

Academic Essays

Popular Culture Control in Early Modern Europe <i>Corinna Hellmrich</i>	11
Heresy, Class and Nationalism in the Bohemian Hussite Era <i>Ken Sbeghen</i>	25
MITI: Myths and Miracles <i>Michael Savage-Morton</i>	35
The Understanding of Papal Supremacy as revealed in the Letters of Pope Gregory the Great <i>Graham Nicholson</i>	49
The Lollards and Social and Religious Reform <i>Doris Haddock</i>	67
The Driving Force of Achievement? British Atomic Tests in Australia, 1952-1957 <i>Brad Cooper</i>	77
Women In Islam <i>Ken Wade</i>	95

Popular culture control in early modern Europe

by Corinna Hellmrich

*"I was born of the people. I have the people in my heart. But its language is inaccessible to me, and I have not been able to speak it."*¹

This paper will establish the priorities that underpinned attempts to control popular culture in early modern Europe. It will provide examples of the way in which the Church and the State, those institutionalised agents of religion and politics, strove to eliminate spiritual and social alternatives by enforcing Christian morality, imposing orthodox religiosity, separating the human from the divine and creating a monopoly on words. Finally, this paper will argue that these attempts were only partially successful, that popular culture proved to elude the methods employed to exterminate it.²

In any analysis of the priorities which underpinned attempts to control popular culture in early modern Europe, and the extent to which these attempts were successful, it is important to define popular culture. However, the ephemeral nature of the quarry poses many difficulties.³ Largely an oral phenomenon,⁴ the extant sources often present us with a popular culture as seen by "literate outsiders".⁵ The formula set by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of early modern Europe,⁶ is not the only obstacle to our understanding popular culture. Perhaps an even larger gulf exists between the experience of an age teetering on the edge of the twenty-first century and the attitudes and values which governed the lives of people living in pre-industrial European society.⁷ It is not my intention to propose a "definition of the indefinite".⁸ Within the context of this essay, popular culture will be defined as "a second life, a second reality for the people, separated from power and the state [and the church] but still public and perennial".⁹ Furthermore, this reality was in no way confined to the rural poor - people from all social classes participated in, and appreciated, popular culture.¹⁰

¹ R.C. Trexler, "Reverence and profanity in the study of early modern religion", in Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 245, quoting Michelet, cited in J. Le Goff, Pour un autre Moyen Age (Paris, 1977), p. 8.

² J. Obelkevich, ed, Religion and the people, 800-1700, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 6.

³ P. Burke, Popular culture in early modern Europe (London: Temple Smith, 1978), p. 65.

⁴ C. Ginzburg, "Cheese and worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller", in Religion and the people, 800-1700 ed. James Obelkevich (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 162.

⁵ P. Burke, Popular culture, p. 65.

⁶ J. Obelkevich, Religion and the people, p. 5.

⁷ P. Burke, Popular culture, p. 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹ G. Ruggiero, Binding passions: Tales of magic, marriage and power at the end of the renaissance (N.Y.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3, quoting N.Z. Davis, "The reasons of misrule", in Society and culture in early modern France (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 103.

¹⁰ M. Ingram, "Ridings, rough music and the 'reform of popular culture' in early modern England", Past and Present, vol.105 (1984), p. 79.

In Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Church and the State, motivated by a fear of popular disorder,¹¹ joined forces in order to bring the centre to the periphery and thereby establish control over the 'subversive' elements of society.¹² It has been argued that the elimination of the "popular vision of the world" was a result of growing centralisation and absolutism within religious and ecclesiastical frameworks;¹³ that the spiritual and moral values of the learned elite were systematically imposed upon the popular masses, in order to "reduce diversities that seemed too great, to destroy superstitions, and to implant everywhere identical ideals founded on obedience, orthodox religion, an austere morality, and work".¹⁴ While it is true that this period was witness to an increase in the efforts of the Church and the State to impose uniformity from above,¹⁵ it would be blinkered and condescending to focus exclusively on the "vertical" links of the social hierarchy of early modern Europe, at the expense of the "horizontal" interaction between the people and their culture.¹⁶ To argue that attempts to control popular culture during this period were wholly successful, is an inadequate and misleading assessment of the nature of popular culture.¹⁷

