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Chapter 10

Queer Walsingham

Dominic Janes

A banner reading “The Bible. Cure for Sodomy” was deemed to be sufficiently inflammatory that the police escorting the National Pilgrimage of Our Lady of Walsingham in 2004 required that it be taken down (fig. 9).¹ Disgust at this official line can be found, as a component of a substantial campaign of vilification of the shrine, on the website of the European Institute of Protestant Studies (EIPS) which is housed in the Paisley Jubilee Complex of the Martyrs’ Memorial Free Presbyterian Church in Belfast. Its President is Ian Paisley, until recently First Minister of Northern Ireland, founder and moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church in Belfast and possessor of an Honorary Doctorate from the evangelical Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. The purpose of the institute is to “expound the Bible and expose the Papacy” and it offers courses which include “showing Roman Catholics the way to Christ,” “False doctrines of Roman Catholicism,” and “The Church of Rome and Politics (an exposure of the Vatican conspiracy to overthrow civil government from the twelfth century to the present, with particular emphasis on the history of Papal assaults against Britain and Rome's contemporary involvement in the European Union).”²

[Fig. 9, Protestants protesting, May 28th 2006, Common Place, Walsingham.

Photograph by Dominic Janes.]

Irish Protestant leadership of opposition to the National Pilgrimage highlights a number of important issues. On the one hand attitudes toward homosexuality in

¹ European Institute of Protestant Studies, “Abp [sic] Williams Leads Walsingham Idolatry,” *British Church Newspaper* 11 June (2004), <http://www.ianpaisley.org/article.asp?artkey=idolatry>.

² European Institute of Protestant Studies, “About EIPS,” (2007), <http://www.ianpaisley.org/about.asp>.

society at large have become increasingly liberal, and this has found its reflection in legal changes such as the provision for state-recognized same-sex Civil Partnerships. Conrad has argued that Paisley's longstanding concern with this issue, notably expressed through his "Save Ulster from Sodomy" campaign of the late 1970s reveals not simply homophobia, but a fear that conceptions of Irish sexual purity could be undermined.³ Paisley's followers in this analysis were confronting the alleged sodomy of the decadent English.

Yet this is not simply a battle between regional partisans within the United Kingdom, since there are considerable tensions within contemporary Anglicanism itself. Homosexuality has recently been described as "probably the most controversial and challenging issue facing contemporary Christianity." The position that has emerged in the Church of England as "something of an orthodoxy" is to accept homosexual persons, but not homosexual acts.⁴ In 1991 a crucial Lambeth Resolution was passed to the effect that stable same-sex relationships were acceptable for lay persons but not for clergy. In 2003 the celibate but openly homosexual Jeffrey John was announced as Bishop of Reading but was forced to withdraw after immense pressure. Similar battles have broken out across the world-wide Anglican Communion as the EIPS notes by highlighting on its website that "bitter fighting has been going on in the [American] Episcopal Church since the consecration of Gene Robinson the homoerotic [sic] Bishop of New Hampshire."⁵

³ Kathryn Conrad, "Queer Treasons: Homosexuality and Irish National Identity," *Cultural Studies* 15 (2001), 124-37.

⁴ Stephen John Hunt, "Alpha and the Gay Issue: A Lesson in Homophobia?" *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 26 (2005), 262-4.

⁵ European Institute of Protestant Studies, "Eames Commission on Anglican Homosexual Schism to Report on 18 October," *British Church Newspaper* 17 September, 2004, <http://www.ianpaisley.org/article.asp?artkey=eames>.

Alleged links between homosexuality and the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England have exacerbated long-running disputes over the legitimacy of pilgrimages to Walsingham. The shrine can be seen as a focus for competing moral discourses.⁶ On one side we find engagement with the sacred, on the other a coming to grips with the devil. Fone, in his *Homophobia: a History*, argues that homophobia is the last acceptable prejudice.⁷ Yet, for Jenkins, in *The New Anti-Catholicism: the Last Acceptable Prejudice*, that accolade goes to attacks on Romanism. In the United Kingdom Ian Paisley is one of the best-known exponents of both these hatreds. The same combination can be found in the United States where, for example, Jenkins attests to the influence of “Jack Chick, whose tracts and comics continue to promulgate bizarre allegations of Catholic conspiracy and sexual hypocrisy. A little more respectable is the fundamentalist church that sponsors Bob Jones University” (which gave Ian Paisley his honorary doctorate).⁸ It is quite clear from Jack Chick’s tract about the destruction of Sodom, *Doom Town*, that these people believe that they are fighting grotesque monsters.⁹

In this essay I am not, however, seeking to accuse or defend Walsingham of charges of sexual immorality. Rather, I want to build on the historical account given

⁶ Simon Coleman and John Elsner, “Performing Pilgrimage: Walsingham and the Ritual Construction of Irony,” in Felicia Hughes-Freeland (ed.), *Ritual, Performance, Media* (London: Routledge, 1998); V. W. Turner and E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (eds), *Contesting the Sacred: the Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991); Philip North and John North (eds), *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven* (London: Continuum, 2007), 5.

