Recovering *The French Convert*

Views of the French and the Uses of Anti-Catholicism in Early America

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Historians today know a great deal more about the history of the book in the Atlantic world than they did twenty years ago, particularly with the publication of the first volume of the American Antiquarian Society's magisterial *History of the Book in America* series, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Although our knowledge has increased dramatically, the eighteenth-century book *The French Convert* still languishes in almost total obscurity. This widely reprinted chapbook, which eventually ran in more than forty editions in Britain and America, has received scant attention from historians, perhaps partly because of difficulties in assigning it authorship, date, or even initial location of publication. But these qualities make *The French Convert* significant and interesting, even beyond its obvious attractions as a largely forgotten colonial best-seller. A book like *The French Convert* is not text alone but an unpredictable interplay among authors, readers, and printers/publishers. Though textual analysis has a place in book history, it alone does not suffice to explain the historical uses of a book.[1] Thus both this book's text and the history of its many printings reveal important trends in Anglo-American print domains and consumer interests during the eighteenth century.[2] This article offers a case study of *The French Convert* and its career in print in order to consider two larger

topics of interest: the changing but enduring influence of anti-Catholicism in early American culture, and the ways in which American views of the French conditioned *The French Convert*'s uses.[3]

The French Convert told the story of the French noblewoman Deidamia's conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism, and its anti-Catholic tropes proved an excellent complement to the growing hostility among Britons toward French Catholicism, first during the early eighteenth century and then later during the era of the American and French Revolutions. Protestantism had been implicitly anti-Catholic since the Reformation, but British anti-Catholicism became much sharper beginning in 1689, with the coming of the imperial wars between Catholic France and Protestant Britain. The deposal of the Catholic king James II by William of Orange had secured Britain's official commitment to Protestantism, which in turn had set the stage for a generation of world war between the nascent French and British empires. These were not simply wars for political or mercantile hegemony, but the Protestant and Catholic powers saw the fate of world Christianity hanging in their balance. On both sides, the print trades helped create and service an apocalyptic hostility between them with hosts of anti-Catholic tracts, sermons, and stories such as *The French Convert*.[4] Later, in the 1770s and '80s, the French alliance with American revolutionaries no doubt complicated Anglo-American anti-Catholicism, but nonetheless many remained culturally anti-Catholic and rejoiced to see the French throw off the shackles of "priestcraft" in the French Revolution. Many Americans saw Catholicism as the inveterate enemy of republicanism and liberty, which helps explain the resurgent popularity of *The French Convert* in the 1790s. Understanding the historical context and various uses of anti-Catholicism in early America goes a long way toward explaining the enduring popularity of Deidamia's story.

Though *The French Convert* underwent some revisions during its two hundred years of printing history, the basic narrative remained the same: it told the story of the noble French woman Deidamia, "a Young Lady of Quality . . . , whose Beauty and Vertue were equally attractive." Beautiful, intelligent, and chaste, Deidamia was lacking in only one respect: knowledge of the true religion.[5] In fact, though anti-Catholic literature did not lack for misogynist tropes, Deidamia represented the French woman as innocent heroine, waiting only to be liberated from the clutches of priestcraft.[6]

Deidamia learns about Protestantism from her Huguenot gardener, Bernard. Her husband is away in the military, and while one might expect an absent husband and a present gardener to lead to more salacious activities, Bernard remains utterly innocent: he is the vehicle of Protestant doctrine and little more. This contrasts sharply with the role played by the book's Franciscan priest, Antonio, who burns "with Lustful desires to

enjoy the tender Beauties of the fair Deidamia" (34). Antonio fills the stereotype of the lecherous, conniving predator, a role priests often played in English anti-Catholic literature and would continue to play in American nativist anti-Catholicism. As the popular British anti-Catholic tract *A Protestant's Resolution* (printed in Boston, 1746) put it, "the Popish doctrine forbidding [priests] to marry, is a devilish and wicked Doctrine . . . it leads to much Leudness and Villany, as Fornication, Adultery, Incest, Sodomy, Murder, &c. Because this Doctrine is a Badge of Antichrist."[7] In the Protestant stereotype, priests like Antonio used their clerical authority to prey sexually on innocents like Deidamia. This standard anticlerical characterization represents an earlier version of the "seducer motif" that became central to the moral lessons of early American novels such as Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791).[8]

Ignorant of Antonio's predatory designs (or similar ones by her household steward, Fronovius), Deidamia sets out on the path to Protestantism after she overhears Bernard reading from the book of Romans and praying. He thanks God that he has been saved from the "Ignorance and Superstition" that holds much of Europe in its sway. Deidamia listens with interest, but her yet-strong "Zeal for the Romish Religion" leads her to rebuke Bernard for disparaging Catholicism. Bernard replies that he does not fear exposure and tells her that the Church forbids reading Scripture only because the Bible would expose "their Worldly Interest, plainly discovering their Errors, gross Idolatries." She rebukes him again but retires, contemplating what he has said (17–20).

