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'Bad Catholics': Anti-Popery in *This is a Short Relation* (Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, 1662)

Catie Gill, Department of English and Drama, Loughborough University

Abstract:

This article explores how two Quaker women who were imprisoned by the Italian Inquisition encoded their critique of Roman Catholicism into their prison narrative. Quaker writing is typically antinomian and antiauthoritarian when discussing the imprisonment of Friends for religious crimes, and these two women follow this bold approach. Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers employ words and signs to indicate the extent of their resistance to their warders' desires to convert them to Catholicism. Yet their text, *This is a Short Relation*, is also unusual in its obliqueness. In this article, I argue that there is a complex relation between speech and act, between censorship and the Quaker women's desire to critique the prison system, its interrogators, and the Catholic faith. The result is a text that shows the Quaker message is conveyed as much through non-verbal signification on the one hand, and highly encrypted language on the other, as it is through the self-evidently critical accounts of the Roman faith which are a part of the literal meaning of the text. The women reveal, as a result, how internalised is the understanding of sacrifice and, moreover, the degree to which censorship, isolation, and fear of repercussion, has affected them.

Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers were imprisoned by the Italian Inquisition after preaching Quaker ideas on the island of Malta.¹ Theirs was a lengthy sentence and full of hardship. Cramped conditions, limited food – the inquisition's treatment of the

¹ Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, *This is a Short Relation of Some of the Cruel Sufferings* (London: Robert Wilson, 1662). This is the second edition. All subsequent references are to this edition, and will be given in parenthesis. Critical accounts of the text can be found in: Elspeth Graham, "'Oppression makes a wise man mad": The Suffering of the Self in Autobiographical Tradition', in Henk Dragstra (et al, ed.), *Betraying Ourselves: Forms of Self-Representation in Early Modern English Texts* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 197-214; Mary Ann Schofield, "'Women's Speaking Justified": Feminine Quaker Voice 1662-1797', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6:1 (1987), 61-77; Rachel Warburton, "'The Lord hath Joined us Together, and Wo be to them that should Part us": Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers as Travelling Friends', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 47:4 (1995), 402-424; Henry J. Cadbury, 'Friends and the Inquisition at Malta', *JFHS*, 53.3 (1974), 219-225; Rosemary Kegl, 'Women's Preaching, Absolute Property, and the Cruel Sufferings (For the Truth's Sake) of Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers', *Women's Studies*, 24 (1994), 51-83. Catherine Gray, *Women Writers and the Public Debate in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

women lead them to observe on one occasion that their ‘burdens’ were ‘very heavy’ (p. 27). The Maltese prison system gave authority to people who clearly had little sympathy towards these two Quaker women. Their warders were Catholic Friars who, driven by dictates from Rome, sought to counter religious heterogeneity by imprisoning people whose ideas differed from their own, threatening with execution those who did not align themselves to the Catholic faith.² Inquisitorial practices were archaic: a remnant of the medieval church. And they were intrusive. Historically, the practice of interrogation could be lengthy, and whether or not it involved torture the aim clearly was to break down the prisoner’s defences so that ultimately he or she no longer had the strength to maintain anti-Catholic beliefs. Even though the more invasive and capital punishments for heresy were on the decline during the later part of the seventeenth century, the belief that inquisitors acted for the sake of God to protect their faith was still vociferously asserted. The Quaker women, Evans and Cheevers, were, in line with this approach, tested by the interrogators over several days’ doctrinal dispute and therefore observed ‘we could take little rest day or night sometimes’ (p. 36). They were also subjected to the kinds of techniques that might have worn down less resilient souls: their prison cell was tiny, airless, they were separated from each other for the majority of their sentence, and, in addition, when these techniques did not work, the women were threatened both with torture and with execution. ‘They said, *they would give us over to the Devil to be tormented, and deliver us over to their bad Catholics*’: though this may essentially have been a hollow threat, their survival is still a remarkable tale of human endurance (p. 37).

