"THERE IN EFFIGIES ARE THEY SENT TO HELL": THE POPE-BURNING PROCESSION AS INDICATIVE OF ENGLISH CULTURAL VALUES.

Patrick Harris

> In that place where the *Fire* made a stand,
> Which was *Inkindled* by their *Flaming Brand*:
> Where all its *Rage* in *Smoky Ashes* fell,
> There in *Effigies* are *They* sent to *Hell*:[1]

The above passage represents the climax of the famous Pope-burning procession at Temple-Bar on November 17th, 1679. Such a grand celebratory display of anti-Catholic sentiment had not been seen before or since in London. But what was the mass mood behind this sentiment, what gave rise to it, and what did it mean for the English people? The strange circumstances behind the murder of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey and the revelation of a supposed Popish Plot against the government, the recent marriage of James VII to the Catholic Mary of Modena, and the persecution of nonconformist Protestants by Charles II all helped stimulate the fervor behind the public display.[2] However, anti-Catholic sentiment can be traced back to that initial break of England from the Roman Church, which in turn raises the question about the relationship between anti-Catholicism and English nationalism. However, my argument is not just that Protestantism is an essential part of English national identity as conceived by the masses at large in early modern times, but that there are certain fundamental differences between English concepts of authority, or to use David Sabean's term–*herrschaft*,

and those of the Catholic Church. This ideological rift is at the core of anti-Catholicism in England. Using a micro-historical style of approach, I will attempt to prove this point by giving a close examination of the Pope-burning procession of 1679 in London, as well as by examining certain types of popular literature, and I will also attempt to show how anti-Catholic sentiment and its display are indicative of English values and an English *mentalite*.

Though the Pope-burning procession was a cultural display, the impetus behind it was essentially political. As briefly mentioned above, there had been a number of recent events that helped rekindle paranoia about Catholics. One pamphlet reads:

> there hath been, and still is a most cunning, strong, execrable Conspiracy contrived at Rome: And for many years together most vigorously pursued in *England* will all industry, policy, and subtilty, by many active and potent Confederates of all sorts, to subvert the Government, to re-establish Popery, and to destroy the Protestant Religion.[3]

Parliament was certainly not immune to such feelings as their debates from the time show. Parliament member Colonel Birch remarked, "Nothing can stand against a popish design when ripe."[4] The Whigs were capitalizing on this feeling by launching an extensive mass media campaign to exploit such feelings.[5] Tim Harris states the Whigs:

> managed to saturate the market with both printed and published materials reflecting their interpretation of political developments…whilst they also developed a sophisticated distribution network to ensure that their

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[1]*A Poem on the Burning of the Pope*, (London: 1679).

[2]Tim Harris, "The Parties and the People: the Press, the Crowd, and Politics 'Out-of-doors' in Restoration England," in *The Reigns of Charles II and James the VII and II*, ed. by Lionel K.J. Glassy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 130; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calender in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 175.

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[3]*The True Protestants Watch-Word* (London: 1679), 1.

[4]"Members of Parliament's Speeches on Religion (1674-8)" from *Sources and Debates in English History 1485-1714*, ed. by Newton Key and Robert Bucholz (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 244.

[5]Tim Harris, *Politics under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715* (London: Longman, 1993), 125.

propaganda reached as broad a geographical and social base as possible.[6]

Here, one may raise the issue of literacy, or the lack thereof, and question how effective such a campaign may have been. However, if one considers the arguments of Barry Reay in *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* one realizes that sentiments initially written can reach far beyond the literate public. Therefore, judging by the amount of participation in the Pope-burning procession, "by a modest computation it is judged there could not be less then Two Hundred Thousand Spectators," as well as that, "so many came in Voluntiers, as made the number to be several Thousands,"[7] one can confidently say that the Whig campaign was largely effective.

