “The Trial of the Innocent,” focuses on the concept of divine justice. In *Tamerlane* (1701) and *Ulysses* (1705), the protagonist serves as “the agent of Providence in the vindication of the innocent (45). The formal design is therefore that of Christian “dramatic theodicy” with the hero serving as the self-sacrificial “Champion of Divine Justice.” When applied to *Tamerlane*, Canfield’s argument takes a form similar to that developed earlier in this study in relation to usurper tragicomedies: just as the plays written to honor Charles II resonate with the Christian arch-narrative of Christ’s death, resurrection, and return, *Tamerlane*, a political allegory and panegyric on William III, exaggerates history in such a way as to create a Tamerlane who is “God’s Champion” and a Bajazet who is “satanic.”

Also under the heading “The Trial of the Innocent” are the plays *The Royal Convert* (1707) and *Lady Jane Gray* (1715), plays which feature what Canfield calls the “Protagonist as Saint.” Canfield describes these plays as “martyr plays,” which overtly place the suffering of their protagonists “in the context of Christian martyrdom” (77). Not surprisingly, Canfield suggests *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* as a possible contributing source text for these plays, pointing out the fact that Rowe had

a copy in his library.²⁸ Canfield asserts that Rowe's *Lady Jane Gray*, not unlike Foxe's *Book*, presents "a universe that is meaningful despite even the death of the virtuous and the triumph of the wicked" (79). I would go further, asserting again that, within a Christian context, narratives are meaningful only to the extent that they replicate the central meaning-authoring narrative of the Passion of Christ. The virtuous who die while holding fast to faith in the ultimate deliverance from death upon Christ's return most perfectly reflect authentic Christian providentialism.

The second category of play in Canfield's study is "The Trial of the Sinner"—no longer concerned with suffering innocence but with the suffering sinner in need of atonement. *The Fair Penitent* and *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* fall under this heading. Canfield writes, "These plays are Christian tragedies because in their formal design they mirror a universe controlled by a God Who cares, Who tries His creatures and eventually rewards and punishes—a God Who in Rowe's other plays answers prayers for justice and Who now answers prayers for mercy" (111). In these plays as in the others, justice—poetic or otherwise—can only rightly be said to exist when viewed in relation to a Christian metaphysic, and especially a Christian eschatological framework. Beyond the end of human life, one anticipates the setting right and re-ordering of the fallen universe by a just and merciful God.

Perhaps Dobrée's early assessment of Rowe can be explained in this light. He claims that, in Rowe's plays, "the sense of finality is lacking" (156)—something Dobrée explains away by asserting, "Rowe was not built to see things on the tragic scale" (157). But one could hardly expect otherwise from a playwright for whom a

²⁸ Canfield usefully includes as an appendix to his book on Rowe, "A Catalogue of the Library of *Nicholas Rowe, esq.*"

play's tragic conclusion can only rightly be interpreted through the lens of the life to come. Christianity's belief in a God of perfect justice and perfect mercy allows for no lasting tragedy; so a tragic sense of finality is fundamentally at odds with its precepts. Comparing Rowe to other tragic playwrights, Dobrée writes, "The point really is, that with Otway, just as with Ford, there is the background of fear: a larger conception is, if not stated, at least implied" (163). But what he fails to see is that the "larger" conception is to be found in Rowe, not Otway: Otway's characters, not wholly unlike Lee's, reside on the brink of chaos, burdened by a sense of fatalism and overwhelmed by a world governed by wrath and destruction. In Rowe's plays, such underlying fear is impossible because a just, merciful, and all-powerful God is being relied upon to set all things right. Rowe's plays harmonize with the Christian response to fear, articulated best, perhaps, in the *First Epistle of John*:

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:17-18).

Such confidence and peace are antithetical to tragedy classically conceived, and may in fact be contrary to conventional dramatic action as a whole, reliant as it is on uncertainty. The Christian confidence in divine justice manifested in Rowe's plays stands in sharp contrast to the chaos Otway or the madness of Lee: where the their dramatic authorship expresses the instability of his world, Rowe acknowledges the fundamental stability on which Christian theodicy relies: the immutability a righteous God. While Lee's plays rely heavily on biblical apocalyptic language and

imagery for the sense of wonder and fear they cultivate, it is Rowe's plays that far more truly reflect the most essential tenets of Christian theology in general and of Christian eschatological belief in particular.