When the fragmentary, collaboratively-authored, account of their imprisonment was published in 1662, the women were still in prison. Fifty years later, in 1715, a composite edition was published, which was a pieced-together collection of 1662’s *This is a Short Relation* with two other Evans and Cheevers-authored texts,

² Most relevant to the women’s case is Andrew P. Vella, *The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta* (Royal University of Malta, 1964), pp. 31-37. Henry Kamen, *The Inquisition and Society in Spain* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985); Stephen Haliczer, ed. and transl, *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987); Owen Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); De Lamar Jensen, *Reformation Europe: Age of Reform and Revolution* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Co, 1992); Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter-Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972); John Tedeschi and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe: Studies on Sources and Methods* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).

and with the commentary of the compiler, George Robinson, interspersed.³ The preface to *A Brief History of the Voyage* gives an indication of how Robinson, and, by extension, other contemporary readers responded to this tale. He sees it as a story of great pathos, but one undermined by poor authorial technique. Hence, whilst terming the women ‘poor sufferers’ of inquisitorial ‘cruelty’, and commenting on how the text was with difficulty written – ‘they were deprived of Ink and Paper for the great part of their confinement’ – he nevertheless found that adjustment was necessary to make up for how ‘obscure’ and ‘brokenly related’ was the account.⁴ Robinson’s interventions, intended to streamline the text, remove some of the unchronological, tangential and evasive features of the initial narrative. Yet in so doing something is lost, because the initial technique more fully gives the idea that the women were living moment-to-moment with the fear of their lives while Robinson’s text suggests, by virtue of its compression and linearity, the inevitability of their survival and release. The later text produces narrative cohesion, not the immediacy of the original.

The clearest example of the link between the inquisition’s control over the women and the corresponding looseness of the text is evidenced through the prison warder’s censorship of ideas.⁵ Some time after the initial questioning, the women wrote a defence of their actions, and presented this to the inquisition. But their outspokenness, which had got them into trouble in the first place, prompted a heated exchange between the prisoners and the Friars:

We desired to die, but death fled from us, We did eat our bread weeping, and mingled our drink with our tears. We did write to the Inquisitor, and laid before him our innocency, and our faithfulness, in giving our testimony for the Lord amongst them; and I told him, if it were our blood they did thirst after, they might take it any other way, as well as to smother us up in that hot room. So he sent the Fryar, and he took away our *Ink-horns*, (they had our *Bibles* before). We asked why they took away our goods? They said, *it was all theirs, and our lives too, if they would*. We asked, how we had forfeited our lives unto them; they said, *For bringing Books and Papers*. We

³ George Robinson, *A Brief History of the Voyage* (London: J Sowle, 1715); Robinson makes use of *A Short Relation* as well as later interpretations of the imprisonment: Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, *A True Account of the Great Trials* (London: Robert Wilson, 1663), Katherine Evans, *A Brief Discovery of God’s Eternal Truth* (London: Robert Wilson, 1663), Sarah Cheevers, *To all People Upon the Face of the Earth* (London: Robert Wilson, 1663).

⁴ Robinson, *A Brief History*, p. iv; p. v.

⁵ One of the chief functions of the Italian inquisition was producing an index of censored books. Quakers, as Sunne Jiterczenka has shown, translated some of their works into European Languages when ministering abroad: ‘Crossing Borders and Negotiating Boundaries: The Seventeenth-Century European Missions and Persecution’, *Quaker Studies*, 12:1 (2007), 39-53. We can deduce from *This is a Short Relation* that the women were carrying books by George Fox (p.4).

said, if there were any thing in them that was not true, they might write against it. They said, *they did scorn to write to fools and asses that did not know true Latine.* And they told us, *the Inquisition would have us separated.* (p. 13)

