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**The Shadow of Patronage: Lewis Stephens and “The Ecclesiastical Climbers”<sup>1</sup>**

Abstract: Drawing extensively from hitherto-unexplored manuscript sources, this article adopts a historical approach to first outline the functioning of patronage within the eighteenth-century church, with particular reference to the formation of Lewis Stephens’s clerical identity. This in turn provides a foundation for the interrogation of Stephens’s satirical compositions, and especially the depiction of his former patron, Archbishop Lancelot Blackburne. Finally, the relationship between Stephens’s contributions to public religious discourse, clerical conduct, and private literary compositions in relation to other leading satirists and writers of the period is analysed in order to further illuminate the interplay between the roles of clergyman and writer in Walpolean Britain.

Keywords: Lancelot Blackburne, Church, patronage, reputation, satire, Southwell, Lewis Stephens, York

In the 1720s, there were few clergymen in England and Wales with greater prospects for future preferment than Lewis Stephens. His success in cultivating the favour of influential patrons in the church was summed up in the *Stamford Mercury* for 3 September 1724, which reported that, ‘the Reverend Mr. Lewis Stephens, Chaplain to the last two Bishops of Winchester, and at present Chaplain to the Archbishop of York, is nominated to the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple.’<sup>2</sup> Just as Stephens’s clerical career was peaking, however, he broke ties with his principal patron, leading to a gradual withdrawal from his ambitions for future preferment, the tumultuous world of politico-religious activity, and from deference to his ecclesiastical superiors.

While Stephens’s known published output is limited to six sermons preached between 1723 and 1735, the identification of his hitherto unexplored correspondence and satirical compositions provides an opportunity for the exploration of the compatibility of religious and literary identities in the mid-eighteenth century using cross-disciplinary methodologies.<sup>3</sup> Whereas, in relation to Methodist studies, McNelly has recently argued for the consolidation of historical and literary approaches to the “myriad of texts” that appeared in response to the evangelical revival, the challenge of assessing the great abundance of literary outputs relating to the discourse of the Church of England often seems

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<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful for the advice and encouragement of the editors, and of Alexander Hardie-Forsyth and William Gibson in the completion of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> *Stamford Mercury*, Thursday. September 3. 1724.

<sup>3</sup> Letter Book from Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, c. 1710-47, Cornwall Record Office, G/1968 (hereafter cited as, Stephens Letters). **Identified by the author in 2015.**

insurmountable.<sup>4</sup> The approach taken by this study, however, is to analyse the texts associated with an individual, in order to reach broader conclusions about the relationship between ostensibly literary endeavours, religious thought, and clerical identity.

### **The Formation of Clerical Identity: Lewis Stephens, Patronage and the Collegiate Church of Southwell**

The ecclesiastical patronage system of the eighteenth century was framed within broader societal notions of reciprocal duty. Writing in 1754, the politician George Bubb Dodington summarised,

Service is obligation, obligation implies return. Could any man of honour profess friendship, accept the offer of his friend's whole services, suffer those offers to be carried into execution, avail himself of their whole utility, and then tell him he could not or would not make him any return? Could there be such a character?<sup>5</sup>

In the church, the ties of service played a particularly important role in the lives of episcopal chaplains. The functions undertaken by these unsalaried clergymen varied greatly, but many were intimate members of a bishop's household, and were centrally involved in the management of diocesan affairs.<sup>6</sup> The degree to which this provided vital experience for further advancement in the church is evident in that half of all bishops in England and Wales between 1660 and 1760 had formerly served as chaplains.<sup>7</sup> As such, many lived in the "shadowlands of expectation" in hope of future rewards.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1715 and 1724, Lewis Stephens served as chaplain in succession to bishops Sir Jonathan Trelawny, Charles Trimmell, and Lancelot Blackburne at Winchester and Exeter. This positioned him at the forefront of church politics, as the Whig ministry looked to Trimmell and then Blackburne as leading ecclesiastical advisors during an unprecedented period in which neither archbishop was deemed to be "in measures" with the government.<sup>9</sup> The sudden death of the Tory

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<sup>4</sup> Brett C. McNelly, "Writing the Revival: The Intersections of Methodism and Literature in the Long 18th Century," *Literature Compass* 12. no.1 (2015): 15.

<sup>5</sup> George Bubb Dodington, *Autobiography, A Collection of the Most Instructive and Amusing Lives Ever Published, Written by the Parties Themselves....* (London: 1828), 22:162.

<sup>6</sup> William Gibson, *A Social History of the Domestic Chaplain, 1530–1840* (Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1997), 145–161.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Ray Hirschberg, "A Social History of the Anglican Episcopate, 1660–1760" (PhD diss. University of Michigan, 1976), 236.

<sup>8</sup> E. H. Plumptre, *The Life of Thomas Ken DD* (London: 1816), 1:368, cited in Gibson, *Social History of the Domestic Chaplain*, 125.

<sup>9</sup> Draft notes on Church management, c. 1723, University of St. Andrews Gibson MS. MS5220.

Archbishop of York in May 1724 provided the ministry with an opportunity to promote a bishop of firm Whig principles, and as such Blackburne was translated from Exeter. This heralded a political wind-change in the North of England, as despite his advanced years, Blackburne was active in exercising his episcopal patronage in favour of loyal Whig clergymen.<sup>10</sup> The extent of this patronage was best summarised by Blackburne's successor, Thomas Herring, who considered the potential of the archbishopric for serving his clients in March 1743.

The ArchB<sup>p</sup> of Yorke is a Patron of above forty Prebends in y<sup>e</sup> two Cathedrals of York & Southwell, all w<sup>th</sup> CorpSES, some good ArchDeaconries & other things, & many Livings of one Hundred a Year & some few of two.<sup>11</sup>

Of this patchwork of patronage, the case of the collegiate church of Southwell in Nottinghamshire is highly illustrative of the manner in which church dignities were distributed to support broader political aims. Southwell was a capitular foundation of sixteen prebendaries, one of which was to serve as residentiary in turn on a quarterly basis. Between 1724 and 1743, Blackburne was assiduous in collating his key allies to the prebends when they fell vacant, thereby granting them access to the profits of the canonries, and placing them in a position to forward his interests in chapter proceedings. Having filled three vacancies according to prior obligations, Blackburne appointed his chaplains Thomas Hayter and Lewis Stephens to prebends in 1728 and 1729, respectively.<sup>12</sup> Aside from the formalities of installation, however, the prebends were treated as sinecures, leaving the chaplains free to fulfil other functions within the diocese. The issue of residence was resolved through delegation, placing the responsibility for the routine business of renewing leases, repairing the fabric, and exercising the peculiar jurisdiction of Southwell in the hands of the prebendaries who lived nearby in Nottinghamshire.<sup>13</sup> As such, Southwell was key to the distribution of the archbishops' patronage during this period, but relatively distant in both proximity and influence from the centre of ecclesiastical administration in York.

