'Odd Conceits and Crafty Jugglings': The English Nation in Rome in the Late Sixteenth Century

Anthony N. Parr
University of the Western Cape

The conceits and jugglings in my title are borrowed from the writer Anthony Munday, whose entertaining and often scurrilous account of life in the English College at Rome in the late 1570s uses these terms to describe various Catholic rituals that he holds up for ridicule, and to lampoon Gregory XIII as a treacherous and scheming Pope, responsible for the Jesuit English mission and for planning an invasion of England.[1] *The English Romayne Lyfe*, published in 1582, is itself a crafty piece of work that may not be all that it seems, since it was written partly to justify Munday's slippery career as a seminary student turned informer against the English Jesuits; and I shall touch on a few of its details. But I want to wrest his phrase from its immediate context to show how it can also apply to some aspects of English travel to Rome and comparable destinations during these fraught years, because it expresses something of the inventive, eccentric and sometimes cunning ways in which travellers negotiated difficult circumstances or seized new opportunities for mobility and profit.

The story of changing English fortunes in Italy during the sixteenth century, as the Counter-Reformation and the growing dominance of Spain in the peninsula created a climate less amenable to the free traffic of people and ideas in the second half of the century, has been vividly told by Edward Chaney in his book on the evolution of the Grand Tour.[2]

---

[1] Anthony Munday, *The English Romayne Lyfe* (London: John Charlewood for Nicholas Ling, 1582), sig. A4.

[2] Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), chapters 2–3.

The Tour, a staple of gentlemanly education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had at its centre the visit to Rome, and is generally regarded as assuming its full dimensions only when peace with Spain in 1604 made travel south of Florence a secure (and legal) proposition. Legal, that is, from the point of view of the English government, which imposed a ban, a rather imperfect one, on travel to Rome and the Papal territories for much of Elizabeth's reign. Yet several of the essential features of the Tour were in place in early Tudor times, when humanist links with Italy were rapidly growing, and although Henry VIII's break with Catholicism interrupted a flourishing cultural exchange with Florence and Rome, one that promised to end England's isolation from the main currents of Renaissance culture, it didn't stop the flow of tourists and students. As far as a taste for travel was concerned, the genie was out of the bottle, and hence it was that the first substantial wave of English tourism coincided with the intensification of religious faultlines across Europe. It is also true, of course, that those faultlines helped to create new forms of mobility: cultural touring – which is what a lot of pilgrimage had become anyway – filled some of the gaps created by the reformation ban on going to religious shrines, and doctrinal schism created religious exiles, missionaries and espionage networks. It was a volatile and dangerous theatre for travel, especially after the excommunication of Elizabeth I in 1570, and the argument about the benefits of venturing abroad inevitably intensified, frequently (in a pre-actuarial age) calling on the language of gambling to try and assess the risks.

There is another, equally important sense in which England's relations with Italy were affected by the Reformation. Tourists going to Italy in the sixteenth century were venturing into an extremely complex geopolitical situation. The Italian peninsula was of course not a nation-state but a set of power blocs in which foreign influences were dominant: the Papal States were locked in uneasy rivalry with the Holy Roman Emperor, who could also command the resources of Spain, and the situation was complicated by the ambitions of the French. This complex struggle was sardonically observed in the 1520s by the French poet Mellin de Saint-Gellais, who presents the stand-off between the Papacy, the Emperor and the King of France as an early form of poker game:

> The king, the pope, the German ruler
>> Play a jolly game of primero.
> The pope proposes an agreement . . .
>> The emperor ponders, hardly daring to glance at his cards . . .
> The king advises him: don't expect any gain;
>> This is my game . . .
> Alas, whoever may be the victor
> The loss falls on the Holy Father.
> . . . in this game skill is worth less than luck.[3]

England had been drawn into this complex play of forces at about the time this poem was written, when Pope Julius II tried to persuade Henry VIII to join a league against France, promising him the French throne in the event of victory, and Henry himself had designs on becoming the next Holy Roman Emperor and wanted Wolsey to be the next Pope. But by the time of Elizabeth's excommunication fifty years later, England had lost its last toehold on French territory, the Papacy was perceived as closely aligned with Spain in its assault on the Reformation in northern Europe, and in this particular 'Great Game' there was now clearly no role for the English state—except of course as the object of a determined Counter-Reformation campaign.

At the beginning of the 1580s, England's standing within Rome itself was correspondingly insecure, by comparison with other nations in this highly cosmopolitan city. There had been an English presence in Rome for centuries, but intermittently prickly relations between the Papacy and England's rulers, dating back at least as far as the Norman kings, meant that the fortunes of successive institutions set up in the city had been rocky. The hospice that was founded in the fourteenth century to accommodate pilgrims fell on hard times after Henry VIII's break with Rome, and by the 1560s was full of exiled Marian priests. In 1579 the hospice was refounded with Papal backing as the English College and given responsibility for training priests for the English Mission; but it was inevitably less prestigious than the Collegium Germanicum founded by

---

[3] Cit. in Oystein Ore, *Cardano: The Gambling Scholar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 119.

