

## Introduction:

### Early Modern Literature and England's Long Reformation

David Loewenstein and Alison Shell

Historians of religion in early modern Europe have been increasingly inclined to view the Reformation as a “Long Reformation” that extended over several centuries.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, historians of early modern England have also begun to emphasize the complex, messy, and long-drawn-out process of reformation that continued well beyond the significant political and religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. In the words of Andrew Pettegree, this refers to “a process requiring many generations before the changes in belief and behavior anticipated by the reformers could be accomplished.”<sup>2</sup> *England's Long Reformation*, a major collection of essays edited by Nicholas Tyacke and published in 1998, has proven especially important in addressing the ways the Reformation in England can be considered a protracted and never-completed process, “not an event with a straightforward beginning and end.”<sup>3</sup> However, critical conversation about the Long Reformation and the uneven, slow process it entailed has been primarily conducted by historians of religion, with little contribution from literary scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971); English translation, with an introduction by John Bossy, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: a New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977); Peter G. Wallace, *The Long European Reformation: Religion, Political Conflicts and the Search for Conformity, 1350-1750* (Houndsmills: Basingstoke, 2004); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 2003); Carlos M. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016); and *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c. 1300-1700*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Pettegree, “Introduction: The Changing Face of Reformation History,” in *The Reformation World*, ed. Pettegree (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *England's Long Reformation, 1500-1800*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (London: UCL Press, 1998); quotation from Jeremy Black's contribution to that volume: “The Making of a Protestant Nation: ‘Success’ and ‘Failure’ in England's Long Reformation,” 313. See also Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51:2 (2008): 497-528; Peter Marshall, “(Re)Defining the Reformation,” *Journal of British Studies* 48:3 (2009): 564-86 (esp. 567-69); Lucy Bates, “The Limits of Possibility in England's Long Reformation,” *The Historical Journal* 53:4 (2010): 1049-70.

The aim of this special issue of *Reformation* is thus twofold: to enhance and stimulate critical discussion about early modern England and the Long Reformation; and to bring literary scholars into the critical discussion in order to see how they, along with the primary texts and early modern authors on which they work, can generate fresh assessments of the Reformation as *longue durée*. Consequently, this special issue includes contributions by both early modern historians and literary critics. Our belief is that scholars from the two disciplines should be in conversation with each other, since their conversation can generate new perspectives on the constant remaking of the Reformation—or Reformations, as some scholars increasingly prefer to characterize the multiple religious upheavals and changes, both Catholic and Protestant, of the early modern period.<sup>4</sup>

When did the Long Reformation begin and end in England? This special issue of *Reformation* does not attempt to answer this question by providing precise dates, and early modern writers themselves did not offer definitive ones. Historians of religion are now less likely to confine the Reformation to the major religious upheavals of sixteenth-century England and Europe and almost none now confine the English Reformation to the few decades between 1529-1559. As the work of Anne Hudson on Wycliffite texts and the “premature Reformation” demonstrates, the origins of the Reformation can be traced back at least to the 1380s.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a recent study reveals that eighteenth-century English divines believed that they were still living

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Eire, *Reformations; English Reformations: Historiography, Theology, and Narrative*, a special issue of *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40:3 (2010), edited by David Aers and Nigel Smith. See also Marshall, “(Re)Defining the English Reformation,” 566-67, on the notion of plural reformations.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). See also Patrick Collinson, “Comment on Eamon Duffy’s Neale Lecture,” in Tyacke, ed., *England’s Long Reformation*, 72.

in a Reformation without end.<sup>6</sup> Several contributions to our special issue, especially those by Ann Hughes, Karl Gunther, and David Loewenstein, focus on the English Revolution as a crucial and fertile period in the Long Reformation; during these decades of religious and political upheaval, preachers and writers—notably John Milton—believed that they were living in an age when the slow-moving Reformation might be reformed, renewed, and, indeed, reinvented. Other contributions, especially those by James Simpson and Alison Shell, prompt us to think about ways the Reformation was continuing to unfold well beyond the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The impact of the Reformation in England is still profoundly felt in our own times in America, for example in the apocalyptic and millenarian prophetic beliefs of modern and contemporary American thought and culture, especially its right-wing evangelical culture.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to the concept of the English Reformation as a protracted process, which he regards as “helpful,” Patrick Collinson has nevertheless argued that “the longer we make this particular piece of string, extending it into the eighteenth and even the nineteenth century, the less useful and meaningful it becomes as a tool of measurement and as a piece of periodization.” Collinson warns that adhering to the idea of *Ecclesia semper reformanda* “may contain an important truth about the dynamics of religious systems, but it does to church history what the farmers have done to Bedfordshire: rooting out the hedges and other landmarks, turning a once