⁷ Byrne Fone, *Homophobia: a History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 411.

⁸ Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: the Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

⁹ Jack Chick, *Doom Town* (Ontario, Cal.: Chick Publications, 1991),

http://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0273/0273_01.asp, accessed January 15 2009.

by Nigel Yates in the previous essay, and explore the idea of the queerness of Walsingham, which, as I will argue, is not the same as alleging that its institutions have an intrinsic homosexual agenda. One of the Protestant banners denounces the cult of Mary as having descended from those addressed to ancient pagan divinities. From neo-pagan points of view one can both affirm and celebrate connections between Mary and pagan goddess worship of antiquity, notably Isis and Cybele.¹⁰ Similarly, I want to explore the notion that from a non-sectarian point of view one can celebrate Walsingham as a place of remarkable and creative cultural queerness.

It is important for me to be clear about what I mean by “queer.” I do not use this word to mean “homosexual” as opposed to “heterosexual” since that would be to accept an essentializing definition of those two terms as constituting (along with “bisexuality”) the inevitable diversity of human sexual expression. Rather I take a cultural-constructionist view of sexuality as a phenomenon that is itself constituted and contested.¹¹ This approach is derived from queer theory via postmodern feminism, but also via a tradition of the “scientific study of religion” in which the erotic was read into religious practices via the perspectives of psychoanalysis: for instance in Michael Carroll’s startlingly titled paper “Praying the Rosary: the Anal-erotic Origins of a Popular Catholic devotion.”¹² My definition of queerness requires one to think of this as a cultural space which is generated through normative cultural discourses. It is thus an area of potential subaltern oppression, but also of considerable

¹⁰ Dana Kramer-Rolls, “The Emergence of the Goddess Mary from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages,” *The Pomegranate: the International Journal of Pagan Studies* 6.1 (2004), 34-50.

¹¹ Jeremy Punt, “Queer Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Biblical Interpretation: A Preliminary Exploration of some Intersections,” <http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/Departemente/DONT/Genderqueer05FT.doc>, 1.

¹² Michael P. Carroll, “Praying the Rosary: The Anal-Erotic Origins of a Popular Catholic Devotion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987), 486-98.

reactive cultural creativity. As Christianity has become marginalized in British cultural and political life, so Walsingham can be seen as growing in significance as a locus of the expression of the ‘other’. Moreover, I will argue that its (partly pseudo-) archaic otherness provides a context for the now unfashionable delights of closet creativity, in which homosexuality may be more or less elegantly expressed in code.¹³

Much of the evidence concerning Walsingham employs the word “queer” in an ambiguous or negative sense, rather than in my positive use of the term as indicating potential for cultural diversity. Its usage in nineteenth- to twentieth-century England focused on a fuzzy area of cultural alternatives ranging from the horrific and criminal, through to the quaint and eccentric.¹⁴ Anglo-Catholic textual practice tended to use the term in the latter manner, as for instance in Edward J. G. Forse, *Ceremonial Curiosities and Queer Sights in Foreign Churches: Ecclesiological and Other Notes from the Travel Diaries* (1938). The Rev. Forse spent many weeks on holidays “tramping” on his own about Europe in his full canonicals. He published many articles in the *Church Times* before suffering a breakdown and collecting his contributions together into this volume. The introduction by the Bishop of Winchester says that the “non-ecclesiastical reader may start with “On tramping abroad” and “Encounters with the police” and he will then be encouraged to read about issues concerning liturgical ceremony. Browsing, the reader finds Forse on 5th September 1920, at Olette in the Rousillon, observing “altar servers in the Pyrenees” in the form of two ten-year-old boys: “but, oh, how they did enjoy serving! What violent emulation they displayed! What a glorious game it was! And with what courtesy and grace did they conduct their public rivalry! And how strictly they kept to the rules of

¹³ See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁴ John Schad, *Queer Fish: Christian Unreason from Darwin to Derrida* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004),

that Glorious Performance!’ He attested that “such a performance elsewhere would have been truly irreligious. Even the description of it in English sounds unedifying. But I can assure you it was quite the reverse.”¹⁵

Forse also showed lively interest in older males. On July 13th, 1924, he was at La Coruna: “here comes a group of little Spanish foot soldiers, very boyish: they have with them one or two of the fine young giants, in naval uniform, from the ‘Linienschiff Braunschweig’ ... There are a thousand young Germans in uniform parading the streets: and unquestionably they are fine, intelligent looking, muscular specimens.” This certainly does not prove Forse to have been homosexual, but his actions were undoubtedly queer by the standards of the interwar use of the word. Not every “confirmed bachelor,” let alone the average married man, was quite so used to being stopped by the police (over one hundred times he recalls), as for instance one time when, as he protests, all he was doing was “creeping carefully through the narrow pitch-black alleys” of Valladolid. Dressed as a Roman Catholic priest although he was not one, by the light of the midnight torch he was both a queer sight, and a site of queerness.¹⁶