Ignatius Loyola in 1552, which prided itself on a demanding curriculum and was charged with the materially more rewarding task of supplying priests to the Catholic parts of Germany: many of *its* graduates ended up in key ecclesiastical positions at home,[4] in stark contrast to the martyrdom fervently embraced by the English Jesuits which, as we shall see, proved to be somewhat controversial in Rome. Similarly, the strong Spanish presence in the city was a constant reminder to English residents and visitors alike of their own country's status as a beleaguered enemy of the Holy See: Philip II established an archive in Rome in 1558 to preserve the many papal bulls and briefs that conceded him various privileges, and a sizable part of the Spanish community served as a powerful lobbying group that influenced papal elections and put pressure on the papacy to support their nation's policies. One year on Easter morning they mounted a mock naval battle in the Piazza Navona that celebrated 'the victory of the cross and the victory of the Spaniards over heresy'.[5] Meanwhile on the cultural front, Rome was full of French students sent to learn architecture and painting,[6] and no doubt those of other nations were there as well, while England would have to wait another generation before the travels of Arundel and Inigo Jones set an example for English artists and connoisseurs. The relative powerlessness of the small English community also apparently made it vulnerable to zealous policing, for some of the English Catholics in exile were starting to feel the rough edge of the Inquisition: early in 1582 Walsingham's secretary informed Anthony Bacon that '[t]he handling of our nation in Italy is daily worse and worse . . . many . . . catholics at Rome, are clapt up, and generally all other English, if the least suspicion can be gathered, that they have other than papists to their friends in England'.[7]

---

[4] Francesco C. Cesareo, 'The Collegium Germanicum and the Ignatian Vision of Education', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993): 829–41.

[5] Thomas Dandelet, 'The Spanish Nation in Rome, 1555–1625', *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997): 481–511, p. 482.

[6] Margaret M. McGowan, 'Impaired vision: the experience of Rome in Renaissance France', *Renaissance Studies* 8 (1994): 244–55, p. 247.

[7] Thomas Birch, *Memoirs of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 2 vols (London: A. Millar, 1754), 1: 21.

With stories like this doing the rounds, it's not difficult to see why the formal dissuasion from travel as a rhetorical set piece centres on Italy in texts as different as Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* and Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, or why Ascham's influential judgement that '*Italie* now, is not that *Italie*, that it was wont to be' for him applied above all to Counter-Reformation Rome.[8] But Protestant tourists who were thus taught to despise the modern city and its pomp still wanted to see ancient Rome, whose universal appeal was enthusiastically expressed at this time by the former Jesuit Giovanni Botero in his book on the greatness of cities, even as he lauds the city of the popes. Praising 'the exceeding wonderfull reliques of her ancient greatnes', he asks: 'And what shall we imagine that Citty was, when she floryshed and triumphed; if now, while she lyeth thus defaced, & is none other then a Sepulture of her selfe, she allureth us to see her, and feedeth us insatiably with the ruynes of her selfe'.[9] Some of the manuals of advice for travellers, however, do their best to damp down such enthusiasm: Sir Thomas Palmer warns against sight-seeing in Italy, calling it 'a fantasticall attracter, and a glutton-feeder of the appetite, rather than of necessarie knowledge', despite 'the speciall gallerie of monuments and olde aged memorials . . . to bee seene thorowout the Countrey'. Instead, he suggests, travel in Italy affords the chance to study 'the multiplex and different governments, and sundrie policies there found'.[10] The same point is made many times in the travel manuals and elsewhere: the traveller must be a Ulysses, seeking to understand the natures of men and the diversity of nations. Palmer's moral caution about the pleasure of ruins had been sounded in Rome a quarter of a millennium earlier, when Petrarch expressed the anxiety that a visitor might be tempted to tour the ancient monuments in a spirit of aesthetic curiosity (*curiositate poetica*) rather than out of Catholic devotion

---

[8] Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London: John Day, 1571), fol. 23v. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller: or, The Life of Jacke Wilton* (London: T. Scarlet for Cuthbert Burby, 1594).

[9] Giovanni Botero, *A Treatise, Concerning the causes of the Magnificencie and greatnes of Cities*, trans. Robert Peterson (London: T.P. for Richard Ockould and Henry Tomes, 1606), p. 11.

[10] Sir Thomas Palmer, *An Essay of the Meanes how to make our Travailes . . . more profitable* (London: Humphrey Lownes for Mathew Lownes, 1606), p. 44.

(*devotione Catholica*) – not that this deterred him from extensive classical sight-seeing.[11] But what Palmer opposes to curiosity is not of course Catholic pilgrimage, since that now represents a snare for men's souls, but a tactical emphasis on 'Matters of State' that directly responded to what were perceived to be the political designs of the Papal court and the Jesuits.