Despite the ties of duty that formerly bound Stephens to his patron, it was only following his breach with Archbishop Blackburne in the 1730s that Stephens determined to attend to his residence at Southwell. Between 1735 and 1743, Stephens completed his quarterly residence on three occasions,

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<sup>10</sup> Gareth Walker, "The Church in York, 1688–1747: Aspects of the Relationship between Church, Politics and Society in York during the Late-Stuart and Early-Hanoverian Period" (master's thesis, University of York, 2001), 85–122.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Herring to William Herring, 31 March 1743, University of Nottingham Special Collections, Pw V 120.

<sup>12</sup> Institution Act Book, 1724–1732, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Inst. AB. 11, p. 189.

<sup>13</sup> Graham Hendy, "The Southwell Set: Prebendaries of Southwell Collegiate Church in 'the Long Eighteenth Century,' c. 1660–1840," *Transactions of the Thoroton Society* 112 (2008): 177–198.

despite living the majority of the year in Hampshire.<sup>14</sup> Stephens's continued willingness to undertake the journey to Nottinghamshire, and distance himself from the main stages of clerical activity, reflected his disaffection with political affairs and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. At the fall of Walpole in 1742, Stephens remarked that "Whoever is y<sup>e</sup> new Minister, I shall pay as little Court [to] him, as to the present (...) the days are evil, & I am glad, y<sup>t</sup> mine are few."<sup>15</sup> When Stephens arrived at Southwell in May 1743, he was determined to preserve his "independency," ignoring calls from Blackburne's executors (his former patron died on 23 March 1743) and declining to wait on the prelate's successor, who passed just four miles away during his primary visitation of the diocese.<sup>16</sup> Stephens also remained aloof from the traditional indulgences of feasting and hospitality, preferring to make use of the chapter library, ~~to~~ attend diligently to his duties as residentiary, and to tutor local men who aimed to enter into holy orders.<sup>17</sup> Describing his residence, Stephens wrote,

I lead here a Philosophical life; I have a mug of ale to refresh me, a few books to divert me, an old woman to dress me a little meat & chide me when I am faulty (. . .) [I] am that odd thing, w<sup>ch</sup> the old woman says, is always spoiling paper, & writing long Nothings, & great Nothing.<sup>18</sup>

The scholarly seclusion and setting of Southwell provided Stephens with inspiration, time, and opportunity to write these "long nothings," two of which were satires representing his most significant reflections on clerical identity, patronage, and the state of church affairs in the mid-eighteenth century.

### **The "Palace of Eatables" and "The Ecclesiastical Climbers"**

The manuscript satires composed by Lewis Stephens at Southwell are bound into a volume of his correspondence with Francis Gregor, held at Cornwall Record Office.<sup>19</sup> That these papers survived to the present is likely due to the care of Gregor and his descendants, as in 1737 Stephens declared that he made no "foul copies" of his letters.<sup>20</sup> The first satire is dated 23 May 1743, less than a month after Stephens came into residence at Southwell, and concerns the comically indulgent lifestyles of the

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<sup>14</sup> Chapter Decree Book, 1727–84, Nottinghamshire Archives, SC/2/2/2.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 6 February 1742, Stephens Letters.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Herring to William Herring, 9 April 1743, University of Nottingham, Pw V 120.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 9 July 1743, Stephens Letters; Minster Library lending book, 18 Jan 1717–16 Dec 1756, Nottinghamshire Archives, SC/11/1/1.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 23 May 1743, Stephens Letters.

<sup>19</sup> Stephens Letters. The ninety letters from Stephens to Gregor are the only substantial body of the former's papers known to exist.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 3 December 1737, Stephens Letters.

“trimestrial Priests” of “Austrofont.”<sup>21</sup> In this reproach to the excesses of the prebendaries, Southwell is reimagined as a palace “built on Eatables,” in which the Goddess Fame dwells among the “little Grandees,” who seek to raise their names through the staging of “Pontifical dinners.” These acts of gluttony are extended to the fabric of the palace, which is described in grotesque detail as formed of cuts of meat, puddings, and various other foodstuffs. The writer casts himself as the “rough illiterate Stephanio,” who is scorned by Fame for “sitting whole days with Xenophon, without Coffee or company,” and being entirely ignorant of Mary Kettlby’s *Three Hundred Receipts in Cookery*.<sup>22</sup> Fame takes solace, however, that Stephens’s time at Southwell is only temporary, and the usual business of hospitality would be restored.

She is assured, that Homer & Virgil will not be able to keep possession of y<sup>e</sup> Residentiary house for any long time; but y<sup>t</sup> in a few moons she shall return to it again in peace, & bring all her rumps of beef with her; for then the old unsociable monk must pass away to some other Cell; & when he is gone, she is resolved like a Woman-Goddess, to be revenged on his old Surlyship for loving Demosthenes, more than y<sup>e</sup> ladies of Austrofont; & for despising the reputation of bacon & veal; & for being so stupid, as to think, that preaching up Frugality w<sup>th</sup> a loud voice is more valuable than y<sup>e</sup> Great honour of y<sup>e</sup> Great Eloquence of ale & tongues.<sup>23</sup>

This critical vision of life at Southwell emphasised Stephens’s clerical identity as an outsider to both the traditions of the collegiate church, and the prevailing political temperature of the Diocese of York. It was, however, in a second composition that Stephens more fully realised his satirical vision of the defects of the **Church** in Walpolean England.

First transmitted to Gregor in July 1743, “The Ecclesiastical Climbers” opens as a first-person narrative of an unnamed observer in Rome, who perceives that the Emperors who once topped the columns in the city had been removed, and “saints are climbed up into their places.” This puts the narrator in mind of the “present Ecclesiastics” of England and Wales, who “pretend to be related to these Elevated Saints” and desire to scale the heights of the clerical profession “whether qualified or not.”<sup>24</sup> With allusions to the environs of Nottinghamshire, Stephens presented a daydream vision of clerical preferment which recalled Nicholas Amhurst’s treatment of a schoolboy contemplating the fruit of the tree of knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 23 May 1743, Stephens Letters.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Kettlby, *A Collection of above Three Hundred Receipts in Cookery, Physick and Surgery* (London, 1714).

