Book Section:
Searle, AA orcid.org/0000-0002-9672-6353 (2017) Exiles at Home. In: Hiscock, A and Wilcox, H, (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Religion. Oxford University Press , Oxford, United Kingdom . ISBN 9780199672806

This is an author's copy. For citation please refer to the original: Alison Searle, 'Exiles at Home', in Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 464-80.

Exiles at Home

Introduction

Though this essay focuses on the experience of Protestant nonconformists in the later seventeenth century, the radical and repeated changes in state religion, accompanied by persecution of any who openly dissented from the status quo, meant that there were numerous groups who found themselves in exile at home in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Protestant Reformation created an initial fissure between the state religion and the convictions of individual conscience that radically undermined contemporary assumptions that the two were synonymous. In an early modern state such as seventeenth-century England theologians and philosophers, like Richard Hooker, defined the civic and religious identities of the subject as coterminous: an English citizen and subject of the queen was, by necessity, also a member of the state church.[1] Subsequent changes of religious allegiance on the part of Tudor, then Stuart, monarchs did nothing to mitigate the complexities (Crosignani, McCoog & Questier, 2010: xvi). This was particularly the case for those who maintained their allegiance to Catholicism after Henry VIII's decision to break with Rome and create a national church. His Lord Chancellor, the humanist Sir Thomas More, was just one amongst many Catholics who were executed for their faith and were revered as martyrs for their commitment to traditional religion and resistance to replacing the Pope with an English monarch as head of the church. Though Mary made a determined effort to reverse these changes – and could draw on strong residual support for Catholicism amongst her subjects – the qualified Protestant settlement achieved under Elizabeth I in 1559 proved to be decisive. Michael Questier (1996; 2006) following John Bossy (1975) has argued that the role of the aristocracy was crucial in shaping the identity of recusant Catholic communities in England once Mary's religious reforms, with their associated political, social and cultural implications, were overturned. Significant examples include the household of Lady Magdalene Browne (1538-1608) at Battle in East Sussex and the Tresham and Vaux families in Northamptonshire (Murphy, 2014: 242, 245-50). Bossy (1975) suggests that this resulted in a transformation of the nature of Catholicism in England and created a structural affinity between the experience of Catholic recusants and Protestant nonconformist communities in contradistinction to the legally established Church of England.

The call for ongoing reformation in the latter sixteenth century and the civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century created space for the proliferation of diverse nonconformist Protestant groups. It also 'highlight[ed] the very real tension between having an established church to which everyone was supposed to conform, and the desire to build a godly community. Predestinarian theology had ecclesiological and ethical implications, and these sat uneasily with the inclusivity of the Elizabethan church whose liturgy implied a pastoral and pragmatic universalism' (Cleugh, 2013: 29). The state's consistent emphasis on the need to conform to the church established by law, despite a brief hiatus during the Commonwealth and

Protectorate, meant that numerous individuals were positioned as religious and political 'exiles' in the country of their birth. This often entailed persecution by the state for their nonconformist principles and practice. Religious nonconformity in early modern England was a capacious term. Other possible synonyms are puritans, separatists and dissenters. The *OED* (1. a) defines the noun *nonconformist* as: 'Originally…a person adhering to the doctrine but not the usages of the Church of England….Later (esp[ecially] after the Act of Uniformity of 1662 and the consequent ejection from their livings of those ministers who refused to conform): a member of a Church which is separated from the Church of England….The term has been sometimes applied analogically to the Puritan section of the Church of England in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I'. Nonconformist, as used here, will incorporate both the historical and analogical meanings of the term.

Recent work (Major, 2010; Spohnholz & Waite, 2014) has demonstrated the ways in which the fact of exile – as a physical experience of fleeing to another country, or as an existential anxiety as a refugee in the country of one's birth – profoundly influenced religious identities and shaped individual and communal experience in ways that were shared across confessional boundaries. Though it is important not to flatten out the remarkable diversity of exilic experiences across Europe during this turbulent period, a shared exposure to exile could inextricably bind 'royalist and non-royalist, Anglican and puritan alike', for example, and open up 'new ways of understanding important historical and social issues about mid-seventeenth-century English society, particularly English exile communities under pressure' (Major, 2010: 4). The concept of exile is freighted with biblical and historical significance which could give politically disempowered religious nonconformists the moral high ground, aligning them, for example, with Israel against Egypt and Pharaoh, or with the persecuted apostles and martyrs of the early church against the evil state (often figured as Babylon). The reestablishment of the state church in 1662 following a period where there had been an unprecedented freedom to live, gather and worship according to the dictates of one's conscience meant that large numbers of people found themselves unable to conform and consequently politically disenfranchised exiles at home. Steed Vernyl Davidson notes that Homi Bhabha defines such people as the '"unhomely". [Bhabha] speaks of the experience of the "unhomely" as those for whom the boundaries between the world and home collapse, where the divisions between the private and the public no longer exist….For him the concern centers not on lack of shelter, but on new positionalities that require new strategies for identity retention and (re)formation, both individual and communal'. Davidson uses 'Bhabha's notions of hybridity and diaspora' as a way of reading Jeremiah's letters to the deported Jewish community in Babylon (see especially Jeremiah 29:1-14) (Davidson, 2011: 131-2). The concept of exile, as inflected through biblical typology, is a helpful way of thinking about the experience of nonconformists in England. However, individuals and households in early modern England did not construct their identity around 'the tension between public and private' as 'part of a grand narrative' and it is important to 'isolate the concepts – including self-examination and secrecy – that were part of a significant cultural debate for early modern individuals' (Longfellow, 2006: 334).