It is somewhat ironic, however, that Palmer's rejection of Rome's tourist attractions closely echoes that of the exiled Catholic priest Gregory Martin, who translated the Bible for English Catholics at Rheims in the early 1580s and wrote a book called *Roma Sancta* after a long visit to the Eternal City. This is a rapturous and deeply devout account of Christian Rome that glances only briefly at the ancient city, and then only to dismiss it:

> I sette a part al worldlie & prophane antiquity thereof, commending and leaving it to them that for curiositie, or gayne, or whatsoever other vanitie, take great paines to abuse their travel and tyme in paltrie. They will tell perhappes goodly tales of the Capitol, the Amphitheatre, of Trajan's pillar . . . & so foorth – but the Christian pilgrime . . . in these thinges taketh only this delight, to se the ruines therof, and how they are neglected, al Christian monuments coming in their places.[12]

What immediately strikes us is the pious triumphalism of Martin's position, celebrating the way in which the Counter-Reformation sought to distance itself from humanist ideas of Rome as a reinvention of classical achievement, a synthesis of past and present, and tried to reimpose on the city a more specifically Catholic look and identity, destroying a good deal of its classical legacy in the process. But the hardening of attitudes can be seen on both sides, for Palmer's conviction that Rome is 'the Forge of every policie' and 'the machedivell of evil policies and practises' prompts him, like Martin, to deny a whole dimension of the travelling experience

---

[11] Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, p. 59.

[12] Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta* (1582), ed. G.B. Parks (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), p. 10.

in order to focus on 'necessarie knowledge'.[13] The eagerness with which the educated tourist might approach his first sight of the Roman monuments, letting them stir in him the various conceptions of ancient Rome that had been traditional since the Middle Ages, is simply denied.

Perhaps the nearest thing to a political programme on the part of the English in Italy – if we except Walsingham's spy network – was Sir Henry Wotton's attempt, while Ambassador to Venice, to create a rapprochement between Protestant Europe and some of the northern Italian states and to import the Protestant faith into Venice. Wotton made it his mission in Italy to undermine the work of the Jesuits and counteract Papal operations in the peninsula, and much later in life, when he decided to take holy orders, he explained to the King that he owed his faith in God's truth to his

> large experience of the abuses thereof in the very seat and sink of all corruption, *Rome* it selfe: To which my wandring curiosity carried mee no lesse then four times in my younger years; where I fixed my Studies most upon the historicall part, in the politick man of Religion, which I found plainly converted from a Rule of Conscience, to an Instrument of State; and from the Mistresse of all Sciences, into a very hand-maid of Ambition.[14]

There's a touch of Shakespeare's Prince Hal in this account, as Wotton's relaxed syntax implies that his wandering curiosity led him into trouble, but also insists that his priorities were always clear: to focus on the 'historical part', which meant not ancient or mediaeval remains but the ways in which Roman political culture has changed. In his letters he makes clear how assiduously he interpreted the need to investigate the city: in 1592, living high on the hog in Rome, he confesses 'my most assured knowledge, that her delights on earth are sweet', adding the conventional corollary: 'and her judgements in heaven heavy'.[15] This neatly appropriates

---

[13] Palmer, *An Essay of the Meanes how to make our Travailes . . . more profitable*, p. 44.

[14] Sir Henry Wotton, *Reliquiae Wottonianae* (London: Thomas Maxey, for R. Marriot, G. Bedel, and T. Garthwait, 1651), pp. 382–3.

[15] *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, ed. Logan Pearsall Smith, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 1: 274.

the traditional verdict on ancient Rome, ruined by her own pride, and applies it to the splendours of the Papal city that both beguile and horrify him. He presents his actions as a calculated gamble – descent into the heart of the beast in order to extract what Palmer called 'necessarie knowledge' – and as we shall see, it involved him both in flamboyant improvisation and in a tactical use of travel customs common amongst his fellow countrymen.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

In turning now more specifically to those English journeys, let us step back a moment and recall for a moment Rome's complicated history as a travel destination. Rome recovered its popularity as a pilgrimage destination in the later fifteenth century, as the city was reborn under the humanist popes, but the real boost came after 1517 when Jerusalem fell to the Ottoman Turks. This meant that the Holy Land became more difficult to visit, and though the package tours to the Middle East that embarked from Venice would continue for the rest of the century, many pilgrims turned instead to Rome or destinations like Santiago di Compostella. It has been estimated that in the Jubilee Year of 1600 Rome had half a million visitors, and by then the pilgrimage routes within the city – to the seven major churches and so on – had been organised by Sixtus V into a formal itinerary.[16] But despite the gradual relaxation of religious policing towards the end of the century, the city was hardly friendly to Protestant visitors, who might include the seven churches in a sight-seeing tour, as Fynes Morison did in 1594, but were careful to keep their mouths shut and were always ready to make a quick exit. They were conditioned to view Rome as alien territory. There is little difference between Henry Timberlake's declaration, on a visit to Palestine, that 'the holy Land [bears] the name onely and no more: for all holinesse is cleane banished from thence',[17] and the Protestant conviction that Rome has

---

[16] Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 330

[17] Henry Timberlake, *A Relation of the Travells of two English Pilgrimes* (London: John Norton for Hugh Perry, 1631), p. 29.

turned into Babylon and poisoned the fount of Christianity. Like the holy places that had fallen to the infidel, Rome thus became for Protestants the object of a particular kind of pilgrimage, both resistant and appropriating, based in a kind of defiance of the occupying power. And this was why, perhaps, it emerged as a prime destination for the travel wager, the bet on a journey that involved 'putting out' a stake that would be repaid at an agreed rate of multiplication if the traveller returned safely having met a particular set of conditions. The 'travell to *Rome* with the returne in certaine daies' was cited by William Rowley in 1609 as an example of a class of stunts that involved particular difficulty or ingenuity,[18] and it represented an adaptation of traditional customs to the special circumstances of sixteenth century tourism, since it had its origins both in pilgrimage practices and in traditions of aristocratic gaming.