Queerness and Catholicism in England

To what extent can one generalize from such an interwar example about the cultural connections between queerness and Catholicism in period since the rise of Anglo-Catholicism in the Church of England which Yates charts in the previous chapter? Hanson has expounded the paradox that “the Roman Catholic Church may well be the world’s most homophobic institution, but it also may well be the world’s largest

¹⁵ Edward J. G. Forse, *Ceremonial Curiosities and Queer Sights in Foreign Churches: Ecclesiological and other Notes from the Travel Diaries* (London: The Faith Press, 1938), vi, 116-9, 153.

¹⁶ Forse, *Ceremonial Curiosities* 157, 160.

employer of lesbians and gay men.”¹⁷ The Catholic requirement for clerical celibacy provided a respectable escape route from the societal expectation of marriage and children. The resulting motivations and cultural productions have been fascinatingly expounded by Mark Jordan in *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (2000). He argues that Catholic practices are queer in their basic otherness from societal norms and that, moreover, they represent intense expressions of camp since they require the self-conscious and exaggerated performance of devotion. He asks, “how would you ‘queer’ Catholic liturgy? How would you make it any campier than it already is?” Drawing attention to the splendid dress and drapes in an official portrait of the prominent archbishop of New York, Cardinal Spellman (1889-1967), Jordan argues that, “as modern eunuchs, they (Roman Catholic priests) are allowed to take on the stereotypes of women. They are allowed to worry about embroidery and the cut of garments.” The resulting culture offers the chance to express queer sensibility at cost of leaving mainstream values untouched, since the queerness of the priest helps to define and support the normative gender roles of others.

One of Jordan’s queer types of Roman Catholic, the “liturgy queen” finds distraction from sexual and psychological trauma through “the collaborative distraction of erudite adoration”: this goes to the essence of the development of Anglo-Catholicism.¹⁸ By the later-nineteenth century, the Oxford Movement had developed into a ritualistic focus, in some cases bordering on obsession, on the highly-self conscious and exact performance of the appearance of liturgical

¹⁷ Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26.

¹⁸ Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 182, 186-9, 199.

Catholicism.¹⁹ This wing of the Church of England became associated with homosexuality. A new undergraduate at Oxford was warned by his cousin in Evelyn Waugh's, *Brideshead Revisited* (1946): "beware of the Anglo-Catholics – they're all sodomites with unpleasant accents."²⁰ How did this come about? Patrick O'Malley, in *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (2006), argues that the gothic imagination constructed a cultural space in which Catholicism and its morality were othered. This was a strategy useful to opponents who, in the manner of Jack Chick, could use it to construct the monsters they desired to combat, and also enthusiasts, since they could use it to construct their very desires. Thus the virginity of the Roman and Anglo-Catholic homosexual was constructed as a sacred sacrifice.²¹ As Hanson says of the fin de siècle Anglo- and Roman Catholic clergy: in 'priesthood they found a spiritualisation of desire, a rebellion against nature and the instincts, and a polymorphous redistribution of pleasure in the body. In the elaborate stagecraft of ritualism they celebrated the effeminate effusions and subversions of the dandy.'²² Thus a male homosexual subculture came to be associated with the more flamboyant wing of Anglo-Catholicism, as has been explored by Martin Stringer in his interesting article "Of gin and lace: sexuality, liturgy and identity among Anglo-Catholics in the mid-twentieth century" (2000).²³

¹⁹ Dominic Janes, *Victorian Reformation: The Fight over Idolatry in the Church of England, 1840-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Boston: Little Brown, 1946), 26.

²¹ Frederick S. Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

²² Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (1997), 7-8.

²³ Martin Stringer, "Of Gin and Lace: Sexuality, Liturgy and Identity among Anglo-Catholics in the Mid-Twentieth Century," *Theology and Sexuality* 13 (2000). See also David Hilliard, "UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality," *Victorian Studies* 20 (1982), 199.