On their next meeting, Deidamia begins to question Bernard about his religion, and here the book moves into what amounts to a Protestant catechism against Catholicism. Anglo-American Protestants had ready access to these sorts of catechisms in many forms: the Westminster Confession of Faith, the standard confession used by British dissenters, identified the Pope as the Antichrist, for instance. But the American colonists also had access to anti-Catholic texts such as *A Protestant's Resolution,* mentioned above, and Cotton Mather's *The Fall of Babylon. A Short and Plain Catechism which Detects & Confutes the Principles of Popery* (Boston, 1707). When Deidamia asks Bernard what he considers the foundation of his religion, he responds that Scripture alone "can Warrant the Truth of any Profession." The Catholic Church, by contrast, teaches that the laity should have no access to the Scriptures and should heed only the hierarchy's testimony as to God's truth. He argues that this has led the Church into all manner of errors and heresies, including "Divine Adoration" of angels and saints and the doctrines of transubstantiation and purgatory. Bernard convinces her of the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church and "the Cheat of

pretended Miracles, and Relicks, the imposing on People with Pardons and Indulgences to get Money; the Whoredoms, Murthers and Incests of many Popes, Cardinals and Prelates of the Romish Church; their Unreasonableness in prohibiting Priests Marriage, which is immediately appointed by God, and the allowing them by Canons and Decrees the Embraces of Concubines, or to commit adultery" (22, 30).

After Bernard leaves, the priest Antonio arrives, right on cue, and tries to seduce Deidamia. She promptly throws Antonio out of her house, convinced now that Bernard is correct in his evaluation of priests (30–32). In the classic Protestant liberatory trope, Deidamia secures her own French Bible and begins to read it with Bernard's assistance.[9] Protestant treatises against Catholicism routinely argued that plain study of the Scriptures would always reveal the truth. As Cotton Mather wrote in *The Fall of Babylon,* "by the Judgment of the Sacred Scripture only (not by any Man, or Church pretending to Infallibility) must all Doubts in Religion be determined."[10]

Antonio continues to spy on Deidamia, hoping to catch her in an affair with Bernard, but instead he overhears her praying, thanking God that he has delivered her from "those Antichristian Errors wherein I have lived since my Child-hood." Antonio is delighted, thinking that he can use her conversion to coerce her into submitting to his lustful designs. Deidamia still refuses to give in, however (40–41). Antonio reveals to Deidamia's horrified parents that she has become a Protestant and proposes that she be detained in a nunnery. The steward Fronovius and Antonio then arrange for two criminals to kidnap Deidamia, but the kidnappers decide to rape and murder her instead. "Heaven interposed," however, and when the two rapists begin to fight over who will go first, one is killed and the other wounded, giving Deidamia her chance to run away (53–54). Deidamia is saved by a generous Huguenot couple and convinces her returning husband to convert as well. Fronovius is hanged for raping a woman, and Antonio falls "Distracted" with guilt, being sure that he will be damned to hell for what he has done. He eventually commits suicide by bashing his head against a wall (79). Here, as in other early American novels that employ the seducer motif, the predators fall prey to the consequences of their own sin.[11]

To further connect the account of Deidamia to the real-life sufferings of French Huguenots, printers of *The French Convert* often appended "A Brief Account of the Present Persecution of the French Protestants." In the colonies and in New England particularly, the news was regularly filled with updates on the condition of these fellow Protestants, from the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes onward. After Boston's John Campbell inaugurated domestic newspaper publishing with the *Boston News-Letter* in 1704, the Huguenots' troubles were standard fare in his publication. In 1704, for instance, Campbell printed a letter from a Huguenot leader

reporting a victory against the royal army and demanding that "the Protestant Religion should be re-established in Languedoc, and that those who are in the Galleys or in Prison for that Religion, should be set at Liberty." The writer thought the Camisards' defeat of the Royalists was providential, noting that they lost few men in the latest battle because "God fought for us; He overthrew our Enemies with all their Devilish Devices."[12] Colonial ministers also regularly reminded their congregants of the fate of the Huguenots. The fictional account of Deidamia, along with the details of the persecution, helped meet an ongoing demand for such information.[13] The "Brief Account" appended to *The French Convert* attributed the Huguenots' troubles to "the restless Malice of the Great Enemy of Mankind against the Church of God," and noted that no other Protestant group in Europe had suffered more at the hands of "Blood thirsty Papists" (80). The account described how some were thrown in the galleys, while others were put in "nasty Dungeons and Holes, full of Mire and Dirt." Despite their terrible circumstances, these courageous Protestants "glorify'd GOD in their Sufferings," making them a heroic example to the world Protestant movement (81–82).