The journey to fulfil a wager had been a lively idea in courtly mediaeval culture, as can be seen in a poem like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where it is both part of a chivalric code of honour and in Christian terms a stringent ethical test. But the monetary wager on a journey is probably a product of the early Tudor court, one of a plethora of noble betting games that sustained the competitive and exclusive ethos of the governing class, and its capacity to rehearse the travels of crusader and knightly pilgrim as a kind of formal game would have lent it a particular status in courtly circles. The favoured destinations of long-distance 'putting out' later in the century (and which were pursued well into the eighteenth century) were all borrowed from the itineraries involved in those two activities of crusading and pilgrimage: Rome, Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus, Constantinople. Within the terms of an Arthurian honour code like the one found in *Gawain,* these were logical sites at which to test patrician virtue and prowess, and this archaic ideal clearly provided a useful container for the aspirations of the new tourism. It allowed travel to be reconceived as adventure, in a manner familiar from epic and romance literature but largely absent from the actual practice of the late-mediaeval English nobility.

---

[18] William Rowley, *A Search for Money* (London: George Eld for Joseph Hunt, 1609), sig. A4v.

Roger Ascham seems to be responding to this spirit in his attack on foreign travel, but his belief is that the habits of the nobility not only fail to set a good example but also make them particularly vulnerable to hazard. For young men to go to Italy in search of experience is a desperate gamble, he suggests,

> whan you doe consider, what mischiefe they have committed, what daungers they have escaped (and yet xx for one, do perishe in the adventure) . . . A Father, that doth let louse his sonne, to all experiences, is most like a fonde Hunter, that letteth slippe a whelpe to the whole herde. Twentie to one, he shall fall upon a rascall [an immature deer], and let go the faire game.[19]

Like many others Ascham thought the English were innocents abroad, and in *The Scholemaster* he rephrases the gamble on travel in terms that remind the governing classes of their moral obligations and the real risks they run. But the travel wager didn't remain confined to the upper classes, and it also operated as a kind of parody of the time-honoured practice of penitential journey, in which repentant heretics or offenders were instructed to make a pilgrimage and 'to bring back a certificate of performance from the church authorities at their destination'.[20] This type of penance was still in force in Rome itself during the 1580s, when it was imposed by the Jesuits on miscreants at the English College: Anthony Munday claims that it included 'trudging to the seven Churches' and 'going into the darke vauts [catacombs] under the ground';[21] and the fact that these ordeals were as likely to be undertaken by the tourist probably explains why the practice of issuing certificates became a virtually automatic ritual at holy sites. The traveller Fynes Moryson, describing his visit to Jerusalem in 1596, reports that the Franciscan friars 'gave to each of us freely and unasked (as it seems of custome) . . . a testimony

---

[19] Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, fols 18v–19.

[20] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Mediaeval England* (New York: Hambledon & London, 2000), p. 234.

[21] Munday, *The English Romayne Lyfe*, p. 25.

under the seale of the Monastery, that we had beene at Jerusalem'. This
sounds a little as if such documents had become standard souvenirs, along
with the 'little stones' from the city's monuments that the travellers were
also given. But Moryson adds that the friars 'for better credit' added to
the certificates 'some remarkable signes of our faces and bodies',[22] and it
seems likely that this practice, which presumably originated with the needs
of penitents, took on a fresh significance with the advent of travel wagers.
Another of Moryson's anecdotes indicates why some might have thought
the identification procedure important: he relates that an English
gentleman of his acquaintance, fearing a Turkish ambush on his way to
the Holy Land, got cold feet about completing the last leg of his journey
and 'returned into England without seeing Jerusalem . . . only carrying with
him a counterfet testimonie and seale that he had been there, because he
had put out much money on his returne'.[23]

Moryson does not appear to have sought a certificate on his own visit
to Rome in 1593, but one traveller that did, in the year that the English
College was established as a seminary, was a goldsmith by the name of
Francis Ridelstone. According to the report of Walsingham's spy Charles
Sledd, Ridelstone turned up in Rome in August 1579 claiming to have
gone there on a wager, and carrying letters of introduction designed to
help him obtain the 'certificate & seale of the cittye', which he needed
with 'spedy dispache . . . by cause the daye of his retorne to London againe
must of necessite be before Michelmas Daye nexte'. Ridelstone could have
stayed at the English College, where under the rules 'poor pilgrims shall
be retained for eight days' – this was the old custom of the fourteenth
century hospice, ratified when it became the English College, and
generally extended to all non-aristocratic visitors who were also protected
by the English Cardinal for the period of their stay. Apparently choosing
not to stay there, he nonetheless attracted the immediate attention of the
College, and 'the next daye came Robert Parsons Jesuite' and two others
'to welcome Ridelstone as they said but they were porporslye sente to

---

22 Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary Containing his Ten Yeeres Travel* (1617), 4 vols (Glasgow:
James MacLehose, 1907–08), 2: 37.