<sup>23</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 23 May 1743, Stephens Letters.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, July 1743 (hereafter cited as Ecclesiastical Climbers), Stephens Letters.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Amhurst, *Terrae-Filius: Or, the Secret History of the University of Oxford, in Several Essays* (London: 1726), 2:29–34.

Whilst I was musing on these Eccles: Climbers, & thinking that they might learn y<sup>t</sup> art at School [very] early, some by climbing after crows nests, & minding little else [. . .] & others by climbing up y<sup>e</sup> Great apple-tree in Lilys Gram<sup>r</sup>. & gathering the fruit of it in [their] Satchels—I was led unaware into a great open plain, as large as Sherwood forest: in [it] were erected a multitude of Maypoles, of different heights & different sizes—Archiepiscopal Maypoles, Episcopal Maypoles, Decanal Maypoles, Canonical Maypoles, Archidiaconal Maypoles, Preb<sup>l</sup>. Maypoles, Parochial Maypoles. & for y<sup>e</sup> benefit of Curates a great multitude of Barbers poles almost as thick as hop-poles in Kent.<sup>26</sup>

Stephens’s presentation of the clerical profession as a plantation of maypoles, distinguished and ordered in precedence according to the respective stations of the church, was critical and subversive.<sup>27</sup> The origins of the ritual preparation of maypoles were “wholly antithetical to Christianity,” but as late as the seventeenth century, the Stuart monarchs had been willing to actively associate themselves with maying games.<sup>28</sup> Deemed by puritans to be an icon of irreligious values, in April 1644 the Lords and Commons passed an ordinance banning maypoles as a “Heathenish vanity.”<sup>29</sup> As Rogers describes, the most famous maypole in England removed by this order was a sixteenth-century pole that stood in the Strand in London. Its subsequent re-erection at the Restoration was a popular and potent symbol of the return of the monarchy, but following the Hanoverian Succession and the 1715 Rebellion, the association of maypoles with the exiled Stuarts brought new connotations of Jacobite loyalty and “High Church idolatry.”<sup>30</sup> The maypole in the Strand was removed for the final time in 1718 during the construction of St. Mary-le-Strand Church, one of the fifty Queen Anne Churches. Original plans included a Corinthian pillar to be erected near to the original site of the maypole, but following the accession of George I, both the architect and his pillar were removed from the project, as new Whig commissioners attempted to expunge unwanted political associations. This shift, Rogers asserts, is alluded to by Pope in *The Dunciad* of 1728 as a marker of how far the “Stuarts’ pole had fallen” by

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<sup>26</sup> Ecclesiastical Climbers.

<sup>27</sup> Marcus Walsh, “Swift’s *Tale of the Tub* and the Mock Book,” in *Jonathan Swift and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, ed. Paddy Bullard and James McLaverty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 106.

<sup>28</sup> N. J. G. Pounds, *The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 399; Pat Rogers, *Documenting Eighteenth Century Satire: Pope, Swift, Gay, and Arbuthnot in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 236.

<sup>29</sup> “April 1644: ‘An Ordinance for the Better Observation of the Lords-Day,’” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (London, 1911), 420–22; *British History Online*, [accessed at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp420-422>, on 10 January 2017].

<sup>30</sup> Rogers, *Documenting Eighteenth Century Satire*, 236; the association of the maypole with the Restoration persisted in some areas into the late eighteenth century. See Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 31.

that time.<sup>31</sup> While Stephens's descriptions of goddesses lurking among the maypoles in "The Ecclesiastical Climbers" draws comparisons with Pope, any topical contention of the removal of the pole on the Strand was a distant memory. As such, Stephens deploys the device to illustrate politico-religious concerns of the 1730s and 1740s.

A Curate of London had attempted many poles, but always failed; he cd neither climb ye Maypole in ye Strand, nor the New Church wch stands in ye place of it but lodged [in] a garret, from whence he had a fair prospect, but no command: [. . .] at last he had no Ambition, but to climb up every night to his bed. Mr Walker, the Ambulatory Reader, has no Parochial Maypole of his own; but reads prayers at 7 places every day; & 'tis believed that he will never climb any pillar, except that of the Seven Dials in Soho.

The characterisation of the "Curate of London" resembles the lot of an ambitious clergyman exhausting himself in a fruitless search for preferment. In the 1730s, Thomas Wilson, son of the bishop of Sodor and Man, was driven to the point of despair having received several setbacks in his attempts to gain a living in London. Prone to melancholic reflections, Wilson recorded in his diary, "God's will be done. I expect nothing but disappointments in the world, especially from the court."<sup>32</sup> While the maypole supposedly attempted by the curate was long gone by the 1740s, the Doric pillar at Seven Dials erected in the reign of William III remained and stood at the crossroads of a religious revival.<sup>33</sup> In May 1743, John Wesley secured a seven-year lease of a former Huguenot chapel on West Street near the Seven Dials for the use of Methodists.<sup>34</sup> For observers such as Stephens, the acquisition of a consecrated building for regular sacramental services challenged Wesley's famous declaration that "I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall."<sup>35</sup>

Aside from such cultural and political connotations, the novelty of depicting church places as "fixt on y<sup>e</sup> tops of Maypoles" allowed Stephens to portray the climbers foolishly in their pursuit of preferment. One character is shoved up a maypole by various allies, but "is much afraid of falling from his place & bursting asunder," until he is supported by a broom "in y<sup>e</sup> manner of a prop against an old rotten wall."<sup>36</sup> Another, identified as the "Son of a rich Lord," climbs to the top of a maypole

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<sup>31</sup> Rogers, *Documenting Eighteenth Century Satire*, 236.

<sup>32</sup> C. L. S. Linnell, ed., *The Diaries of Thomas Wilson D. D., 1731–37 & 1750* (London: SPCK, 1964), 148.

<sup>33</sup> Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race and Imperial Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 55–58.

<sup>34</sup> W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 19, *Journals and Diaries II (1738–43)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 326; Gareth Lloyd, "Eighteenth-Century Methodism and the London Poor," in *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002), 122.

<sup>35</sup> John Wesley, *An Extract of the Revd. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, From August 12, 1738, To Nov. 1 1739* (Bristol, 1742), 55.

