



2012

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Myers, Joanne E. "Catharine Trotter and the Claims of Conscience." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 31.1-2 (2012): 53-75.

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# Catharine Trotter and the Claims of Conscience

## **Abstract**

Although Catherine Trotter, later Cockburn, has begun to receive increased critical attention, the role of religious themes in her writing remains largely unexplored. A key tendency in critical accounts, in fact, has been to ally her with the secular contractarian philosophy of John Locke, whom she defended in print. Biographical evidence suggests, however, that Trotter was not unconcerned with religious questions; raised an Anglican, she converted to Catholicism in her youth and returned to the Church of England in her early thirties. Her later philosophical works remain preoccupied with theological issues, notably voluntarism. This article proposes that we can identify religious concerns in Trotter's early plays by recognizing how her tragedies dramatize cases of conscience. Her characters often struggle to accept the binding nature of vows and question the power of private conscience to govern conduct. In *The Unhappy Penitent* (1701), the influence of the Catholic casuistical tradition is seen as Trotter casts doubt on the adequacy of private moral judgment, suggesting that individuals will judge right only when aided by an authoritative and external guide. Emphasizing the tragic consequences that follow from pursuing one's interests, the dramas qualify assessments of Trotter that align her modernity with secularity.

## **Keywords**

Catharine Trotter, Catharine Cockburn, *The New Atalantis*, *The Adventures of Rivella*

## **Disciplines**

English Language and Literature

# Catharine Trotter and the Claims of Conscience

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In her day, Catharine Trotter—later Cockburn—enjoyed a divided reputation, dogged by rumors of licentiousness even as she was alternately praised and mocked for her erudition. “I read Aristotle in his own Language,” proclaims Calista, a character in the anonymous *The Female Wits; or the Triumverate of Poets at Rehearsal* (1696) generally seen to represent Trotter; she adds, “The Translation may alter the Expression.”<sup>1</sup> Delarivier Manley was initially supportive of Trotter, but she turned her satiric wit on her friend in both *The New Atalantis* (1709), which shows Trotter embroiled in flirtations with men and women alike, and in *The Adventures of Rivella* (1714), which also names Trotter “Calista” and accuses her of both prudery and adultery.<sup>2</sup> Even during the years when Trotter was enmeshed in London’s theatrical scene, however, she was writing work that garnered her a letter of acknowledgment from John Locke: her defense of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690).<sup>3</sup> Despite this relatively high-profile career and her varied output—which embraced prose fiction, drama, and philosophical writings—Trotter has tended to receive relatively scant critical attention. As Anne Cline Kelley has pointed out, most commentators have followed her contemporaries in focusing either on her scandalous ties to the libertine theatrical culture of the Restoration or on her subsequent image as a pious learned lady (pp. 11-25).

Recent, more nuanced scholarship on Trotter has sought to push beyond these stereotypes to establish her importance in Restoration culture but retains something of a divided emphasis. Some commentators, highlighting her importance as a woman writer, have pointed out Trotter’s advocacy of rational female friendship or her exposure of the violence inherent in patriarchal power.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that Trotter, though a defender of Locke and Samuel Clarke, also makes a unique philosophical contribution of her own, offering arguments about the disinterested nature of moral obligation and the intrinsically authoritative character of natural law.<sup>5</sup> These valuable contributions, however, still leave avenues for further research. Trotter’s religious beliefs, for example, have rarely been discussed by critics. Raised in the Church of England, Trotter converted early to Catholicism and then returned to the Anglican fold sometime around 1707. While many critical accounts allude to her double conversion, it is usually accounted for in passing, with the implication that Trotter’s religious commitments

are of merely biographical interest.<sup>6</sup> Kelley, who has argued strenuously for Trotter's importance, does not take up her religious commitments in any detail.

This article will attempt to show, however, that Trotter's life contains several hints that her religious beliefs were of more than passing significance both to herself and to contemporaries. Notably, her second conversion resulted in the publication of *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies," in Two Letters* (1707), which Bishop Gilbert Burnet praised for "the strength and clearness of the reasoning."<sup>7</sup> I hope to suggest, moreover, that both the structure and themes of Trotter's early tragedies are influenced in key ways by religious concerns and questions. *Agnes de Castro* (1695), *The Fatal Friendship* (1698), and *The Unhappy Penitent* (1701) all confront the audience with cases of conscience that the protagonists must attempt both to understand and resolve. Both Protestant and Catholic traditions made use of such cases as tools for moral discernment. In *The Unhappy Penitent*, however, the representation of the authority of conscience is influenced, I will suggest, by Trotter's exposure to Catholic moral teaching. Whereas more recent criticism of this play has noted its defense of female rationality and moral agency, I argue that the play's tragic conflict derives from the tension between conscience understood as an individual moral capacity and conscience understood as an external rule. Questioning the authority of the former view of conscience, *The Unhappy Penitent* casts doubt on the adequacy of private moral judgment and suggests that such judgment stands in need of authoritative supplement.

Elsewhere in Trotter's drama, a similar tension reoccurs between individuals and the forms of obligation that bind or constrain their desires. Repeatedly, her plays subordinate those desires to prior commitments that overrule subjective interests. Doubt about the authority of "interest" pervades Trotter's moral philosophy, where she contests any assumption that "good" and "evil" are subjective rather than transcendent categories. To the extent that the dramas emphasize the fatal consequences that attend the breaking of one's vows, they qualify the extent to which Trotter can be allied with the kind of secular modernity represented by the contractarian logic undeniably key to her final play, the heroic drama *The Revolution of Sweden* (1706).<sup>8</sup> Seeing continuity between Trotter's plays and her philosophy has the added advantage of avoiding the bifurcation of her career perpetuated by existing criticism.<sup>9</sup>

If we consider how religious concerns may inform Trotter's representation of her characters' dilemmas, we avoid reproducing an analytic unease with religious concerns that, as Paula McDowell has noted, can prove distorting when we study an age for which such concerns were ubiquitous.<sup>10</sup> Especially among critics of the early modern period, there has been an increasing agreement that questions of religious conviction and practice

are not just inescapable but potentially illuminating. Women authors' religious beliefs in particular have sometimes been dismissively interpreted as a kind of conservative handicap, but work by Erica Longfellow and Kimberly Anne Coles, for example, has suggested more productive possibilities.<sup>11</sup> Trotter is especially interesting because she writes with erudition on religious and moral issues but also pens popular entertainments. In proposing a continuity between the questions that occupy Trotter throughout her career, we can explore how such questions become rendered imaginatively and thereby gain insight into what Charles Taylor, among others, has termed the "social imaginary" of an age—the repository of images and narratives in and through which a culture imagines itself.<sup>12</sup> Imaginative texts allow authors to play with such structures in ways that more formal and discursive texts do not; they thus accommodate a flexibility in thinking about religious issues that is more true to the lived experience of faith. Though all the evidence suggests that Trotter eventually came to hold a Protestant view of conscience and a broadly Lockean account of the subject, her tragedies of the 1690s offer a competing vision of the heroism achieved when individuals accede to authority's superior claims.