23 *Ibid.*, 1: 461.

talke with him & to knowe the cause of his cominge thether, to undermine him & knowe what capasite he was of or whether he was a like name to a spye'. They 'exorted entreated & persuaded him to come to the englishe seminarye', meet the students, be instructed in religion, and renounce the Queen. Ridelstone seems to have resisted the pressure and left six days later; but Sledd reported that 'Of his departure grewe many wordes for that he had not confessed nor submitted himselfe to the Pope', nor did he comply with the 'requests & persuationes' of Persons and the others, 'wherfore his departure was not well disgested neyther taken in good parte by the said parties which . . . repented them greatly that they had not caused his imprisonment & for his sake thretned all suche Englishemen as should come thether afterwards'.[24]

Ridelstone's story illuminates the particular perils faced by Protestant travellers in Catholic Europe and particularly in cities where seminary training had been instituted: being suspected of spying for the English government, and falling victim to the Jesuit battle for hearts and minds. Both were plausible scenarios: Walsingham got his agents into the English College at Rome very soon after its foundation, and young men thought susceptible to conversion were specifically targeted by Catholic agents. Propaganda pamphlets may have played up the idea of 'devilish' Jesuit stratagems to trap the unwary or needy tourist, but the risks were genuine. The circumstances of travel had changed in two, crucially intertwined respects. While there had always been poor pilgrims on the road, their numbers and purposes were predictable and systems of hospitality existed to cope with them. And before the Reformation they moved through a landscape generally untroubled by doctrinal conflict. In the sixteenth century the world of mediaeval travel was disrupted by a growth in numbers and uncertainty about the status and intentions of many tourists, and this coincided with religious schism in some calamitous ways.

Yet we cannot simply see the tourist as the victim of perilous circumstances. Although the concept of insurance on private travel was

---

[24] Charles Sledd, 'A general discourse of the Popes holynes devices', in *Miscellanea: Recusant Records*, Catholic Record Society 53 (London: Catholic Record Society, 1961), 193–245, pp. 219–21.

only beginning to be accepted in the late sixteenth century, young men venturing abroad were taking a recognized gamble on personal security that was distinct from the imponderable risks of bandits, bad roads and foreign food. When Thomas Coryat returned from his epic walk to Venice in 1608 and his sponsor refused to honour the wager he had made on the journey, he had to go to court to claim his winnings, and his indignant riposte to insinuations about 'the smalnesse and commonnesse of my Voyage' was to play up his dangerous trip through the Alps and his ability in Milan and elsewhere 'to passe throgh that carnificina, that excruciating and excarnificating torture of the *Spanish Inquisition*'.[25] Ridelstone too made a stop in Milan, perhaps the most dangerous city in Italy for Protestant visitors, part of his journey and perhaps part of his wager; and Anthony Munday, in justifying his trip to Rome in the early pages of *The English Romayne Lyfe*, claims that various Catholic gentlemen in Paris urged him and his companion to go there and offered to give them letters 'for our better welcome thether'. Wanting to emphasise that Catholic persuasion was not what decided him, Munday then declares that 'we thought, that if we could goe to *Roome*, and returne safelie againe into *England*, wee should accomplish a great matter, the place beeing so farre of, and the voyage so daungerous'.[26] Munday is clearly availing himself of the vocabulary of the heroic gamble, even though his journey doesn't seem to have involved a monetary wager, and given his later notoriety both at home and in Rome, the brag indicates why the authorities might have had reason to suspect that any claim to be 'putting out' is a cover for other activities – whether it be Persons's suspicion that Ridelstone was a spy, or the uncertainty, which has persisted to our own day, about Munday's real reasons for going to Rome.

Munday also says that he wrote the book 'Because a number have been desirous, to understand the successe of my journey to *Roome*, and a number beside are doubtfull, whether I have beene there or no', which was a common reaction to the vaunting claims of the traveller. But we

[25] Thomas Coryat, *Coryats Crambe* (London; William Stansby, 1611), sigs. D3v–D4.

[26] Munday, *The English Romayne Lyfe*, p. 8.

might note that Munday's more sober explanation for his trip, that he was impelled by 'desire to see straunge Countreies, as also affection to learne the languages', is identical to that given by Charles Sledd: 'As a traviler . . . & desyerous to learne languages & also to see the naturall enclynations and dispositions of strainge & forayne contryes withe their inhabytes'. Both men present themselves as having realised after the fact that their real mission was to expose, as Sledd put it, 'the Popes . . . devices & polices which were first discovered to me in Rome', or in Munday's words, 'the odd conceits and crafty jugglings of the Pope'.[27] Yet however assiduous were Munday's subsequent attempts to destroy the English Mission by informing on his erstwhile contacts at the English College, and his claim that he pretended to be Catholic in order to 'undermine them and sift out their purposes', opinion has started to swing back to the old proposition that he set off on his travels as some sort of Catholic and may have enrolled in the English College as a sincere believer in the old religion.[28] The argument is not one that I can pursue very far here, but Munday's case illustrates the extraordinary difficulty of disentangling motives for travel at this time, and suggests ways in which the picaresque adventure could act as a container for a variety of clandestine activities.