<sup>36</sup> Ecclesiastical Climbers.

by standing on his pedigree, where he is said to “remain 7 years; & leave nothing behind him, but his coat of Arms, & one sermon foolishly delivered.”<sup>37</sup> Other figures are portrayed more sympathetically as the victims of a ruthless system of patronage. “Burneo,” described as a “learned, industrious, well-behaved Curate,” is identifiable as John Burn, a young clergyman known personally to Stephens in Hampshire. His maypole is described as being maliciously removed “into another mans field,” and as such he has climbed a “Serjeants halberd” (representing an army chaplaincy) in **the hopes** of gaining a parochial living in the future.<sup>38</sup> Whereas the manner of each character’s introduction into the satire recalls Swift, Stephens thought the *Battel of the Books* to be a lineal extension of older works. In a letter of 24 December 1738, Stephens stated that he thought it was “taken” from Strada’s *Prolusions*, in which “every Poet enter[s] the field, upon a horse agreeable to y<sup>e</sup> Character of the Rider each has a Copy of Verses representing his Peculiar manner of writing.”<sup>39</sup>

The introduction of the characters into “The Ecclesiastical Climbers” recalls earlier works, but one pervasive theme throughout the satire can be identified as particular to Stephens’s literary identity. While Philip Connell has stated that Pope’s political poetry of the 1730s played to suspicions that church preferment under Walpole’s ministry meant the “abandonment of both political and spiritual integrity,” Stephens repeatedly alludes to the redundancy of learning in the pursuit of a clerical career.<sup>40</sup> Many of the climbers are observed to have laid down their books at the bottom of the maypoles, “y<sup>t</sup> the weight of them might not hinder them in climbing.”<sup>41</sup> These clerics are contrasted against the previous generation of church leaders, such as Bishops Beveridge, Lloyd, and Stillingfleet, who the Goddess Divinity “had formerly power & interest enough” to help to the tops of episcopal maypoles. Stephens’s high regard for learning among the clergy is apparent in that he identifies only Archbishop John Potter as being of the same scholarly cast as these Latitudinarian divines and Williamite heroes of the church. Of other contemporary clerics, Stephens presents ignorance, frivolous pursuits, idleness, negligence of parochial duties, and fervent activity in support of the ministry as their chief qualifications for success in the clerical profession: ‘they are frequently running after new dignities, & new Maypoles; and are, in every shop in town, except the booksellers; meddling w<sup>th</sup> every thing, except learning; & appearing [^]in every public place, except the Church; and are [^]indeed in every Parish, except their own.’<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 24 December 1738, Stephens Letters. Stephens believed that Strada had also been imitated by George Smalridge in *Auctio Davisiana*, a Latin poem concerning a book auction first published in 1689.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Connell, *Secular Chains: Poetry and Politics of Religion from Milton to Pope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 231.

<sup>41</sup> Ecclesiastical Climbers.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



## “Sons of Belial”—Depicting the Patron

To better understand Stephens’s derisive views of his clerical contemporaries, the depiction in “The Ecclesiastical Climbers” of his former patron Lancelot Blackburne is particularly instructive when considered in the context of other anti-Walpolean satires of the 1730s. When Stephens entered Blackburne’s household in Exeter as chaplain in 1723, the bishop closely matched the model of an ecclesiastical patron “not overstock’d with Relations” as recommended by Swift.<sup>43</sup> With no acknowledged biological children, and few blood relatives, Blackburne was munificent in the distribution of his patronage to his closest allies.<sup>44</sup> The extent to which Blackburne exercised this favour to Stephens’s benefit only serves to deepen the mystery surrounding the breach between the two men. Certainly, in other cases the separation of clerical patron and client was the source of great anguish. In 1730, following the death of William Talbot, bishop of Durham, his former chaplain Thomas Rundle lamented, “I have lost my patron, friend, father! To him I owe all the happiness I have ever enjoyed in life, all the comfort [. . .] that I am still to receive, flow from his bounty to me!”<sup>45</sup> In sharp contrast, Stephens observed dismissively that “I might have made much greater advances in learning, if I had not danced after Bishops from Palace to Palace”<sup>46</sup> The extent of Stephens’s antipathy toward his former patron is ubiquitous in his correspondence, and plain in his depiction of Blackburne in “The Ecclesiastical Climbers,” under the pseudonym of “Cossa.”<sup>47</sup>

Cossa climbed some years ago, chiefly by y<sup>e</sup> assistance of his enemies; [. . .] he [. . .] sprang up the pole [with] great alacrity. & he assisted his own climbing by skewing VICES into y<sup>e</sup> Maypole, & [placing] his feet upon them.—his Maypole had generally women about it, & he frequently carried [in] his pocket a pack of cards, w<sup>ch</sup> he plaid with even in his climb<sup>s</sup> [. . .] & when Cossa sat down [on] top of y<sup>e</sup> highest Maypole, he constantly kept in his hand Spadil & Basto [. . .]<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Swift, *A Letter to a Young Gentleman Latterly Entered into Holy Orders by a Person of Quality* (London, 1721), 4, quoted in William Gibson, *A Social History of the Domestic Chaplain, 1530–1840* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 146.

<sup>44</sup> The author’s forthcoming doctoral thesis at Oxford Brookes University reassesses the functioning of patronage during Lancelot Blackburne’s archiepiscopacy.

<sup>45</sup> *Letters of the late Thomas Rundle, . . . to Mrs. Barbara Sandys . . . With introductory memoirs, by James Dalloway*. . . (London, 1789), 187.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 9 August 1745, Stephens Letters.

<sup>47</sup> Stephens Letters. Stephen refers to Blackburne negatively more than twenty times in his correspondence between 1742 and 1745.

<sup>48</sup> Ecclesiastical Climbers.

Central to this depiction are the rumours of sexual impropriety that dogged Blackburne for much of his later life, and were a recurring point of reference for anticlerical commentary by opponents of the Whig ministry throughout the 1730s.

As Begiato and Gibson have noted, sexual scandals in the long eighteenth century often developed as adjuncts to political disputes, and in Blackburne's case this can be traced to the bitter party divisions of Queen Anne's reign.<sup>49</sup> In 1703, he was closely involved in cathedral chapter disputes in Exeter between Bishop Trelawny and his opponents.<sup>50</sup> Amid this quarrel, a rumour emerged that a sexual scandal had been discovered involving Blackburne and one Mary Martin. Confronted by the allegation, Blackburne immediately resigned as subdean of the cathedral, despite his allies' belief that the rumour was merely the "common tittle-tattle of Exeter."<sup>51</sup> Matters were complicated, however, when details of the scandal reached London and were shared at Westminster Hall, and with the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>52</sup> Blackburne's lay supporters, such as John Ellis, the undersecretary of state, grew increasingly concerned that the "thing has gott aire & begins to make a noise here."<sup>53</sup> Francis Atterbury, archdeacon of Totnes, acknowledged the difficulties Trelawny faced in managing the case, asking of his bishop, "would they have your Lordship be yourself prosecutor of a man who hath so long and faithfully served you upon a mere rumour?"<sup>54</sup> At the intercession of William Wake, dean of Exeter, the matter was concluded by an inquiry instigated by the cathedral chapter, which pronounced Blackburne innocent on 23 October 1703.<sup>55</sup>

While the allegations of sexual misbehaviour were never proven against Blackburne, the stain of scandal followed his progress through the clerical profession. Blackburne's increasing prominence as a leading Whig prelate prompted the re-emergence of the rumours as the subject of table-talk, epistolary gossip, and popular verse among opponents of the government.<sup>56</sup> During the early years of

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<sup>49</sup> Joanne Begiato and William Gibson, *Sex and the Church in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> M. G. Smith, "The Cathedral Chapter of Exeter and the Election of 1705," in *The Devonshire Association For the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art Report and Transactions*, vol. 116 (1984), 116–19.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Atterbury, *The Miscellaneous Works of Bishop Atterbury*. . . (London, 1789), 1:198–200.