This account of censorship, evidenced in the taking away of writing materials, is self-contradictory only in the sense that the women draw the reader's attention to the difficulty of continuing to write under these circumstances. Arguably, aspects of the writerly style also testify to the effects of the writing ban. There's a sense of urgency; the writing is pared down so that only the important details emerge: here the women's resistance to tyranny when challenging the Friars' accusations, and the almost private reflections on hardship ('we desired to die'). We are further reminded, not just by the words, but also by the breathiness of the style, that this text was written in *media res*, and under a sentence of indefinite duration. The veering between 'I' and 'we' makes another important point about collectivity: the merging of voices, so fundamental to this Quaker style, is a reaction to inquisitorial efforts to silence the two women, and it indicates unity of purpose in the face of the accusation – quite similar to those in England that opposed women's preaching – that women were 'fools' who lacked proper understanding of the Bible.⁶

The aims of this article are twofold: given the connection between persecution and authorial style, I intend to examine the effect of imprisonment on the writers, and, specifically, their compression of ideas. The second aim is more cultural. I will analyse the relationship between Catholic and Quaker in a wider historical context. It is one of the contentions of this article that the martyrological tradition being drawn on whilst these women construct their text is more archaic than that used by many other Friends, since the last execution for heresy occurred in England in 1612.⁷ My aim, then, is to highlight the effects of the inquisition's policy of burning religious

⁶ The women recognise the similarity of the two situations in a comment that 'they [the Catholics] ... say none should preach but Prelates to a Bishop (as they used to say in England)' (p. 15) cit. Kegl, 'Women's Preaching', p. 72. For pejorative reactions to English women preachers see, for instance, Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* (London: Ralph Smith, 1646). [Thomason E 323 (2)], pp. 84-8. One woman preached on 1 John 4 but according to Edwards, 'could make nothing of it, speaking non-sense all along' (p. 86).

⁷ See *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England c 1400-1700*, ed by Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 33. See also Freeman's introduction for a concise account of martyrology from 1400-1700; Jesse Lander, "'Foxe's' Book of Martyrs: printing and Popularising the Acts and Monuments', in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. by Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 69-92; William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Jonathan Cope, 1963); John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993); Brad S Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

heretics on the women. Evans and Cheevers were aware of this sentence and were indeed told by the Friars that they courted death ‘you would fain be burned’ (p. 19). I do not presume that the women knew of the continental writings about inquisitorial imprisonment.⁸ I’m arguing that their point of reference is the English context of martyrdom; but I think their parochialism harks back to the struggles in post-reformation England. This autobiographical polemic reveals much about the effects of censorship and fear on writers under sentence of possible death: this should be traced both through content and form.

I

The 1662 text was brought to publication by Daniel Baker, a fellow Quaker who visited the two women in prison and smuggled out their writing. Before his arrival, the women were operating some sort of clandestine process of recording, despite the fact that Katherine was usually without artificial light, and for most of the day had ‘neither fire nor candle’ (p. 20). Just as the women’s position was precarious, so too was Baker’s, as he makes clear by observing that once the captors found that he was in possession of the women’s writing ‘the Consul was wrath with me’ (p. 48). We could rightly presume that there would be a difference in perspective between the women and their rescuer, but, even so, the contrast is quite marked if viewed through the polemical addresses of Baker’s preface. He recommends the text to fellow Quakers, but also seeks an extended audience by arguing that the aim of *This is a Short Relation* is animadmatory. It will show the ‘discerning’ reader that Quakers have separated from the pre-reformation church:

Many there be among the Nations in the world, that in their haste have unjustly condemned the innocent, guiltless and harmless people of the Lord of Hosts (scornfully called Quakers) viz, *That they are Papists, Jesuits, and what else, adhering to the Whorish false Church of Rome.* I say [...] be not hasty to judge (sigy A2r).

⁸ Texts about inquisitorial imprisonment typically focus on aspects that are more-or-less absent from Evans and Cheevers’ texts. Their themes tend to be imprisonment without trial, the use of unnamed accusers’ testimonies, the inquisition’s sequestration of goods, their subtlety in ‘trapping’ the accused and making him/her confess, the use of torture, and the prisoner’s consideration of whether or not to recant their allegedly heretical position. See for instance Gonzalez de Montes, *A Discoverie and Plaine Declaration of Sundry [Su]btill Practices of Holy Inquisition of Spain* (London: John Bellamie, 1625); Gabriel Dellon, *The History of the Inquisition, As it is Exercised at Goa* (London: n. p., 1688).