Interpretive communities of nonconformists can be traced from the early sixteenth century

through to the eventual repeal of the Corporation Act (1661) and the Test Act (1673) in 1828. As noted above, I will focus here on the experience of individuals and congregations between the passing of the Act of Uniformity (1662) and the Toleration Act (1689). Many nonconformists, including prominent leaders such as Richard Baxter and John Howe, desired comprehension within the state church and yet because of scruples of conscience found themselves unable to subscribe and therefore positioned with separatists, like John Bunyan and John Owen, whose ecclesiology enabled them to accept with equanimity or even enthusiasm exclusion from the national body, though not the associated persecution. Such nonconformists or exiles, like Bhabha's 'unhomely', needed to develop new ways of positioning themselves and formulating their identities as individuals and local communities of believers. Kristen Poole has noted that the 'phenomenon of religious nonconformity' led people 'to contemplate and interrogate the basis of their familial, parochial, and national communities'. The 'organization of church and state' was discussed in 'the alehouse and home'. The stakes of conversations regarding sectarianism and separatism were high and had 'far-reaching implications for the relationship of the individual to the community; the grounds for political authority; the autonomy of the individual conscience; the right to participate in public discourse; and the right to determine one's own religious society' (2000: 13).[2] This essay examines the ways in which nonconformist communities interpreted their experiences, interrogating and recording these in a variety of literary genres. The concept of exile at home is analyzed through five discrete and interconnected categories: imprisonment, legal disputation in the courts, corporate worship, itinerant preaching and letter writing. Each section draws upon a number of case studies that illustrate the wide range of spiritual experiences and theological convictions in nonconformist communities and how these were encapsulated, transformed and disputed in journals, letters, sermons and biographies, amongst other literary genres.

Imprisonment

Imprisonment was probably the most acute form of internal exile that the state could inflict on its subjects. However, as Lake and Questier (1998) have argued, prisons could also act as clerical lodging houses and facilitate the pastoral and propaganda activities of Catholic priests. A similar effect resulted from the concentration of nonconformists imprisoned following the Restoration. Nonetheless, experiences of imprisonment during this period could vary widely depending on the attitude of the gaoler and the number of prisoners incarcerated at a particular location. Theodosia Alleine records of her husband, Joseph, imprisoned at Ilchester: 'There were also Five more Ministers, with Fifty *Quakers*, which all had their Lodgings in the same Room….It was not long after before Mr. Coven, and Mr. Powel, with Eight more, were brought into the same place, being taken at Meetings; which made their Rooms very straight, and it was so nigh to the upper part of the Prison, that they could touch the Tiles as they lay in their Beds…they had very little Air….and had no place but a small Garden, joyned to the place where all the common Prisoners were, which was no Retirement for them, they having there and in their Chamber, the constant noise of those Wretches, except when they slept….there was the sight of their Clothes hanging full of Vermin, and themselves in their Rags and Chains…' (1671: E5r). Whereas Richard Baxter notes that his wife, Margaret, 'When I was carried thence to the common Gaol for teaching them…I never

perceived her troubled at it: she cheerfully went with me into Prison; *she brought her best bed thither*, and did much to remove the removable inconveniences of the Prison. I think she had scarce ever a pleasanter time in her life than while she was with me there' (1681: H2r).

Mary Smith married the nonconformist Presbyterian minister Robert Franklin in 1669. Shortly after Franklin was arrested for preaching and imprisoned in Aylesbury gaol; Mary was heavily pregnant. During Robert's imprisonment they exchanged several letters and Mary's spiritual journal recounting her experience of grace from childhood to marriage and motherhood provides a vivid account both of the impact of Robert's imprisonment (in 1670, 1684 and on at least one other occasion) and of the ways in which principled nonconformity could disrupt the security of the home and render families intensely vulnerable, resulting in the violent disturbance of activities from attendance at conventicles to breastfeeding and other aspects of daily life. The letters and journal also reveal the crucial importance of fellowship between believers and the local support networks that these provided: facilitating payments ensuring that the prisoner was adequately cared for; maintaining up to date communication regarding preaching and the publication of good books, the activity of informers and the physical health and spiritual condition of members of the congregation and, more generally, the predicament of other English nonconformist communities. Mary's journal is strongly inflected and shaped by her Calvinist theology of election and providence and offers a graphic, tactile account of what nonconformity entailed for one relatively ordinary woman and her family. The desire to preserve an account of God's provision for the edification of her children led to the creation of a manuscript document that selectively shapes and filters her life experience in a reasonably self-conscious literary form.[3]

Mary's first extant letter to her husband whilst imprisoned in Aylesbury (4 July [dated 1667, but actually 1670]) notes that she is 'now more alone' as her mother has left her to care for her brother who was very sick, but concludes: 'I hope the Lord is with me, and so Long I cannot say that I am alone, for he is the best company, as I beleive you do find by Experience'. She has received the book 'a wellcome to the plague' from a friend: it speaks counsel to her condition and she requests her husband to pray to the Lord 'for his blessing in y^{e} reading of it'. With a typical female apology she asks twice that he 'Excuse y^{e} bad writing and spelling for I am in great hast'. A postscript informs Robert that: 'through y^{e} goodness of god wee have injoyed another sabath in peace, though we had . 3 . sermons…but m^{r} parthridg was disturbed by y^{e} soulders who were very rude they shots bulets to shut open his door and killd his mayd and caried severall of his people to prison'. Her second letter (dated 6 July 1670) notes the safe receipt of his 'Loveing Letters' rejoicing in their mutual health, but troubled regarding her spiritual condition and asking for his prayers that she might follow his 'good and seasonable advice'. Mary is thankful for the glimpses of God's countenance that she has received despite the bitterness of her present cup, observing 'thy heart cannot be more with me then mine is with thee, I never so much Expereincd a longing condition as now by reason of thy absence'. She corrects the information sent in her earlier letter: 'y^{e} news that I sent you about m^{r} partridge is true only that y^{e} maid was dead is not true she was nigh death but is recovered'. She updates him on the possible amputation of an acquaintance's leg, and another's private marriage, and finishes by observing 'my sister Tanner remembers her Love

to you her kindness is very great in bearing me company now my mother is absent' (CL, MS I.i.25).