With so successful a campaign, the Whigs were able to mobilize enough support to put on a grand display. David Cressy relates, "Young people paraded diabolic and papal effigies, and called at the houses of eminent persons demanding money. The exchange of coins linked the crowd with the elite, and turned selected merchants and gentleman into informal sponsors of the processions."[8] Of course, one may question Cressy's conclusion that these elite figures were in fact only "informal" sponsors, especially if they could be linked with the Whig party itself. In a sense, the Whig campaign at this point had already come full circle by influencing the young people to come back to them and ask for sponsorship. In addition, artisans and apprentices were constructing figures and floats to be used in the procession.[9] This mobilization of apprentices was especially important because some of them would be the future civic leaders of the community.[10] One could say that the Whigs

were not only looking to influence, but also initiate the young into their fold. This particular type of appeal to the commoners is especially important in establishing the idea of an English *mentalite* for reasons that will be elucidated later.

On the evening of November 17th, the procession began: 1. First marched six Whisslers in Pioneer Caps and Red Wastcoats. 2. Bellman ringing his Bell, and with a dolesome voice, crying all the way, *Remember Justice* Godfrey. 3. A dead Body representing Justice *Godfrey* in the habit he usually wore, and the *Crevat* wherewith he was murdered…4. A Priest came next in a Surplice, and Cope imbroidered with Dead mens *Sculls* and *Bones*, and *Skeletons*, who gave out Pardons plentifully to all that would murder *Protestants*, and proclaiming it *Meritorious*. 5. A Priest alone with a large Silver Cross. 6. Four *Carmelite Fryars* in White and Black Habits. 7. Four *Grey Fryars* in their proper Habits. 8. Six *Jesuits* carrying bloody Daggers. 9. Four wind-Musick, called the *Waits*, playing all the way. 10. Four *Bishops* in Purple…11. Four other Bishops in their *Pontificalibus…*12. Six Cardinals in Scarlet Robes and Caps. 13. Then followed the Popes Chief Physician with *Jesuits* powder in one hand, and an Urinal in the other. 14. Two Priests with Surplices, with Two Golden Crosses. Lastly, the *Pope* in a Glorious Pageant, or Chair of State, covered with Scarlet…at his feet was a Cushion of State, and Two Boys sate on each side of the Pope, in Surplices with White Silk banners, painted with Red Crosses, and bloody Consecrated Daggers for murdering *Protestant* Kings and Princes…at his Back stood the Devil, *His Holiness* Privy Councillor, Hugging and Whispering, him all the way, and oftentimes instructing him aloud to destroy His Majesty.[11]

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[6]Harris, *Politics under the Later Stuarts,* 205.

[7]*An Account of the Burning of the Pope at Temple-Bar* (London: 1679).

[8]Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 181.

[9]Alexander Dove, "The Autumn Celebrations of the Ritual Calender in the later-Stuart Period," Master's Thesis, Eastern Illinois University, 1997, 61.

[10]Tim Harris, "Perceptions of the crowd in Later Stuart London," *Imagining Early Modern London*, J.F. Merritt, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2001), 259.

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[11]*An Account of the Burning of the Pope at Temple-bar;* see appendix A for image.

The account relates further that, "Never were the Balconies, Windows and Houses more filled, nor the Streets more thronged with multitudes of People, all expressing their Abhorrence of Popery." The procession ended at Temple-Bar where four statues representing Kings Charles I and II, James I, and Queen Elizabeth with a Golden Shield inscribed with the words "The Protestant Religion and Magna Carta." There the effigies of the Pope and the Devil were burned, followed by fireworks and bonfires in general celebration throughout the streets of London.[12]

Tim Harris states that the procession represented a mock papal coronation ceremony.[13] The procession also traces the murder of Sir Godrey back to the Pope and even the Devil himself. But the most compelling symbolism is at the end of the procession where the effigies are burned in front of the statues of the former monarchs and the inscriptions of *The Protestant Religion* and *Magna Carta*. This symbol juxtaposes Catholicism with figures that represent English cultural values—the autonomy of England as represented by the monarchs and republican values as symbolized by the Magna Carta. Also, the symbolism of fire is important in the context that it mocks the burning of Protestants by Mary Tudor and the burning of London by Catholic conspirators, also perhaps with an allusion to Guy Fawkes' foiled plot to blow-up Parliament.