Walsingham is in a quiet area of Norfolk and Norfolk is a quiet area of England, yet Anglo-Catholic scandal reached it less than thirty years after the advent of the Oxford Movement. On 17th September 1864, the *Norfolk News* broke the story of “Ignatius and his singing boys.” Nine days earlier, one Mrs Hase had taken a letter from her fifteen-year old son. It was a love letter in which Brother Augustine, choirmaster of Rev. Joseph Leycester Lyne’s (Father Ignatius) monastic community in Norwich, said that “sometimes on Sundays you have sat in your cassock and cotta looking so like an angel that I could have worshipped you.”²⁴ Mrs Hase wrote to the newspaper asking “if such letters are written to a boy what may we conjecture are written to the young of the other sex?” and the paper responded with the well-worn trope against priestcraft that the threat consisted of the “breaking up of homes and the substituting of monkish influence for parental.”²⁵ However, the sexually queer content of these events was also tacitly acknowledged. The son was described as having been being wooed: “to use an expression used by a companion who accompanied the lad to the monastery, the superior was ‘sweet’ upon him – inviting him to the services, giving him fruit and other presents, and occasionally asking him to tea.” In the article “Recent Pranks at the Monastery,” published the following week, it was stated that “the suppression or perversion of natural love and of the proper passions of our being does not root out the powers that the creator has implanted, but misdirects them into corruption and defilement,” and, furthermore it was argued in “Augustine, Satan and

²⁴ *The Norfolk News*, 17th September (1864), 5.

²⁵ Arthur Calder-Marshall, *The Enthusiast: an Enquiry into the Life, Beliefs and Character of the Rev. Joseph Leycester Lyne, alias Fr. Ignatius, O.S.B., Abbot of Elm Hill, Norwich and Llanthony, Wales* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 112-3.

the Norfolk News” in the same edition, that “there is a cozening of boys going on which is most unmanly, and we may add unnatural.”²⁶

Ignatius was widely attacked for not denouncing Augustine for having writing the letter, but simply for writing it in secret and trying to get a photograph. However, as one of his biographers suggests, “the scandal about Brother Augustine was in an oblique way a good advertisement for Father Ignatius. His order offered what could be called in modern times a sublimation of homosexual tendencies. Ignatius himself, with that delicate physique, that devotion to his mother, that love for his fellow men and sympathy with lonely women, appeared to be the homosexual made Holy.”²⁷

It seems quite clear that the part of the cultural queerness of this Anglo-Catholic community was derived from same-sex desire. I am by no means arguing that this was obviously the case with the Shrine of Our Lady and the associated communities established by Rev. Alfred Hope Patten (1885-1958) at Walsingham (fig. 10). However, I do think that we can see many of the same attractions and themes at work. Patten’s great rival, the first Roman Catholic priest in modern Walsingham, Bruno James, for instance, was, clearly aware of the beauty of the spiritually heroic male body:

Of all the beautiful things of which are and nature are full, nothing is surely one-hundredth part as beautiful as the human body... Those who have seen men die, torn away in the pride of youth, know immediately on death the body loses the fairest part of its beauty and becomes like a lamp in which the light has gone out.²⁸

²⁶ *The Norfolk News*, 24th September (1864), 5.

²⁷ Calder-Marshall, *The Enthusiast*, 160.

²⁸ Bruno S. James, *Asking for Trouble* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962), 4-5.

Patten's latest and most thorough biographer, Martin Yelton, does not compare Patten with Lyne, but he does compare him with the most famous Anglo-Catholic monastic leader Benjamin Carlyle (1874-1955) who established Caldey Abbey:

although they both enjoyed leading young men into religion, Hope Patten's friendships of that nature were conducted with the utmost propriety, whereas with Carlyle there was an underlying unhealthiness in the way in which he favoured some members of the community, took one up to be his valet, and so on. The homoerotic atmosphere at Caldey is hinted at by those who have written about it, and was undoubtedly picked up by some of the visitors.²⁹

Patten long harbored dreams not only of refounding the shrine of Our Lady, but of establishing a large monastic community and it is no coincidence that, like Carlyle at Caldey, he used stones from various ancient abbeys in the construction of his high altar. Hope Patten in all his propriety may or may not have been homosexual, but he was certainly queer under my definition of the term as referring to alternative and unusual forms of gender performance. He was a man with a "strong theatrical streak" who was frightened of women who were attracted to him and, moreover, who had two "surrogate sons." Patten, not of course a married man, established a college with a rule based on that of the Augustinians but with vestments of noted flamboyance: "the dress of the members of the College was, and remained, somewhat idiosyncratic... Most people who saw the members of the College remarked on the birettas, which were made so elevated as to be unique in the experience of even the most seasoned observers of ecclesiastical garb." Furthermore, his establishments were no strangers to homosexual innuendo and scandal. In 1935 a member of the College of Guardians of the Shrine at Walsingham resigned after a conviction for indecency with a male. During the 1950s "one or two [members of the college] were, in the perception of most observers, obviously homosexual, which led to difficulties in the College and in

²⁹ Michael Yelton, *Anglican Papalism, A History: 1900-1960* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005), 128.

the public perception of the brothers.” In 1955, for instance, Owen Webber-Jones arrived, a person who appears in a letter in the shrine archives as a “very willowy old queen” who was a “great gossip.” Yelton comments that Hope Patten was “intolerant” of flagrantly homosexual behavior but was naïve in so far as he was slow to recognize it.³⁰ But if we accept Jordan’s argument that “the only emphasis required for broad clerical camp is just the denial that it represents anything out of the ordinary, especially in regard to secular expectations of gender,” it was Hope Patten, elaborator of the etiolated biretta, who was the true fount of Our Lady of Walsingham’s camp (fig. 10).³¹

[Fig. 10, Father Hope Patten. Reproduced by permission of the Archive, Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.]