Through the eyes of ecclesiastical and secular authorities, popular culture was immoral and therefore polluting.¹⁸ Reformers viewed popular cultural forms such as festivals, plays, songs and dances, as violations of common decency, incitements to revolt and occasions of wanton excess.¹⁹ St. Charles Borromeo, a reforming bishop and cardinal in late sixteenth-century Milan, believed that "the scandals, disorders and corruption of customs induced in the citizens by [the commedie] ... are even more pernicious to manners and to souls than those other seminaries of evil, dances, festivals and like spectacles."²⁰ Other reformers criticised the 'errors' inherent in carnevale, damning its "worldly and sensual aftermath [which] spills over from the piazza to the Churches, from profane conversations into divine offices".²¹ In particular, charivari, that is, games of religious and hierarchical inversion, "bore witness to ambiguities and unresolvable conflicts in the ideal and actual social system"²² and were therefore viewed as seditious by kings and bishops alike.

¹¹ R. Briggs, Witches and neighbours: the social and cultural context of european witchcraft (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), p. 296.

¹² C. Ginzburg, "Cheese and worms", p. 166.

¹³ R. Muchembled, Popular culture and elite culture in France 1400-1700, transl. Lydia Cochrane (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), pp. 184-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁵ J. Obelkevich, Religion and the people, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ R. Muchembled, Popular culture and elite culture, p. 315.

¹⁸ M.R. O'Neil, Discerning superstition: Popular errors and orthodox response in late sixteenth-century Italy, Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1982), p. 4.

¹⁹ P. Burke, Popular culture, pp. 212-3.

²⁰ M.R. O'Neil, Discerning superstition, pp. 3-4, quoting Carlo Borromeo, "Lettera al Cardinal Gabriello Paleotti, Arcivescovo di Bologna, luglio 1578," in Ferdinando Taviani, La Commedia dell'Arte e la società barocca: La fascinazione del teatro (Rome, 1969), pp. 23-24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4, quoting Carlo Bascapè, "Contra gli errori che si commettono avanti la Quaresima, 1594," in F. Taviani, La fascinazione del teatro, p. 53.

²² M. Ingram, "Ridings, rough music and the 'reform of popular culture'", p. 97.

Reformers also objected to the unorthodox way in which popular culture blended the holy with the unholy.²³ The *carta di voler bene*, a popular type of love magic, which was used to attract the attentions of an erring lover, was just one of many such sacred and diabolic concoctions.²⁴ What began as a most devout prayer to Christ, ended by requesting that He persuade “my lover to love me with good heart and love me as much as the love of his own eyes. Moreover all those people who would get in the way or cause problems or annoy me are with your powers to be destroyed Lord as you punished Adam and Eve”.²⁵ Here, orthodox prayer, and magic are fused, and become a set of “parallel and competing remedies”,²⁶ demonstrating that within popular culture, religion consisted of more than those rituals offered and approved by the Church.²⁷ Solutions to the problems of everyday life made up what has been described as “a shopping list of things holy”,²⁸ where God and the Devil, prayer and magic and faith and superstition appear indiscriminately.²⁹ A blend of orthodoxy, folklore and paganism, “popular religion was quite another beast from Christianity as a theological tradition”.³⁰

Popular culture, therefore, was seen as “shot through with [an] error and [an] ignorance”³¹ which religious and secular reformers saw as their duty to correct.³² In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the parish clergy, those “footsoldier[s] of the ecclesiastical state”,³³ together with local lay judges, brought the ideologies of a reformed Church and a highly centralised State to the rural and urban masses.³⁴ John Bossy tells us that during this period, collective manifestations of religious and social activity, such as fraternities, wakes, feasts, dances and ‘obscene’ ritual, were “exposed...to the thunders of the Counter-Reformation Church” because they offered an ‘indecent’ alternative to orthodox religion.³⁵ Indeed, both Catholic and Protestant reformers aimed at internalising and individualising faith during this period. In 1668, Michel Colbert, bishop of Mâcon, warned people “that going to Mass in their fraternities...in no way exempts them from attendance at their parochial Mass; they

²³ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, p. 100.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.: I am unable to verify the primary source here as this book is in a hold queue at present.

²⁶ M.R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’: Ecclesiastical and superstitious remedies in sixteenth-century Italy”, in *Understanding popular culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin; N.Y.: Mouten, 1984), p. 53.