*"The fassion of her religion"*

Trotter's religious leanings were remarked upon often enough by those who knew her to let us speculate that they were known and of some interest to contemporaries. Like Trotter herself, though, those leanings drew varied reactions. Perhaps not wholly disinterestedly, Burnet praises her religious reflections: "having been for some time dissatisfied with several practices and doctrines" of the Catholic Church, he notes in the preface to *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies,"* Trotter "had resolv'd to examine, with great Care, the Grounds of that Authority, on which they were received . . . these Papers were the result of those free and impartial Enquiries" (p. A2r). As might be expected, Trotter's Catholicism evokes more ambivalence. In a letter to Locke, Burnet's third wife, Elizabeth, comments with faint dismay that

the fassion of her religion which allows great libertys, her stract circumstances, & being forced as it were to write plays, & consequently to contract Idle acquaintance, has left great blemishes on her reputation. . . . she has as I have been told spook with great contempt of some who have talked very gently with her [on] the heads of religion. (qtd. in Kelley, p. 15)

Here, Catholicism is a sort of keeping bad company. In *The New Atalantis*, Manley charges Trotter with religious fickleness when, apparently thinking of *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies,"* she jeers at Trotter's attempt to make herself "an Ornament to that Religion, which she had once before abandon'd and newly again profess'd."<sup>13</sup> Whether positive or

negative, such commentary suggests that religious issues formed part of the interpretive frame that contemporaries applied to Trotter and perhaps, by extension, to her works.

Trotter's Catholicism has not often been seen as a relevant context for understanding her work, so it is worth noting the biographical details that establish its significance in her career. These are not numerous, and I am not claiming to have discovered new facts that enhance that significance; the point is simply that their coincidence is worth noticing. At this juncture, it may also be useful to note Kelley's recent revision of Trotter's likely birth date. Although most sources, including even Trotter's gravestone, point to a birth date in 1679, Kelley has uncovered a baptismal record that seems to place Trotter's birth in 1674 (p. 1, n. 1). If this revised date makes Trotter look slightly less precocious—so that her first play would have been produced when she was twenty-one rather than sixteen—it may also give her initial conversion more weight, making it an adult rather than a juvenile act.

Though the early chronology of her life is blurred, Thomas Birch, editor of her collected works, implies that Trotter had become a Catholic by 1693, the year of her first known work—a poem sent to Bevil Higgons that congratulates the “lovely youth” on his recovery from smallpox.<sup>14</sup> Higgons had theatrical connections, and a number of commentators cast Trotter's gesture as opportunistic networking. However, in the 1690s, Trotter could scarcely have been ignorant of Higgons's Catholic and Jacobite ties. The first publication of Higgons, a member of a prominent Hampshire Catholic family, had also been a congratulatory poem—to Mary of Modena, on the birth of James Francis Edward Stuart. In 1692, Higgons actually followed James II into exile in France, and in 1695-96, he was first associated with a plot against William and then briefly arrested for conspiracy. His play *The Generous Conqueror* (1702) praises James and promotes the politics of divine right. If Trotter did hope to cultivate Higgons as a professional acquaintance, it seems hard to believe that she was not also gesturing sympathetically towards his religio-political affiliations. More ambiguously, Trotter later sought out Alexander Pope's patronage and dedicated her entry in the *History of the Works of the Learned* (1743) to him. There need be no sense of religious kinship, of course, for Trotter to seek Pope's imprimatur though she does single out his “Moral Character” in her dedication.<sup>15</sup> Her collected works, in fact, over whose publication it seems that Trotter exercised some supervision, closes with a translation of a prayer attributed to St. Francis Xavier that Pope later translates as well—though Pope's translation was not published in Trotter's lifetime—and that, a century or so later, Gerard Manley Hopkins would translate again. Likely not by the saint but indebted to Ignatian spirituality, the prayer, whose Latin title is “*O Deus, ego amo te,*” is a “rapture” inspired by meditation on a crucifix—a

curious text for a Protestant author to place in a position of prominence in her works: "Thou only canst this flame inspire," Trotter paraphrases, her diction calling to mind Richard Crashaw's in "The Flaming Heart" (1648), "Thou source, and period of desire!"<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, Trotter's marriage to the nonjuror Patrick Cockburn, while it does not connect directly with her Catholicism, makes it plausible that she was in sympathy with a more critical view of the Restoration settlement than some accounts of her Lockean outlook would lead us to expect. Trotter married Cockburn in 1708, apparently not long after her return to the Church of England, and although the family seems for a time to have lived quite well in Suffolk and then in London, Cockburn's refusal to take the oath of allegiance to George I in 1714 caused him to lose his church living and led to over a decade of hardship for his family until he reconciled himself to taking the oath in 1726.<sup>17</sup> Given the heterogeneity of the nonjuring community, one cannot assume that a protest against the accession of George I implies an affirmation of a Catholic claim to the throne.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, Trotter's marriage to Cockburn would seem to place her at some distance from the Whiggish politics that have sometimes been ascribed to her (Kelley, p. 134).<sup>19</sup>

To draw together these biographical details is not to claim that Trotter's Catholicism must be granted greater interpretive authority, only to suggest that it might be. Her one overtly polemical work, *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies,"* does not seem to bear directly on the interpretation of her dramatic texts except to the extent that it explores questions of interpretive authority. In the tract, Trotter identifies the doctrine of infallibility as her principal point of difference with the Roman Catholic Church. Writing to an unknown interlocutor, Trotter holds both that there is scant scriptural basis for ecclesiastical infallibility and that such infallibility is not itself a necessary premise of scriptural infallibility. As Burnet's prefatory comments imply, Trotter's posture throughout *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies"* is that of an open-minded enquirer, albeit one with a slight bias towards scriptural evidence; she writes, "I began my search with a full Perswasion, that my Eternal Salvation depended on my judging with Sincerity of the Arguments on both Sides, especially of those which are urg'd from the Holy Scriptures."<sup>20</sup> Consistently, Trotter emphasizes liberty of understanding: "what Absurdity is there in thinking," she wonders, "that God has left our Understanding as free as our Will?" (p. 12).

With its emphasis on the authority of individual judgment governed by the careful reading of scripture, *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies"* implies that Trotter's reasons for returning to the Church of England included a desire for greater intellectual autonomy than that afforded within Catholicism. Despite the clarity of the discourse's position, however, Trotter's works do not everywhere grant the authority of

individual judgment. In *The Unhappy Penitent* and to a lesser extent in Trotter's other plays from the 1690s, tragedy follows or threatens to follow from the mistaken conclusions of consciences blinded by interest. These tragedies of conscience thus provide imaginative explorations of how individuals judge incorrectly and what ensues when they do so. *The Unhappy Penitent*, moreover, resolves the problem of erring conscience by proposing that virtue derives from the submission to an authority that enforces its own judgment.