Dobrée, then, is partially right when he argues, "What [Rowe] was after was not an expression of the dreadful workings of fate, but the agreeable workings of the domestic emotions, and what might to-day be called the bourgeois (that is, the certainly comfortable and perhaps necessary) virtues" (162). Rowe *is* concerned with expressing the workings of fate; but to his mind, they are by no means "dreadful." His plays seem "comfortable" because his characters can clearly be located in the camps of virtue and villainy, with the clearest indicator of where they reside being their relation to Providence: those who trust in its care are the virtuous, and those who doubt it or malign it are villains. Furthermore, there is in Rowe's plays a "comfort" for the suffering hero to be found in the unfaltering mercy of God—something on which Lee's and Otway's characters could never rely.

It is therefore in Nicholas Rowe's plays that Christian providentialism, far from being abandoned, in actuality finds its fullest and most authentic expression. Earlier notions of providentialism and poetic justice reflected attempts to marry Christian doctrine with rules for dramatic construction derived from Aristotle. These rules also grew out of the dramatists' efforts to establish an English drama that responded to current events and made sense of the religio-political chaos of the day, clearly contoured by Civil War and regicide, instability and disaster, plots and crises. But Rowe's providentialism, achieved only as the tumultuous years of the Restoration draw to a close, reflects the abiding hope at the very heart of Christian

eschatological belief—not a providentialism borne out of apocalyptic fear, but one rooted in a belief that a loving God can be relied upon to bring about renewal in the end, setting all things right.

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Chapter Seven

“This ruination will be blanketed white”:

Epilogue: Apocalypticism’s Continuing Onstage Legacy

Fifteen years till the third millennium. Maybe Christ will come again. Maybe seeds will be planted, maybe there’ll be harvests then, maybe early figs to eat, maybe new life, maybe fresh blood... maybe the troubles will come, and the end will come, and the sky will collapse and there will be terrible rains and showers of poison light...

The suspense, Mr. Lies, it’s killing me.

- From *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* by Tony Kushner (1991)

⁶And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.
⁷For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

⁸All these are the beginning of sorrows.

- Matthew 24:6-8 (King James Version)

Millennium Approaches

In 1991, Eureka Theatre Company presented the world premiere of Tony Kushner's modern theatre classic, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*. The play received wide acclaim, and the London premiere at the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain a year later would cement its place as one of the most important dramatic works of the late Twentieth Century. The play, set in New York in 1985, surprised the world with its earnest—if unorthodox and often funny—engagement with the apocalyptic themes and images that prevailed at the end of the second millennium. The complex comingling of anxiety and hope that apocalypticism generates is voiced most explicitly by the character Harper:

I feel ... that something's going to give. It's 1985. Fifteen years till the third millennium. Maybe Christ will come again. Maybe seeds will be planted, maybe there'll be harvests then, maybe early figs to eat, maybe new life, maybe fresh blood, maybe companionship and love and protection, safety from what's outside, maybe the door will hold, or maybe ... maybe the troubles will come, and the end will come, and the sky will collapse and there will be terrible rains and showers of poison light, or maybe my life is really fine, maybe Joe loves me and I'm only crazy thinking otherwise, or maybe not, maybe it's even worse than I know, maybe ... I want to know, maybe I don't. The suspense, Mr. Lies, it's killing me (24).

In Kushner's play, the AIDS epidemic serves both as a profound personal catastrophe and a plague indicating the world's imminent end. Many of the familiar images of apocalypse persist: for example, Prior Walter is visited by an angel and is called to assume the role of prophet. Truths are revealed by angels and by dreams. And while much about the play's content and form marks it as the distinct product of its time—perhaps the most exemplary example of 1990s theatre—this only demonstrates how potent the distinct imagery and language of apocalypse

continues to be. Harper's reference to "poison light" translates her anxieties into the late twentieth century, in which the catastrophic effects of a depleted ozone layer and melting ice shelves have replaced the Four Horsemen and Antichrist as the icons and referents for anxiety; but the sense of unease in the face of global catastrophe remains much the same.

Similarly, the sense of hope at the dawning of a new age—the opposite and equally vital aspect of biblical apocalypticism—finds a modern voice in Kushner's play. In the final act of *Millennium Approaches*, Belize says to Louis:

Belize: Oh, cheer up, Louis. Look at that heavy sky out there.

Louis: Purple.

Belize: *Purple?* Boy, what kind of homosexual are you, anyway? That's not purple, Mary, that color up there is (*Very grand*) *mauve*.

All day today it's felt like Thanksgiving. Soon, this ... ruination will be blanketed white. You can smell it—can you smell it?