Robert responded gratefully on 9 July 1670 acknowledging her loving letters and willingly excusing her 'bad writing w^{ch} I could easily doe were thy defects many more but my Dear: I cannot excuse thy defects in Arithmetick in that thy last by the coach was dated 1667 nigh two years before we could call Husband & Wife this Antedateing is an errata y^{t} requires amendment'. The close proximity in the date of these letters and the loving, intimate, even humorous tone indicates the companionate nature and strength of the marriage: he provided spiritual counsel and she much needed emotional succour during the period of his imprisonment. Robert notes if Mary did but know 'the content I take to see thy handwriteing now I cannot see thy deare face thou wouldest not let me goe a weeke long wthout a letter'. But, as the time for the delivery of their child draws near, she 'will not be in a condition to give me those paper visits thy excuse will y^{n} be made the God of Heaven draw nigh vnto thee stand by thee p^{re}serve thee & deliver thee spare no needfull thing for thy good Our God will p[ro]vide his providence is our inheritance My Dear I pray let their be care taken the first coach after thy delivery that I may heare of thee'. The remainder of the letter touches on the health of acquaintances, rejoices in her spiritual mind and warns of the hypocrisy of one who went to a meeting and afterward 'betrayed' them 'to penalty of law'. Robert observes, in contrast, 'My Reverend & Worthy Brother Wells wth his good wife & sonne were in towne last night sent for me to their Inn did condole at my suffering…& further expressed their kindness' by providing almost enough to cover his prison charges for a week (CL, MS I.i.25).

The final extant letter from Robert to Mary (10 August 1670) affirms: 'I am greatly refreshed to see againe thy handwriteing & to heare of thy recovery and at the hopes to see & enjoy thee y^{e} next weeke by Divine permission', when she will travel to visit him with his parents. Robert surmises that he might be released at the next Assizes due to the support of a nobleman who is 'much troubled at my imprisonment intends to be at Assize & to doe his utmost for my release'. He then refers to some family business in horse-trading and actively discourages his wife from offering hospitality to a particular woman concluding: 'Howbeit if my ffather & you judge meete I will not absolutely oppose it' (CL, MS I.i.25).

Quite a different perspective is thrown on this two-month period in the first-person narrative account provided by Mary's journal. It complements rather than contradicts the information conveyed in the correspondence discussed above. But the death of her first child, referred to elliptically, I think, in Robert's final letter – 'I greatly delight in these seasonable & sutible notes thou didst take as to Divine dealeing wth us…it is much better to have at the hand of God what is good for us then what we desire our selves Gods dispensations are the results of the highest wisdome' – takes centre stage (CL, MS I.i.25). Mary writes as follows:

> The . first year after we were marryed my husband was taken, at Colbrook, for preacheing which was .15. mills from london, and was carryed to Ailsbury Jayl which was 15 mills further; which was . 30 mils from me, and I was big with Child, it pleased God I went out my full time, and after very Sore and hard

> labour I was delivered of a larg man Child, but it was stilleborn which was Judged by most, to be occationed by my greif that I had upon me by reason of my husbands being so far from me, in my condition, it being new work for me to be Exercised in the School of affliction, it was more difficult for me to bear, but the lord was graeciously pleased to suport me both in soul and body, and as soon as my month was up, my father and mother \&/ I rode to the prison where my husband was, it being the Sizes; some friend moved the Judges to consider his condition, he being Elegally commited, but they would not medle with it (CL, MS I.h.33: 7).

Here she does not mention the higher wisdom of divine providence, rather the physical distance and absence of her husband is noted, along with her 'very Sore and hard labour' and, though she abstracts herself from the conclusion that the still birth of her first son was 'Judged by most' to be caused by grief at her husband's imprisonment, it was nonetheless a 'School of affliction' that she found 'more difficult…to bear' because she had not experienced it before.

Throughout the journal Mary recounts the inextricable correlation between her own bodily health, that of her children, and her family's vulnerability to informers, imprisonment, expulsion from their home, and the forced removal of their goods. She focuses particularly on pregnancies (ten of which are recorded), disrupted breastfeeding and weaning, still birth and the illnesses of very young infants (such as St Anthony's fire), domestic accidents (including a maid scalding her four-year-old daughter, Mary, with a skillet of milk and bread boiling over the fire, resulting in horrendous disfigurement and death several days later), and melancholy (this could have been postnatal depression). Mary's nonconformity and gender reconfigure the normative generic structure of the spiritual journal in important ways: the individual's passionate pursuit of God, painstaking self-analysis and obsessive engagement with the scriptural texts are all there, but the voice is somatic, firmly situated in specific domestic spaces and family and congregational networks that are radically disrupted by Mary and Robert's committed nonconformity and particularly the imprisonment of the latter.