"What Resolution can be trusted!": Conscience in *The Unhappy Penitent*

Performed at Drury Lane in 1701, *The Unhappy Penitent* is Trotter's third tragedy and marks her return to that genre following *Love at a Loss* (1700), her sole comedy. Her prior tragedies had merited some applause, but *The Unhappy Penitent* does not seem to have been as successful. Critical reception has remained cool as well; Edmund Gosse remarks that "*The Unhappy Penitent* is not a pleasing performance: it is amorous and violent, but yet dull."<sup>21</sup> Even Kelley finds Ann, the play's moral center, "one of Trotter's least attractive female characters. . . she lacks humanity—there is an air of sanctimonious complacency about her" (p. 116). Despite these lukewarm notices, the play's representation of female friendship has been praised. Heather King argues that "by showing women as rational friends capable of virtue, Trotter . . . revises both reigning constructions of women as irrational and incapable of friendship and dramatic conventions that position women as emotional objects rather than rational agents" (p. 7). According to King, the drama hinges on Ann's ability to foster the moral development of her friend and romantic rival, Margarite of Flanders, who is engaged to Charles VIII of France with whom Ann is in love. Insisting against her own interest that the prior engagement between Charles and Margarite be honored, Ann exhorts Margarite to take responsibility for her actions despite the perfidious counsels of the male characters. Margarite, however, becomes the unhappy penitent of the title when, having secretly married her lover the Duke of Lorraine and then vowed to forsake him if she can be freed from false accusations against her honor, she must do penance for this ill-judged and clandestine marriage by cloistering herself in a convent. At each stage, Ann steadfastly reminds Margarite of the binding force of her vows and the honor she must seek to preserve at all costs. King casts Margarite's development as a progressive "self-mastery" that depends on Ann's "commitment to virtue and community" (pp. 19, 15). Like King, Paula Backscheider emphasizes how female relationships in Trotter's plays foster rational virtue, pointing to the "clearly Lockean" structure of the female characters' reflections in *Love at a Loss* (p. 457). For both critics, debates over gender form the best context for understanding Trotter's representations of moral reflection.



*The Unhappy Penitent*, like *Agnes de Castro* and, to a lesser extent, *The Revolution of Sweden*, does present an image of female friendship that emphasizes women's constancy to one another despite what Rebecca Merrens has characterized as the "agonistic" homosocial relations of the men around them (p. 48). In the play's first moments, the strength of Ann and Margarite's bond is emphasized when a character expresses skepticism about a possible match between Ann and Charles by protesting that "there's appearance / Of a strict Friendship betwixt" the two women.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, as the play follows Ann's attempt to redirect Margarite's passion back to Charles, the word "strict" has an ongoing resonance. In the scenes between the two female characters, Ann is less a companionable supporter of her friend than a stern monitor who arrives onstage to reroute her straying passions by appealing to the binding force of vows. As a figure of conscience or a kind of confessor to Margarite, Ann encourages and enforces a structure of judgment that is less reflective and collaborative than absolute. The conflict of the drama depends as much on the enforcement of Ann's judgment as on the conversion of Margarite's, and at all points the drama emphasizes the frailty and fallibility of individual determinations of moral duty. The play thus represents the authority of conscience as largely external to the self and enforced more by rule than reasoned reflection. This view of conscience bears traces of a seventeenth-century Catholic moral outlook, which tends to emphasize what Ceri Sullivan calls "the professional administration" of conscientious self-scrutiny.<sup>23</sup>

The dramatic structure of *The Unhappy Penitent*, which emphasizes a series of dilemmas that characters must resolve, helps to justify the claim that casuistry, or the process of moral reflection that entails applying general principles to particular cases, is a relevant context for the play. At the outset, the chief problem is whether Charles is obliged to go through with his arranged marriage to Margarite or if he is free—as his sister, Madame de Bourbon, and his courtiers insist—to break off that betrothal and make a politically advantageous match with the woman whom, conveniently enough, he also loves. Later, Margarite faces her own series of dilemmas: should she wait for Charles to abrogate their marriage contract publicly before marrying Lorrain? Is her vow to enter a convent, made in contradiction to her marriage vows and with incomplete knowledge due to another's machinations, a binding one? The plot's development depends on how characters answer the central question of what is to be done in a particular circumstance.<sup>24</sup> Marital issues were often the focus of casuistical reasoning. In *Ductor Dubitantium: Or, The Rule of Conscience in all her General Measures* (1660), a compilation of cases of conscience, Jeremy Taylor notes that he omitted most matrimonial questions because these are "very Material and very Numerous" that they merit a separate volume.<sup>25</sup> When Charles's advisors urge him to break with Margarite, their logic echoes

that of such handbooks, with one arguing that the king cannot “break a Contract which you made not: / ’Twas by your Father in your Infancy” (p. 3).<sup>26</sup> At a few points, the text overtly points to a casuistical context; in the play’s closing scene, the volatile Lorrain, frustrated by Margarite’s resolution to enter the convent, fumes that “no Casuists, / No Canons, can convince like inclination” (p. 45).

Trotter asserts in the play’s dedication to Charles, Lord Halifax, that her aim is to inculcate an “Instructive Moral,” but the play’s early scenes seem to bear out her scruple about the moral efficacy of a love plot, which Trotter claims she “partly design’d in Compliance with the effeminate taste of the Age” (pp. A2v-3r). While that plot dominates, venality rules the day. Charles’s scruples about forsaking Margarite seem destined to be drowned out by his counselors’ calculations about the political capital to be gained from marriage with Ann; the match between Margarite and Lorrain is presented as decadently passionate. Lorrain declares early in the second act, “Look on me as another *Antony*,” describing himself as Margarite’s “Slave” (p. 9). Though Margarite’s own preference for Lorrain seems to make the way clear for the plot’s resolution, matters are complicated not only by Charles’s doubts but also by the fact that Ann’s father, the Duke of Brittany, is promoting the match between Charles and his daughter in part because he loves Margarite himself. No clear moral center emerges until near the end of the second act, when Ann arrives onstage. This somewhat belated entrance emphasizes Ann’s distance and difference from the other characters. Though she has a stake in the potential dismissal of Margarite, Ann is not seen engaging in the politicking that forms the early central action. From the time of her arrival onstage, moreover, the play’s locus of judgment reposes securely in Ann, whose “stoic denial of passion” it ultimately validates.<sup>27</sup>

Although King rightly argues that the play emphasizes the close bond between Ann and Margarite, in the women’s first scene together, Ann’s tone has a note of austerity that undercuts a sense of the two women’s intimacy and suggests that she wields the authority in their relationship. Margarite greets her as both “the truest Friend” and “the perfectest / Of all her Sex,” and though the superlatives emphasize their closeness, they also introduce a gap between them as Ann’s exceptional nature is highlighted (p. 13). Left onstage alone together, the women converse in a slightly stilted fashion. Rather than engage in a process of mutual reflection about whether Margarite should wed Lorrain privately, they offer differing views on the question, with Ann contradicting each assessment of the situation that Margarite offers to register her contrasting point of view. When Margarite suggests how much more she loves Lorrain than she could ever have loved Charles, Ann stops her: “yet I hope,” she advises,

You’d part with that, rather than stain your Honour,  
Not wed *Lorrain*, rather than not deserve him.