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<sup>6</sup> Robert G. Ingram, *Reformation without End: Religion, Politics and the Past in Post-Revolutionary England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> See also James Simpson, *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), for an account of the ongoing impact of the Reformation and a powerful reconsideration of the Whig tradition of interpretation and Protestant triumphalism; Simpson argues that the “illiberal” dimensions of the evangelical revolution in the Reformation are especially crucial to understanding modern-day Western liberalism.

<sup>8</sup> See the superb study by Paul Boyer: *When Time Shall be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); besides tracing American prophecy belief back to the Bible, Boyer also includes discussion of the impact of the Reformation in England (see esp. 62-68). Religious culture and conflict in America as a significant manifestation of the Long Reformation goes beyond the scope of our special issue with its focus on England and its literature. For a valuable study of the legacy of the Protestant Reformation and interpreting the Hebrew Bible on American exceptionalism, see Achsah Guibbory, “The Reformation of Hebrew Scripture: Chosen People, Chosen Nations, and Exceptionalism,” *Reformation* 23.1 (May 2018): 100-19.

subtly varied landscape into a featureless prairie.”<sup>9</sup> These comments, published over twenty years ago, preserve a historiographical moment when the notion of the English Reformation as defined by legislative events was being questioned, but when historians of the topic would typically have set boundaries between political and cultural history, as well as between historical and literary studies.<sup>10</sup>

In the intervening twenty years, such demarcations have been ploughed up as often as the English hedgerows which Collinson nostalgically recalled. In Reformation studies, as across the humanities in general, firm disciplinary boundaries matter less than ever. Thus, the early modern religious historians who contribute to our special issue attend to the rhetorical, generic, and literary qualities of the printed and manuscript works they address. Collaboration between scholars in the disciplines still remains too infrequent; yet in this special issue Thomas Freeman and Susannah Brietz Monta, working in history and English departments respectively, have combined their expertise to produce an essay illuminating John Foxe’s (1516/17-1587) handling of virgin martyr legends in relation to the Long Reformation. The literary historians who contribute to this issue likewise tend to employ a variety of historicist methodologies, while addressing the Long Reformation by analyzing closely the uses of narrative, biblical hermeneutics and exegetical debates, metaphorical writing, and the translation and reception of texts. Moreover, chronological boundaries have been increasingly challenged and reconsidered

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<sup>9</sup> Collinson, “Comment on Eamon Duffy’s Neale Lecture,” in Tyacke, ed., *England’s Long Reformation*, 75. Harriet Lyon discusses this passage in this issue [pagination to be added at proof stage]. See also Ann Hughes’s essay in this issue, [pagination to be added at proof stage]; and the concerns raised by Peter Marshall in explaining the English Reformation “in any of its long, longer, and longest variants”: “(Re)Defining the English Reformation,” 568-69.

<sup>10</sup> Of course there are some important exceptions to this assertion in terms of the cross-disciplinary work of other early modern historians in the later twentieth century: e.g., Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber, 1977); Hill, *A Tinker and A Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: Knopf, 1989); Kevin Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

in interdisciplinary work on England's Long Reformation. For instance, the recent AHRC-funded project "Remembering the Reformation" benefits from a collaboration between historians and literary scholars aiming to investigate "how the Reformations were remembered, forgotten, contested and re-invented."<sup>11</sup>

Attention to literature can only elongate notions of reformation. Literature is, after all, resistant to fixed points and hospitable to memories, resonances and hauntings. Representations come after events, sometimes a long way after. But the traffic between historical occasion and imaginative depiction is not always one-way; the effects of religious reform ricocheted between representation and actuality, and literary responses to the past could affect future events. In his contribution to this special issue, Karl Gunther describes how the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia was used to give the Marian martyrs a voice, helping to articulate a notion that their deaths called out for vengeance: since Protestants did not believe in the intercession of saints, literary stratagems bypassed doctrinal orthodoxy here. Such anxieties bore legislative fruit in *An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament, Exhorting all his Majesties good subjects...to the duty of Repentance, (as the onely remedy for their present Calamities) with an earnest Confession, and deepe Humiliation for all particular and Nationall Sins* (1643).<sup>12</sup>