So, for example, shortly after Robert's release from Aylesbury gaol 'there came forth new warrants, to sease our goods, and the Enformers…Endeavored often to get into our house which occation much disturbance to us, and at this time I…having a young Child, hanging on my brest, and I was forced to wean the Child my milk being disturbed, it did both me and the child hurt…' (CL, MS I.h.33: 8-9). Similarly, on opening the window of her home to speak to a friend, an 'informer being, behind, flew up to the window, and snacht it out of my hand; and got up into it presently (he was a Glasser by trade which made him soe Expert at the work) but my husband being in the room thrust him back again…at this time I gave suck to my 4 fourth Child Joanna, but these frights did so disturb my milk that I was forced to wean her' (CL, MS I.h.33:12). They were, however, unsuccessful in preventing the informers from entering one Saturday afternoon in November 1684:

> they got the window of the hinges, and quickly got in there being nobody to resist them, only a poor sickly child in the cradle, the other two children being in

> a great fright followed me up stairs, and when they were got in, they quickly, came up to us, the informer had his drawn sword in his hand…and laid hold of my husband, and told him, he was the kings prissoner [and was committed by a Justice to prison for half a year for refusing the corporation oaths] …they returned to our house…and Eate up our victualls and drank up our drink….I refused to pay down any mony [for the household goods they had seized] …they fell in a great rage, to pulling and nocking down the things…not leaveing . so much as a chair to sit in, or a cup to drinke in...my Cheife end in declareing these things is to acquaint my freinds, and relations, Especially my Children, and also, that I, may not forget my selfe, how greatly the lord Supportd me in this time of trouble… (CL, MS I.h.33:16-18).

The common puritan impulse to record God's faithfulness for the edification of her children led Mary Franklin to produce a remarkable text that demonstrates the ways in which this particular community of Presbyterian nonconformists made sense of the persecution they experienced at the hands of the state and its powerful impact on every aspect of their lives. Her spiritual journal both enshrines and enacts that interpretation.

Legal Disputation in the Courts

Closely related to imprisonment, and providing an effective stage for the performance of nonconformity, were the court debates that often led to the internal exile or incarceration of religious dissenters. Amongst the correspondence providing details of John Bunyan's imprisonment following the Restoration is a short account of his second wife, Elizabeth's, encounter with the justices at the Midsummer Assizes in August 1661 (Bunyan, 1998: 116-18). Bunyan sets out the exchange in the style of a dramatic dialogue, which, he claims, '*I took from her own Mouth*' (1998: 116). There are thus several layers that separate us from Elizabeth's own narration of her encounter with the authorities: the manuscript correspondence detailing Bunyan's imprisonment was not published until 1765 and the originals are no longer extant.[4] Elizabeth's oral performance is textually mediated through the authorial persona of her husband and shifts freely from the third to the first person in its transcription of her speech; there is, thus, no direct access to Elizabeth's own record of her dramatic engagement on her husband's behalf.[5] John was imprisoned shortly after marrying Elizabeth in 1659. Elizabeth presented John's plea for him before the justices, including Sir Matthew Hale, Sir Thomas Twisden and Sir Henry Chester, at the Bedford Midsummer Assizes. She followed up on two further occasions attempting to obtain John's release without acknowledging that he had acted illegally by preaching.

Though the law proscribed the practice of Baptist worship, Elizabeth persistently pursued all legal avenues on behalf of her husband. She had already been to London and consulted with members of the House of Lords as to the best way to obtain her husband's freedom. Their advice had been 'that they could not release him, but had committed his releasement to the Judges, at the next assizes' (Bunyan, 1998: 118). John characterises Elizabeth in biblical terms as the poor widow who repeatedly accosted the unjust judge and succeeded simply because he wished to be rid of her (Luke 18:1-8). The analogy is not entirely apt, as Elizabeth

was unsuccessful. She did, however, manage to attract the attention of Sir Matthew Hale, one of the few justices at this time who showed some sympathy to dissenters. He 'mildly received [the petition] at her hand' on the first occasion; he was willing, 'as it seemed', 'to give her audience' on the second occasion, but was intercepted by Sir Henry Chester, who dismissed Bunyan as already 'convicted in the court' and 'a hot spirited fellow'; on the third occasion, having been encouraged by the High Sheriff, Edmund Wylde, Elizabeth again approached the court as it was meeting in the upper room of the Swan Inn, near the bridge over the Ouse, and addressed herself to Hale 'with a bashed face, and a trembling heart' (Bunyan, 1998: 117).

The literary representation of this dramatic encounter in dialogue form results in a concrete immediacy that instantly engages the reader's interest and sympathy. Richard Greaves describes it as 'arguably Bunyan's most dramatic prose' (2002: 144). Neil Keeble observes further: 'It is not by direct address to the reader nor by tendentious commentary but by the ironic import of its dramatic presentation of events that the *Relation* comes to bear out Bunyan's contention that "those that are most commonly counted foolish by the world, are the wisest before God"' (1987: 54). Elizabeth is denoted simply by the generic 'woman', which highlights her comparative vulnerability and powerlessness alongside the male justices who are usually identified by their surname and often their title as well. Hale, Elizabeth's best hope, is sympathetic towards her condition as the stepmother of four young children, one blind, whilst only a teenager herself, but is unable to do more than offer procedural advice: 'thou must either apply thyself to the King, or sue out his pardon, or get a writ of error' (Bunyan, 1998: 119). Even this mild suggestion arouses the ire of his fellow justice, Chester. Elizabeth, however, desires action and insofar as this particular account can be trusted performs more effectively and intelligently than the males on the bench, despite her relative powerlessness as a member of the lower classes, a woman and a religious nonconformist. Chester can do no more than idiotically repeat, 'it is recorded, woman, it is recorded', to which Bunyan adds in an acid aside, '[a]s if it must be of necessity be true because it was recorded…having no other argument to convince her….' Elizabeth continues to object that Bunyan 'was not lawfully convicted' (Bunyan, 1998: 118). Sir Thomas Twisden, perhaps aware of the weakness of Chester's gambit in the face of Elizabeth's claims, seeks to undermine her petition on the grounds of social class. Bunyan is dismissed as 'a pestilent fellow', 'a breaker of the peace', and Elizabeth is accused of making 'poverty her cloak'. She responds with simple efficacy, 'Yes…and because he is a Tinker, and a poor man; therefore he is despised, and cannot have justice' (Bunyan, 1998: 119). The account of Elizabeth's performance ends with her 'break[ing] forth into tears, not so much because they were so hard-hearted against me, and my husband, but to think what a sad account such poor creatures will have to give at the coming of the Lord…' (Bunyan, 1998: 120). This eschatological frame of reference, invoking the ultimate divine judgement of God, reduces the patriarchal authority of the bench to a travesty of justice, and leaves Elizabeth on the moral high ground, weeping not for herself, but for the ultimate fate of those that ignored the testimony of God who had 'owned' her husband 'and done much good by him' (Bunyan, 1998: 120).