*Mar.* Intend you to accuse me?  
 I am not conscious to my self of guilt.  
*Ann.* We owe our care first to be justify'd  
 To our own Thoughts, next to the Worlds;  
 I wou'd not have my Friend give an occasion  
 For Malice to reproach her, may not the King  
 T'excuse himself, lay the first Breach on you?  
*Mar.* Therefore we shall conceal our Marriage,  
 Till he declare his Falshood.  
*Ann.* Innocence needs not such close Coward Arts,  
 As much the punishment of guilt, as it's  
 Security; no *Marg'rite*, with Actions  
 Fair, and open, as you know 'em just,  
 Upbraid the Crime, that shames him to dissembling.  
 (pp. 13-14)

Ann may be offering Margarite counsel, but their exchange lacks a genuinely dialogic feel, and Ann's diction—"stain" and "Coward"—has a judgmental and directive edge. Margarite goes on to admit that she is "with Passion blinded" and thus "may need [Ann's] aid / To lead" her (p. 14). This language of support is supplemented by one of obedience; Ann says she will "advise" Margarite, but Margarite later claims that she will "obey" her friend's direction, again suggesting that the power in the relationship lies with Ann (p. 14). As the scene closes, Ann's advice to Margarite emphasizes her own authority: "cherish, and reward my affection," she tells Margarite, "that I may ne'er / My choice in this dear Friendship disapprove" (p. 14). Ann's invulnerability to her passion for Charles when contrasted with Margarite's susceptibility further heightens the gap between the two women in this scene.

Ann's authoritative intervention seems necessary as Margarite grapples with her case of conscience. Her character functions to refocus Margarite's attention beyond herself and the play of her feelings, offering a standard of judgment that transcends the subjective. It is this structural function of Ann's role that hearkens to the Catholic view that conscientious judgment must be mediated by an authoritative guide. In itself, casuistry is common to both Catholic and Protestant traditions in the seventeenth century. Protestant casuists tend to envision a more strongly inward and personal process than is found in Catholic texts, which offer a more rule-bound structure for conscientious decision-making. The differences are of emphasis rather than kind, for the extent to which case-based reasoning was widely used by participants in all traditions makes drawing clear distinctions difficult. Contemporaries, though, knew that conscience was understood differently across doctrinal lines. Commenting on the want of "publick provisions of Books of Casuistical Theology" for the Church of England, Taylor writes in *Ductor Dubitantium* that "we cannot

be well supplied out of the Roman Store-houses: for . . . we have found the Merchants to be deceivers, and the Wares too often falsified” (p. i). Such texts as Taylor’s were a more prominent aspect of Protestant culture for, as Camille Slight’s has noted, Protestant casuistry tended to be more accessible, circulating in vernacular texts for a general audience, whereas Catholic casuistry was most often contained in Latin texts intended for confessors.<sup>28</sup> In both contexts, the conscience is always understood primarily as an inward faculty, one that helps the individual apply broad moral principles to particular problems and that serves as a sort of prosecuting attorney or judge, examining the heart for signs of error.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, the questions of how conscience is to be activated and how it asserts its ultimate authority differ slightly. Susannah Brietz Monta has cautioned against over-emphasizing the inward nature of conscience in the Protestant traditions,<sup>30</sup> but the structure of conscientious decision making in manuals by Church of England and Puritan divines alike has a strongly introspective character and is, importantly, not highly mediated. Taylor emphasizes the issue of mediation in *Ductor Dubitantium* when he charges that

the Casuists of the *Roman* Church take these things for resolution and answer to questions of Conscience which are spoken by an authority that is not sufficient; and they admit of Canons, and the Epistles of Popes for authentick warranties . . . and have not any sufficient means to ascertain themselves what is binding in very many cases argued in their Canons, and Decretal Epistles, and Bulls of Popes. (p. iii)

By contrast, Protestant casuists assume that the individual will initiate the process of self-scrutiny himself and pursue it with an adequate degree of rigor. “Protestantism,” Slight’s writes, “assumes that ultimately everyone is his own casuist and must think through every moral doubt for himself” (p. 35).<sup>31</sup> Conscience is personal if not individualistic, “inviolable,” though “by no means autonomous” (p. 26). In these manuals, the aim is to help the individual discover what William Perkins calls the “little God setting in the middle of mens hearts.”<sup>32</sup>

Catholic examination of conscience, by contrast, takes a more mediated approach and is typically oriented towards preparing the individual for the sacrament of penance or confession. Built into the Catholic conception of conscience, therefore, is the need for recourse to an authority that is, if not precisely external to the self—because the good conscience will be in harmony with that authority—at least structured in a way that implicitly questions whether the individual will adequately carry out the process of self-scrutiny on his or her own. Manuals to prepare the individual for confession reveal this more mediated approach when they offer readers lists of questions, ranked under each of the ten commandments, to identify a wide

range of possible infractions. Breaking down the principle “Thou shalt not kill,” for example, the Jesuit William Warford asks the reader to consider “if he have refused to pardon or remit injuries, to those which have offended him,” or “if he have cursed others, either alive or dead: and with what intention.”<sup>33</sup> The phrasing of these hypothetical sins seems to invite repetition in the confessional so that the penitent can ventriloquize the language of an authority that has already established the range of possible offenses. Such ventriloquism is also of course implied by the inclusion of acts of contrition and other prayers that give shape and substance to conscientious reflection. Embedded in such practices is a belief that the individual conscience is neither so unique nor so perspicacious as to require a unique form for its articulation. Rather, external form governs self-presentation; conscience’s conclusions are common, not idiosyncratic. The Confiteor that Warford includes runs, “I have grievously offended in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, my fault, my most grievous fault,” and he observes that “Catholike people use to knock their brest” during its recitation (pp. 59-60). Here, the scripting of spiritual transformation, even down to its physical performance, guarantees rather than undermines authenticity.<sup>34</sup>

In *The Unhappy Penitent*, part of Ann’s dramatic function is to provide an authoritative characterization of Margarite’s situation and, to a lesser extent, Charles’s. As she serves to correct erring consciences, she assumes the kind of mediating authority that is embedded in Catholic penitential manuals. From this angle, her generally austere manner may be seen to position her as Margarite’s confessor rather than confidante. When Margarite accuses Ann of making her “miserable” by encouraging Charles to honor the initial marriage contract, Ann retains control of the language of value; she has acted, she says, in hopes “that both might so acquit your selves with honour” (p. 19). Margarite’s situation is

sad yet better to be born,  
 Than the reproaches of all the Just and Vertuous  
 Of Mankind, or what’s more terrible,  
 The Stings of sharp remors for violated Vows. (p. 20)

Though Margarite accepts Ann’s assessment—“You did the duty of a Friend, I know you did”—that assessment remains to some extent exterior to her own judgment (p. 20). She asks Ann to “leave me for a while to my distraction, / I wou’d alone indulge it to the height” (p. 20). More significantly, her acquiescence is only temporary, for she succumbs to Lorrain’s pleas to marry him clandestinely. “Passion,” Lorrain tells her presciently, “is all your Principle of Conscience” (p. 23). Rather than staging Margarite’s progressive assimilation of Ann’s judgments, the play implies that the binding of conscience depends on the presence of a superintending authority whose judgment may be admitted but not always obeyed.