To portray the book as directly produced by the courageous French Protestants, *The French Convert*'s publishers always advertised it as having been penned by a French Protestant pastor, one A. D'Auborn, and it was probably first published in London in 1696. Scholars have doubted both points, and have speculated that an English or even a colonial American writer might have written it. It is not clear whether D'Auborn was a real person or an invented pseudonym. Furthermore, though always listed as having been published originally by London's John Gwillim, some have argued that the appearance and construction of the earliest version available hints at a Boston manufacture and publication.[14] In any case, there can be no doubt as to *The French Convert*'s popularity and its distinguished publication record. It almost certainly was printed in Boston as early as 1708, and it became noted New York printer John Peter Zenger's first independently printed book in 1725. By 1897 it had gone through at least twenty-one American and twenty-five British editions.[15] We know then a good deal not only about the text of *The French Convert* but also the locations and years of printing, and from these we may ascertain some of the text's uses. As is often the case, we know little about what readers thought of the book, but the printing record suffices to show that *The French Convert* played on pervasive anti-Catholic sensibilities to entertain readers not only in metropolitan London and provincial Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, but in outlying towns such as Walpole, New Hampshire,[16] and even Buffalo, New York, where it seems to have become the first locally printed book in 1812. A survey of the book's printing record will help us

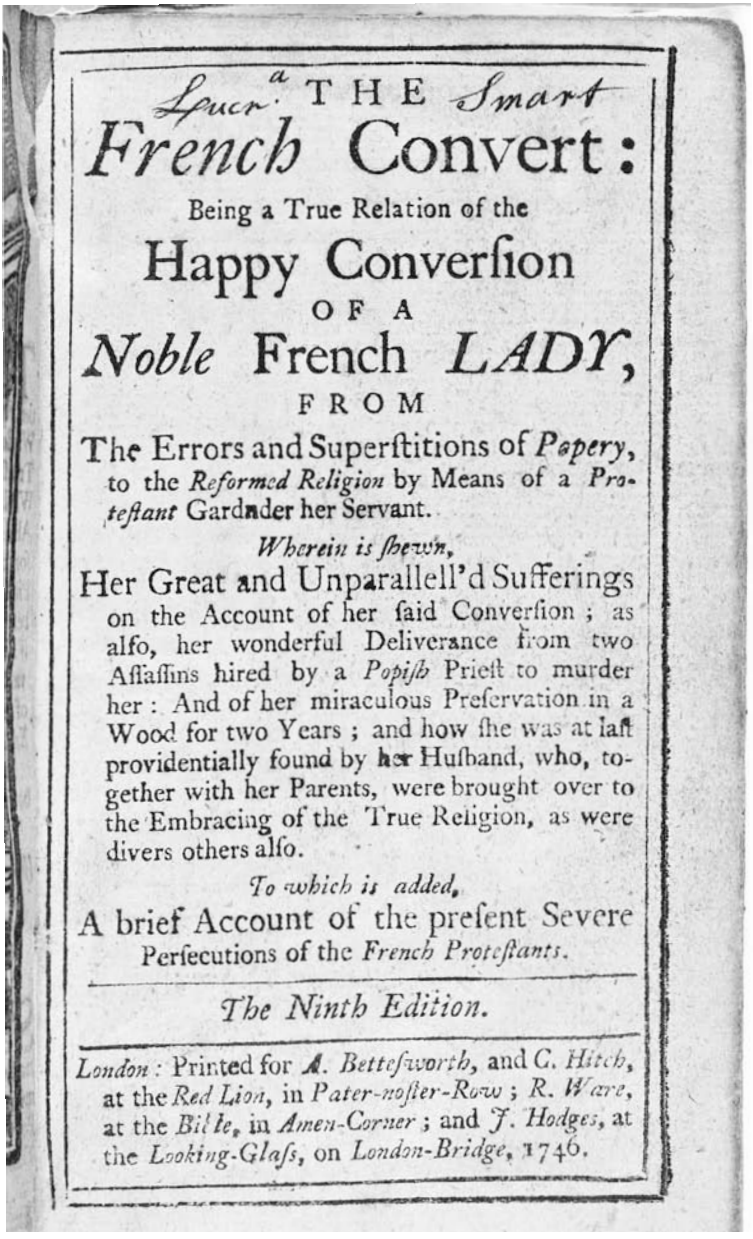
understand the local conditions under which the book became popular, and will also help introduce us to colonial and Atlantic print domains in which authorship was often indeterminate and in which local printers responded to changing interests to sell their wares.[17]