²⁷ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, p. 160.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁹ J. Obelkevich, *Religion and the people*, p. 5.

³⁰ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, p. 89.

³¹ N.Z. Davis, “Proverbial wisdom and popular errors”, p. 261.

³² M.R. O’Neil, *Discerning superstition*, p. 4.

³³ R. Po-chia Hsia, “The moral police”, in *Social discipline in the reformation: Central Europe, 1550-1750* (London; N.Y.: Routledge, 1989), p. 141.

³⁴ R. Muchembled, “Lay judges and the acculturation of the masses (France and southern Low Countries, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries)”, transl. John Burke, in *Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 64.

³⁵ J. Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation and the people of catholic Europe”, *Past and Present*, vol.47 (1970), pp. 58-62.

must learn ... that they are parishioners first and confrères afterwards”.³⁶ Besides, a subject stripped of his or her community network, would have been more likely to conform to the established social order, where the King was God’s representative on earth and to be obeyed at all times.

Education was considered to be a positive form of social control. In Protestant areas of early modern Europe, catechism aimed to eliminate superstition, while simultaneously avoiding the dangers involved in allowing the people “to meet the Bible on their own terms”.³⁷ Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, preferred to combat unorthodoxy by providing ecclesiastically controlled remedies for access to the divine, such as prayers, holy water, priestly blessings and exorcism.³⁸ Fra Girolamo Menghi’s *Compendio dell’arte essorcista* of 1576, prescribes ecclesiastical medicine such as exorcism, pilgrimage, confession and the sign of the cross for melancholic persons.³⁹ Indeed, exorcists were widely sought as alternatives to doctors and healers and exorcist manuals were distributed so that it was performed properly.⁴⁰ Also, religious and civil sanctions enforced regular attendance at mass and the fulfillment of Easter duties.⁴¹ And so, preachers, schoolmasters and religious and ecclesiastical courts increased their control over popular cultural forms,⁴² which represented “the deceits of the devil”, where “the sensual and the sexual were crowned king and given free rein”.⁴³ Witchcraft, belief in diviners and faith healers, abuse of relics and amulets, erroneous opinions, blasphemies, sacrileges and superstitions, became crimes of *lèse-majesté* against God.⁴⁴

During the early modern period, clerical and lay experts attempted to theologise popular Christian practice, in order to drive a wedge between the human and the divine.⁴⁵ Horrified by the appropriation of Christian ritual in unorthodox and superstitious ways, theologians such as Paulus Frisius of Nagold, in Württemberg, retaliated by identifying aspects of popular culture with the activity of the Devil.⁴⁶ As the ultimate authority on the sacred and the profane, the Church was able to enter into social space, redefine popular activity as diabolical and thereby attempt to take control of people’s private lives.⁴⁷ In his article ‘The devil’s hoodwink: Seeing and believing in the world of sixteenth-century witchcraft’, Charles Zika demonstrates the way in which the demonological literature of the sixteenth century undermined the late

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.: Primary source unverifiable.

³⁷ G. Strauss, "Lutheranism and literacy: A reassessment", in *Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp. 113-117.

³⁸ M.R. O’Neil, *Discerning superstition*, pp. 9-10.

³⁹ M.R. O’Neil, "‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’", p. 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

⁴¹ J. Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A new view of the Counter-Reformation*, transl. Jenny Moiser, with an introduction by John Bossy (London: Burns and Oates, 1977), p. 214.

⁴² M.R. O’Neil, "‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’", p. 53.

⁴³ C. Zika, "The Devil’s hoodwink: Seeing and believing in the world of sixteenth-century witchcraft", in *No gods except me: Orthodoxy and religious practice in Europe, 1200-1600*, ed. Charles Zika (Melbourne: University of Melbourne History Department, 1991), p. 181.

⁴⁴ R. Muchembled, "Lay judges and the acculturation of the masses", p. 61.