As the play progresses, Ann tends to appear on stage to reprove Margarite for straying from her virtuous resolutions, and she admonishes more often than she directly assists her friend. Hearing of Margarite's improvident marriage with Lorrain, Ann laments, "there's no certain worth, / On which to found a firm, exalted Friendship; / I saw in you, a stock that promis'd much" and moralizes that her friend has been "indulgent to [her] vicious Passions" (pp. 35-36). Ann thus typically offers judgment rather than counsel. In the play's closing scene, Margarite's exoneration from Brittany's calumnies requires her renunciation of Lorrain. As she accepts this renunciation, King argues, we can see the "complete . . . self-mastery" that Margarite has achieved with Ann's counsel (p. 19). However, in the resolution of this final case of conscience, there are several signs that Ann retains her function as an externalized figure of conscientious authority. Ann's first words to Margarite after her honor is restored are neither congratulatory nor consolatory but stern: "Now my poor Friend, does not your melting heart / Repent your Vow?" she asks (p. 44). Whether she is chiding Margarite for her rash promise or probing her fidelity to that promise, Ann is the external authority that activates Margarite's conscience. When Margarite again wavers, Ann again bewails her frailty, exclaiming, "She's lost! What resolution can be trusted!" (p. 46). She is less a faithful friend than a remorseless enforcer of Margarite's obligations to heaven.

In her dialogue with Lorrain in the play's closing scene, Margarite seems to have adopted Ann's judgment to the extent that she emphasizes abstract virtue over the claims of feeling, but her actions suggest that she remains unsure if she can honor her vow to enter the cloister. Her marriage vow to Lorrain, she observes, "was it self null'd by my former Contract," making her promise to separate from him binding (p. 45). Though she and Lorrain "strove with fate, broke to each other / Through all Obligations, Conscience, and Honour," Margarite declares that they must now submit to "the Will of Heav'n" (p. 45). In practice, though, she falters: "O Madam," she says, appealing to Ann, "now assist, take, force me from him, / Or I shall yield, forget my Vow, fly perjur'd / To his Arms" (pp. 45-46). Her self-mastery seems to have limits. While Ann is largely silent as Margarite explains to Lorrain why they must part, she is on hand and steps in to escort Margarite offstage at the critical moment. Margarite has to be virtually carried away. She exclaims, "I tear my self for ever, ever, from thee!" (p. 47), in a moment that Robert Hume describes as "sentimental mush of the most contrived sort."<sup>35</sup> The stage direction notes that she exits "led by Women," and her brother notes, "She faints, support, lead her away" (p. 47). The scene's sentimental excess is slightly mitigated if we see the crucial tension here as whether Ann's determination will prevail over Margarite's yielding temperament; the play certainly asks us to sympathize

with Margarite but that sympathy is tempered by the supervening judgment that Ann represents.

While Ann's function in the play seems to be to impress on Margarite the claims of conscience, she is not an infallible paragon. Like the other characters, she is duped by her father's plot to besmirch Margarite's reputation. Yet, although Brittany's cunning can lead Ann astray, she never offers false counsel. The plot twist in fact serves to accentuate her virtue, for when she hears the allegation that Charles and Margarite have consummated their relationship, she believes in Margarite's innocence, prioritizing friendship over love, and is willing to go against her own interests to accuse Charles when he seems to malign Margarite. When her father's plot begins to unravel and her own error appears, Ann declares, "Let truth be known, who ever it condemn" (p. 43). Ann is vulnerable to deception, but her values and decision-making process remain sound.

Trotter also has Charles acknowledge his duty to Margarite largely independent of Ann's counsel. In fact, critical accounts that stress Trotter's negative portrayal of patriarchal structures, while largely accurate, should accommodate the fact that Charles is akin to Ann in his determination to honor even those vows contrary to his inclination. Though Ann does not exert the same direct authority over Charles that she does over Margarite, she still supplies a pattern for his own conscientious reflections. In their first scene together, Charles occasionally wavers in his resolution to marry Margarite, but Ann reinforces it, reassuring him that

A noble heart dreads nothing more than finding  
The choice it made unworthy, and sees with pleasure  
It's inclination justify'd by merit,  
Tho' to the loss of what was dearest to it. (p. 16)

Later, she tells Charles

cou'd you be tempted from your Faith  
To Heav'n and *Marg'rite*, not all the shining Glories  
Of your Crown . . . shou'd bribe me from my just Disdain,  
Of a dishonourable and impious  
Alliance, and undeserving my Esteem. (p. 17)

Once again, Ann's judgments of the situation are given a normative force. Charles emphasizes her role in supporting his determination when he acclaims her "a glorious Model" and assures her that "To preserve your heart I will for ever lose you" (p. 17). Ann's "Esteem" and approbation thus remain a standard even when her direct assistance is not required. Though Charles hesitates over the right course of action, Ann never does. If one might accuse Trotter of creating in Ann a dreadfully virtuous champion of self-denial—Trotter declaims in the play's closing lines, "let us correct our

selves / By these Examples” of “Unruly passion”—her character is more plausible when understood as an element of the larger casuistical structure of the drama (pp. 47-48). That structure suggests that conscientious reflection is defined neither solely by introspection nor collaboration but by a negotiation of authority whose mediated structure secures rather than hinders the proper ordering of the oft-recalcitrant will.

### *The Tragic Potential of “The Interested Scheme”*

*The Unhappy Penitent’s* use of moral dilemma as a plot device is representative of Trotter’s other early tragedies, but these plays also share a consistent thematic focus that is of interest. With some variation, each, like *The Unhappy Penitent*, centers on a situation in which characters must determine the extent to which they are obliged to honor prior vows and promises. In *Agnes de Castro*, the Prince struggles to remain faithful to his wife, Constantia, despite his passion for Agnes, who struggles to decide after Constantia’s death if she may return his love. In *The Fatal Friendship*, Gramont must decide whether or not to enter into a bigamous marriage with Lamira that will protect his first wife, Felicia, from her brother’s wrath, enable his friend Castalio to be freed from jail, and provide him sufficient funds to ransom his and Felicia’s kidnapped son. As in *The Unhappy Penitent*, these plays raise questions about the binding nature of vows made before the dramatic action opens and sometimes against the characters’ own interests—as in *Agnes de Castro*, where Constantia herself admits that “Th’ insensible my Husband, never felt / A transport of Fierce Love” and that he apparently married her for reasons of state.<sup>36</sup> Though *The Unhappy Penitent* heightens these tensions by presenting a situation in which the vows to be honored were made both on behalf of the protagonists and counter to their wishes, these thematic elements are present from Trotter’s first drama.