Camp, Diva Worship and Masochism in Anglo-Catholic Mariolatry

It is sometimes assumed that its very campiness means that we need not take modern Walsingham seriously. Coleman and Elsner introduce their readers to a “young man very involved in the Church of England” who is not High Church but who has this to say of Walsingham: “you can cross yourself hugely, and genuflect at every available shrine, and you do sort of High Church stuff, get a feeling for it in a way you can’t elsewhere... It’s very theatrical... There is something quite self-conscious... I can’t take it too seriously... It’s very two-dimensional in the way that camp is often two-dimensional... It’s in good bad taste.”³² Anglo-Catholic theological colleges have indeed, on occasion, developed codes of camp ecclesiastical humor, for instance over such matters as “the use of the thurible (or the ‘handbag’, to use sacristy parlance) to

³⁰ Michael Yelton, *Alfred Hope Patten and the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham: an Illustrated Biography* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006), 23-4, 35, 53, 116, 183, 208-10.

³¹ Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom*, 184.

³² Coleman and Elsner, “Performing Pilgrimage,” 58-59.

excess, either by being swung in full circles, or by the production of too much smoke... Music could also take on double meanings to those who were ‘in the know’. One apocryphal story tells of an organist who improvised on ‘What shall we do with a drunken sailor’ during communion on the feast of the Assumption.”³³

This might be amusing for those involved, but was it not indeed in bad taste and simply silly if not actually blasphemous? However, I want to argue that the ecclesiastical camp and queerness of Anglo-Catholicism in general and Walsingham in particular should be analysed with respect. The essential sadness of camp is that is about the awareness of failure of moral performance as either man or woman: “it is affection, a sense of awe, and an acknowledgement of the ultimate seriousness and centrality of the liturgy that allowed the Anglo-Catholic to import camp into the Mass.” Just as a drag queen may celebrate the humor and sadness of trying and failing to be a perfect woman, so the drag priest acknowledges the humor and sadness of trying and failing to be a perfect man (through his poor imitation of Christ).³⁴

The transgressive and emotive power of ecclesiastical camp partly arises from its development out of gothic cultural conventions. Not only is Walsingham an exercise in neo-medieval architecture and practice, but it needs to be understood in relation to the cultural practices of the gothic genre of the imaginary. As O’Malley comments, the cultural construction of Catholicism as associated with the sexual other was developed through Gothic fiction from the eighteenth century.³⁵ This means that

³³ Stringer, “Of Gin and Lace,” 45-48.

³⁴ Stringer, “Of Gin and Lace,” 45-8.

³⁵ Patrick R. O’Malley, *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Max Fincher, “The Gothic as Camp: Queer Aesthetics in *The Monk*,” *Romanticism on the Net: the Gothic: from Ann Radcliffe to Anne Rice* 44 (2006), <http://www.erudit.org/revue/RON/2006/v/n44/013997ar.html>.

the collision of queerness, camp, monstrosity and religious ecstasy has very deep roots in English culture. In relation to Mariolatry in particular, the connection can be seen to lie even deeper in time. Ruth Vanita, writing of the nineteenth century, argues that the Virgin Mary “acts as a model and justification for unconventional behavior by both women and men, [and] provides a convention for alternative ways of life.”³⁶ This queerness emerged as a direct development from the Reformation rejection of sexual denial as an ideal.³⁷ This immediately opened up the potential for excitements and fears of both inappropriate expression and denial of sexuality which were to provide the fuel for the development of gothic fiction.

Marian cults were, we should not forget, ways of attempting to regulate female authority and their repression can be seen as deriving from a belief that they had not succeeded, or that they had even become productive of dangerous female power and sexuality. It is the very desire to escape the regulation of a hegemonic heterosexual male order that leads many gay men to admire charismatic women as divas. As Farmer comments: “it makes perfect sense that gay male cultures should have mobilized and privileged the figure of the diva for such processes of queer transcendence and expanded self-creation. Born out of nineteenth-century traditions of operatic spectacle and melodramatic theatricality... the diva is nothing if not a consummate figure of self-authorization, a magisterial image of triumphant identificatory production.” Queer Anglo-Catholic Mariolatry can be seen as a form of diva worship, the aim of which is “the transcendence of a limiting heteronormative

³⁶ Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 25.