⁴⁵ C. Zika, "The Devil’s hoodwink", p. 155.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-6.

medieval concept of religion as an experience of seeing and feeling, instilling in its stead a religion of blind faith.⁴⁸ By denying that witches and healers, among others, had any real power, that they had in fact been seduced by the Devil,⁴⁹ the Church was established as the authority on all matters of a spiritual nature, as well as the only valid interpreters of, and mediators between, the “visible and invisible worlds”.⁵⁰ And if people did not understand this, if they dared to inquire how witches could be evil when their remedies were effective, then they were told “that the criterion should not be what worked but what was permitted”.⁵¹

Words were thought to have the power to secure God’s action on earth.⁵² The reforms of the Council of Trent, by stressing the importance of such verbal activities as catechism, prayer, and the rosary, had recognised the need to create a monopoly on the power of language.⁵³ Outside learned circles, words were bundled together in disorder.⁵⁴ Manuals aimed at regulating behaviour and manners by stressing the importance of the correct use of words were issued,⁵⁵ while swearing (*bestemmia*) and slander were increasingly frowned upon by civic and ecclesiastical magistracies.⁵⁶ In 1577, the clergy of the diocese of Bologna were instructed to “seek to collect all those incantations, superstitions and *brevi da portar adosso* bearing superstitious words, unapproved names and similar abuses”.⁵⁷ This was to be done even in cases where “the words do not appear to be evil [*my italics*]”,⁵⁸ which implies that ironically, the clergy were considered just as easily led by the Devil as their parishioners!

In addition, that the *benandanti* of the Friuli, “a peasant army of the faith established by God”,⁵⁹ were denounced as witches by Inquisitors in the late sixteenth century, illustrates the growing importance of expressing spiritual experience in theologically sound language.⁶⁰ The *benandanti*’s nightly sojourns into the fields, in order to do battle with witches and warlocks, were an ancient agricultural rite aimed at protecting crops - upon which the entire community depended - from destructive and

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 153-155.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵¹ S. Clark, "Protestant demonology: Sin, superstition, and society", in Early modern european witchcraft: Centers and peripheries, eds. B. Ankara and G. Henningson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 74.

⁵² G. Ruggiero, Binding passions, p. 102.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 102-3.

⁵⁴ N.Z. Davis, "Proverbial wisdom and popular errors", p. 247.

⁵⁵ G. Ruggiero, Binding passions, p. 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ M.R. O’Neil, Discerning superstition, p. 6, quoting, "Alcune cose, per memoria dei Reverendi Curati di Bologna tratte nelle Congregazione fatta in Vescovado alli 24 d’ottobre 1577," Stabilimenti e dichiarazioni delle congregazioni annuali dei R.R. arcipreti, pievani e vicari foranei di Bologna (Bologna, 1577), in Cieto Corrain and Pier Luigi Zampini, Documenti etnografici e folkloristici nei sinodi diocesani italiani (Bologna, 1970), p. 36.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ C. Ginzburg, The night battles: Witchcraft and agrarian cults in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, transl. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 21-2.

evil spirits.⁶¹ Once these battles were translated into concrete literalism by theologians, the benandanti were condemned as witches and their combats with evil as diabolical Sabbaths.⁶² Indeed, their experience was remoulded and thus “incorporated into the inquisitorial schema” of devilish activity.⁶³ It is important to note, however, that although the notion of the Sabbath was imposed by the dominant, learned culture upon the popular culture, fear of the Devil and his accomplices was “a culturally mixed phenomenon”.⁶⁴

Although it can be argued that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ecclesiastical and secular authorities united in an attempt to control popular culture, it is nevertheless important to consider just how effective these attempts at control were.⁶⁵ Recent research has revealed that religious and social conformity among the general population of early modern Europe, was at best lukewarm.⁶⁶ Martin Scharfe describes the “poor attendance at services; absence from school; breaking the Sabbath by work, play, idleness, mischief; dissidence about the Lord’s supper; and...superstition” in a Protestant village called Dusslingen as “the widespread negligence usual for the time in fulfilling religious obligations”.⁶⁷ Mission reports from the valley of the Garonne and the valley of the Tarn in France, from 1683-1714, inform us of the “uninstructed and undevout”.⁶⁸

Furthermore, indifference was not the only reaction to the tightening of religious and social controls during this period. In 1743, the curé of the parish of Sérignan, in lower Languedoc, forbade drinking at the tavern during Church services and on Sunday - that night his flower-beds were destroyed, his wheelbarrow smashed and his chickens set free.⁶⁹ Indeed, all over Europe, there could be seen resistance, both passive and active, to what has been described as “the moral offensive of the rigorists”.⁷⁰ I would argue that the Church and the State lacked the two requirements essential for the effective control of popular culture. Firstly, a will on the part of the local religious and secular authorities to enforce “godly discipline” and secondly, a simple and homogenous society to enforce it on.⁷¹

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 22-3.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 21-2.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁴ C. Ginzburg, “Deciphering the Sabbath”, in Early modern european witchcraft: Centres and peripheries, eds. B. Ankarloo and G. Henningson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 121-22.