The French Convert's publishing history lies in the interstices between premodern and modern publishing practices, and this is particularly evident from the author "D'Auborn," who appears to exist only within the book itself. One can see here a striking example of the lack of emphasis on authorial rights and profits under the premodern patronage system, especially if one assumes that the author of the book was English and took no profits whatsoever from the many American editions. In fact, the standard presentation of the book (as seen in the earliest edition, ostensibly 1696) subordinates "D'Auborn's" role in the production of the book to the bookseller's and reader's roles. Gwillim (if he was the original publisher) constructed a narrative to explain his own reception of the text, which he claimed to have received from one "R. D.," who received it from D'Auborn. R. D. wrote to Gwillim that he was looking for an English bookseller of integrity to take control of the manuscript, not knowing whether he should just circulate the manuscript or actually print it. He suspected that putting it in print would be "most for God's Glory," and he assured Gwillim that D'Auborn's account was reliable.

This explanation of source and authorship lends an air of providence to the text, a sense that God had ordained its emergence in the print market, obscuring the profit motive of the bookseller, whether he was Gwillim or one of the many British and American peddlers who sold editions of it. The book's producers downplayed the author function to add divine sanction to the story and allow the author-to-printer transmission to seem only a continuation of the purposes God had for the narrative. Books could gain credibility not only through their antiquity or the credibility of the author but through the appearance of divine agency in bringing them to print, so that the market fades from view and God's hand comes to the fore, sanctifying the transmission of the narrative into print and then into the bookstores and peddlers' hands.[18]

Whether or not readers believed that *The French Convert* was a "true" story, as it asserted, the book clearly served in the colonies and early republic not only to entertain but also to confirm existing impressions about the heroic Huguenots, lecherous Catholic priests, and damnable French Catholics. Combining these types with an adventure story featuring treachery, lust, and Protestant heroism made *The French Convert* a great marketing success throughout the British Atlantic world.

Beginning in the 1680s, American readers learned how Catholic France had begun vicious persecution of the Huguenots, quartering dragoons in



Lucr.ª THE Smart

French Convert:

Being a True Relation of the

Happy Converſion

OF A

Noble French *LADY*,

FROM

The Errors and Superſtitions of *Popery*, to the *Reformed Religion* by Means of a *Proteſtant* Gardner her Servant.

Wherein is ſhewn,

Her Great and Unparallell'd Sufferings on the Account of her ſaid Converſion; as alſo, her wonderful Deliverance from two Aſſaſſins hired by a *Popiſh* Prieſt to murder her: And of her miraculous Preſervation in a Wood for two Years; and how ſhe was at laſt providentially found by her Huſband, who, together with her Parents, were brought over to the Embracing of the True Religion, as were divers others alſo.

To which is added,

A brief Account of the preſent Severe Perſecutions of the *French Proteſtants*.

The Ninth Edition.

London: Printed for *A. Betteſworth*, and *C. Hitch*, at the *Red Lion*, in *Pater-noſter-Row*; *R. Ware*, at the *Bible*, in *Amen-Corner*; and *J. Hodges*, at the *Looking-Glaſs*, on *London-Bridge*, 1746.

Figure 1. Title page of *The French Convert* (London, 1746), by permission of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Protestant homes and trying to force conversions to Catholicism. Eventually Louis XIV's anti-Protestant crusade culminated in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, a 1598 decree that had protected the rights of religious dissenters. French Protestantism, already desperately weakened by persecution, almost completely collapsed after 1685. Beginning in 1695, however, war began between the holdout Camisards and the French government forces, who were trying to stamp out Protestant resistance once and for all, and this resistance movement proved highly interesting to American observers. The dissenters of New England, who considered themselves in common cause with the persecuted Protestants of Europe, watched with particular interest. Reverend Nicholas Noyes of Salem argued in his 1698 election sermon that "It were Infidelity to conclude that God hath done with the Protestant People, and his Witnesses in Germany, Bohemia, Hungarra, France, the Valleys of the Piedmont; and many other places in Europe: where for his Name and Gospel sake they have been Killed all the day long."[19] The prospect of a French Protestant remnant held considerable attraction, representing persecuted martyrs of the world Protestant cause.[20] Surely not coincidentally, the first edition of *The French Convert* probably appeared in London in 1696, and the first American edition appeared in 1708.