³⁷ Theodora A. Janowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

materiality and the sublime reconstruction, at least in fantasy, or a more capacious, kinder, queerer world.”³⁸

The cultural practices at Walsingham can also be viewed in a third way as being an expression of queerness because of the cultural interconnections between asceticism and aestheticism in Victorian and contemporary Britain. The poetry of the English Roman Catholic convert Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-89) nicely illustrates this phenomenon, one which has recently come under scholarly scrutiny. For instance, Frederick Roden describes Hopkins’s *Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875), as a “homosocial wet dream” in which Catholic asceticism and homoeroticism were blended.³⁹ In *The Loss of the Eurydice* (1878), Hopkins made a direct linkage between Walsingham and his erotic tastes when he wrote of the “lovely manly mould” of drowned English sailors “rolled in ruin.” These representatives of our “fast foundering own generation” are contrasted with contemporary ruins of shrines. He references the fall of Our Lady’s greatness with particular regret: “time was, to his truth and grace, that a starlight-wender of ours would say, the marvellous Milk was Walsingham way,” but he says, “let be, let be: more, more that was will yet be.”⁴⁰

Julia Saville argues that, in his poems, monastic asceticism “merges with the pleasure of masochistic eros.”⁴¹ Hopkins’s keen interest in men’s bodies, monastic shrines and his dreams of the perfect resurrection of both were shared by increasing numbers of Anglo- as well as Roman Catholics as the nineteenth century moved

³⁸ Brett Farmer, “The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship,” *Camera Obscura* 59 (2005), 170, 189.

³⁹ Roden, *Same-Sex Desire*, 114.

⁴⁰ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works*, Catherine Phillips (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134; see also 233.

⁴¹ Julia Saville, *A Queer Chivalry: The Homoerotic Asceticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville, 2000), 70.

towards its end, as can be seen from the fiction of the previously mentioned Father Ignatius.⁴² His erotic interests would appear to have been rather less sublimated than those of Hopkins if his novel *Brother Placidus and Why he Became a Monk: a Tale for the Young Men of the Times* (1870) is anything to go by. The future Brother Placidus (a young man called Charles Lyndhurst), is seen going to church wherein a monk rises to preach: “his calm, black eyes met those of Charles, who crimsoned deeply, and his eyes fell beneath a look, such as he had never met before.”⁴³ The monk preaches, pauses, and “again his piercing glance met Charles’s eye. But now our young friend gazed into the eyes of the monk with intense eagerness. He seemed to be drinking in, with all the longing of a thirsty soul, the strange impressions which were floating from the mind of the speaker, like balm into the aching void of his innermost being.”⁴⁴

Charles, himself begins the process of becoming a monk, and, eventually we are offered our own sly peep at his young ecclesiastical form: “how beautiful Brother Placidus looked!... we have no business to admit a secular into the sacred cell of the holy monk, and yet we must give the reader a glimpse of the sleeping novice... a crimson coverlet is over the bed, marked with a large white cross. The sleeper’s hands, folded on his breast, grasp a crucifix. *Such* a smile is playing upon the fair classic face, which is as white as an alabaster statue.”⁴⁵

Not only voyeurism, but also the pleasures of adoration, camp banter and sado-masochism are available in the monastery. One of the monks cries at the thought

⁴² Jill Muller, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Victorian Catholicism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 50.

⁴³ Joseph Leycester Lyne, *Brother Placidus and Why he Became a Monk. A Tale for the Young Men of the Times* (Abergavenny: J. L. Lyne, 1870), 15.

⁴⁴ Lyne, *Brother Placidus*, 19.

⁴⁵ Lyne, *Brother Placidus*, 146.

of the death of Placidius who has become ill and later when the latter makes a penance of kissing the feet of the community, “positively shuddered, when he felt the hot lips of his friend pressing his feet”.⁴⁶ We learn that Father Philip pronounces queer as “quare”: “What a ‘quare’ customer you are! Laughed Brother Oswald, bantering the other with his word ‘quare.’ You’re getting quite unlike the old witch you used to be.”⁴⁷ Meanwhile a boy oblate had begged to be beaten, as recounted in banter between two of the brothers:

“Well [said the Abbot], if you will take a good caning before your communion, and another after, and without crying for the pain, I think that would prove to us all that you were really sorry.”

“May I have a beating then?” asked the child. “I should like to for dear blessed Jesus’ sake.” “You shall, then, my dear child,” answered the Abbot.

“And you don’t mean to say that the Reverend Father really did beat the little darling, Brother Oswald?”

“Indeed, he did, though, and well too.”

“Didn’t he child squall?”

“Not a sound, but received the sacrament with almost a rapture. His fair, bright face and sweet blue eyes were upturned to the Host with such delight, but his face was suffused with crimson from the pain.”

“And knowing that he was to receive another caning when he left the altar?”

“Yes; and he took the second still more bravely.”

“Well, upon my word, I never could have believed such a thing possible. It is a wonderful life this monastery life”^{* 48}

⁴⁶ Lyne, *Brother Placidius*, 141.

⁴⁷ Lyne, *Brother Placidius*, 127.

⁴⁸ Lyne, *Brother Placidius*, 146-7.