In order to know the true significance of these symbols, one must understand how these symbols were appropriated by the different types of people participating in the procession. The organizers of the procession were very conscious of the images they were using. Tim Harris states that the procession had a triple function for the Whigs: to satirize Catholicism, narrate the Popish Plot, and condemn those who were hostile to the Whigs.[14]

They were also very conscious as to who they were expressing this symbolism. The procession took a route with a heavy concentration of non-conformist Protestants—a route taken by no other civic ritual.[15] However, I do not wish to focus on the aspect of popular manipulation by the Whigs here. I would rather examine the idea of why the Whigs believed it necessary to rally popular support, and why their propaganda was so effective amongst the masses. David Cressy states that, "The London processions were designed to impress members of Parliament and to intimidate the Court."[16] However, this view is contradicted by the fact that, "Most literary and political figures in the period harbored none but ill feelings toward the masses,"[17] and that, "if the pope-burnings were…massive expressions of popular feeling, they had little or no coercive influence on a government that was determined to ignore them."[18] Therefore, though the Whigs were successful at mobilizing the masses, they were not so successful in influencing the elite. This fact is further proved when one considers once the processions began to lose their appeal for the masses, they began to be suppressed by the authorities who, though previously would have found it difficult to suppress over two hundred thousand people, once the numbers declined, were quick to assert themselves.

But, the fact that the Whigs were trying for popular appeal in a language the masses could understand in order to establish their legitimacy in the eyes of the elites is extremely important. "To be legitimate, they [the Whigs] felt, government had to rule in accordance with the wishes of the people."[19] And as the work of E.P. Thompson suggests, this was a view that was also shared by the masses at large. The contemporary accounts of this

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[12]Ibid.

[13]Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 103.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., 121.

[16]Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 180-1.

[17]Michael A. Seidel, "The Restoration Mob: Drones and Dregs," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 12, no. 3 (Summer, 1972): 430.

[18]John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1688* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 184.

[19]Harris, "The Parties and the People," 135.

particular Pope-burning procession reveal this idea in the language praising Queen Elizabeth for taking into account the will of the people which consequently endeared her to them. For example, in the introduction to an account of the 1679 procession:

> If we may inquire by what *Charms* she Conciliated this *Universal Renown*, we shall find it was not by any *Sham-Maximes* of little *Matchivellian Policy*, but by those of truly Royal Qualifications of Generous *Honour*, *Clemency*, *Justice*, and *Love* towards Her People, particularly in firm Relyance on their *Advice* in *Parliament*.[20]

With Elizabeth's Honor, Clemency, and Justice, one begins to gain a sense of the English *mentalite*. In his article, "The Mystery of Property," Alan Marfarlane states that England was "an island of common law and a powerful, but not absolutist, state where the crown was ultimately beneath and not above the law."[21] He goes on to argue that it is the relative security that living on an island provides which gives the commoners more confidence in asserting themselves against state authority.

So how is this *mentalite* indicated by the Pope-burning procession of 1679? First, let us look at the idea of anti-Catholicism. As stated previously, there is something unappealing about the power structure of Catholicism to the English people, which is perhaps why England was able to escape the violence schism created in other countries such as France. Catholicism is a centralized, authoritarian religion, with dogma being dictated solely from above. If one takes Macfarlane's ideas into account, one can see why such a structure, and especially an idea like infallibility, goes against English sensibility. Consider the following satirical passage from the balled *An Invitation to Popery* from 1674:

> As for matters of faith,
> believe what the Church saith,
> But for Scripture, leave that to the Learned:
> For these are edge tools, and you Laymen are fools,
> If you touch them y'are sure to be harmed.[22]

In a culture where the commoners are confident to assert themselves, it is no wonder why Protestantism, with its shift to a more individualistic understanding of the Bible, was able to root itself so strongly. The Catholic system of organization seems fundamentally opposed to the English *mentalite*.