Not surprisingly, given the denunciatory comments on the ‘false Church’, Baker wants readers to recognise the difference between the two faiths. He is exercised by the cultural association of Quakers and Catholics that fascinated writers of pamphlet literature in England.⁹ By contrast, the two Quaker women show no desire to address this theme: they admit no interest in re-shaping the heresiographer’s conflation of Quakers and Catholics, though their parochial recognition of England’s tradition of martyrdom does shape their text.

As Hilary Hinds has observed in *God’s Englishwomen*, ‘it is important to consider how such representations [of the persecuted self] function to shape the texts themselves: for the texts do not exist separate from the responses they anticipate, but are structured in relation to, and therefore through them’.¹⁰ This insight can be applied to Evans and Cheevers’s *Short Relation* because the issue of the text’s reception is particularly moot. Not only does Daniel Baker, the conveyor of their writing, repeatedly emphasise that it was with considerable risk that he brought the text to publication, the women, too, comment on the difficulty of writing and transmitting their record. Evans and Cheevers’s letters to Friends and relations were intercepted by the inquisition after they had been passed to Baker by an unnamed man, and he only narrowly escaped having them confiscated (p. 48). This leads Baker to make a number of observations, some of them alerting the reader to the sections of the printed text that the inquisition had seen whilst in epistolary form, and others more generally reflecting on how risky was his task: ‘I had received these papers [...] with jeopardy of my precious life’ (p. 88).¹¹ But for the women, who confess only to a ‘private’ way of communicating, this threat was even more immediate (p. 21). The inquisition suspected that Evans and Cheevers were getting inside help so they threatened to chain the women unless they revealed their accomplices (pp. 21-22). Evans and Cheevers refused to name their allies. Adding together each of these factors, it is clear that the women could realistically expect that they would fail to keep from the

⁹ Thomas Underhill, *Hell Broke Loose* (London: Simon Miller, 1660), pp. 13-16; William Prynne, *The Quakers Unmasked* (London: Edward Thomas, 1655); Anon, *The Quacking Mountebank, or the Jesuite turn’d Quaker* (London: pr. E. B., 1655); Thomas Weld, *The Perfect Pharisee* (London: Richard Tomlins, 1654), p. 7.

¹⁰ Hilary Hinds, *God’s Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: MUP, 1996), p.158.

¹¹ Daniel Baker alerts the reader to the status of the letters. Some were intercepted, and he notes this (pp. 48-49); others were not (p. 64); one letter was perhaps seized ‘I do not well remember’ (p. 57); several letters were translated into Italian (p. 21). Daniel Baker talks about the difficulty of smuggling out these works in observations on p. 66, p. 88, p. 91.

inquisition their methods of writing, hence making their captors the first possible readership for their manuscript. Even though Quaker rhetoricians would often, during the 1650s, engage with hostile audiences, the inquisition is arguably one of the most hostile of all.

This is a Short Relation undoubtedly shares with many other Quaker accounts of imprisonment the twin aims to shore up resistance to oppression whilst also denouncing enemies; and yet, as I hope to show, this text is also subtly different from other Quaker martyrological writing, partly because the inquisition is one of the imagined readerships for this text. It is the case, therefore, that in like manner to other works in this genre, the Pauline method of using imprisonment to address a community of co-religionists is followed; both friend and foe are perceived as readers.¹² However, one of the ways in which their account modifies our understanding is through its sense of suffering as both relational (which is the norm) and isolating (which is unusual). Quakers, as John R. Knott and others have shown, typically express a commonality of religious experience when describing suffering: they refer, for instance, to the notion that Friends suffer as one body.¹³ The Maltese experience indeed makes the women observe that they have unity with their Friendly readers, though physically absent.¹⁴ Their text, then, does to an extent create a virtual community by uniting believers with a shared belief that imprisoning religious thinkers is fundamental assault on the liberty of conscience. However, within the text there is subtle evidence that the women think that their experience is more arduous than other Quakers', and hence their survival more extraordinary.