<sup>52</sup> Atterbury, *Miscellaneous Works*, 1:201–2; Nicholas Morice to Humphrey Prideaux, 17 April 1703, Cornwall Record Office, PB/8/.

<sup>53</sup> John Ellis to Humphrey Prideaux, 1 May 1703, Cornwall Record Office, PB/8/4; Lancelot Blackburne to John Ellis, 29 May 1696, Ellis Papers, correspondence of John Ellis, Vol. VI, 1696, Add. MS. 28880, British Library; Lancelot Blackburne to John Ellis, 3 February 1701, Ellis Papers, correspondence of John Ellis, Vol. XII, 1700–1701, Add. Ms. 28886, quoted in *The Antiquary*, vol. 19 (1889), 170.

<sup>54</sup> Atterbury, *Miscellaneous Works*, 1:201–2.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, "The Cathedral Chapter of Exeter and the Election of 1705," 120; Norman Sykes, "'The Buccaneer Bishop': Lancelot Blackburne, 1658–1743," *The Church Quarterly Review* (1940), 83; Atterbury, *The Miscellaneous Works*, 1:267–68; Blackburne was reinstated as subdean of Exeter in 1704 and, a year later, succeeded Wake as dean.

<sup>56</sup> "On Dr Blackburn Archbishop of York when Dean of Exeter," 1724, Brotherton Collection of Manuscript Verse. Lt 35, 35.

Walpole's ministry, hearsay of this kind rarely appeared in print, as criticism of the government was suppressed. On 7 October 1725, Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, wrote to the attorney general concerning a relatively minor report in the Tory *Mist's Weekly Journal* relating to Blackburne's high expectations of ordinands in his diocese.<sup>57</sup> Gibson thought the report "a spiteful and unworthy reflection upon the Archbishop of York," and felt the printers should be punished for portraying the "King's friends" in "such ridiculous dresses."<sup>58</sup> The ability to contain the publication of these views was challenged in the 1730s, as increasingly active and erudite opposition writers exploited "popular anti-clerical prejudices" to pillory the Whig episcopate.<sup>59</sup> One of the earliest identifiable satirical works to refer to Blackburne directly was *The Anatomy of a Modern B-----p: Or An Excellent and Approv'd Receipt for Gaining Preferment in the C-----h* (1732), published in response to William Bowman's preaching of a notorious anticlerical sermon at Wakefield in June 1731.<sup>60</sup> While the author entered into a deliberate conceit that the pamphlet was written in "general terms," the *Anatomy of a Modern B-----p* appears to have been the first printed work to conflate the persistent rumours of sexual scandal with Blackburne's extensive patronage toward his chaplain Thomas Hayter, asserting that the younger man was the bishop's illegitimate son.

Has he no Children born to him in Wedlock? Perhaps he may have a natural Son, who shall go into Orders without a Dispensation; who shall be taken into his family as Chaplain and Secretary [] who shall be Conscience-keeper and Confessor to his Master and Father; who shall lead the venerable Dotard in ridiculous Captivity about with him; and shall procure a good Living, and a large Archdeaconry, and the Promise of much great Preferment, by putting him in Remembrance of past Pleasures, and screening past Impieties.<sup>61</sup>

The *Anatomy of a Modern B-----p* is revealing of the degree to which a client's reputation could become entwined with that of their patron, and be similarly open to criticism. This is also evident in *The Farmer's Daughter: Or, the Art of Getting Preferment* (1738), which described the role of the

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<sup>57</sup> Gibson refers to an article in *Mist's Weekly Journal* 25 (London: Saturday, September 25, 1725): 2.

<sup>58</sup> Edmund Gibson to Phillip Yorke, 7 October 1725, Hardwicke Papers, Vol. CCXXXVII, Add. MS. 35585, British Library.

<sup>59</sup> Connell, *Secular Chains*, 231.

<sup>60</sup> *Anatomy of a Modern B-----p: Or An Excellent and Approv'd Receipt For Gaining Preferment in the C-----h*. . . (London, 1732). This anonymous pamphlet has no entry in the *ESTC* or *ECCO*. The only extant copy is located among Lancelot Blackburne's papers at Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp. C. & P. III/8/1; Stephen Taylor, "The Bowman Affair: Latitudinarian Theology, Anti-clericalism and the Limits of Orthodoxy in Early Hanoverian England," in *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660–1832*, ed. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 35–50.

<sup>61</sup> *Anatomy of a Modern B-----p*, 20–21.

client in colluding in the sexual deviancy of his patron.<sup>62</sup> The poem recounted the tale of a bishop's chaplain procuring a young milkmaid for an "old, thin, meager Priest" living in a "Mitred Palace" on the banks of the River Ouse, who gains a church living for her incompetent brother in exchange for her affections.