Louis: Smell what?

Belize: Softness, compliance, forgiveness, grace.

In Kushner's remarkable, timely, apocalyptic "Gay Fantasia on National Themes," the end of a broken age is marked supernaturally by a sky turned mauve, an omen for the dawning of a better world.

Several of the previous chapters have examined ways in which the images of apocalypse and associated millennialist and millenarian themes offered up on the Restoration stage reflect specific religious and political concerns of their day. Allusions to Antichrist were especially salient at the height of the Popish Plot, and the image of a suffering savior restored to his rightful throne carried special

significance in the wake of Charles II's return. But in a very real sense, history has offered an endless stream of dates and events carrying apocalyptic significance for those looking for them; and even those who aren't compelled by fear or faith to do so are not insensible to apocalypticism's impact on culture when narratives of catastrophe abound, both religious and secular.

At the heart of apocalyptic anxiety is almost certainly something that transcends particular religious doctrines or individual and corporate systems of belief. As Frank Kermode writes, "...whether you think time will have a stop or that the world is eternal; there is still a need to speak humanly of a life's importance in relation to it—a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and an end" (4). For Kermode, the very nature of literary fiction is defined in large part by our need for a "sense of an ending." Though he is writing of novels, his assertion is no less applicable to plays when he writes, "No novel can avoid being in some sense what Aristotle calls 'a completed action.' This being so, all novels imitate a world of potentiality... They have a fixation on the eidetic imagery of beginning, middle, and end, potency and cause" (138). In a context where meaning-creation is less reliant on a common religious narrative than it might have been in Restoration London, the playwright of the Twentieth or Twenty-First Century is no less involved in maintaining the general notion that our chronology is shaped and comprehensible, and that the sequence of events that constitute the present will be understood in light of the end. Though providentialism as a religious doctrine or a structural literary device no longer holds sway, the very process of narrative creation, shaping a chain of causally-linked events with a beginning,

middle, and end into a complete action maintains the notion of a meaningful course of events in an authored universe.

Angels in America and Prophecy Belief at the End of the Twentieth Century

When Elkannah Settle staged *The Female Prelate*, the image of Antichrist figured in a villainous female Pope capitalized on the current political climate and on widely-held religious beliefs in England concerning the end of the world and the Catholic Church. Apocalypticism does not fundamentally require belief in a specific doctrine to communicate meaning, but it does rely upon a common vocabulary of images and ideas if it is to evoke the sense of catastrophe and finality that makes the apocalypse such a vital contributor to a culture's meaning-making. That being said, it is noteworthy that biblical prophecy belief in the English-speaking world was higher at the end of the Twentieth Century than might be imagined. Paul Boyer's study of American millennialism belief cites a 1983 Gallup Poll in which "62 percent of Americans had 'no doubts' that Jesus will come to earth again. A 1980 poll by the same organization found that 40 percent of Americans regarded the Bible as 'the actual Word of God, ... to be taken literally word for word' (2). Similarly, in a 1988 poll, "80 percent of the respondents expressed the conviction that they will appear before God on Judgment Day" (2). Even if specific religious beliefs are not necessary for apocalyptic thought to influence culture, such numbers suggest that it may still be reasonable to consider apocalyptic imagery's significance to those who hold such beliefs as well as those who do not.

The appeal of prophecy belief has not meaningfully altered or diminished over time. It continues to have value for believers “as a quasi-empirical, ‘scientific’ validation of their faith” (Boyer 293); it provides a solution for some of Christianity’s most contentious theological dilemmas, reconciling free will and determinism by placing individuals in control of their fates while maintaining God’s supremacy as the author of a predetermined end (296); it provides an avenue for broad, popular, heterodox theological speculation among the otherwise often rigid umbrella of biblical literalism (304); and perhaps most importantly, it provides “harmony, symmetry, and meaning in history” (312), as has already been discussed. Apocalypticism allows the individual to locate her existence in relation to the beginning, middle, and end of history’s overarching narrative.