Once they have a dialogue with Daniel Baker, for instance, they can reflect on their time in jail: 'none can receive or discern it but those that do see it', they state (p. 76). They further refer to the isolation they experienced when directly addressing co-religionists:

We beseech you all, faithful Friends, pray for us, for great are our trials: Did you but know the abominations that the Devil hath invented here, you would think it were tryal enough: But here we have cruel mockings, and the same contradictions, trials and temptations that ever the servants of the Lord had, & Christ himself: It is the

¹² The first address to Friends occurs on page 12; following that, there are numerous pastoral letters (pp. 30-33, pp. 53-64). In contrast, one letter addresses the lord inquisitor (pp. 30-41), another Friar Malachy (pp. 43-44).

¹³ Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, pp. 83-116, pp. 216-255.

¹⁴ For example, Katherine Evans writes to her family 'I have unity and fellowship with thee day and night [...] which neither Sea nor Land can separate or divide' (p. 53).

wonderful Power of God that we are preserved til this time, for all the whole Island are Papists, and given up to Idolatry. We are despised of all people, and abhorred of all Nations; and because they cannot have any just thing against us, they do invent lyes against us; But the Lord is on our side, or else the Enemy would soon destroy us; for great is their rage; and we have continual War with them night and day we feel; behold their threatenings and cruelty is more than our tongues can express. (p. 75).

Persecution has been harrowing, not only because their beliefs have been constantly tried, but also because interrogation leaves a mark on them that cannot be vocalised, being ‘more than our tongues can express’. Likewise, in verse they observe: ‘Our sorrows none can read nor learn, / But those that have past through the same’ (p. 79).¹⁵ Reiteration of the notion that there is something beyond language becomes something like a standard of Evans and Cheevers’ prose. It is a feature suggesting the limits of language, showing discourse is an inexact reflector of their hardships; and it also begins to indicate that there is encoding in the text. As a result of censorship, the women are pointing to a subtext that is more than language can express.¹⁶

Their actions reveal as much as their words, in fact, and this is partly what’s being alluded to in the narrative overviews that I’ve just quoted. I would argue that the women are inviting readers to unravel meanings that run deeper than the explicit connotations that can be derived from a focus on language. The narrative of their experiences, in deed, prompts the reader to unravel visual gestures that are performative signs of their commitment to their faith. Their bodies tell the story of their persecution. During the early stages of the interrogation, for instance, one of the women ‘lay night and day for 12 days together, fasting and sweating’ (p. 9). They fasted, usually for quite lengthy periods, throughout their term of imprisonment, and this inedia graphically indicates their resistance to inquisitorial methods. ‘We have been near death many times [...] I have lain twelve day or more in a fast [...] [and] would have been glad if the Lord would have taken me out of the body, because of my weak affliction’, the women state (p. 77). The inquisition’s sentence is beyond their control, but fasting gives them autonomy even whilst it brings them closer to their God. The symbol of the fasting body, let me be clear, can be interpreted linguistically, and it does indeed generate discussion.¹⁷ But the famished body of the

¹⁵ 1663’s *A True Account* rewords this passage: ‘our sorrows none can learn nor reade, / But those that in our path do tread’ (p. 156).

¹⁶ There is also a practical reason for these protests: the women explain that ‘time is too little’ for them to express ‘the twentieth part of the terrible trials’ (p. 78).

¹⁷ See p. 6, p. 9, p. 11, p. 13, p. 23, p. 28.

suffering prophet is also a symbol that, decoded, registers the infamy of the inquisitorial tormentors by working as a visual metaphor.¹⁸ Another instance where language shows that the text is incomplete, therefore, explains the inquisitors behave in a way ‘so monstrous, that they are unrehearsable’ (p. 32).