This said, she stroak'd his grizly Face,  
Long Life she cries attend your Grace;  
The Vacant Vicarage I claim,  
That Brother *Numps* enjoy the same  
Thus yielded was to Beauty's Pow'r  
What long was promis'd to another.<sup>63</sup>

These associations were likely the inspiration for the pseudonym "Cossa" for Blackburne, which was coined by Francis Gregor prior to the composition of "The Ecclesiastical Climbers." First appearing in a letter of 11 January 1742, Stephens wrote of his friend John Anstis, "he lives near Balthazar Cossa (for whom I thank you) but I shall visit none of the Sons of Belial."<sup>64</sup> This conflation of Old Testament wickedness with the figure of Baldassarre Cossa, a fifteenth-century Neapolitan antipope, is revealing of the depths of Stephens's hostility toward his former patron.<sup>65</sup> The return of an obscure medieval antipope to the eighteenth-century imagination owed much to the political climate of post-Restoration Britain. From the reign of James II, accounts of John XXIII appeared in an increasing number of anti-Catholic texts, such as the polemicist Henry Care's *History of Popery* (1682), which declared the antipope to have been "the most profligate Villain that one shall read of."<sup>66</sup> By the time the first full account of John XXIII's papacy appeared in Jacques L'Enfant's *Histoire de Concile de Constance* (1714, English translation in 1730), the antipope had become a prime example of the excesses of Popery and was cited in anti-Catholic texts and sermons through the 1730s.<sup>67</sup>

Where Stephens differed from the writers of these works, however, is that he had personal experience of Blackburne's lifestyle, and continued to be informed of the elderly archbishop's activities through correspondence with those still in favour with the prelate. While it was the politically charged scandal from Exeter that formed the backdrop of persistent suspicions of

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<sup>62</sup> *Derby Mercury*, no. 44 (Wednesday, 19 January 1738).

<sup>63</sup> *The Farmer's Daughter: Or, The Art of Getting Preferment* (London, 1738), 4–5.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 11 January 1742, Stephens Letters.

<sup>65</sup> John N. King, *Milton and Religious Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55.

<sup>66</sup> *The History of Popery; or Pacquet of Advice from Rome, The Fourth Volume* (London: 1682), 53–54.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques L'Enfant, *Histoire de Concile de Constance* (Amsterdam: 1714); *The History of Popery. . . .*, Volume II (London: 1736), 266; *A Preservative Against Popery. . . .* (London: 1738), Tit. IV, 152; George Smyth, *The Church of Rome's Claim of Authority and Infallibility Examined, in a Sermon Preached at Salters-Hall, January 30th, 1734* (London: 1735), 47.

impropriety against Blackburne, the archbishop's unconventional living arrangements with his "housekeeper" Dorothy Cruwys fanned the flames of disrepute. This penetrated through to the machinery of diocesan administration, as many of those close to the archbishop offered their best services to Cruwys in their official correspondence.<sup>68</sup> Once Stephens was outside this sphere of influence, the openness of Blackburne's relationship with Cruwys appeared to him another marker of the dissolute character of church affairs. When reflecting on the misfortunes of **his friend fellow clergyman** Daniel Lombard, Stephens stated that he had "received hard measures from the Court, the D<sup>f</sup>: was too Honest to stoop to y<sup>e</sup> low modern way of Preferment [. . .] to make any Court to M<sup>rs</sup>. Cruwys."<sup>69</sup> While the references to the card game Ombre in the depiction of Blackburne recall Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, Stephens may have had in mind the archbishop's sociable and worldly lifestyle.<sup>70</sup> Writing in August 1742, Stephens related that the octogenarian Blackburne was alleged to spend his mornings with Cruwys, afternoons with the "Old Actress" Ann Bracegirdle, and his evenings at cards with Martin Benson, the bishop of Gloucester. This, Stephens thought, was "preparation for a cheerful Death."<sup>71</sup> Personal insights such as these allowed Stephens to ironically portray Blackburne as having risen to the highest ranks of the church through the very worldliness which other satirical writers of the period cited in their criticisms of the Whig episcopate.

### **Clerical Practice, Public Discourse, and Private Expressions**

This final section explores the interplay between the roles of clergyman and writer in the context of Lewis Stephens's contributions to public religious discourse, conduct within the clerical profession, and private expressions of discontentment. As an episcopal chaplain, it is evident that Stephens's abilities as a scholar and writer were utilised by his ecclesiastical patrons through engagement in various aspects of diocesan administration, and the examination of candidates for ordination.<sup>72</sup> More significant to Stephens's rise in the church, however, were his abilities as a compelling and persuasive preacher. These aptitudes were noticed early at Oxford, where his preaching was met with approval by Thomas Hearne, who in 1716 recorded that he thought Stephens "a good Scholar & a studious

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<sup>68</sup> See Richard Osbaldeston to Lancelot Blackburne, 26 May 1729, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp C&P XIX; Samuel Berdmore to Thomas Hayter, 31 December 1735, Bp C&P XVII/26.

<sup>69</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 12 July 1740, Stephens Letters.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, rev. ed. (London, 1714).

<sup>71</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 20 August 1742, Stephens Letters.

<sup>72</sup> For examples of Stephens's contributions toward diocesan administration in York, see Thomas Jubb to Lewis Stephens, 6 August 1725, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp C&P XIX; Thomas Jubb to Lewis Stephens, 8 July 1730, Bp C&P III/26. For references to Stephens's examination of ordination candidates, see Nottinghamshire Archives, DD/TS/14/2, commonplace book [of Robert Marsden], 1724–35; Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp C & P III/20, Martin Rutter's examination papers, September 1726.

Man.”<sup>73</sup> Such high praise from one famously uncharitable toward those who exhibited Low Church sentiments is suggestive that Stephens realigned his sermonizing with orthodox Whig views over the years that followed.<sup>74</sup> When Stephens’s funeral sermon for Bishop Trimmell came to Hearne’s attention in 1723, he adjudged it to be a public declaration of ambitions in the church.<sup>75</sup>

A greater Character cannot be given a Man than Stephens gives of this B<sup>p</sup>, tho’, among other Things, he reckons it as one of his great Excellencies y<sup>t</sup> he was so zealous for King George. Stephens aims at Preferment.<sup>76</sup>

In York, Stephens’s sermons formed an intrinsic component of the rhetoric of Lancelot Blackburne’s administration, as the archbishop sought to make the church the chief agent for forwarding the Whig interest in the North of England.<sup>77</sup> As Walker identifies, sermons delivered in the Diocese of York during this period shifted from a tone of “godly providentialism” to an outlook which praised the “goodness of the present age.”<sup>78</sup> Stephens emerged as the most prominent exponent of this political line, as three of his sermons preached on notable public occasions between 1726 and 1727 were ordered to be printed “by his Grace’s command.”<sup>79</sup> Of these discourses, Stephens was at his most strident in a sermon delivered at the consecration of Holy Trinity Church in Leeds preached during Blackburne’s primary visitation of the diocese in August 1727, shortly after the accession of George II,

let us not fear any more where no fear is; nor let us think the Church in Danger under a Protestant KING, a Protestant QUEEN, a Protestant ISSUE, a Protestant MINISTRY, a Protestant PARLIAMENT, Protestant BISHOPS, and Protestant JUDGES.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> D. W. Rannie, ed., *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1901), 5:376.

<sup>74</sup> David C. Douglas, *English Scholars* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), 226–49.