One may question how conscious the crowd at the Pope-burning procession was of such issues. Undoubtedly, the circulation of popular literature and the oral tradition did have an effect on raising awareness of these fundamental differences. But, let us also consider the act of the procession itself as both a festive ritual and also as a sort of charivari. One may argue that in the minds of the crowd the procession was just a part of the festive nationalistic celebrations associated with Queen Elizabeth's coronation day and did not have any deeper cultural significance for them; in other words, that the procession was purely nationalistic in nature and not a larger statement against absolutism. It is true that much of the language in the popular literature indicates more concrete reasons for anti-Catholic sentiment, most namely the seemingly perpetual attempts by Catholics to overthrow the English government. Barry Reay states, "civic rituals were secular morality plays where the virtues of order, loyalty to the monarch, civic and guild pride were impressed through dramaturgy and spectacle,"[23] however, the necessity for these rituals themselves seems rooted in republican ideals when Reay also relates that Charles I in his "failure to exercise this cultural representation of political authority…weakened his charisma and hence his control of

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[20]*London's Defiance of Rome* (London: 1679), 1.

[21]Alan Macfarlane, "The mystery of property: inheritance and industrial-izetion in England and Japan," [alanmacfarlane.com], 116.

[22]*The Catholick Ballad: or an Invitation to Popery* (London: for Henry Brome at the Gun at the West-end of St. Paul's Church-yard, 1674).

[23]Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), 147.

London."[24] Therefore, it is the act of the procession itself that is the representation of the English *mentalite.* The sponsorship of such exhibitions on festive calendar days was necessary for the legitimization of authority. The Whigs probably understood this since it was in line with their ideology, which is why their appeal to popular sentiment is also indicative of the English *mentalite.* Legitimization by the public was not just an idea held by the public itself but also realized by the elites who sought the public's favor.

The assertion of public opinion can be seen further by viewing this Pope-burning as a sort of charivari. Charivaris were public assertions of popular values and could be viewed as vigilantism when directed at particular individuals. But, the prevalence of these rituals is indicative of the English view that one must conform to popular opinion. Therefore, the fact that a charivari was used to express the rejection of Catholicism is symbolic in and of itself. And this was a charivari. The aspects that particularly make it such are the use of rough music and the inversion of symbols; rough music itself was a satiric inversion.[25] The overall mockery of Church officials and the Pope, effigy burning, along with the inversion of the use of fire itself are all aspects of a charivari. Reay and Thompson also allude to the issue of the charivari as displaced violence. The procession of 1679 seems to fit this aspect especially if one considers that later, when Pope-burning processions were suppressed, actual violence against Catholics and Catholic symbols occurred.[26] The main issue here though, is that a charivari is a public assertion of the public's authority and values; this is what connects it to the English *mentalite.*

This conclusion is problematic however if one takes into account that charivaris are not solely an English phenomenon. France, Germany, Italy, and later the United States had their own versions of these rituals.[27] However, this does not necessarily contradict the idea of public assertion of a popular moral consensus, it may be better developed in England, but a comparative study is necessary to prove this. We must also distinguish between absolute authority coming from a singular individual and a sort of absolute authority coming from the public body. It is this latter form of absolutism that seems to embody the English *mentalite.* This is a key idea when thinking of where individual rights fall in the view of the English masses. The complaint against Catholicism is not that it suppresses individual autonomy, but that it does not allow space for public opinion. Individualism seemingly has little to do with the English *mentalite* of this time and actually may be in contradiction to it. Conformity to the consensus of public opinion seems to be the value held above all by the English public—it is an absolutism of the masses.