Elizabeth's dramatic intervention on behalf of her husband was one of the first of the courtroom scenes that were to be enacted again and again by nonconformists following the Restoration. Keeble argues:

> There was something irrepressible to the point of flamboyance about the defiance of these defendants. Court room scenes, with their clearly defined conflict, claustrophobic location and increasing suspense as they move through charge, counter-charge and disclosure to the climatic verdict, are intrinsically dramatic. The accused, casting themselves as the protagonists, conducted themselves very much as actors upon a stage. And, by putting these proceedings swiftly into print, they played before a far wider audience than the 12 men of the jury. Such reports, in which the participants are identified, the dialogue carefully attributed, and the exchanges reproduced *verbatim*, are dramatic texts as animated as, and far more searching and serious than, the staple fare of the Restoration stage (1987: 53).

Bunyan's account of Elizabeth's action, however, was not published until 1765; prior to that it was only available via manuscript circulation – perhaps because of its inflammatory political nature, or possibly because it depicted a woman acting in a way that was inconsistent with Bunyan's own theological convictions.[6] That there was significant disagreement within the nonconformist community – which embraced a reluctant and ill-assorted spectrum ranging from Quaker to Presbyterian – is evident from the fact that one of the latter, Thomas Manton, could indict the behaviour of the former as ostentatious rather than edifying. Manton's critical theological perspective defines the Quaker performance of nonconformity as 'culpably histrionic' reducing legal authority to 'melodramatic absurdity' (cited by Keeble, 1987: 53). Debates about whether or not such dramatic accounts should be published and what constituted an authentic performance of religious nonconformity demonstrate the fluidity and political fervour that inflected the self-identification of dissenting communities in the early years of Charles II's reign and the significance of their performance in the public arenas of courtroom and print.

Elizabeth Bunyan negotiated the complex political terrain of the reconstituted House of Lords and the Midsummer Assizes in Bedford in an attempt to obtain justice for her imprisoned husband. Bunyan's account of her dramatic performance demonstrates her astute deployment of legal argument, her careful attempt to target the most sympathetic audience member amongst the justices, and her strategic enactment of both female weakness – as the teenage stepmother of four children, one blind – and evangelical sorrow – grieving over the spiritual blindness and potential damnation of her male interlocutors. Bunyan's apparent endorsement of Elizabeth's actions also demonstrates that women, even within the most restrictive of nonconformist communities, had a crucial impact on the public performance of nonconformity through their personal intervention in legal and political processes.

Corporate Worship

Their status as exiles at home had a profound impact upon the corporate worship practices of all nonconformists, just as the protection of priests in noble homes and attempts to preserve some aspects of Catholic ritual and worship were crucial to recusant identity and practice after the Protestant Reformation in England. The ways in which nonconformist sects defined

the physical spaces they worshipped in were complex. The abstract concept of such space was inflected both by varying theologies of what constituted the local church together with the practical logistics of worshipping as a group legally proscribed by the civil authorities. As Cynthia Wall notes, space as a concept, due to its historical appearance in London in the aftermath of the Great Fire, began 'a wider cultural moment of more primitive *human* concern'. Her phenomenological approach attempts 'to recover and understand what it might have meant to a tenant or poet of London to suffer the loss of an experiential *given*, to confront the various abrupt intersections and transformations of physically and socially determined spaces' (1998: xiv-xv). Congregationalists and Baptists, amongst others, raised theological objections to a definition of the local church as synonymous with the geographical boundaries of the parish, its spiritual membership consonant with its civil population. For such, the local church was a gathered community of saints – an elect group called out from amongst the general population who covenanted together to form an ecclesial body. The Spirit of God was present wherever his people gathered: this downgraded the importance of a sanctified physical location, though some kind of meeting-place (whether indoors or outside) was obviously required for corporate worship.

Following the Act of Uniformity (1662) and the Five-Mile Act (1665) it became very difficult for nonconformists of all persuasions to meet together, whether officially separatist in their theology – as were the aforementioned Congregationalists and Baptists – or those who continued to hope for some kind of comprehension into the state church, like the Presbyterians. The Fire of London further exacerbated the political dimension of these religious tensions. Despite the ambitious rebuilding programme headed by Sir Christopher Wren, nonconformists had often been more efficient in acquiring or rebuilding spaces for religious worship than their counterparts within the state church. As the *London Gazette* (13-16 June 1670, No. 478) records, Charles II authorized the Church of England to re-appropriate these spaces for the use of legally sanctioned worship. This meant that an already toxic situation was further inflamed as a shared civic disaster was used to justify a partisan undermining of cherished property rights: the state attempted to aggressively write out and physically remove worshipping nonconformists from the city of London.