That Trotter’s tragedies emphasize the need to be true to one’s vows must be considered before endorsing the view that Trotter can be unproblematically associated with a Lockean contractarian politics that is in turn linked with, as Susan Staves puts it, a “secular and utilitarian” view of obligation more broadly.<sup>37</sup> Trotter’s ties to Locke are indisputable. In the realm of philosophy, she defends the moral epistemology of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* against the suggestion that it inadequately accounts for the origins and reality of moral distinctions. In the realm of politics, as Kelley notes, Trotter frequently points out the harms inflicted by tyrants (pp. 134-38). Tyranny certainly seems to receive a contractarian rebuke in *The Revolution of Sweden*, whose heroine, again named Constantia, bests a political opponent when she argues on behalf of the popular right to rebellion. According to Constantia, the people must have recourse



When Kings who are in Trust  
The Guardians of the Laws, the publick Peace and Welfare,  
Confess no Law but Arbitrary Will,  
Or know no use of Pow'r but to Oppress,  
And Injure, with Impunity.<sup>38</sup>

Though her antagonist argues that political authority derives from power, Constantia argues that such power ultimately comes from the people:

Is it Rebellion for a wretched People  
Oppress'd and Ruin'd, by that Power they gave  
For their Defence, the safety of their Rights  
To seek Redress? (p. 19)

Such moments suggest Trotter's sympathy with political ideals articulated by Locke and others though it is worth noting that her own work is more consistently informed by the philosophy of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* than the politics of his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689).

Nonetheless, it is necessary to be cautious about identifying Trotter with Lockean thought more broadly or with the kind of secular modernity for which Locke often stands as a convenient figure.<sup>39</sup> To the extent that tragedy in Trotter's dramas ensues when individuals break or are unfaithful to their vows, the dramas express ambivalence about the role of interest or desire in moral judgment. Setting aside the political implications of this ambivalence, Trotter's skepticism about the authority of desire accords with her impatience with voluntarist doctrines of moral obligation. Voluntarism—what Trotter terms “the interested scheme”—plays on desire by orienting morality around the will, not reason, and grounding obligation in pleasure and pain rather than right and wrong.<sup>40</sup> Trotter consistently objects to this identification of the right with the advantageous. In so doing, she marks her break with Locke, whose voluntarism she tried unsuccessfully to deny.<sup>41</sup> Unlike Locke, Trotter consistently seeks to derive moral obligation from normative sources beyond the self. In so doing, she draws on an arguably richer metaphysical view that again highlights the potential importance of her religious views for understanding her work more broadly. As in *The Unhappy Penitent*, vows in Trotter's other early tragedies provide the standard for conscientious judgment. And as in *The Unhappy Penitent*, trouble arises when individuals seek to renege on their formal commitments. In *Agnes de Castro*, a play that adapts the 1688 prose fiction of the same title by Aphra Behn that in turn borrows from a work by Jean-Baptiste de Brillhac, the Prince's passion for the eponymous heroine precipitates the tragedy and appalls even the Prince himself. When his love is discovered, the Prince describes his passion as a “Crime” and, tormented at the prospect of violating his marriage vows, accuses himself

of “wronging” his wife (p. 8). Although the murder of Constantia by the villainess Elvira conveniently opens the way for the Prince and Agnes to marry, the plot highlights desire’s transgressive and disruptive potential, which is confirmed by Agnes’s death (Merrens, p. 46). In *The Fatal Friendship*, the tragedy frames as specious the protagonist’s suggestion that abandoning his marriage vows is a heroic act. Speculating about what will happen to his wife, comrade, and child if he does not commit bigamy, Gramont wonders,

should I sacrifice 'em all, to keep  
A little peace of mind. . . .  
Walk on by rules, and calmly let 'em perish,  
Rather than tread one step beyond to save 'em!<sup>42</sup>

Rather than valorize Gramont, the play confronts him with Felicia’s insistent fidelity: “Look on me,” she implores him after learning of his bigamy, “look upon your wretched Wife!” (2:518). The value she places on her marriage vow leads Felicia, when confronted with her romantic rival, to rely on that vow rather than be drawn into a romantic contest: “I’ll not dispute with you my Charms,” she declares, “But urge my Right in him” (2:514).

Staves suggests that late Restoration plays increasingly present oaths as open to negotiation and revision, imagining how “a nominalist universe of force and passion triumphs over an idealist universe of words” (p. 192). More recently, Toni Bowers has noted that promise keeping (and breaking) retain their purchase in works that keep a skeptical distance from the liberal Restoration settlement.<sup>43</sup> In *The Fatal Friendship*, it is only Lamira, the villainess, who slights the power of vows and celebrates passion: “Because he swore to you, think you that Men / Remember Oaths in their loose Pleasures made?” she scoffs to Felicia (2:514). Later, she suggests that Gramont’s “adulterated love” releases his first wife from her own vows (2:516). In *Agnes de Castro*, the wicked Elvira scoffs at the idea of conscience, calling its influence “the childish prejudice of Education” and describing it as “a turn-coat Monitor” (p. 34). Her comments are immediately succeeded by the appearance of a ghost onstage, a rather clumsy device whose sole function is to enforce the judgment of conscience that Elvira has sought to dismiss. As in *The Unhappy Penitent*, a faulty conscience that misjudges the binding power of oaths must be corrected by an external “Monitor.” All three plays thematize the chaos that ensues when individuals make fresh calculations of their best interests instead of remaining subject to their existing promises. Particularly because they emphasize the binding power of commitments made prior to the dramatic action, Trotter’s plays insist that passion must be brought under the government of ideals even when their motive power diminishes.

To a certain extent, the emphasis on promise keeping in Trotter’s plays

is indebted to the emphasis on honor prominent in the heroic tradition though the motif of honor is somewhat more prevalent in the drama of the earlier rather than the later Restoration when pathos increasingly prevails.<sup>44</sup> Arguably, though, Trotter's plays invoke broader contexts than genre alone. As many critics note, she is self-consciously a moralist. Though the religious and political implications of the theme of fidelity to one's vows are suggestive, given a lack of biographical evidence, determinations must be tentative at best. In terms of the religious context, Staves has noted that despite the revocation of the Civil Marriage Act, the Restoration sees a continued development of the idea of marriage as a contractual relationship (p. 116). King adds that *Love at a Loss* "examines the implications of contract theory in courtship" and represents vows as theoretically negotiable.<sup>45</sup> However, Trotter's tragedies seem to resist a contractual view of marriage. Even *Love at a Loss* concludes with Lesbia married to the man to whom she was originally engaged rather than the man she prefers; as King observes, "Her choice . . . was ultimately for what she should do, not what she wants to do" (p. 142). If it is hard to attribute to Trotter a definitively sacramental view of marriage, her tragedies at least sit at odds with the spirit of the age by insisting on vows' durability. In terms of the political context, an analogy between the domestic relationships of the tragedies and political relationships is warranted by Staves's claim that representations of familial authority shift with changing representations of political authority in the period (pp. 111-18).<sup>46</sup> The political context for Trotter's emphasis on fidelity and on the power of prior oaths would seem to be Jacobitism.<sup>47</sup> Gosse even proposes that Trotter has "Jacobite propensities."<sup>48</sup> As I suggested above, however, claiming Trotter for the Jacobite cause is inadvisable if tempting. The difficulty of defining what it means to be a Jacobite in the 1690s is too great and the biographical evidence too slim to make a conclusive judgment possible. Bowers's suggestion that a "new-tory sensibility" arises in the early eighteenth century to stake out a space of political resistance less extreme than Jacobitism offers one way of understanding how someone like Trotter could hold to a political stance more nuanced than traditional binary oppositions allow (pp. 45-51).