One topic that deserves further exploration in the context of the Long Reformation is the link between trauma and narrative, and its double-edged effects. Story-telling is a way of therapeutically addressing the past – yet, by the same token, it obliges one to keep remembering

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<sup>11</sup> <https://rememberingthereformation.org.uk>. For work that unsettles the boundary between the late medieval period and the Reformation, see *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), as well as James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Volume 2: 1350-1547 in *The Oxford English Literary History*, and Simpson, *Permanent Revolution*.

<sup>12</sup> Wing E1849.

it.<sup>13</sup> For Protestants, the national trauma activated during the reign of Mary I (1553-58) resonated for centuries afterwards. Conversely, on the subject of the Reformation's Catholic victims, the Reformation could bring about transgenerational traumas within family units. Alison Shell's essay examines the long afterlife of the sacrilege narrative, which cast a long shadow over families who had benefited from monastic impropriations, co-opting any misfortunes they might suffer into stories of genealogical taint which now seem Gothic. Here again, narrative drove people to action: whether that was to surrender monastic land to the church, or to set up bodies such as the Tithe Redemption Trust. This might seem a long way from the memory of Protestant martyrs – but in both contexts, the idea of a continuing Reformation translated into a desire for expiation, exacerbated by uncertainty as to how much repentance was enough.

The distant past was inspirational too. When it came to ecclesiastical history, Protestant ideals were typically long-sighted – the further away, the worthier of respect. In their attempts to recover the charisma of the early Church, reformers constantly looked back in order to remake the Reformation in the present. As discussed by Thomas Freeman and Susannah Breitz Monta in this collection, John Foxe conscripted the virgin martyrs of early Christianity into the quintessentially Reformation narratives of his *Actes and Monuments*, with their bodies – resistant, broken, transmogrified – personifying the quest to recover primitive purity. But even this looks chronologically timid when set alongside the reformers who look back to the beginning of time, searching – as Kristen Poole describes in her essay – for the Adamic language, free of later impurities and ambiguities: a quest of immense symbolic importance, doomed by the metaphorical nature of language.

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<sup>13</sup> See J. Roger Kurtz (ed.), *Trauma and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), introduction.

The irony here is the centrality of figurative discourse to the reformers' endeavor. Imaginative extensions of metaphor were inseparable from the conceptualization of the Long Reformation: for instance, the comparison of reformation to housekeeping. Long before Christopher Haigh caused waves by speaking of "English Reformations," reformation was thought of in the plural because of reformers' sensitivity to the re-encroachments of impure religion.<sup>14</sup> In her essay for this collection, Ann Hughes quotes the view of Gaspar Hicke (1605-77) that, for reformation to advance, stains and abuses needed to be wiped away and the church purged: "this is sweeping the floore, weeding the garden, fining the silver from its drosse."<sup>15</sup> Speaking in 1644 and reflecting on the legacy of a century earlier, Hicke exemplified the desire for constant reform and alertness. Tidying could shade into renovation, the temple-work needed to keep God's house in order, which in turn could become a warning against short-term thinking about the slow-moving Reformation. With typical originality, John Milton (1608-74) turns this into an apology for dissent as he addresses "the reforming of Reformation it self"; David Loewenstein's essay considers how in *Areopagitica* Milton promotes a new and bolder age of Reformation, while inveighing against "a sort of irrationall men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built."<sup>16</sup>

Literary genres, like literary language, helped drive reformers' thinking. Anti-Catholic satire resonated for generations after the Reformation: Harriet Lyon's essay on the satirical and polemical *Friers Chronicle* considers its complex amalgam of fact and fiction as it transforms the chronicle genre. Commenting on the Dissolution of the Monasteries from the vantage-point

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<sup>14</sup> Haigh, *English Reformations*.

<sup>15</sup> Ann Hughes, [pagination to be added at proof stage] in this issue.