The star indicated an astonishing footnote which asserted that this story was “unvarnished fact” and had “happened at Llantonny Priory” (which was a successor project after the disgrace and failure in Norfolk). In this context it may be appropriate to point out that at the time of writing Lyne was sharing a bedroom with a ten-year-old boy whom he had received from a penniless mother two days before the scandal broke in Norwich. He continued to share a room with the child until the boy was fourteen. It would appear that, for some Anglo-Catholics who experienced same-sex desire, the violation of ritual propriety replaced sexual transgression as the definitive site of private and public shame. In this alternative moral economy it was the normative sign of heterosexual marriage became the badge of scandal and moral betrayal. In such ways the taint of homosexuality was not erased, but it was at least obscured by such strategic reordering of the moral landscape.⁴⁹

Landscape and Protestant Heteronormativity

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, not all those who travel through the quiet rural landscape to Walsingham, are supportive Anglo-Catholics. The shrine also needs to be understood in relation to its surrounding Protestant, secular and heterosexual contexts. The countryside itself, in an idealized form as a picturesque arcadia free from the moral ambiguities and troubles of modern life, has long played a key role in the English imagination.⁵⁰ Tolkien’s depiction of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* (published 1954-5, although begun just before the outbreak of World War Two) is just one example of the ways in which the national home that was to be fought for was

⁴⁹ Michael Farrer, *Faithful Cross: A History of Holy Cross, Cromer Street*, William Young (ed.) (London: Cromer Street Publications, 1999), 118.

⁵⁰ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 517-25.

still represented in the modern era by the rural idyll.⁵¹ One place to find the idealized countryside was in fiction, but it could also be physically searched for in a sort of modern pilgrimage to Englishness. This deep countryside was opened up to the urban and suburban masses by the motorcar in the interwar period. It was via the paradoxical application of the industrial technology of the internal combustion engine that the search for primitive perfection was enabled, as can be seen in the work of a series of nationalistic evangelists of the road, one of the most prominent of whom was H. V. Morton (1892-1979).⁵² The most successful of his many books, *In Search of England* (London, 1927) had sold a million copies and gone through twenty-nine editions by 1943.

Sidhe has explained how Morton expounded the belief one must leave behind London, that “degenerate, industrial, and racially impure space” and that England is only to be found in the pure countryside. There is, however, an important additional issue, in that Morton gendered the landscape of the “mother country.” London, representing modernity, was associated with the challenges posed by liberated women. Femininity is constructed as an object for the male gaze, but it is only in its idealized earthly form that it remains safely passive, fertile, serene and beautiful. He thus participated in an “interwar discourse of the rural [which] located Englishness in a heterosexual bond between a masculine national subject and a feminine nature or landscape.” This romantic and sexualized appeal to seek out Mother Nature, can of course, also be used to explain some of the appeal of journeying to Walsingham to encounter Our Lady, save for the key difference that Morton’s writing assumed a

⁵¹ Christine Berberich, “This Green and Pleasant Land: Cultural Constructions of Englishness,” in Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl (eds), *Landscape and Englishness* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 207-23.

⁵² Ben Knights, “In Search of England: Travelogue and Nation between the Wars,” in *Landscape and Englishness*, 165-84.

Protestant audience which, by opposing Mariolatry, was forced into a secular romance with feminine nature. Those of a Catholic persuasion had, of course, no sense that the Virgin was foreign to English soil. Quite the contrary; for them the Shrine represented the resurfacing of the true face of rural England.

Morton's world of rural purity also excluded the troubling dangers of sexual involvement. The presence of the openly rapturous cult of a powerful woman could easily act to disrupt this uneasy cultural construction, for Morton had not banished desire from the landscape. He wrote that: "I went into the churchyard where the green stones nodded together, and I took up a handful of earth and felt it crumble and run through my fingers, thinking that as long as one English field lies against another there in something left in the world for a man to love." But within this heterosexual love-scene between man and earth is a lesbian image in which one (feminine) English, farmed, male-controlled field lies against another one.⁵³ Even if we regard this as a cliché of straight male fantasy it appears that in Morton's arcadia we can read the signs of the death of heteronormativity. Walsingham's queerness, being both English and other, was, therefore, developed in the context of an ongoing and precarious balance with the gender battles of the world around it.

If we can read Morton's and his millions of readers' interwar longings as having a queer dimension, how then did that society accommodate the inevitability of queerness without openly acknowledging it? This is how I wish to read the cultural construction of Walsingham at this time. It was a place in which sexual queerness could be represented as religious otherness and, thus, more or less accommodated with social respectability. It is as well to recall the ambiguous role played by the notion of holy pilgrimage in English identity as a legacy of Chaucer's *Canterbury*

⁵³ Wren Sidhe, "H. V. Morton's Pilgrimages to Englishness," *Literature and History* 12 (2003), 57-8, 63-4.