One of the properties referred to in this notice belonged to the Presbyterian congregation pastored by Thomas Doolittle: 'in *Mugwell-street, Mr. Doolittle's Meeting house*) built of Brick, with three Galleries, full of large Pews, and thirty eight large Pews below, with Locks and Keys to them, besides Benches and Forms' (*London Gazette*, 13-16 June 1670, No. 478). Doolittle had been converted under the powerful Interregnum preaching of Richard Baxter in Kidderminster and was later ordained as a minister. Following his ejection as rector of St Alphage, London Wall, he moved to Moorfields and 'opened his house for boarders'. He instructed children and young people and held conventicles in a variety of locations during the following decade including a house in Bunhill Fields, in Woodford Bridge during the plague of 1665, then in Romford. This was similar in many ways to the activities of the Jesuit Superior in England, Henry Garnet, who rented houses in London that acted as seminaries and shelters for priests from 1587 until his arrest and execution in 1606.[7] After the Fire Doolittle initially set-up a meeting house near his home at Bunhill, but this proved to be too

small and so he erected 'a large and commodious place of worship' in Monkwell Street, St Giles, Cripplegate – that referred to in the *Gazette.* On the evidence provided by Doolittle's will, Mark Burden has suggested that this meeting house 'was built as a consequence of 'Two Leases to me granted by Elizabeth Vaughan of the ground and buildings thereon by me erected…in Mugwell Street where I now dwell' (TNA, PRO, PROB 11/495/318). The Lord Mayor tried and failed to persuade Doolittle to stop preaching; soldiers were sent to arrest him, beating down the door, but neither this, nor a second attempt in May 1670 was successful (Burden, 2013: 141-2). However, it does provide the background context for the state church's appropriation of the property: violence on the authority of the royal prerogative contravened rights established by law.

Wall notes that this persecution had important implications for the ways in which nonconformists experienced the physical and cultural space of London, as well as their meeting houses, arguing that they

> had to occupy space differently. The legal and social pressures to be quiet, private, and concealed, meant that Dissenting ministers moved their congregations into *other* public and private spaces, but occupied those spaces secretly. Schoolrooms, warehouses, public buildings, and barns supplied continually shifting premises as each new location was betrayed and exposed. Pinners' Hall, for example, in Pinners'-Hall-Court, Old Broad Street, where Samuel Annesley…later preached, and where Defoe in 1681 transcribed six sermons of John Collins, was variously rented out to several congregations on Saturdays and Sundays, and, when not in use by the Pinners' Company, also during the week. Dissenting spaces belonged to someone else; they were borrowed, contingent, temporary, unreliable (1998: 187).

This perpetual harassment and deliberate exclusion from politics and religion in the public sphere impacted upon the way in which nonconformist groups or congregations constructed their corporate identity and enhanced the sense that they were exiles in the wilderness of Restoration England longing for home. The most famous literary expression of this is, of course, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with its solitary opening: 'As I walk'd through the Wilderness of this World…' (1678: A7r). Though the corporate dimension of this exilic pilgrimage is more consistently depicted in Part II, Christian and Faithful's journey through Vanity Fair, and the incomprehension and hostility of its inhabitants, vividly captures aspects of nonconformist religious experience (whether in London or Bedford): 'And as they wondred at their *Apparel*, so they did likewise at their *Speech*; they naturally spoke the Language of *Canaan*; But they that kept the *Fair*, were the men of this world: So that from one end of the *Fair* to the other, they seemed *Barbarians* each to the other' (Bunyan, 1678: G10r).

Itinerant Preaching

As Bunyan's linguistic and cultural metaphor makes clear, the nonconformist experience of internal exile, or exclusion from officially sanctioned political and religious spheres, paradoxically created its own sense of community. Though there was an increasingly complex diversity of devotional groupings and literary practices amongst nonconformists after the Restoration, the necessity of itinerant preaching in order to meet the spiritual needs

of those who were dissatisfied with their parish church, to try and avoid consistent fines, and to fulfil the evangelical imperative to proclaim the gospel, was shared across groups as diverse as Presbyterians, Particular Baptists and Quakers. The sermon was a corporate event – it could occur in prisons, where a minister might be incarcerated with a significant proportion of his congregation (as was the case with Joseph Alleine), within a domestic house (as Baxter practised in Acton following the parish church service), or in the streets and fields to try and avoid informers. Such events were memorialized in biographies designed to edify, encourage and challenge the next generation of nonconformists. As Baxter writes in his preface to the collaborative biography of Joseph Alleine: 'In the Lives of Holy men we see Gods Image, and the Beauties of Holiness, not only in Precept, but in Reality and Practice; not *Pictured*, but in the *Substance*…' (Alleine, 1671: B1v-B2r). In his preface to his biography of his wife, Baxter is even more explicit about the apologetic, pastoral and entertainment value of history as a genre: '*…finding young people naturally much delighted in History, and that for want of better, abundance are quickly corrupted and ensnared by Tale-books, Romances, Play-books, and false or hurtful History, I have long thought that true and useful History is of great use to prevent such evils, and to many profitable ends…*' (Baxter, 1681: A2r-A2v). It is in this generic context that Theodosia Alleine recounts her husband's 'parting Counsels' given to 'many of his Flock confined to the Prison with him'. She notes, 'I shall Recite in his own Words, as they were taken from his Mouth in Short-hand, by an intimate Friend, and fellow Prisoner' (1671: F1v-F2r). Inset into her biographical account is the text of this prison sermon.