<sup>75</sup> Lewis Stephens, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Winchester . . . at the Funeral of the Right Reverend Father in God, Dr. Charles Trimmell. . . .* (London, 1723).

<sup>76</sup> *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne, (Sept. 23, 1722–Aug. 9, 1725)* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1907), 8:125.

<sup>77</sup> Walker, “The Church in York, 1688–1747,” 162.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>79</sup> Lewis Stephens, *A Sermon Preached in St. Margaret’s Church, Westminster, at the Consecration of . . . Samuel, Lord Bishop of Chester* (London 1726); *A Sermon Preach’d in the Chapel of Bishop-Thorp near York, At an Ordination. . . .* (London, 1727); *A Sermon Preached On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 1727, at the Consecration of Trinity-Chapel, in the Town of Leeds in Yorkshire* (London, 1727).

<sup>80</sup> Stephens, *A Sermon Preached . . . at the Consecration of Trinity-Chapel, in the Town of Leeds*, 20.

Following his breach with Blackburne, however, Stephens's abilities as a writer and orator made him a potentially dangerous opponent to the archbishop. Indeed, it is apparent that Blackburne's remaining allies believed that the former chaplain's antipathy toward the administration could manifest itself in his clerical activities. Stephens's first residence at Southwell in 1735 came amid a bitter dispute between the chapter and vicars choral of the collegiate church, and Archbishop Blackburne's supporters were sceptical whether Stephens could be trusted to further their interests in the case.<sup>81</sup> On 6 October 1735, Blackburne's principal agent in Nottinghamshire, Samuel Berdmore, stated that "I am in some doubt ab<sup>t</sup> his acting for a reason that you'l guess."<sup>82</sup> Surprisingly for the archbishop's allies, Stephens was willing to place the harmony of Southwell before his animosity toward his former patron, and used his time in residence to coordinate with the other prebendaries to direct the chapter's legal case; an approach welcomed by other outsiders to Blackburne's administration at York, such as Thomas Sharp, who commended Stephens for deploying his pen for the promotion of "the good of Our Collegiate Church."<sup>83</sup> Stephens's conduct at Southwell demonstrates that, publicly, he was willing to be conciliatory toward his clerical contemporaries, even at times when his private writings were critical of the church establishment. The tension between these two positions is evident during the composition and transmission of his satires, as Stephens demonstrated awareness that the works could be deemed subversive to those outside of the small epistolary community who were their intended audience.

In 1743, Stephens originally planned to send the manuscript of "The Ecclesiastical Climbers" to Francis Gregor at Mitcheldean in Gloucestershire, where he was staying following a journey to Bath. He was anxious, however, not to have a certain address for Gregor, and was concerned that the manuscript might pass through a posthouse where the "follies" of the work might be mistaken for "treason and Architecture."<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, Stephens sent the draft (with additions) to another trusted friend, John Fursman, the chancellor of Exeter cathedral.<sup>85</sup> Once carried safely from Southwell into Devon, at least one of the intended readers was also expected to act as a collaborator, as Stephens related, "the Subject grows under y<sup>e</sup> pen, & will admit of new pictures from Suttons Pencil."<sup>86</sup> It was hoped that this Sutton (as yet unidentified) would use a "burlesque turn" to make "The Ecclesiastical

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<sup>81</sup> Nottinghamshire Archives, SC/2/2/2, Chapter decree book, 1727–1784; for the Southwell dispute, see Daniel Cummins, "The controversys betwixt the Chapter and the Vicars Chorall': Property and Conflict at the Collegiate Church of Southwell, 1734–1737," *Midland History* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 53–68.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel Berdmore to Thomas Hayter, 6 October 1735, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp C&P XVII/26.

<sup>83</sup> Memorandum of proceedings in case Bugg v. Southwell Chapter, 1735–1736, Nottinghamshire Archives, SC/3/4/26; Thomas Sharp to Lewis Stephens, 18 January 1736, SC/3/4/34; Samuel Berdmore to Thomas Hayter, 24 November 1735, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp C&P XVII/26; Samuel Berdmore to Thomas Hayter, 26 November 1735.

<sup>84</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, May 1743, Stephens Letters; Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 9 July 1743.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 9 July 1743, Stephens Letters.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Climbers” “much more humourous.”<sup>87</sup> Beyond this small audience, however, there is no evidence that Stephens intended to further circulate or publish his satires, which stresses that the works should not be read as public polemics, but as highly personal expressions of an individual’s view on the state of church affairs shaped by their particular notion of clerical identity.

Stephens’s cautiousness in the transmission of his manuscripts seemingly acknowledges his awareness of the potentially libellous nature of the compositions, but also indicates that he did not seek to harness the potential of the satirical form as a corrective force against the defects he perceived in the church by making his views public.<sup>88</sup> Further insights into his motivations for this can be gleaned from his views of other leading satirists and writers of the period. In 1738, Stephens claimed that he thought Swift’s *A Vindication of his Excellency Lord Carteret* to be “finely managd, & delicately fine.” In this public compliment to Carteret, Stephens may have found comfort in the celebration of a Whig who openly opposed Walpole’s ministry.<sup>89</sup> Writing as a clergyman, however, Stephens recounted that Bishop Smalridge (his former tutor at Christ Church, Oxford) thought poorly of the dean, believing his salvation to be in “great danger.”<sup>90</sup> While Swift provoked concerns in Stephens about the tension between clerical and literary identities, his views on Alexander Pope were unequivocal. Writing in 1745, Stephens made plain his aversion to Pope, thinking his “Letters, like our modern Comedies, are Stuffed w<sup>th</sup> so many Similitudes & low things, y<sup>t</sup> I coud not read them.”<sup>91</sup> While Pope’s Catholicism was likely anathema to Stephens, his particular animosity may have derived from his perception of the poet as a translator. At Christ Church, Stephens was engaged (alongside Thomas Fenton, a fellow M. A. candidate) in editing a Greek edition of Homer’s *Iliad* (1714).<sup>92</sup> This was the foundation of a lifelong passion for Homer, of whom Stephens declared, “one plain line in him is worth a thousand modern turns & witticisms.”<sup>93</sup> By comparison, Stephens fiercely criticised Pope’s English edition of the *Iliad*, of which he asserted derisively that the poet had not

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Vic Gattrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic, 2006), 171.

<sup>89</sup> *A Vindication of his Excellency the Lord Carteret, from the charge of favouring none but Tories, High-Churchmen, and Jacobites* (London, 1730); Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 24 December 1738, Stephens Letters.