Tales. On the one hand Chaucer is widely regarded as the first great English poet. Yet he wrote much that was irreverent and bawdy and has also been read as an expresser of queerness, most notably in his characterization of the Pardoner. It is important to note that the Pardoner is not a modern ‘homosexual.’ He can, however, be understood to represent the ‘sodomite,’ a cultural creation of medieval clerical culture in which a person becomes prone to alternative forms of sexual temptation because they do not have the ‘normal’ outlet of marriage.⁵⁴ One way to deal with the Pardoner is to pretend he is not there, and Burger has commented that “again and again the Pardoner’s audiences, pilgrim and modern alike, have sought to maintain the purity of the Canterbury journey by disassociating themselves from the Pardoner.”⁵⁵ Bearing in mind that queerness is, however, an essential by-product of the search for purity, dissociation is something that requires ongoing effort on the path to salvation. Walsingham, as a place of potent queerness, was enabled to function partly through the denial of this aspect by most of its devotees. The shrine could thus appear to those outside the evangelical fringes of Protestantism as marginal and quaint rather than dangerously transgressive.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that even many worldly homosexuals do not want to be associated with the threatening aspects of queerness. The wartime photography of Cecil Beaton, for instance, represents the successful efforts of a conservative homosexual to fit the figure of the dandy into the People’s War of 1939-45.⁵⁶ Those years of national emergency can, in fact, be read as a period when England needed everyone to serve, even those who might have been previously

⁵⁴ Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ Glenn Burger, “Kissing the Pardoner,” *PMLA* 107 (1992), 1143-56.

⁵⁶ Martin Francis, “Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), 90-117.

marginalized as queer. This can be illustrated by reference to Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). This film was, according to Powell, made to explain to the Americans and the British what they were fighting for. The film can be read, however, as powerfully queer. Set in wartime England, at the centre of the film is the mystery of the "glueman," a criminal who puts glue on the hair of local girls to stop them going out with American soldiers. This turns out to be Colpeper, a squire and a bachelor who lives with his mother. He is "queer in the sense that he is no strongly or definitively coded as either conventionally homosexual or heterosexual." The queer humor was, according to Doty, even more pronounced in earlier drafts of the script. Yet there are still lots of queer puns as, for instance, when the organist of Canterbury Cathedral asks "do I look like a charwoman?" (the answer, of course, is yes!). This humor is used to relieve tension, to enable us to realize that there is nothing really to worry about. In the end Colpeper is constructed as a victim. Moreover, he is compared to a saint, or to Christ, being shown in on scene as haloed against the lantern-light during a lecture he is giving on the medieval pilgrims to Canterbury (fig. 11).

[Fig. 11, Colpeper haloed, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). Reproduced by permission of ITV Global Entertainment.]

The moral is that the good queer must make a sacrifice to serve the dominant culture "by the denial of his body" and the renunciation of his supposed hatred of women). Fascinatingly, this construction of queer Christian heroism and self-denial is precisely that which was espoused by Anglo-Catholicism. It is a form of conservative Christian heroism in which the good homosexual was rewarded for sexual abstinence

by taking on the heroic mantle of Christ-like suffering.⁵⁷ In Walsingham the focus on the cult of women disempowered the queer and yet also acted to save him, living with his spiritual mother, from the worse danger of the cult of men, a cult that was only safely practiced via the manly bonding rituals of the heterosexual male. The queerness of Walsingham was, therefore, sixty years ago as a locus for the queer “other” which contrasted and yet, thereby, reinforced the trumpeted heteronormative straightness of the surrounding nation about it. But what about today? In the age of post-gay liberation homosexuals do not need to find secret networks of support such as once drew them into the Anglo-Catholic fold. I would, however, argue that this makes Anglo-Catholicism more rather than less queer. The combination of queer cultural expression and adulation of virginity makes for a cultural space which is perhaps even more remote from contemporary English culture: “when homosexual identities may be fully distinguished from queer Catholic ones, [modern culture] allows these discourses to intersect only with great anxiety. Contemporary culture has polarized homosexuality and religion, often pathologizing both Christian and queer identities... religious identity seems to have little place in the life of the sexually self-aware subject. The modern individual must repress one aspect of her/his identity or the other.”⁵⁸ If we understand queerness as being outside societal norms, Walsingham continues to provide rich opportunities for creativity, play and expression, including those which focus on the perverse joys of the abject expression of sexuality and the self. In our age of rampant consumption when we are expected to shop ourselves into existence we are lucky to be able to admire Walsingham’s queer countercultural dramas of self-expression through self-denial.

⁵⁷ Alexander Doty, “An Instrument with a Flaming Sword: Conservative Queerness in *A Canterbury Tale*,” in Robin Griffiths (ed.), *British Queer Cinema*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 47, 55, 58, 60.

⁵⁸ Roden, *Same-Sex Desire*, 8.