<sup>16</sup> David Loewenstein, [pagination to be added at proof stage] in this issue.

of the 1620s and drawing on genuine but imaginative commissioners' reports, it masquerades tongue-in-cheek as an authentic document – and a chronicle at that, concerned with the business of historical record. Its wild bricolage reminds us that reformers sometimes drew on their predecessors in a playful manner. More decorously, reactions to the Reformation's founding fathers can be tracked by the decisions of successive editors and adapters, who recalibrated them for new generations and illustrated shifting preoccupations in so doing. Hence, phases of the *longue durée* Reformation can be tracked via critical methodologies evolved to address literary texts. Cathy Shrank's essay on printed English translations of Erasmus' colloquies provides a striking illustration of this. It shows how Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466-1536), the Catholic reformer, was re-reformed to keep his literary legacy up to date throughout the early modern period: first via local semantic changes and paratext, then by heavy reworking.

One way to gauge long reformations is by the length of specific scholarly, polemical and imaginative interchanges inspired by reformed doctrine and discipline. When such conversations no longer generate soteriological concern, or dry up altogether, it makes sense to talk of an end. Phebe Jensen's essay on astrology and religion in the Long Reformation offers one such case-study. Astrology was often thought to mimic notions of predestination, and Christopher Marlowe's (1564-93) *Dr. Faustus*, as he invokes "the 'stars' that reigned at my nativity / Whose influence hath allotted death and hell," stimulates the imaginative anxieties this would have engaged.<sup>17</sup> Even when the play was first put on, audiences would have been aware of a counter-argument that the stars influenced man, but could not compel him. For later generations, after the "alliance between English reformed religion and astrology" had been broken, Marlowe's play

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<sup>17</sup> *Doctor Faustus*, 5:2, 81-2. Quoted from the A-text of the play in Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

would have come across differently again. Like some other scholars who have contributed to this volume, Jensen traces a cultural phenomenon inspired by the Reformation from its source to its end.

Political and legislative watersheds, which lend themselves to firm terminal dating, can only be of limited help in endeavors of this kind. Because cultural shifts are less clear-cut, they demand fresh thinking about how we assess the Long Reformation. While literary evidence is only one aspect of this, literature is – as James Simpson comments in his essay for this collection – “at home with the individual case, social context, and gradualism.”<sup>18</sup> His plea for the “very long Reformation” as a conceptual category, in an essay dealing ultimately with nineteenth-century literature, takes us back to Collinson’s concern that “the longer we make this particular piece of string, extending it into the eighteenth and even the nineteenth century, the less useful and meaningful it becomes.” Yet, to extend the metaphor, one piece of string is hardly enough. Assessing the Long Reformation with an eye to cultural particularity leaves one with a very ragged fringe – some filaments of which extend, *pace* Collinson, into the nineteenth century and well beyond.

Fringes of another kind problematize over-neat definitions of the Long Reformation. As the past few years have reminded the English-speaking world, groups considered marginal or *personae non gratae* within the academy are legion outside, and powerful opinion-formers. Sometimes this has had the effect of curtailing battles dating from the Reformation era. Conservative Catholics and Protestants join forces on many social issues, and in their attitudes to homosexuality, for instance, have more in common with each other than with liberal members of their own denominations. Yet one should not assume that all Reformation-era battles are now of

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<sup>18</sup> James Simpson, [pagination to be added at proof stage] in this issue.

purely academic interest. One literary – or semi-literary – testament to their continued vigor can be found in the series of Chick pamphlets, American publications that are widely distributed in Britain. Crudely illustrated, venomously anti-Catholic, Calvinist in a way that caricatures Calvin, these offer a present-day analogy to the popular Protestant polemic of Tudor and Stuart England. To most readers of *Reformation* – believers, agnostics and atheists alike – they would be of intense academic interest but utterly unconvincing as tracts, serving only to reinforce ideals of religious toleration. Yet readers of Chick pamphlets considerably outnumber readers of *Reformation* – if we are to believe the website, over 900 million have been sold to date – and have, no doubt, converted more individuals than *Reformation*.<sup>19</sup> There is a gulf between us and our contemporaries who read such matter for real, and we are better equipped to look across it than they are. For them, Reformation-era quarrels continue; for us, they should not be consigned to the past.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.chick.com>.