Reports from France concerning the Camisard revolt and the Huguenot persecutions were regular fare in Campbell's *Boston News-Letter.* As prospects for French Protestants looked increasingly bleak and increasing numbers fled France, New Englanders also followed accounts of their movements in London and America, including New England.[21] Colonial pastors regularly called for prayer and sympathy for the Huguenots, warning the people that they could easily become the next victims should the French succeed in their North American ambitions. John Danforth, pastor at Dorchester, Massachusetts, told his congregation and reading audience in 1716 to thank God they had not yet met the fate of the French Protestants, that "Our ministers are not Banished, nor our Children (excepting a few in Captivity) forced from us, and brought up in Soul-Destroying Popery; Nor our Assemblies broken up, nor Dragoons let in upon us, to Torture us a thousand ways, to Compel us to Blaspheme & Abjure our Holy Religion. . . . Do we Escape the Woful Day, because of our Godliness and Righteousness, that is greater than theirs? No verily."[22]

New Englanders and New Yorkers also had firsthand experience with Huguenots for a generation after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, as thousands made their way to Boston, New York, and smaller settlements such as Oxford, Massachusetts. Many Bostonians appreciated the beneficence of Huguenots in Massachusetts such as Andrew and Peter Faneuil.[23] The French Protestant pastor Andrew Le Mercier became a figure of some

considerable influence in Boston and led the French church there until its dissolution in 1748.[24] As Jon Butler has noted, however, the Huguenots' numbers in America were overall not very large and their communities quickly assimilated religiously and ethnically. But the image of the persecuted French Protestant remained powerful enough to help sustain printings of *The French Convert* through the mid-eighteenth century.

A survey of the printing record of the chapbook also reminds us, however, that local printers' marketing decisions are often the key element in the survival of a book, much more so than authorial credit or reliability. The story of the uses of *The French Convert* also shows the nuances of a book's "fixity" in the colonial context: although the narrative and packaging were essentially the same from place to place, interest in the book changed from a fascination with French Huguenots to an anti-Catholic celebration of the French Revolution. Following its publishing record is like following a map of the progress of print markets in the colonies and early republic, as the "village Enlightenment" not only made outlying townspeople more conversant with the produced knowledge of the Atlantic world, but made them cosmopolitan consumers of, among other things, books sold by the peddlers and publishers representing that broader market.[25] And so it was that residents in Hudson, New York, or Amherst, New Hampshire, could buy or hear Deidamia's enduring story.

The first known publisher of *The French Convert* in the American colonies was Boston's John Phillips, who was also a major publisher of Cotton Mather's and Benjamin Colman's works and therefore a promoter of two of Boston's leading pastors and advocates of Protestant internationalism. Phillips's printing of *The French Convert* in 1725 fed the existing interest in Boston concerning the French Huguenots.[26] Likewise, Boston bookbinder and dealer Thomas Rand arranged for the prolific printers Daniel Fowle and Gamaliel Rogers to print a 1744 edition, supplying the same market that bought titles by Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Colman, and George Whitefield, leading evangelicals and internationalists in the 1730s and 1740s. It is not clear from this catalogue of imprints that Rogers and Fowle themselves were evangelicals; they also printed works by opponents of the religious awakenings such as Charles Chauncy. But *The French Convert* fit well into their strategy of making profits from the evangelical book and pamphlet trade.[27]

Later, *The French Convert* seems to have been published to serve new markets and interests. It was sometimes paired with various accounts of the persecution of not only French but also Scots-Irish Protestants, or with other religious pieces. In 1758 the "12th edition" of *The French Convert* came from Philadelphia publisher William Dunlap. Dunlap, an Anglican from Ulster who had married Benjamin Franklin's wife's niece, took over

for Franklin as Philadelphia's postmaster and a bookseller when Franklin departed for England in 1757.[28] His edition of *The French Convert* came at the height of the Seven Years' War in North America, which saw France, Britain, and their respective Native American allies fight for imperial domination of North America. The fall of Quebec, the key moment of the North American theater of the war, came in 1759 and led to new heights of American anti-Catholicism. Timothy Green Jr. also published an edition in the same environment of anti–French-Catholic sentiment in New London, Connecticut, in 1762, and Zechariah Fowle, brother of Daniel and patron of Isaiah Thomas, printed an edition even in the postwar depression of 1766.