⁶⁵ M. Ingram, “Ridings, rough music and the ‘reform of popular culture’ in early modern England”, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Delumeau, Catholicism, p. 217.

⁶⁷ M. Scharfe, “The distances between the lower classes official religion: Examples from eighteenth-century Württemberg Protestantism”, transl. Deborah Monroe, in Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 157.

⁶⁸ J. Delumeau, Catholicism, p. 217, quoting Premiers itinéraires, pp. 44-6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 218-19.

⁷⁰ B. Lenman, “The limits of godly discipline in the early modern period with particular reference to England and Scotland”, in Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 133.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 141.

The clergy, schoolmasters and lay judges were “the front line of defense against ... rustic errors”.⁷² However, Mary O’Neil tells us that twenty percent of trials held in Modena between 1580 and 1600, involved clerics.⁷³ In 1588, the Holy Office of Venice tried the priest Don Felice di Bibona for consecrating a host in order that the courtesan Paolina di Rossi might give it to her lover and bind him to her in love.⁷⁴ It is hardly surprising that the Church considered Don Felice a much graver threat to Paolina - as a priest he had not only abused the sacramental and teaching functions entrusted to him by the Church⁷⁵ but had also violated the Eucharist which was “the central mystery of the Mass”.⁷⁶ In 1590, a Franciscan friar living in Venice, was tried for dispensing bollettini or polizze (charms for healing sick people) from the scuola of his convent.⁷⁷ Although technically they represented orthodoxy on a local level, the clergy nevertheless shared the “milieu and mentalité” of their parishioners, due to the fact that many were originally artisans and peasants themselves.⁷⁸ Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, due to the clergy’s role as mediators between popular and elite culture, trials involving the uneducated laity were designed to frighten, whereas trials involving the clergy were designed to enlighten.⁷⁹ Certainly, this indifference on the part of Inquisitors to explain to lay people why certain practices were erroneous, would not have helped to control the ‘misconceptions’ inherent in popular culture.

In addition, priests were often considered as outsiders by their parishioners.⁸⁰ “At times [they were] even marginal to the community”.⁸¹ In Latisana during this period, priests could not compete with women healers because the latter were embedded within the community network - they were the wives and the mothers, the daughters and the sisters and “the true masters of spiritual things”.⁸² Some priests went to women healers themselves!⁸³ Others, impressed by the efficacy of their remedies, recommended them to their parishioners.⁸⁴ It has been suggested that the relationship between priests and women healers was symbiotic in nature- women used priests to ensure their good reputation while priests used women “to penetrate the families of a community”.⁸⁵ However, if distance from their community was a problem for the clergy during the early modern period, proximity could be an even greater handicap.⁸⁶ In 1585, the priest Don Gian Battista of Modena, was tried for

⁷² M.R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’”, p. 55.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁴ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, pp. 90-3.

⁷⁵ M.R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’”, p. 56.

⁷⁶ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, p. 93.

⁷⁷ M.R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’”, pp. 57-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

⁸⁰ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, p. 137.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁸⁴ E.R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’”, p. 69.

⁸⁵ G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, p. 147.

⁸⁶ M.R. O’Neil, “‘Sacerdote ovvero strione’”, p. 68.

baptising a piece of magnet so that it could be used by Signora Castanza as a love charm.⁸⁷ Interestingly, the lady in question was his social superior.⁸⁸