Rather than focus specifically on the particular religious or political stakes of the plays' representation of vows or contracts, however, I would argue that seeing this theme as an instance of Trotter's focus on the broader category of "interest" makes her moral philosophy the most relevant context for understanding its stakes. If we see the early plays as imaginatively preoccupied with the ill effects of desire, a continuity emerges with her later discursive works' denial that interest is a central category in morals. As Sheridan and Martha Brandt Bolton have both noted, Trotter works hard both to deny the voluntarist account of moral obligation and to exonerate Locke from voluntarism because she is disquieted by the idea that in

pursuing the rewards and avoiding the punishments of an omnipotent God, the individual in a voluntarist scheme seeks her own pleasure in determining her moral obligations.<sup>49</sup> She asserts in *Remarks upon some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundations of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation* (1743), “I readily grant . . . that the relation of things to our own happiness, as *sensible* beings, is a very material relation, worth examining into; but it does not follow, that there is no other worth considering.”<sup>50</sup> Trotter prefers a tripartite scheme of moral motivation that embraces not only “happiness” and “misery” but also a good that derives its force from the individual’s rational and social, rather than simply sensual, natures. The underlying assumption is that moral good and evil inhere in the nature of things and in certain actions: “Though pleasure may be generally consequent upon doing a right or morally good action, that is not the true reason of doing it, is not the end the agent has in view,” she contends, “The rectitude or goodness of the action makes it preferable in itself” (1:424). Locke’s moral psychology sounds more hedonistic: “Things then are Good or Evil,” he writes, “only in reference to Pleasure or Pain.”<sup>51</sup> This statement squares with his belief that “*Morally Good and Evil* . . . is only the conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good or Evil is drawn on us, from the Will and Power of the Law-maker” (p. 351). Essentially, the principles of moral conduct are here shaped by calculations about what will produce the greatest quantum of happiness.

Critics have debated the extent of Locke’s voluntarism, but it seems clear that Trotter places less emphasis on interest—or that which pleases our “*sensible*” nature—than Locke, largely as a result of a different underlying metaphysical and religious picture.<sup>52</sup> Trotter’s greater emphasis on a teleological account of human nature and her belief in “eternal moral truths” that transcend God’s commands mean that, for her, doing what is right is intrinsically appealing and only coincidentally desirable.<sup>53</sup> In a letter to her niece that denies Locke’s sympathy with voluntarism, Trotter does admit that “I am not myself satisfied upon a review of what Mr. *Locke* has said on moral relations” and worries that “he has given occasion to the interested scheme so much in fashion of late.”<sup>54</sup> Though her plays are not mere fictionalizations of her philosophy, the tragic conflict they stage between principle and subjective judgment resonates with Trotter’s desire, as a philosopher, to offer disinterested grounds for morality. The standard of value for Trotter lies always beyond the self, whose limited ability to discern the good is her consistent theme; the “pleasure” and “pain” of the individual are hardly a reliable standard for her.<sup>55</sup> Moral heroism, moreover, depends on self-abnegation, on governing the will despite the powerful movements of desire. Ann anchors the moral framework of *The Unhappy Penitent* because she perceives, and directs others to perceive, the claims of conscience over and against the will. This perception can certainly be read

as the triumph of a certain sort of rationality,<sup>56</sup> but it is also a spiritual triumph, one whose underlying metaphysical grounds should not be ignored. For Trotter, the will is always in service to that numinous reality, the good: the will, she writes, will naturally be subject to “the *necessary* relations and *essential differences* of things.”<sup>57</sup> If we are tempted to let interpretive weight fall on how Trotter imagines and makes available the individual’s ability to affirm what is “necessary,” the “essential” nature of the good is the constant backdrop against which individual choice is exercised.

Critics are increasingly realizing, or remembering, that religion forms an often unavoidable context for understanding literature of the long eighteenth century. In this context, Trotter’s case can help us notice that individual religious crisis—internal debate about the “Fassion of [one’s] Religion”—does not necessarily entail a shift towards secularity. The overarching argument here has been that Trotter’s two conversions highlight the extent to which matters of faith play an important role in her life and thought. Her biography, moreover, hints at more complex socio-religious affiliations than have previously been noted. Casting her as a largely secular author, as many critics have tended to do, feels especially inappropriate when one considers the consistently religious focus of the writings that absorbed her energy later in life. Recovering a Catholic context in which to understand the structure and thematic concerns of her early tragedies can help us perceive a continuity, in emphasis if not in doctrine, across her career. In those early tragedies, it may be tempting to see the conscience-stricken individual as a figure for Trotter herself—torn, we might speculate, between older, hierarchical institutions and a modernizing individualism. However, to the extent that the tragedies affirm individuals’ choices to sacrifice their desires and submit to authoritative judgment, they affirm the moral achievement of what we might think of as an alternatively modern individual, one whose liberty is more readily recognizable when understood as the product of a specifically religious experience.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Female Wits; or the Triumverate of Poets at Rehearsal: A Comedy* (London: William Turner, 1704), 8. For the identification of Calista with Catharine Trotter, see Margaret Maison, “Pope and Two Learned Nymphs,” *The Review of English Studies*, n. s., 29 (1978), 407-08; and Anne Cline Kelley, *Catharine Trotter: An Early Modern Writer in the Vanguard of Feminism* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 19-20. Subsequent references to Kelley will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> For the details of these identifications, see Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 19-20. In Delarivier Manley’s *Secret Memoirs and Manners of several persons of quality, of both sexes. From the New Atalantis, an island in the Mediterranean*, vol. 2 (London: John Morphew and J. Woodward, 1709), the character identified with Trotter is a favorite with men and women alike (p. 56); in *The Adventures of Rivella* (London: 1714),

the Trotter character is described as “the most of a *Prude* in her outward Professions, and the least of it in her inward Practice” (p. 66).

<sup>3</sup> John Locke to Mrs. Cockburn [Catharine Trotter], Oates, 30 December 1702, in *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, 12th ed. (London: Rivington, 1824), 9:314-15.

<sup>4</sup> On female friendship in Trotter, see Heather King, “‘Be Mistress of Yourself and Firm to Virtue’: Female Friendship in Catharine Trotter’s *The Unhappy Penitent*,” *Eighteenth Century Women: Studies in Their Lives, Work, and Culture*, 3 (2003), 1-23; and Paula Backscheider, “Stretching the Form: Catharine Trotter Cockburn and Other Failures,” *Theatre Journal*, 47 (1995), 443-58. On her revision of heroic tragedy, see Rebecca Merrens, “Unmanned with Thy Words: Regendering Tragedy in Manley and Trotter,” in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 31-53. Subsequent references to King, Backscheider, and Merrens will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup> See Kathryn Ready, “Damaris Cudworth Masham, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, and the Feminist Legacy of Locke’s Theory of Personal Identity,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35 (2002), 563-76; Martha Brandt Bolton, “Some Aspects of the Philosophical Work of Catharine Trotter,” in *Hypatia’s Daughters: Fifteen Hundred Years of Women Philosophers*, ed. Linda Lopez McAlister (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 141-47; and Patricia Sheridan, “Reflection, Nature, and Moral Law: The Extent of Catharine Cockburn’s Lockeanism in her *Defence of Mr. Locke’s Essay*,” *Hypatia*, 22, No. 3 (2007), 133-51.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Constance Clark, *Three Augustan Playwrights* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 48-49.