Though not all nonconformists who engaged in itinerant preaching ended up in prison, the constant threat posed by informers shaped the ways in which they exercised their ministry. Owen Stockton, a nonconformist minister in Chattisham, Suffolk, records in his writing-book that he had been asked by 'Mr B' to preach at White Colne on 15 October, 1665. However, as he prepared to leave on the Saturday, 'H. P. came in [and] told us that the soldiers had seazed Mr B imprisoned him and it would not be safe for me to go at that season'. His friends advised him not to go, and one of his children held him 'in an unusual manner crying & would by no means be pacifyed, saying the troopers would kill me'. Despite eventually taking their advice, as he had 'been very lately sought after by name by the soldiers in those parts', Stockton 'was under much despondency of spirit for missing such an opportunity of service'. It was not until he read Matthew 16:20 in his devotions that evening that he received some ease, noting 'I observed, that the divulging of the most necessary truths was at some seasons…prohibited by Jesus Christ' (Stockton cited by Schildt, 2008: 198). As Jeremy Schildt comments, Stockton's experience of such difficulties in attempting to fulfil his vocation as a minister led him to write and publish. Drawing on the precedent of an Old Testament prophet, Stockton writes: 'I observed that when Jeremiah was shut up & could not come forth to preach he caused Baruck to write the words that he had from the Lord & publish them to the people….I saw from hence when we were hindered from preaching, we might do good by writing' (cited by Schildt, 2008: 199). This is a refrain that was echoed by many ejected ministers and parallels the way in which the culture of print acted as an 'imperfect proxy and deputy' in the absence of priests enabling the policies of the Council of Trent to shape the worship of English Catholic laity (Walsham, 2000: 121).

Gender also influenced how nonconformists delivered what they believed was a divinely inspired message following the Restoration. For example, the schismatic Particular Baptist, Anne Wentworth, initially attempted to commit the messages she received from God to writing in her manuscript book. However, her husband, William, was deeply concerned by his wife's prophetic activity: 'in a most cruel manner' he hindered Wentworth 'from performing' the commands of her heavenly bridegroom by 'seizing, and running away with [her] Writings' (Wentworth, *Vindication*: A3r). Her recovery from what appears, in her own account, to be domestic abuse, and rejection by her Baptist congregation in London, radicalized her public stance and led her to write a series of printed pamphlets and manuscript letters to those in authority – including the Lord Mayor of London and Charles II – in order to ensure her apocalyptic message reached its intended audience.

Letter Writing

I discussed the letters exchanged between Robert and Mary Franklin during the former's imprisonment in some detail earlier. In many ways letters are the genre that best exemplify the history and development of the nonconformist community in exile at home. Letters demonstrate nonconformists' shared identity and vision, as well as the tensions and controversies generated and confronted by community members. Letters could be intercepted, censored, and used as grounds for prosecution.[8] However, writing and receiving them was crucial in creating and maintaining interconnections between exiles at home, enabling congregations to retain a corporate identity through correspondence with their ejected ministers, and virtual communities to be established between nonconformists throughout the country who embraced the same religious vision but could no longer meet in a shared physical space with ease. Letter writing also enabled the complexities of the Restoration religious settlement and the cases of conscience it created for ministers, as well as lay people, to be worked through as they sought to negotiate how to fulfil the biblical commands to gather together in public worship (Hebrews 10:25), to honour those in authority (Romans 13:1-7), and to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33), whilst exiled from the public sphere due to legislation enacted by the Cavalier Parliament.

Mary and Robert Franklin's correspondence demonstrates the importance of letter writing in maintaining a companionate marriage, spiritual resolution, and management of practical affairs between husband and wife when the former was imprisoned for his nonconformist principles. Similarly, it was an essential literary genre deployed by ministers separated from their congregations, either through ejection, imprisonment, or both. As Theodosia Alleine noted of her husband, Joseph, 'although he had many of his Flock confined to the Prison with him, by which means he had the fairer Opportunity of Instructing, and Watching over them, for their Spiritual good; yet he was not forgetful of the rest that were left behind, but would frequently visit them also, by his Letters, full of serious profitable Matter, from which they might Reap no small benefit, while they were debarred of his Bodily presence' (1671: F1v). Like Stockton, when he could not preach or undertake pastoral visits, Alleine sought to do good by writing.

However, the most significant archive of correspondence revealing the critical role that letter

writing played in maintaining relationships and setting up a series of interconnected communities of ejected ministers and nonconformist congregations is that of the eminent dissenter, Richard Baxter. There are approximately thirteen hundred letters exchanged with around three hundred and fifty correspondents; the largest single group are some seventy ministers in his epistolary network that became nonconformists following the Restoration (Keeble & Nuttall, 1991, Vol. 1: xxv). The letters demonstrate the ways in which Baxter and his clerical colleagues negotiated the ecclesiastical, political and financial implications of the Act of Uniformity (1662) that effectively rendered them exiles at home. The correspondence also demonstrates how the emerging cultures of nonconformity were shaped, interrogated and defined through epistolary exchange. The shared experience of involuntary exile did not entail homogeneity and the diverse nature of religious dissent is represented in the variety of convictions held by Baxter's correspondents. These included, for example, the Presbyterians, William Bates and Thomas Manton, the Independents, Philip Nye and John Owen, the Baptist, John Tombes, and the Quaker, William Penn (Keeble & Nuttall, 1991, Vol. 1: xxvi). The letter was absolutely central, generically, textually and materially, in fostering an epistolary community that was by turns, spiritually nourishing, intellectually curious, inherently disputatious, persecuted, fissured, but irrevocably and influentially literate.