After the Seven Years' War, *The French Convert* declined in popularity but then reemerged in the 1790s as a response to the French Revolution. Colonists, and particularly New Englanders, had taken various paths of justifying that which previously would have been unthinkable: the French alliance during the Revolution. Anti-Catholicism waned in some circles, while others explained that the spirit of Antichrist could live even in British Protestants, especially in those who sought to destroy the liberty of the American colonists. Some argued that God could deliver the colonists even through the agency of an evil state such as France, just as God had used Cyrus to deliver Israel from the Babylonians. Still others explained that France was no longer all that Catholic anyway, and that association with the Protestant colonists might help bring about the downfall of the rotten edifice of French Catholicism, making France open finally to the spread of the true gospel.[29] In any case, hostility to French Catholicism persisted and was transformed into a strain that celebrated the anticlericalism of the French Revolution. And, as Gary Nash has shown, the American clergy and the presses that gave them public voice were nearly unanimous in their celebration of the Revolution as the destroyer of French popery. This sentiment would persist until 1795, when fears of Deism, French corruption, and social chaos began to turn many clerics toward a Federalist critique of the Revolution's excesses.[30] The early enthusiasm for the Revolution also proved welcoming to *The French Convert,* which went through at least nine new printings in three years between 1793 and 1795.

Samuel Hall, who specialized in sermons, catechisms, chapbooks, and children's literature, and published the first Boston edition of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1795), also sold *The French Convert* in 1793, with another edition following in 1794. Hall had earlier supplied interest in French culture by publishing the weekly *Courier de Boston* for J. Nancrede, who taught French at Harvard, evidence of the growing print market for things French.[31] New York also saw editions in 1793 and 1795, while the third Timothy Green of the New London printing family brought out another edition for that port town in 1794.

Most striking, however, in this spate of new editions were those coming to inland towns and villages that could support printing presses only after the revolutionary diaspora. Haverhill, Massachusetts, Exeter, New Hampshire, Amherst, New Hampshire, and Hudson, New York, all saw editions between 1794 and 1796. Isaiah Thomas arranged for a Walpole, New Hampshire, edition in 1794 as well. New Haven and Hartford, Connecticut, Brookfield, Massachusetts, and Catskill, New York, all produced editions in 1798.[32] These revealed the trend toward local "country printing" along the rivers and thoroughfares connecting the interior towns to the large port cities and the broader Atlantic world beyond. The country printers facilitated the transformation of the northwestern Revolutionary frontiers into significantly commercialized regions with newly integrated communication networks.[33] The development of local markets for printed goods more fully integrated these towns with the Atlantic trade systems, which in the early republic increasingly siphoned through the large national publishing houses of Boston and New York. But in the transition period between the Revolution and the rise of the large-scale publishing house, agents and peddlers like Isaiah Thomas brought the outlying towns into the print market by selling imprints of *The French Convert* and similar texts.[34]

It is instructive to compare this reemergence of *The French Convert* with the simultaneous popularity of James Bicheno's two-part *Signs of the Times; or, The Overthrow of the Papal Tyranny in France, the Prelude of Destruction to Popery and Despotism; but of Peace to Mankind*. Susan Juster has described Bicheno as a "republican prophet" in England and a defender of the French and American Revolutions. He and other more radical writers, such as Richard Brothers, gained circulation in the 1790s in America among many of the same peddlers and readers who bought *The French Convert,* a market anticipating the divinely ordained destruction of priestcraft. Providence, Rhode Island, saw Bicheno's first American edition in 1794, while Hudson and Catskill, New York, among others, saw printings of the first volume in 1795, and Philadelphia received another run of the book in 1797.[35] Bicheno's popularity lay in his interpretation of prophecy in simple, accessible language, and he believed that reason made prophecy clear to his wide audience. In fact, he believed, a reasonable and simple approach to prophecy would destroy the hold of priestcraft.[36] The literary climate in Britain and America in the 1790s, inclined to see in the French Revolution the destruction of popery by reason, could also find literary heroes for that cause in Deidamia and especially in Bernard, the simple Bible-reading gardener.

The French Convert did not disappear in the nineteenth century, either, as editions came out in New York and New Hampshire in the 1830s. In 1863 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* printed a book inventory from a

newly discovered pastor's will of 1711 in the Connecticut valley. The editors used the occasion to lament the Puritans' reading habits and to wonder at how the dour Puritan of the early eighteenth century became the enlightened New Englander of the mid-nineteenth. In the inventory, among forty-one other books that were almost exclusively theological, was *The French Convert*. "The Puritan was an uncharitable Christian," the editor noted, who "would have burnt a Romish priest with the same solemn zest that he hung a Quaker."[37] Colonial hostility toward French Catholicism, born of centuries of conflict between Protestant and Catholic but newly energized by the imperial wars of the eighteenth century, found its most widespread literary expression in *The French Convert*. The publishing history of this book demonstrates that increasing engagement with the book in the Atlantic world also generated increasing interest in the ongoing world contest for the fate of Christianity. Among the issues of greatest interest in this battle was the question of religion in France. If Protestantism could win out there, as it did, in microcosm, with Deidamia's conversion, then the greatest military power behind the Roman Church would fall, and, ultimately, Protestantism would win the war for Christianity in Europe and the world, a victory with millennial implications.