Martin Ingram, in his article 'Ridings, rough music and the "reform of popular culture" in early modern England', tells us that although charivaris were usually performed by the lower classes, they were nevertheless frequently participated in and supported by officers of the lower classes, justices of peace, members of the gentry and scholars.⁸⁹ In 1618, the constable of Burton led a charivari where a couple found in bed together were paraded through the streets and set in stocks, claiming that his actions had been approved by the justices of the town.⁹⁰ Consequently, elite patronage of charivaris demonstrates an aspect of popular culture that was encouraged on a local level.⁹¹ Moreover, an encounter with the Holy Office did not always spell disaster for lay healers.⁹² In 1592, a Venetian healer named Benetta, was released (licentiata) with a warning not to heal any more.⁹³ Unfortunately for the Inquisitors, licentiata could also mean "being licensed to practice".⁹⁴ In this way, the courts were often endorsing the very unorthodoxy of popular culture they were trying to control.⁹⁵ The stereotype of the learned judges and theologians leading the ignorant lower classes into confession needs to be challenged;⁹⁶ "often the people examined were neither ignorant nor uncultured, and some were also quite capable of turning the thread of the interrogation in directions that were significant for them".⁹⁷

In addition, early modern European society was neither simple nor homogenous. John Bossy, in his article 'The Counter-Reformation and the people of catholic Europe', has challenged the assumption that popular culture was merely "a passive recipient of hierarchically-conveyed instructions".⁹⁸ The complexity and variety of popular culture during this period was "the great[est] obstacle to Tridentine uniformity".⁹⁹ The imposition of morality and orthodoxy were often "beyond the powers of the clergy".¹⁰⁰ Bossy attributes this inability to control popular culture to kinship bonds.¹⁰¹ Bernard Gilpin, a missionary in England, could not get his parishioners to worship in the same place because "to enter under the same roof as members of a family with which one's own had a dispute was to violate the rules which alone could maintain some sort of order in so benighted a countryside".¹⁰²

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ M. Ingram, "Ridings, rough music, and the 'reform of popular culture'", pp. 104-106.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁹² G. Ruggiero, *Binding passions*, pp. 164-5.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 164.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ J. Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the people of catholic Europe", p. 54.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

People resented the assaults of reforming curés and judges on ancient institutions.¹⁰³ It has been suggested that reformers in Protestant areas were unable to control popular culture and even contributed to rising levels of fear and anxiety amongst the general population because the only thing they had to offer in place of its many rituals was blind faith.¹⁰⁴ Besides, the rural and urban masses were not the only ones who resented these attacks - the clergy and the lay judges were themselves opposed to pressure from the Church and State to control what were seen as “legitimate social custom[s]”.¹⁰⁵ In Elena Crusichi, a healer who practised in Venice from 1550-1580, we meet a woman who is able to ask interrogators to leave her home when friends call in unexpectedly!¹⁰⁶

Hence, it becomes apparent that although to an extent the control of popular culture by Church and State authorities was successful, it was nevertheless “a rather different world of power and religion, where ecclesiastical [and secular] authorities ... [were] dismissed with disarming ease”.¹⁰⁷ To attribute the attempt by the Church and the State to control popular culture, with “the transition [of early modern Europe] from a polysegmentary society to a society striving for unity”,¹⁰⁸ is to ignore the “complexity and multiplicity” of the nature of popular culture.¹⁰⁹

In conclusion, this paper has established the priorities that underpinned attempts to control popular culture in early modern Europe. It has provided examples of the ways in which the Church and the State strove to eliminate spiritual and social alternatives by enforcing Christian morality, imposing orthodox religiosity, separating the human from the divine and creating a monopoly on words. This paper has argued that while this period saw an increased effort on the part of religious and secular authorities to control the errors inherent in popular culture, it was never fully Christianised.¹¹⁰ Further, attempts at control did not result in “achieved cultural facts”,¹¹¹ due to the fact that popular culture was not something that could easily be defined, let alone controlled.

¹⁰³ Jean-Pierre Gutton, "Confaternities, curés and communities in rural areas of the diocese of Lyons under the Ancien Regime", transl. John Burke, in Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 209.

¹⁰⁴ Kaspar von Greyerz, "Religion in the life of German and Swiss autobiographers (sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries)", in Religion and society in early modern Europe, 1500-1800, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp. 233-4.

¹⁰⁵ J. Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the people of catholic Europe", p.56

¹⁰⁶ G. Ruggiero, Binding passions, pp. 149-163.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁸ R. Muchembled, Popular culture and elite culture, p. 315.

¹⁰⁹ M.R. O'Neil, "'Sacerdote ovvero strione'", p. 76.

¹¹⁰ J. Obelkevich, Religion and the people, p. 6.

¹¹¹ M.R. O'Neil, "'Sacerdote ovvero strione'", p.76.

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