Our difficulty was clearly also that of the Roman authorities. In July 1581, the Venetian ambassador in Rome reported that 'in Saint Peter's an English heretic attacked the priest officiating at mass, and endeavoured to snatch the Host . . . from his hands . . . [H]e has confessed that he is one of several who have come into Italy for this very purpose'.[29] Elizabeth's 1580 edict recalling travellers from the Continent after Persons and Campion began the English Mission had been ineffective, a point that was rubbed in by a very different ruling from the Pope just over two months after the St Peter's incident. On October 9th, the English ambassador in Paris reported as follows to Walsingham:

---

[27] Munday, *The English Romayne Lyfe*, p. 1, sig. A4; Sledd, 'A general discourse of the Popes holynes devices', p. 214.

[28] Donna B. Hamilton, *Anthony Munday and the Catholics, 1560–1633* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 39–40.

[29] *Calendar of State Papers Venetian*, 29th July 1581.

> The Pope, as I am told, has given severe orders that all Englishmen who shall come to Rome on 'bargains of return' are to be apprehended, imprisoned, and executed as felons. Some are upon this lately imprisoned, and others who last passed this way will be in great danger. The execution of this tyrannical order was offered to the English College there, but they refusing it the Inquisition has taken the matter in hand.[30]

The English College in Rome had three years earlier been placed under the control of the Jesuits, but it remained a place of call for Protestant visitors; and despite their ruling two years before in the Ridelstone case, which 'thretned all suche Englishemen as should come thether afterwards',[31] the College was clearly unwilling to be associated with a draconian policy that might affect a number of its visitors and lump them together with extremists. But the ambassador, despite condemning the order as 'tyrannical', is not apparently surprised by it; and it seems very likely that the Pope's edict was provoked in part by incidents like the one described, which Fynes Moryson condemned as the product of excessive zeal but which he feared might result from the Protestant tourist habit of attending mass 'as going to see a stage-play, or for curiositie, wherewith many are led'.[32] Attending such a spectacle, he implies, can lead to acts of bravado, and those acts lent fuel to the idea that English travel to Rome is excessively bound up with the making of dares or wagers. One wonders whether the unfortunate prisoners described in the March 1582 letter from Nicholas Faunt to Anthony Bacon that I quoted earlier were victims of this policy: 'For LISTER and others in the inquisition at Rome, it will go very hard: but on EGLEBY and DUTTON there is like to be execution done, if already it is not'.[33]

The St Peter's offender was one Richard Atkins, whom Anthony Munday reports as turning up at the English College in midsummer 1581

---

[30] *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, 1581–2*, p. 335.

[31] Sledd, 'A general discourse of the Popes holynes devices', p. 221.

[32] Moryson, *An Itinerary Containing his Ten Yeeres Travel*, 3: 415.

[33] Birch, *Memoirs of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 1: 21.

to rebuke his countrymen for the 'great misorder' of their lives, before going on to commit his fatal act.[34] A Catholic account of the incident portrays Atkins as an illiterate fanatic, virtually unhinged by his heresy, who dressed himself in a cloak or scapular

> having the figure of a paire of gallowes sowed fast upon the same in redde clothe bothe on the backe and the brest, aswell for signification that he sought to be persecuted for the gospel, as for prophecie, that he should die upon the gallowes for his faith . . . professing that he came to that place purposely that he might be killed for Christ, and that he would from thence into Turkie if he could not attaine the same in Rome.[35]

Zealots bent on martyrdom were surely distinct from travellers negotiating the perils of Rome on a 'bargain of return'; but the authorities may not have seen it like that, especially since the English were known for clumsy theatricality – Moryson, who was proud of his own ability to pass himself off as a foreigner, says the 'craftie spies of Rome' can usually see through English attempts at disguise, 'as the muffling a man's face with his cloke, or the like'; and he tells the story of the Englishman who tried to hide behind 'apparrell of so many colours, and so strange fashions' that 'he drew the eyes of all Jesuites and Romans upon him'.[36] The prospective martyrs best known to the Vatican were of course the Jesuits who undertook the English mission, and in 1581 reports were already filtering back to Rome of their hair's-breadth escapes and elaborate subterfuges. Persons and Campion had arrived in England in summer 1580 disguised as a swordsman and a jewel merchant, disguises that Dennis Flynn describes as offering 'a dash of chivalry that was . . . exotically attractive to many who sympathized with the old religion'.[37] In November Campion

[34] Munday, *The English Romayne Lyfe*, p. 72.