In the late eighteenth century, this global conflict was transformed into a war between reason and tradition, liberty and slavery, democracy and monarchy. This does not necessarily mean, however, that for the new American democrats the matter had become "secular." In the revolutionary climate of the late eighteenth century, *The French Convert* served a reading public interested in the liberating effects of the French and American Revolutions. Many Americans believed that the destruction of corrupt priestcraft of the sort represented by Antonio, and the empowerment of the people, figured in the simple Protestant gardener Bernard, were crucial to the success of the American and French Revolutions. For those influenced by both Jeffersonian democracy and evangelicalism, *The French Convert* may have served to narrate the impulse that the revolutions unleashed: a great and perhaps apocalyptic flood of liberty, democracy, and Protestant freedom.[38]

Neither sacred nor secular, fact nor fiction, *The French Convert* and its career tell us a great deal about the categories of literature that might become best-sellers in early America. How did this book function in the print market? We can draw several conclusions: first, it was clearly meant to entertain, and its narrative of heroic Christian womanhood against Romish licentiousness and treachery met this demand well. Second, it was meant to edify, in the tradition of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs,* as the story reinforced Protestant ideology and assured readers that with a fair hearing Protestantism would win over Catholicism. Finally, *The French Convert*

helped personalize the ongoing struggle between Protestant and Catholic powers as seen in the wars from 1689 to 1763. Later it helped fix the issues at stake in the American and French Revolutions, which were often couched as wars against priestcraft and, in the case of the French, against Romanism specifically.

That this book's uses were so pliable and instructive makes its current obscurity all the more undeserved. *The French Convert* was uniquely suited to take advantage of the developing print market of eighteenth-century America, which was becoming more integrated with Atlantic world trade systems. This trade increasingly demanded tales of adventure and virtue, which helped Britons and Americans categorize the ongoing violence and ideological conflict between them and the French empire, or between them and the enemies of democracy. Despite the changing views of the French and the uses of anti-Catholicism, the story of Bernard and Deidamia persisted in popularity, revealing again how books cannot be taken out of context but must be understood as they are written, produced, sold, and read in ever-shifting print domains.

Notes

1. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries,* trans. Lydia Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 7–10.

2. On the concept of print "domains," see Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 59–61.

3. The question of print's role in history has been a matter of vigorous debate, especially between Adrian Johns and Elizabeth Eisenstein, "AHR Forum: How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?" *American Historical Review* 107 (Feb. 2002): 84–128.

4. W. R. Ward, *Christianity Under the Ancien Régime, 1648–1789* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6. On British anti-Catholicism generally, see among others Raymond Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660–1745* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 11–54; Francis Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995).

5. *The French Convert,* 2d ed. (London: Gwillim, 1699?), 2. I use this edition, contained in *Early English Books,* with the understanding that some doubt the place and date of publication. I do believe that it was written by an English author, not the French pastor "D'Auborn," as it advertises. Further citations of this edition appear parenthetically in the text.

6. Frances Dolan has shown that anti-Catholic English literature in the seventeenth century tended to portray women as more easily duped by Catholicism than men because of their illiteracy and ignorance. Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 27–28.

7. *A Protestant's Resolution* (Boston, 1746), 18–19, cited in Cogliano, *No King, No Popery,* 10–11. *A Protestant's Resolution* was apparently printed first in late seventeenth-century London but saw editions in Edinburgh and Dublin. An 1831 printing in London

is listed as the thirty-seventh edition. See also Dolan, *Whores of Babylon,* 85–94; Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 122–25.

8. Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 136–37.

9. Hugh Amory and David Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World,* vol. 1 of *The History of the Book in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2–3.

10. Cotton Mather, *The Fall of Babylon* (Boston, 1707), 4.

11. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word,* 137.

12. *Boston News-Letter,* 9 Oct. 1704, no. 10.

13. On news of the Huguenots in provincial Boston, see Thomas S. Kidd, "'Let Hell and Rome Do Their Worst': World News, Anti-Catholicism, and International Protestantism in Early Eighteenth-Century Boston," *New England Quarterly* 76 (June 2003): 265–90.