The women’s interactions with the Maltese, prior to their imprisonment, were also performative, thus anticipating the visual mode of addressing their Catholic interrogators. When first on the island they

Went in obedience to the Lord to one of their Tower-Houses in time of their Worship, and stood trembling in the midst of them; and I was made to turn my back to the high Altar [...] We having but little of their Tongue, gave our Testimony (for the Lord) in words and signs, as well as we could, and they were made subject to the power. (p. 73).

Stephen Greenblatt has observed of Englishmen and women’s interaction with natives in America that the texts produce a fiction of complete communication, when not commenting on the opposite phenomenon – the babel of different voices.¹⁹ The Quaker women follow something of this norm of travel writing by suggesting that the power of god can be perceived by all, regardless of the fact that the majority of their hearers would understand only brief sections of their preaching. However, in the fact that this passage highlights the correspondence of words and signs in creating a message, we are also reminded that speech will sometimes be unequal to the demands of their new environment. In effect, their captivity partly imprisons their speech, which might remind us of images used of a similar situation in a more literary context by Shakespeare’s *Richard II*.²⁰ But the situation for the women is different: it reflects the atmosphere of censorship and cross-cultural problems with translation. This might

¹⁸ On fasting: Diane Purkiss, ‘Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century’, in *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740*, ed. by Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (London: B. T. Batsford, 1992), pp. 139-158; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), Theresa Feroli, *Political Speaking Justified: Women and Prophets and the English Revolution* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), pp. 97-147; Graham, “‘Oppression’”, in Dragsta (et al, ed.), *All By Myself*, pp. 197-214; Jane Shaw, ‘Fasting Women: the Significance of Gender and Bodies in Radical Religion and Politics, 1650-1813’, in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. by Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 101-118.

¹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth-Century’, in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early-Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 16-39 (p. 37).

²⁰ William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. by Stanley Wells (London: Penguin, 1969). Once in prison Richard is subject to ‘still-breeding thoughts’ which ‘do set the word itself / Against the word’ (V.v. 8, 13-14).

be the first instance, then, of the defining attitude to their experience – that ‘none can receive or discern’ their situation (p. 76).

If the imprisonment of the women, their interrogation, and their fasting is seen as being structured by the limited understanding of Catholic to Quaker, the text achieves its defining paradigm. In fact, the Friars also read the bodies of the women, and reacted to their non-verbal codes. As Diane Purkiss has shown in her reading of inedia, fasting is both a way of weakening the body so as to empty it in preparation for god, and a complex reflection on illness and diabolism.²¹ Hence the Friars believed that the Devil, rather than God, inhabited the women, which was a common seventeenth-century interpretation of sickness.²² This is made clear in the following exchange:

The tenth day of my fast there came *two Fryars, the Chancellor, the man with the black Rod, and a Physician, and the Keeper*; and the *Fryar* commanded my dear Friend to go out of the room, and he came and pull'd my hand out of the bed, and said, *Is the Devil so great in you, that you cannot speak?* (p. 10).

Non-verbal signification, then, is multivalent. The Friars refuse to recognise the holiness of the famished body, taking as their examples of possession not only the women's weakness, but, also, other external factors such as the fact that they were covered in the bites of mosquitoes and had lost their hair, which fell out during their sentence.²³ The women's bodily signification, then, is subject to multiple, and contested readings.

What this means, I think, is that there is a complex relation between speech and act, between censorship and the Quaker women's desire to critique the prison system, its interrogators, and the Catholic faith. The text, in other words, shows the women boldly challenging the inquisition, but also repeatedly indicates that something more is to be inferred than what they expressed to the Friars. So, for instance, Katherine explains with a parenthetical note to the reader that she had been ironic in answer to one of the Friar's questions:

²¹ Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice'.

²² Andrew Wear, *Health and Healing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), see especially pp. 145-169, 55-99.

²³ Loss of hair (p. 13), rashes (p. 14), mosquito bites (p. 70, p. 72).