To take several instances: Thomas Manton invited Baxter to re-engage in discussions as to whether a scheme of comprehension could be established that would allow moderate nonconformists to rejoin the national church. Baxter, however, refused. On 17 February, 1670, he stated that it would require 'going to Acton to search among my confused Scripts' and added – though these words were deleted later – 'if I do without the leave of his Ma[jesty]; I must expect to go to prison; And I doubt whether if I stay so long in London as that busynes requireth, without leave, it will not be an offense' (Keeble & Nuttall, 1991, Vol. 2: 84-5). John Tombes, who challenged Baxter's position on infant baptism wrote on 22 August 1670 that 'either hate or some other distemper' must have prompted Baxter's letter to him. 'I know no reason why you should turn me off to them [i.e. William Allen and Thomas Lambe] unless you thought me so below your self as that it would be a disparagement to you to condescend to any motion of mine, or thought your writings so infallible as that they neede not a reexamination'. Tombes observes further that 'there is too much of your sceptical and unbrotherly spirit, which you shewed in the dispute at Bewdley [1 January 1649]' (Keeble & Nuttall, 1991, Vol. 2: 98-9). This demonstrates how the tensions and controversies that divided Protestants during the Interregnum could continue to shape the epistolary culture and sectarian groupings within nonconformity decades later. However, letters also enabled the formation of a spiritual community that could transcend the distinction between those who embraced a separatist ecclesiology and others, like Baxter, who favoured comprehension. Baxter's letter to Barbara Lambe (married to Thomas, mentioned above) on 22 August 1658 indicates this. He writes: 'unacquaintedness with the Face is no hindrance to the Communion of the Saints….I have an inward sense in my Soul, that told me so feelingly in the reading of your Lines, that your Husband, and you, and I are one in our dear Lord, that if all the self-conceited Dividers in the World should contradict it on the account of Baptism, I could not believe them' (Keeble & Nuttall, 1991, Vol. 1: 332-33).

Conclusion

Bhabha describes the invasion of the personal sphere by the public world as an 'unhomely' moment: the boundaries between home and world become confused. 'Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy' (1994: 19). In many ways, with due recognition to the anachronism inherent in an opposition between public and private in the early modern period, Bhabha's concept of the 'unhomely' captures the identity of nonconformists who found themselves political and religious exiles in their own country. The case studies examined here indicate that nonconformists experienced a significant degree of community in exclusion. However, it is important to note too the increasingly complex diversity of devotional groupings and literary practices amongst nonconformists after the Restoration. Sharing the experience of nonconformity, or exile at home, could create a sense of spiritual kinship, but this was not necessarily the case, as Baxter's very different relationships with several Baptists (the Lambes, Allen, and Tombes) indicate. Similarly, Mary Franklin's journal documents a less spiritually acquiescent and more somatic literary examination of the stillbirth of her first child during Robert's imprisonment than that created and shared in her correspondence with him.

This chapter has analyzed the ways that the various environments within which nonconformity was practised – gaols, homes, streets, courts, other public buildings, families and, indeed, the human body – influenced the creation and reception of religious or devotional texts. It has traced the history of the community with its shared identity and vision, as well as the tensions and controversies generated and confronted by various members. The spiritual experiences constructed in and through texts such as letters, sermons and journals written and shared while in exile at home were a powerful factor in the formation of nonconformist communities between 1662 and 1689. However, as the different literary responses to death and persecution recorded by husbands and wives who shared the same convictions indicate, the religious fervour that led to exile at home was also an intensely private phenomenon.

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I am grateful to Drs Rebecca McNamara, Ian O'Harae, Penelope Woods and Helen Young for feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

[1] 'We hold that seeing there is not any man of the Church of England, but the same man is also a member of the Commonwealth, nor any man a member of the Commonwealth which is not also of the Church of England….' Richard Hooker cited by A. S. McGrade, ed., *Hooker – Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 130.

[2]Poole notes further: 'While *Hudibras* begins with the comic partnership of the antithetical Presbyterian and Independent, by the end of the poem the distinction has nearly vanished. By merging together Presbyterians and Anabaptists, Butler recasts the multi-headed conflict of the civil wars into a polarized comparison: all those opposed to episcopacy are grouped together as dissenters. The saga begins to be told in terms which lend themselves to a labeling of "Puritans" and "Anglicans" (185).

[3] Congregational Library MS I.h.33. It is interesting to note in this context that her granddaughter used the same manuscript book to record her own experiences in the eighteenth century because she could not afford to purchase new paper. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Congregational Library for permission to quote from the manuscripts in their possession.

[4] *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr John Bunyan, Minister of the Gospel at Bedford, in November, 1660* (London, 1765). For further discussion of the textual history of *A Relation* see Roger Sharrock, 'The Origin of *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr John Bunyan*', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 10 (1959), 250-6. See also Beth Lynch, *John Bunyan and the Language of Conviction* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 23-33.

[5] See also Tasmin Spargo's discussion of this issue in *The Writing of John Bunyan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 40.

[6] For further discussion of this point and debate as to the extent to which Bunyan endorsed his wife's actions on his behalf see Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 145 and Spargo, 40, 85-7.

[7] See, for example, the record of his activity in 1594 in Thomas M. McCoog, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1589-1597: Building the Faith of Saint Peter Upon the King of Spain's Monarchy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 162-4.

[8] See, for example, the postscript to Baxter's letter to John Humfrey (probably sent early in 1669), where he notes: 'I had many more things to have said, & you may see my folly in putting this much into your hand, when I know not who may see it, or what use may be made of it'. N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), Vol. 2, 68 [Letter 766].