[35] *The Copie of a Double Letter sent by an Englishe gentilman . . . containing . . . the death, of one R. Atkins* (Rheims: Jean Foigny, 1581), p. 9. Published anonymously, this work is often attributed to Robert Persons.

[36] Moryson, *An Itinerary Containing his Ten Yeeres Travel*, 1: 412.

[37] Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 98.

wrote to Cardinal Allen saying that 'I cannot long escape the heretics, they have so many scouts; I wear ridiculous clothes, often change my name, and so often read news letters that Campion is taken, that I am without fear'.[38] Allen wrote approvingly of how would-be martyrs at the English College clamoured 'that they might have the lotte' and be selected for the mission: knowing that they couldn't expect 'worldly preferment or honour' (unlike the German missionaries), they 'were much inflamed to hazard their person in the same spiritual adventure'.[39] But the Vatican became ambivalent about the English taste for risky escapades, as we may infer from a report of conversations that Robert Persons had with Clement VIII about the students in the English College who 'bragged much of their Martyrdome . . . His Holinesse oftentimes told me that he was never so vexed with any nation on the world . . . and ever now and then . . . would put his finger up to his braine, signifying: that there stood their sicknesse: and so would most of the Court, when they talked of them, saying: the *English* were *indiavoluti*, and like words'.[40] The source of this account is an anti-Jesuit diatribe that needs treating with caution, but here it offers a vivid cameo that is broadly supported by other evidence. Dicing with death had become, in these circles at least, a hallmark of English travel.

Clement's predecessor-but-one Gregory XIII, who in 1581 declined to abrogate the original bull of excommunication against Elizabeth I, enthusiastically promoted the English mission and paid the travel expenses of those who joined it, but from the start he had to deal with dissension in the English College and had good reason to be sceptical about the motives and character of some of its occupants. Atkins's claim to have been part of a conspiracy was not upheld at his trial, yet a similar incident took place in November 1581 in which an Englishman tried to strangle a priest officiating at Mass. If such behaviour was not the direct result of

---

[38] *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Addenda, 1580–1625*, p. 24.

[39] William Allen, *An Apologie and True Declaration . . . of the two English Colleges* (Rheims: Jean Foigny, 1581), fols 83v–84.

[40] William Watson, *A Decacordon of Ten Quodlibeticall Questions* (London: Richard Field, 1602), p. 128.

wagering, it nonetheless looked like the product of a mindset that was attracted to rash gambles on personal immunity. Anthony Munday catches the bravado of Protestant talk in England whilst defending himself against those who accuse him of having dabbled in popery:

> These rash heads being in *England*, would doo many goodly matters at *Roome*, they would tell the Pope of his lascivious & unchristian life, the Cardinals of their Sodomiticall sinnes, the Friers of their secret jugling with the Nunnes, & the Preestes of their painted Purgatorie, their wafer God, and their counterfeit blood in the Challice: all this they would doo, nowe they are in *England*. But I doubt if they were at *Roome* . . . they would be as ready to doo any thing for the safegard of their lives, as I was.[41]

Yet Munday himself acknowledged the brave candour of Atkins at his trial and agreed with the Venetian ambassador's report that he went to his death 'with such firmness as to excite universal comment'. This kind of behaviour was also being licensed by popular fiction of the Nashean kind in which reckless iconoclasm is made part of the English idea of the picaresque. 'I was at *Pontius Pilates* house and pist against it', says Jack Wilton on his arrival in Rome in Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, immediately setting the tone of truculent resistance to the city's dangerous allure.[42]

Pope Gregory XIII's strenuous reaction to bargains of return remains surprising at a time when he was preoccupied with the English mission and the creation of diplomatic and military alliances against Elizabeth's government. But it can probably be explained in part as a suspicion that the travel wager acted as a cover for other activities. In 1578 the Papal Nuncio in France indicated 'the Pope's desire to know who are the persons in the pay of the Queen of England in Italy'.[43] The English government lost no time in planting spies in the newly formed seminaries – amongst

---

[41] Munday, *The English Romayne Lyfe*, p. 47.

[42] Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, sig. H1v.

[43] *Calendar of State Papers Rome, 1572–8*, p. 537.

the earliest visitors recorded in the Pilgrim-Book of the English College in Rome on 10 March 1581 is Solomon Aldred, who soon after being granted a pension by the Pope became one of Walsingham's agents.[44] In April of the following year came a report of 'Fifty Englishmen, as well Papists as Protestants taken in Rome and other places, for spies'.[45] The situation was complicated by the ambiguous reputation of the English residents in Rome. Cardinal Sega, appointed by the Vatican in the 1590s to investigate the chronic unrest in the English College, was convinced that the 'multitude of spies and traitors . . . sent out from England' helped to 'sow discord' there, and suggested that the College needed to be more careful in choosing candidates for seminary training. When the English Jesuit Robert Persons took over as Rector in 1598, he suspected that many were enrolling as theological students more for the comfortable lifestyle than out of true vocation; and Sega argued similarly that many of the students coming to Rome were 'steeped with worldly thoughts, and accustomed to uncontrolled freedom'. A majority of graduates from the College did not undertake the English mission, and some of the alumni who remained in Rome were regarded by Sega as leading 'a wandering and unrestricted life' marked by 'irregularity and lukewarmness'.[46] It is not difficult to see why they might be suspected of providing an alibi for visitors who claimed to be travelling for pleasure or on a wager but were actually spies and informants.