<sup>90</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 24 December 1738, Stephens Letters. This echoes Samuel Johnson’s account of Smalridge’s alleged outburst, “Not all that you and I have in the world, nor all that ever we shall have, should hire me to write the Tale of a Tub.” See Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. . . . (London, 1800), 1:472.

<sup>91</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 14 December 1745, Stephens Letters.

<sup>92</sup> Homer, *Iliad* (Oxford: Ek Theatrou en Oxonia, 1714). A copy offered for sale by Blackwell’s Rare Books of Oxford in 2016 contains the manuscript note, “The edition by Mr Lewis Stephens of Ch: Oxford.” Letter from William Stratford, 13 November 1711, HMC, Portland MSS, VII, p. 72; Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 14 January 1744, Stephens Letters. In the 1770s the 1714 Oxford edition of the *Iliad* was declared to be “one of the most correct Editions of Homer.” See Edward Harwood, *A View of the Various Editions of the Greek and Roman Classics* (London, 1775), 3.

<sup>93</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 8 July 1738, Stephens Letters.



translated himself, and that it was “no Homer at all.”<sup>94</sup> Stephens’s composition of “The Ecclesiastical Climbers” closely preceded the publication of the four-volume edition of *The Dunciad*, which concluded Pope’s prophetic vision of “England’s final descent into spiritual and cultural oblivion.”<sup>95</sup> This may prompt comparison with the satirical vision of the church presented in “The Ecclesiastical Climbers,” but it appears that Stephens saw no common ground between his writings and **those of Pope**, considering the poet to have “extended the word Duncie too far, even to y<sup>e</sup> depreciating of human Nature.”<sup>96</sup> In this sense, Stephens’s clerical identity as a disappointed Whig did not extend to a literary affinity with opposition writers such as Pope, the public veneration of whom only served to confound his concerns of the “badness of y<sup>e</sup> times.”<sup>97</sup>

### **Clerical and Literary Identities—Reflections and Future Pathways**

Lewis Stephens’s satirical compositions of 1743 are best understood as an individual’s expression of his personal and professional dislocation from politico-religious affairs, precipitated by disaffection with the Whig establishment and separation from his ecclesiastical patron. While initial readings seemingly locate Stephens’s writings among other antiministerial satires of the 1730s and 1740s, his desire to keep the works private suggests that the motivations for their composition must be viewed in the context of the small Anglican epistolary group who were their intended audience. Further research into the religious, political, and scholarly backgrounds of the individuals within this network will likely bring new readings of Stephens’s writings, but at this time it should be considered that Stephens’s views of his contemporaries were very much his own. Despite the extensive mythologisation of Lancelot Blackburne’s character and career that has taken place between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, the archbishop was not remembered entirely negatively in ecclesiastical circles.<sup>98</sup> Some four years after his death in 1743, the deputy registrar of York recalled Blackburne as his “kind Master and patron.”<sup>99</sup> Nor did the stain of disrepute negatively impact the career trajectories of all of the archbishop’s clients. Thomas Hayter rose to the bishopric of London

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<sup>94</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 9 July 1743, Stephens Letters; Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 4 June 1744, Stephens Letters.

<sup>95</sup> Connell, *Secular Chains*, 233.

<sup>96</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 4 June 1744, Stephens Letters.

<sup>97</sup> In July 1744, Stephens lamented both the granting to Walpole of a pension of £4000 per annum, and Pope’s decision to name William Warburton as his editor and literary executor, stating, “How wou’d Poet Pope have insulted any other writer y<sup>e</sup> had made his own books y<sup>e</sup> first Bequest in his Will? he w<sup>d</sup> have said a hundred bitter things on y<sup>e</sup>: Occasion.” Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 24 January 1743, Stephens Letters.

<sup>98</sup> This will be further delineated in the author’s forthcoming doctoral thesis at Oxford Brookes University.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from Robert Jubb, 23 February 1750, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Bp. C & P V/20.

before his death in 1762 and, despite rumours of illegitimacy, was regarded by contemporaries as “a very worthy man.”<sup>100</sup>

In historical terms, Stephens’s writings also demonstrate that efforts to bring ecclesiastical administration into closer political alignment with the Whig ministry during the reigns of George I and George II were not without difficulties, providing further weight to Connell’s assessment that for many, the fall of the first minister did not “mitigate the moral and spiritual corruption of the Walpolean regime.”<sup>101</sup> Future analysis of Stephens’s writings alongside those of Laurence Sterne may be fruitful in this respect. Although not of the same generation, both men held dignities of the cathedral of York during the 1740s and expressed feelings of frustration over their clerical identities following separation from patrons. Sterne’s pursuit of fame owed a great deal to his stasis as a “lousy prebendary.”<sup>102</sup> It should be further considered that literary and clerical identities were not static. In Stephens’s case, his sense of disaffection was finally punctured by the outbreak of the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. Despite faltering health, Stephens was spurred into anti-Catholic activity and once again utilised his abilities as a preacher and writer to warn his parishioners of the dangers of Jacobitism and Popery.<sup>103</sup> This time of national crisis marked a further shift in the significance of cultural tropes such as maypoles, altering the tone of “The Ecclesiastical Climbers” irrevocably. For Stephens, the Rebellion sharpened his sense of clerical (particularly, Anglican) identity, bringing his actions—if not his moral and scholarly sensibilities—back in line with many of those who appeared in his satires.

When considered methodologically, Stephens’s writings also provide further opportunities for the reconsideration of old assumptions. The model of the clerical profession presented in “The Ecclesiastical Climbers” offers an alternative, contemporary view to the metaphorical descriptions of patronage within the eighteenth-century church presented by twentieth-century historians such as Norman Sykes and L. P. Curtis, who variously utilized stepped models, such as the “ladder of preferment,” and “pagoda of patronage.”<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Stephens’s unpublished works are instructive of the degree to which crucial contextual information is often only recoverable when ostensibly literary forms of writings are subjected to close reading and interpretation alongside related documentary evidence, such as correspondence, and records of diocesan administration. Through further consideration of these usually disparate sources, a more balanced and representative view of religious writing in the eighteenth century will emerge.

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<sup>100</sup> William Cole’s Collections, Vol. XXX, Add MS 5831, f. 52, British Library.

<sup>101</sup> Walker, “The Church in York, 1688–1747,” 85–122; Connell, *Secular Chains*, 234.

<sup>102</sup> Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, 2 vols. (London, 1768), I, 65.

<sup>103</sup> Lewis Stephens to Francis Gregor, 1 November 1745, Stephens Letters.

<sup>104</sup> Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the XVIIIth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934); L. P. Curtis, *Anglican Moods of the Eighteenth Century* (Archon, 1966).