14. For details on these questions, see Mary Daniels, ed., *French Literature in American Translation: A Bibliographical Survey of Books and Pamphlets Printed in the United States from 1688 Through 1820* (New York: Garland, 1977), 484–88.

15. On Zenger's edition, see Linda M. Kruger, "The New York City Book Trade, 1725–1750" (D.L.S. diss., Columbia University, 1980), 77–79. Thanks to Joyce Goodfriend for sharing this reference with me. An 1897 American version published by J. & M. Robertson is listed as the twenty-first edition. A 1795 version published in Blackburn, England, by J. Waterworth is listed as the thirteenth edition, but it was published at least nine more times in Britain after this version.

16. On Walpole, books, and the "Village Enlightenment," see David Jaffee, "The Village Enlightenment in New England, 1760–1820," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd ser., 47 (July 1990): 333, 339; William Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 59.

17. Johns, *Nature of the Book,* 30, 59.

18. Chartier, *Order of Books,* 58–59.

19. Nicholas Noyes, *New-Englands Duty and Interest* (Boston, 1698), 67.

20. On the Camisard revolt and the Huguenot persecution, especially in their international context, see among others Ward, *Christianity Under the Ancien Régime,* 14–20; Marco Sioli, "Huguenot Traditions in the Mountains of Kentucky: Daniel Trabue's Memories," *Journal of American History* 84 (March 1998): 1313–23; Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, *Societies in Upheaval: Insurrections in France, Hungary, and Spain in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), 37–60; Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 13–40; Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 15–34; Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion,* reprint ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 356–71.

21. See, for instance, *News-Letter,* 1 Sept. 1707, no. 177, on Huguenots in London, and March 6, 1709, no. 257, on French Protestants in Oxford, Massachusetts. Sometimes the French Protestant presence in New England could be unsettling, as Marco Sioli explains in "Huguenot Traditions," citing a General Court resolution from 1692 that suspected that some of the refugees only "pretend to be Protestants" and were actually Catholics (1322).

22. John Danforth, *Judgment Begun at the House of God* (Boston, 1716), 42–43.

23. On the Faneuils, see Jonathan Beagle, "Remembering Peter Faneuil: Yankees, Huguenots, and Ethnicity in Boston, 1743–1900," *New England Quarterly* 75 (Sept. 2002): 389–93.

24. Butler, *Huguenots in America,* 71–90.

25. Jaffee, "Village Enlightenment," 334; T. H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present,* no. 119 (May 1988): 73–104.

26. Benjamin Franklin V, ed., *Boston Printers, Publishers, and Booksellers: 1640–1800* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), 406–7.

27. Ibid., 181–85, 421, 426–31.

28. Amory and Hall, *Colonial Book in the Atlantic World,* 272–73; Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America* (reprint, New York: Weathervane Books, 1970), 386–87.

29. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery,* 74–78; Charles Hanson, *Necessary Virtue: The Pragmatic Origins of Religious Liberty in New England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 119–53.

30. Gary Nash, "The American Clergy and the French Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd ser., 22 (July 1965): 392–412. Nash noted *The French Convert* as evidence of sympathies for the Revolution (394).

31. Franklin, *Boston Printers,* 271; Thomas, *History of Printing,* 177.

32. Other extant American editions include Philadelphia (1801); Burlington, N.J. (1802); New York (1804); Wilmington, Del. (1806); [Unknown] (1812); Buffalo, N.Y. (1812); Utica, N.Y. (1831); Concord, N.H. (1833); [Unknown] (J. & M. Robertson, 1896). Extant British editions besides the advertised London 1696 and 1699 editions include London (1719, c. 1725, 1740?, 1746, 1757, 1784?); Glasgow (1762, 1808); Bolton (1786); Berwick (1795); Burslem (1808); Tewksbury (unknown); London (c. 1780, 1785, 1790?); Blackburn (1795?); Leeds (1806, 1808, 1809, 1812); Edinburgh (1811); Manchester (1823, 1828).

33. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity,* 17–18.

34. Amory and Hall, *Colonial Book in the Atlantic World,* 316.

35. Other American editions are Baltimore (1794); Albany (1795), which was then sold in Lansingburgh, Cooperstown, and Schenectady in addition to the above New York locations; West Springfield, Mass. (1796). Part II was sold in Philadelphia (1797).

36. Susan Juster, "Demagogues or Mystagogues? Gender and the Language of Prophecy in the Age of Democratic Revolutions," *American Historical Review* 104 (Dec. 1999): 1568–70.

37. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 27 (Oct. 1863), 711–12.

38. Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 184–85.