The Friar went to my friend, and told her, *I called him a worker of iniquity*. Did she, said Sarah? *Art thou without sin?* He said *he was*. Then she hath wronged thee. [But I say the wise Reader may judge]. (p. 10)

This passage, then, appeals to a readership that will perceive the irony of her verbal comment, one that, in recognising that Sarah meant the opposite of what she said aloud, could therefore earn the label 'wise Reader'.

There is plenty of explicit rejection of the Catholic faith in this text, but it is important also to draw out the more implicit denunciations. *This is a Short Relation* can hardly be said to mask its objections to Catholicism, which appear both through the critique of the faith, and through the challenges to inquisitorial practices. The text contains, for instance, widespread rejection of the ceremonialism and formalism of Catholic ritual, and it also repeatedly dismisses the aims of the inquisition to use intimidation as a method for converting unbelievers. And yet, though the women show incredible boldness in their speech and writing, they are also using literary features such as irony and metaphor to add an extra level of meaning to their text.

When the women challenge the Catholic belief in transubstantiation these other features of their narrative technique becomes apparent. In her analysis of political writings in England, 1642-1660, Elizabeth Skerpan referred to a polemical technique whereby 'the use of the undefined term as a strategy unified the audience in a discourse community that possesses special understanding of particular phrases'.²⁴ Likewise, several 'undefined' terms appear in Evans and Cheevers' text that could be assumed to trigger polemical responses in a Protestant readership. We can see this in the women's reactions to the ceremony most denoting the Catholic Faith: mass. The Quakers were accused by the Friars of not beholding the 'life' of Christ because they refused to take communion, a point they refuted by arguing that Christ inhabits the believer through their faith, not through the consumption of the body and blood. They state their objections openly (p. 7). But another doctrinal point can be inferred when the women state that 'the inquisitor [...] lookt down upon us as if he would have eaten us' and further observe that the Friars 'thirst daily for our blood, because we would not turn' (p. 29, p. 8). This indirectly shows that consuming the body of Christ through the communion wafer is cannibalism. And this critique of communion reveals another encrypted message in the women's fasting: they show their holiness through

²⁴ Elizabeth Skerpan, *The Rhetoric of Politics in the English Revolution 1642-1660* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1992), p. 74.

their inedia and not through participation in Catholic Mass. The women enact their critique through the sign of the famished body, and refer to it through scattered allusions. In this way, the Quakers evoke an image-based method of communication.

The final part of this article will show how these narrative techniques can be mapped onto a discussion of how these Quakers reflect issues that were current in the first wave of English Protestant martyrdom, as the reformers sacrificed their lives during the protracted reformation period. Suffering, it might be argued, in line with the interpretation expressed by Stephen Greenblatt in relation to renaissance drama's use of travel narratives, can be interpreted as being 'centrally, repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder'.²⁵ Most relevant, here, to the text by these two Quaker women is the fact that some of their subversiveness is encrypted rather than transparent. The critique of Catholic doctrine is, applying Greenblatt's knowing paradox, both produced and contained. The most pertinent narrative feature here is their use of the prophetic mode, which implies a fusion of the women with the divine, and allows 'God' to critique the Holy Roman Faith. For instance, when looking back on the early days of her imprisonment, Katherine describes a 'Vision in the night' that presented itself to her:

The Lord appeared unto me, and showed me, that round about us, and above and beneath us, there were many Magicians of *Aegypt*; and the Lord smote me, and said unto me, *The Devil hath desired to winnow you as wheat; but pray that your faith fail not.* (73)

This response to persecution gives the most critical voicings to God. The specific allusions are also significant. The Magicians of Aegypt presumably refers to the Protestant perception of Catholicism as superstitious ceremony – the priest being a Magician who turns the wafer in to flesh. The other, to winnowing, of course indicates, once more, the women's recognition of the punishment for heresy, and it is here that there is the clearest echo of archaic suffering since separating the wheat from the chaff is like flaying the flesh. Janel M. Mueller has indicated that this trope, in which the faithful compare their body to wheat, encodes commentary on the sacrament.²⁶ Through its invocation of wheat, we see Protestantism's rough

²⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets", in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 786-803 (p. 791).