There is some direct evidence that the travel wager was used to deflect suspicion or to conceal the true purpose or destination of a journey, and a brief detour to consider this will bring us back to Henry Wotton and his Italian travels. In November 1589, writing to his brother Edward from Germany during his first continental tour, Wotton reported a meeting 'with one Mr. Mallorie, who went with Mr. Candishe to Constantinople upon the *braveraria*, and is lately returned'. This was the journey undertaken by Henry Cavendish in the same year, recorded in a narrative

---

[44] *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, ed. Henry Foley, 8 vols in 7 (London: Burns and Oates, 1875–1883), 6: 550.

[45] *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, 1581–90*, 93: 50.

[46] *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, ed. Foley, 6: 59–60.

by his servant Fox that was not printed until 1940; its modern editor, noting that no reason is given for the trip, speculates that it was a buying or trading venture of some kind by Cavendish's mother Bess of Hardwick, and points to the presence in inventories of a number of Turkish carpets at Hardwick Hall.[47] No doubt the travellers returned with goods and souvenirs (Mallory did have commercial interests in the Levant); but it seems likely that a journey 'upon the *braveraria*' is synonymous with the travel wager; the italianate word may well be Wotton's own coinage from words like *bravo* and *bravare*, with their connotations of vaunting or taking on a challenge. This early example of tourism to Turkey would then have been firmly in the aristocratic tradition of putting out, and Cavendish may not have had any other motive for the journey. But Wotton's response to his meeting with Mallory shows vividly how the patrician custom is losing its immunity to being appropriated and distorted. 'Him I closed withal,' continues Wotton, 'and persuaded that I meant to go very shortly the same voyage; and so I did.' But what Wotton means is that he pretended an interest in doing the same. 'I learned his advice, and he laid open unto me a large discourse of his travel, which I have treasured up to [my] good use'.[48] In a later letter, dated 6 February 1591, Wotton explains what his intentions had been:

> Concerning Constantinople, I had never any thoughts or inclination that way, but gave it forth among the English merchants in Nuremburg upon this reason, that they might satisfy themselves with opinion that I was gone that way, and I in the meantime cross up the country in secret; and my intent is not to be seen by them again till I come into Italy, because it might much endanger me, to have any know the time of my going thither.[49]

---

[47] Henry Cavendish, 'Mr Harrie Cavendish: his Journey to and from Constantinople, 1589', ed. A.C. Wood, in *Camden Miscellany XVII*, Camden Society, 3rd ser., vol. 64 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1940).

[48] *Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, ed. Pearsall Smith, 1: 230.

[49] *Ibid.*, 1: 256.

It is clear from his correspondence that the ambitious Wotton took particularly seriously the injunction to travellers to observe political conditions abroad, as a preparation for his ambassadorial career. There are signs, in fact, that on this first journey he was already engaged in information-gathering for the English authorities—which helps to explain Wotton's ambitious itinerary in Italy, taking in difficult destinations like Naples and Milan as well as several visits to Rome. On his first trip to the latter in 1592, Wotton staged his own kind of *braveraria*, entering the city 'with a mighty blue feather in a black hat', so that 'I was reputed as light in my mind as in my apparel', and 'no man could think I desired to be unknown'.[50] Wotton's stunt apparently worked, though Fynes Moryson as we saw earlier describes a case of such exhibitionism having a less happy outcome. And in his deft appropriation of the travel wager, Wotton shows himself at ease in a world of tourists and small-time adventurers, and able to turn the game of travel into political opportunity and, not least, safety.

A final thought about the Pope's condemnation of 'bargains of return'. The travel wager is a response to the secularisation of travel, even though it has roots in pilgrimage practices. When Michel de Montaigne entered Rome on his visit in 1580, his books were carefully inspected and several taken away for further scrutiny, including his own writings. They were returned with strong advice to remove references to 'fortune': Montaigne's brand of sceptical free-thinking was predictably not to the taste of the papal authorities. But Montaigne was not about to exchange his brand of philosophical enquiry for papal dogma, and when he wrote about the ruins of ancient Rome he commented that, although most of the city was buried beyond recovery, 'fortune' had preserved some of it – though not the best bits – for posterity.[51] This is in strong contrast to Gregory Martin's belief that Rome's remains had been providentially buried so that a new Christian Sion could be built over them. The opposition of Providence and Fortune is key here. The traditional pilgrimage to Rome, or the Jesuit

---

[50] *Ibid.*, 1: 272.

[51] *Montaigne's Travel Journal*, trans. Donald M. Frame (San Francisco: North Point Press 1983), pp. 87, 79.

Mission that departed from Rome to reclaim a heretical England, were journeys that fulfilled the divine plan: they were providentially ordered and their outcomes were in God's hand. The bargain of return, on the other hand, seeks to capitalize upon uncertainty, to turn a skirmish with potential accident into a source of gain.