Apocalypticism’s efficacy as a source for individual meaning is determined in part by one’s perceived proximity to apocalyptic events. Eschatological concern in Restoration England manifested itself in speculations that consistently located seventeenth-century England in the thick of God’s final battle. Similarly, American prophecy belief has on the whole imagined the United States to be a central player in the events of the End Times. While figures such as Hitler, Gorbachev, and Saddam Hussein have in turn been identified as Antichrist by Americans inclined toward apocalyptic prophecy belief, each has placed America squarely on the side of the angels as Armageddon approached. The tendency to identify America as the

new Zion is especially prevalent in the distinctive American Christian sect, Mormonism. the Book of Mormon does this explicitly.²⁹

In *Angels in America*, Joe Porter Pitt and his mother Hannah are Mormons. By incorporating them into the story he tells, Kushner engages the Mormon notion that America is the home of the New Jerusalem, the chosen land of God, and is therefore the modern epicenter for events with cosmic significance. Prior's calling as a prophet, including the process of receiving his revelation, echoes the mode of revelation by which Joseph Smith reported receiving the Book of Mormon: Prior receives and then loses a book of divine authorship, along with a holy object (in this case stone glasses) through which visions can be received. By incorporating these objects and events into his play, Tony Kushner draws his play more closely into the distinctly American apocalyptic discourse occurring at the end of the second millennium. Functionally speaking, this is not unlike the numerous allusions to usurpers in the plays of the 1660s or to "plots" in the 1670s: apocalyptic events are thereby made current and localized.

Christian apocalypticism is anchored to ancient scriptures but is nonetheless always current. When considering the image of the Antichrist in Christian eschatological thought in particular, Boyer (citing Christopher Hill) writes:

Commenting on the versatility of the Antichrist image—the Pope, the Turk, Mohammed, Charles I, Bishop Laud (and soon Oliver Cromwell)—Hill perceptively observes, 'One advantage of the symbolism ... was its vagueness: it could conceal attacks on more than one target' and enable people to express their 'confusion and shifting opinions' in uncertain times. Or, as a skeptic put it in 1663, people 'set

²⁹ An example can be found in 2 Nephi 10:11-13, which reads, "And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. And I will fortify this land against all other nations. And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God."

up a Jack-o-[lantern] of their fancy's framing, and then hoot at it for Antichrist.' The insight applies as well to late-twentieth-century U.S. prophecy popularizers (64).

Vague biblical prophecies have thus been adopted in every age throughout Christendom to articulate the particular anxieties of the present through well-worn and time-honored language and imagery received through scripture. Kermode makes a similar observation, stating, "This is part of [Apocalypticism's] extraordinary resilience. It can also absorb changing interests, rival apocalypses, such as the Sibylline writings. It is patient of change and of historiographical sophistications" (8). Kushner can therefore embrace its visual language and its force for shaping personal narratives without being reduced to what Kermode calls "naïve apocalypticism" (9). Kushner employs recognizable strains from Christian apocalyptic prophecy in novel ways, seamlessly incorporating the AIDS epidemic and other modern crises into a biblical apocalyptic vocabulary, embracing the power of its imagery rather than undercutting it. It is true that some authentic American apocalyptic speculation at the end of the Twentieth Century incorporated the AIDS epidemic differently, identifying what was perceived as a "gay plague" as irrefutable evidence of God's disdain for homosexuality. Kushner's play does not countenance this interpretation but invests apocalyptic significance in the AIDS epidemic nonetheless: it is a plague of biblical proportions, a tribulation.

As one might expect, Part Two of *Angels in America, Perestroika*, employs still more apocalyptic imagery. The end that was announced in Part One is drawing nearer, and nature itself continues to reflect this supernatural reality. A violent thunderstorm rages through much of the play. Harper announces, "The end of the

world is at hand... Nothing like storm clouds over Manhattan to get you in the mood for Judgment Day” (233). But importantly—and perhaps it is the most important feature of the play—the end of the world does not actually come, despite the portents. Prior refuses the Angel’s book and advises the angels to sue God for abandonment. Heaven, not Earth, is found to be in ruins. And rather than reaching its preordained terminus, the world and its people are determined to work towards a “restructuring”—the meaning of the Russian word “perestroika.” Humanity refuses to sit still, always intent on moving forward, growing, changing, fixing its problems where it can, and seeking a blessing even “With Apocalypse Descending” (266).

But even when the play offers a message that stands in some ways starkly at odds with a roughly orthodox interpretation of apocalyptic scripture, the system and structure of apocalyptic thought is used to lend urgency and weight to the play’s events. Kermode and Boyer both suggest that the ends of the narratives we create are used to give meaning to our present. In *Angels in America*, this theory holds. As Hannah states in the play’s brief epilogue, summarizing this notion well: “You can’t live in the world without an idea of the world, but it’s living that makes the ideas. You can’t wait for a theory, but you have to have a theory” (278).

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