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert Burnet, preface to *A Discourse concerning “A Guide in Controversies,”* in *Two Letters*, by Trotter (London: A. and J. Churchhill, 1707), A2. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>8</sup> For the classification of the play as a “late heroic” drama, see Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 474.

<sup>9</sup> See Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Kimberly Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women’s Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Maison, “Pope and Two Learned Nymphs,” 409.

<sup>14</sup> Trotter, “Verses sent to Mr. Bevil Higgons,” in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn: Theological, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical*, ed. Thomas Birch, 2 vols. (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1751), 2:557.

<sup>15</sup> Trotter’s entry in *The History of the Works of the Learned* was published as *Remarks upon some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtues*, in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*, 1:455.

<sup>16</sup> Trotter, "O Deus, ego amo te," in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*, 2:576.

<sup>17</sup> For further details, see Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> For some of the complexities of the nonjurors' sympathies, see Eveline Cruickshanks, ed., *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1689-1759* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982); and Paul Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Niall Mackenzie argues that Trotter's "role as a Whig apologist is complicated by" her connections with the Catholic and nonjuring communities; see Mackenzie, "Some British Writers and Gustavus Vasa," *Studia Neophilologica*, 78 (2006), 65.

<sup>20</sup> Trotter, *A Discourse concerning "A Guide in Controversies,"* in *Two Letters*, 39. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (New York: Scribner's, 1920), 51.

<sup>22</sup> Trotter, *The Unhappy Penitent* (London: William Turner, 1701), 2. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>23</sup> Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of the Conscience in Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>24</sup> On the centrality of this question in casuistical reflection, see Hilaire Kallendorf, *Conscience on Stage: The Comedia as Casuistry in Early Modern Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium: Or, The Rule of Conscience in all her General Measures*, 4th ed. (London: Meredith, 1696), 721. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor uses Aristotle, among other authorities, to argue that fathers cannot compel their children to marry whom they will: "It may not be done against their wills, but neither is their will alone sufficient. The Fathers have a negative, but the children must also like. . . . For it is certain they have the power of choice" (*Ductor Dubitantium*, p. 719).

<sup>27</sup> Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 119.

<sup>28</sup> Camille Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 4. Kallendorf, however, notes that vernacular Catholic casuistical texts in early modern Spain were accessible to both lay and clerical readers (pp. 9-10). Subsequent references to Slight's will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>29</sup> For common metaphors for the conscience, see Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of the Conscience*, 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Susannah Brietz Monta, "'Thou Fall'st a Blessed Martyr': Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and the Polemics of Conscience," *English Literary Renaissance*, 30 (2000), 266.

<sup>31</sup> Slight does observe that Protestant traditions that place a greater emphasis on the corruption of reason place a correspondingly greater emphasis on the importance of revelation but not on the interpretive power of an external authority.

<sup>32</sup> William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Uniuersitie of Cambri Mr. William Perkins*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: John Leggett, 1612), 519.

<sup>33</sup> William Warford, *A Briefe Treatise of Pennance* (St. Omer: 1624), 76-77. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>34</sup> Trotter's subsequent moral philosophy offers a standard view of conscience that



occasionally alludes to its potentially mediated quality. The conscience is not a sensory faculty, she argues, but can operate almost unnoticed due to “previous ratiocination, or instruction”; see *A Defence of Mr. Locke’s “Essay of Human Understanding,”* in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*, 1:100. Defining conscience, she writes that it “is nothing else but a judgment, which we make of our actions, with reference to some law, which we are persuaded ought to be the rule of them,” though she immediately cautions that “this account . . . leaves all its authority in those, who have had occasions of being rightly informed of their duty” (1:104-05).

<sup>35</sup> Robert Hume, *Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 453.

<sup>36</sup> Trotter, *Agnes de Castro* (London: 1696), 4. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Staves, *Players’ Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 48. Staves argues that, across the Restoration period, we can see “the emergence of new political myths to correspond to the new secular and utilitarian ideology of Locke and his eighteenth-century followers” (p. 48), but she also links such political myths with changing accounts of obligation in the family and social relations more generally (pp. 111-90). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>38</sup> Catharine Trotter, *The Revolution of Sweden* (London: Knapton, 1706), 19. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>39</sup> For Trotter’s links with Locke’s philosophy, see Backscheider, “Stretching the Form,” 457; and King, “‘Nay, then, ’Tis past Jestin’: Piety and Female Friendship in Catharine Trotter’s *Love at a Loss*,” in *The Pious Sex: Essays on Women and Religion in the History of Political Thought*, ed. Andrea Radasanu (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010), 127.

<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece [Anne Hepburn], 29 September 1748, in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*, 2:343.

<sup>41</sup> See Sheridan, “Reflection, Nature, and Moral Law.”

<sup>42</sup> Trotter, *The Fatal Friendship*, in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*, 2:501. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>43</sup> Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46, 217. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>44</sup> See Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 3-27. Rothstein emphasizes more continuity in the period in *Restoration Tragedy*, 113-34.

<sup>45</sup> King, “‘Nay, then, ’Tis past Jestin,” 144. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>46</sup> See also Bowers, *Force or Fraud*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> See Howard Erskine-Hill, “Literature and the Jacobite Cause: Was there a Rhetoric of Jacobitism?” in *Ideology and Conspiracy*, 49-69; and Murray Pittock, “Jacobite Literature: Love, Death and Violence,” in *Culture and Revolution*, ed. Paul Dukes and John Dunkley (London: Pinter, 1990), 33-45.

<sup>48</sup> Gosse, *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters*, 43.

<sup>49</sup> See Sheridan, “Reflection, Nature, and Moral Law,” 139-40; and Bolton, “Some Aspects of the Philosophical Work of Catharine Trotter,” 141-47.



<sup>50</sup> Trotter, *Remarks upon some Writers*, 1:421. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>51</sup> John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 229. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>52</sup> On Locke's voluntarism, see, for example, James Tully, "Governing Conduct," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 12-71; and Alex Tuckness, "The Coherence of a Mind: John Locke and the Law of Nature," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 37 (1999), 73-90.

<sup>53</sup> Bolton, "Some Aspects of the Philosophical Work of Catharine Trotter," 148.

<sup>54</sup> Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece [Anne Hepburn], 2:343.

<sup>55</sup> Sheridan suggests that Trotter is in some ways more secular than Locke because for her the moral law binds independent of God's sanction (pp. 48-49). The view of God as a purveyor of what Sheridan terms "subjective interests," however, seems out of place in the seventeenth century (p. 149).

<sup>56</sup> See Broad, *Women Philosophers*, 150.

<sup>57</sup> Trotter, "Mrs. Cockburn's Answer to Dr. Sharp," in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*, 2:357.