The commoners were not afraid to assert themselves in the face of higher authority either. E.P. Thompson, in his important work, "Moral Economy of the Crowd," rejects a spasmodic view of riot as applied to early modern England, and points to the fact that the crowd was willing to assert its own idea of what was "right" when powerful figures attempted to exploit market conditions. These ideas can be directly applied to the Pope-burning procession. The spasmodic schema would suggest that size and fervor of the procession resulted directly from Whig manipulation of the political circumstances of the time. But, I would choose a Thompson-like interpretation in that, I would agree that the political circumstances had an effect on the size of the procession, but there were also deeper cultural sensibilities being displayed by the crowd itself. Suzanne Desan criticized Thompson's "Moral Economy" by stating that he did not focus at all on the individual motives of those within the crowd.[28] But

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[24]Ibid., 143.

[25]E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: the New Press, 1993), 469.

[26]Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 182-3.

[27]Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 467,470.

[28]Suzanne Desan, "Crowds, Community and Ritual in the Work of E.P. Thompson and Natalie Davis," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. by Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 60.

if, as argued above, popular consensus is one of the most highly held values by the English masses, though individual motives certainly come into play, we are dealing with popular mobilization and the mentality of the crowd at large, and not selfish individual motivation. Also, individual motivations must be in line with the motivations of the crowd or else the individual risks being ostracized perhaps even through a charivari.

Once the accusations of the Popish Plot had begun to be seen as less than credible, the Whigs lost some of their support and the Pope-burning processions lost some of their appeal. The Tories capitalized on this by launching a media campaign of their own and responded to the Pope-burnings with Jack Presbyter burnings in mockery of the Whig celebration. One Tory pamphlet reads:

Jack Presbyter's up, And hopes at one Swoop,
To swallow *King, Bishop*, and All-a:
The *Miter* and *Crown*, Must both tumble down,
Or the Kingdom he tells you will Fall-a.[29]

While the Whigs were emphasizing the attachment to liberty and Parliament, the Tories sought to emphasize duty and loyalty.[30] However, one value the Whigs and the Tories had in common was the contempt for the arbitrary dictation of religion. Again, it is the placement of religious authority into one person or one body without public consent that was the crime. This idea coincides with the English *mentalite.* Also, coinciding with this *mentalite* was the appeal for popular sentiment by the Tories. However, a problem may occur when one looks to the Tory idea of loyalty to the monarch. Is this not a form of appeal to absolutism? This problem can be reconciled when one considers that the monarch is a figure-head and an embodiment of English values, and if the monarch strays from the popular values, the masses are indeed willing to assert themselves. Queen Elizabeth was brilliant in her public displays which helped legitimize her

rule in the eyes of the masses. While, as previously stated, Charles I, by not appealing to the public in such a way, contributed to his own downfall. Later, James II would suffer a similar fate.

Barry Reay asked the question whether there was an English culture as opposed to English cultures in early modern times. By attempting to establish the idea of an English *mentalite,* I would argue the former. Reay stated that cultures could be draw upon lines of class, occupation, and geography. In terms of my argument, geography may not be applied since I deal only with the procession of London though Pope-burning processions occurred in a multitude of regions. Concerning occupations, political figures helped to organize the procession, artisans and apprentices help build the props, and the lower classes participated in the celebration. But the most compelling argument for a singular culture comes from the shared values across class lines. As I had mentioned, the need for public legitimization was a value held by all levels of society. The Whigs and the Tories battled for the hearts of the masses because they knew if they had the public then they had the power. This is also the reason why Catholicism ultimately failed in England and why it was subject to such ridicule. Furthermore, Catholicism implies duel loyalty—loyalty to the Pope as well as to the state. But in a society where conformity to popular opinion is held most high, such a division of loyalties would naturally raise suspicion. This is why I used the term absolutism of the masses, because there seems to be little room for individuality within such a society. Either one conforms to popular opinion or one is ostracized; it does not matter if one is a commoner or a monarch. If one is not legitimized in the eyes of the public then one is doomed to humiliation. Therefore, I feel confident in saying that the idea of popular consensus as the ultimate authority is at the heart of the English *mentalite.*

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[29]*The Present State of England* (Edinburgh: 1681, reprinted London: 1681).
[30]Harris, "Perceptions of the crowd in Later Stuart London," 265.