

Gender, religion, and early modern nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and the genesis of English anti-Catholicism.

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ANNE McLAREN

God send our mistress a husband, and by him a son, that we may hope our posterity shall have a masculine succession.

William Cecil to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, 1561¹

IN OCTOBER 2000, the European Human Rights Convention was incorporated into British law. In December 2000, *The Guardian*, a left-leaning national daily, announced that it would use that step toward European integration to contest the legality of the 1701 Act of Settlement. That act was designed to limit succession to the throne to Protestant heirs in the Hanoverian line. Geoffrey Robertson, the human rights lawyer spearheading the campaign, argued that the act infringed the convention by discriminating first and foremost against Roman Catholics but also against women, adopted children, and bastards. *The Guardian's* campaign highlights yet again the militant anti-Catholicism that has been one of the defining traits, and lasting puzzlements, of English history from the late sixteenth century onward. Equally revealing are the subordinate groups that Robertson identified as having been disadvantaged by the 1701 Act. The drive to secure the constitutional innovation that had given the crown to the Dutchman William III—in his own right and, in the last resort, as a consequence of his Protestant virility—also privileged male primogeniture (although it did not exclude women from the throne) and blood right, albeit in limited terms.² *The Guardian's* campaign quickly fizzled out. It seems to have been intended primarily to call attention to the institutional constraints

I would like to extend my thanks to J. H. Burns, Andrew Hadfield, Keith Mason, and Pauline Stafford for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this article, and to Richard Price for urging me to consider the *longue durée*. The *AHR* reviewers' reports, even the bracing ones, made me clarify my argument. For support and encouragement, my thanks to Frances Dolan, Sarah Hanley, and Jeffrey Wasserstrom. I presented an earlier draft at the Early Modern British History Seminar at the Huntington Library and would like to thank its organizer, Barbara Donagan, and those who attended for a probing and stimulating discussion.

¹ British Library (hereafter, BL), Add. 35830, fol. 159v.

² Clare Dyer, "A Challenge to the Crown: Now Is the Time for Change," *The Guardian* (December 6, 2000): 1. The campaign was covered in the British and American press in December 2000. At the same time, on December 6, the Scottish National Party tabled a motion calling for repeal of the Act of Settlement, after having unanimously backed an SNP-led motion condemning the act as discriminatory and calling for its abolition in December 1999. For the gender dynamics of Restoration England, see Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680–1714* (Manchester, 1999).

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