²⁶ See Janel M. Mueller, 'Pain, Persecution, and the Construction of Selfhood in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*', in *Religion and Culture*, ed. by McEachern, pp. 161-187 (particularly pp. 174-77).

appropriation of Catholic theology, because it is here that the believer's body becomes holy, like the body of Christ, through its transformation into bread.

Another image of archaic suffering pertains when the women refer directly to the punishment of heretics. Their God advises them to 'fear not', since he 'will carry you forth as Gold tried out of the fire' (p. 34). In this image, the idea that punishment for heresy offers up the self in a still more reformed, and precious state, once again signifies the women's resistance to oppression.

The level of encodedness behind such allusions begins to suggest both the potentialities and the limits of the mode that Phyllis Mack has called 'ecstatic prophecy'.²⁷ Much is condensed in this hidden polemic which uses images to signify on more than one level: and we can assume that the trope of the body as wheat, or gold, is critical enough taken literally as an image of sacrifice, but is even more profound when related to a tradition of martyrology. Allegory, metaphor, are particularly potent when a readership is addressed that is familiar with biblical language and its non-literalness. And using the voice of god was an established way of producing an authoritative authorial position, even as it elided the particular subjectivity of the writer in favour of invoking divine presence. However, what we are made also aware of, as modern-day readers, is how fully this Quaker text shows the effect of persecution on the sufferers. Allegory can be understood as a linguistic mode that unlocks the text, yet it also shows how internalised are these images of sacrifice and, moreover, it suggests the degree to which censorship, isolation, and fear of repercussions, has affected these women.

I have been arguing that there is a degree of encodedness to this text, and that the narrative style is produced by the terms of these women's captivity. The encryption is, if you like, there by virtue of necessity.²⁸ Biblical allegory is, of course, the common mode of writing amongst radicals during the English revolution as critics such as Nigel Smith, David Loewenstein, Thomas N. Corns, and others, have shown.²⁹ This mode is enabling since it inserts a level of subtlety into these polemical

²⁷ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

²⁸ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (London: Virago, 1988). The women also encode more private emotions, such as same-sex desire.

²⁹ Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 'allegories and also obscure myths need to be decoded in order to reveal the social and political determinants of the writer, and the social and political statements which the writer is making' (p. 229). 'The Emergence of Quaker Writing', *Prose Studies*, 17:3 (1994),

texts; and when we remember that these were living texts that identified the writer often with subversive, or anti-hierarchical positions, the use of allegory and biblical exemplar, of course, produces the authorial authority that society often denied them. What remains a point of contention, of course, across much of the scholarship, is how far the appropriation of 'God's voice' makes up for the lack of secular power that such a need to assume divine authority presumes. In the case of these Quaker women, this is a moot point indeed. Whether they are made powerful or powerless by their imprisonment is open to interpretation.

In concluding this article, I want to refer again to what I have been calling the defining attitude to their experience: the statement that the inquisition's 'threatenings and cruelty is more than our tongues can express'. Such an articulation certainly seems to point to the containment of their polemic, where speech is reigned in. Yet the phrase, or something like it, also resonates in the context of the indescribability of God's love: 'No tongue can express it, no heart can conceive it, nor mind can comprehend it' (p. 54).³⁰ In Christian thought, sacrifice *is* love: God's willingness to sacrifice his son showed his abiding hopes for humanity. It is, arguably, the case that Evans and Cheevers's text points towards a network of associations working to unravel, but always deferring, the meanings of imprisonment, sacrifice, and love. Something about each cannot be verbalised. If this is a text that points to the transforming power of suffering in God, even whilst acknowledging that language is unequal to the task of describing this experience, then this text, surely, must demonstrate the paradox that godly authorship entails the fruitful 'production and containment of subversion and disorder'.

ed. by Thomas N. Corns and David Loewenstein; Jackson I. Cope, 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 225-54.

³⁰ See also, p. 69.