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**Joshua Polster**

**Under The Crown:**

**The Royal Protection of Jews in Restoration Politics and Drama**

I say, King Charles Steeward, Son to the late King Charles of England, is he whom you [the Jews] call your Messiah Captain and Deliverer, who will bring you to present happiness, if you follow him.

--"The prophecy of Arise Evans," 1656 (12)

During the Interregnum, the prophet Arise Evans correctly predicted that King Charles II would "come into his throne within this five years, without one drop of blood spilt in the cause," and bring the Jews to "present happiness" (8, 12). During the reign of Charles II, Jews were legally allowed back into England after centuries of exile and were granted a political protection in the courts that also extended to the dramatic works of the period. This study attempts to read the King's protection of Jews as a surrogate act of endorsing Catholic tolerance in an intolerant Protestant country. As a result, the Tories, who were against Jewish readmission, were unable to speak against the Jews and, therefore, surrogated their assaults with attacks on Whigs.

There is a curious kind of absence of Jews in the dramatic works and political records of England during the twenty-five year reign of Charles II (1660-1685). In M.J. Landa's critical study, *The Jew in Drama*, he found it "difficult to explain the comparative neglect of the Jews by the dramatists at this period" and emphasized how "the playwrights almost entirely ignored them" (105). Previous to the Restoration, the Jew was consistently, clearly, and malevolently marked in English dramatic performances by the dominant Christian culture in the country. The stage-Jew was effeminate, sly, lecherous, murderous, and avaricious. Moreover, he was presented as the Devil, Christ-killer, kidnapper, seducer of Christian maidenhood, foil and fool, exotically dressed in a red wig, red beard, and false protruding nose, with a barely comprehensible accent and erratic gestures. Oddly enough, none of these Jewish stage representations, for the most part, were present in the early works of the Restoration.

In the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles II, 1660-1685*, there is also a general omission of Jews. Browsing through the twenty-eight volumes of state records, one might assume to find an abundance of listed grievances and violent attacks against the Jews living in England. After all, the periods of Oliver Cromwell and Charles II were when the Jews began to resettle in England after over three hundred years of exile. In addition, this is when the small Jewish minority that existed in the country—refugees from the Spanish Inquisition living in Spanish and Portuguese embassies, or converts, like the Marranos, who were forced into Christianity but continued to secretly practice Judaism—began to resurface more publicly as Jews (Marcus 66). This period of Jewish resettlement, coincidentally, is also when England was struck with the plague of 1665 that killed 15% of the population and the Great Fire of 1666 that destroyed four-fifths of the ancient commercial and topographic center of London. Traditionally, the accusing English finger would point toward the Jews.

A long-standing and deep hatred for Jews was ingrained in the social conscience of England since their first arrival there in 1070 C.E. To the Christian, the Jew was the avaricious usurer to whom many of the English owed great sums of money; he was the monster who kidnapped and murdered Christian children for cultic rituals; he was the Christ killer, and the villain who sought out the deaths of every Christian by poisoning wells, contaminating the air, infecting clothing and covering walls with poison in order to create and spread pestilence. The Jew was the feared and hated Other, the inferior foreigner constructed in direct opposition to the superior Christian culture. This Medieval imagining of the Jew, however, is oddly not present in the political records of the early Restoration.

In the *Calendar of State Papers*, there are a few minor mentions of financial and religious skirmishes between Jews and Christians, but there are no accusations of the Jews being responsible for the plague or the Great Fire. Catholics, instead, were given the blame during a period of mass hysteria over fears of a Catholic royal succession and Catholic plots to kill the King and members of Parliament. Interestingly, the only two recorded violent attacks against Jews listed in the *State Papers* were by Jews punishing those who chose to convert to Christianity.

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Statement by Jonas Gabay, a Jew by birth, who was converted to the Christian faith and was baptized 28 April, 1672, of his persecutions and sufferings at the hands of the Jews. On the other side is a more detailed statement addressed to all Christian readers zealous of the Christian faith of how he was beaten by the Jews, how they attempted to poison him, and how they procured persons with whom he lodged to beat and misuse him. (Great Britain 18: 345)

Eve Cohan now Elizabeth wife of Michael Verboom to Lord Chief Justice Sir Francis Norh. Petition for relief. Was a Jewess in Holland, but being threatened with death by her relations for becoming a Christian came to England, where she was pursued by her brother and Vandersee, a kinsman, for fear of whom she was forced to marry to obtain the protection of a husband, and detailing various persecutions by her brother and kinsman, who employed persons to arrest her husband 2 Oct. last on an action of 200 *l.*, who so terrified her that she miscarried. (Great Britain 22: 120)

Seemingly, the greatest threat facing Jews during the Restoration was Jews themselves. During the reign of Charles II, the *State Papers* demonstrated a new period in which Christian violence toward the Jews—too frequently encountered during their pre-Expulsion days—was not visibly present.

In sum, there was an unusual quiet operating in the dramatic works and political records of early Restoration England. It is not enough to say, as Landa does, that “The Restoration dramatists, it can only be concluded, were rich enough in material, and certainly in wit, not to need [the Jews]” (104). Moreover, various other studies, such as Cecil Roth’s *History of the Jews in England*, too easily conclude that when Charles II came to the throne, “religion was to him a matter of minor consequence” and that he brought along a “good-natured indifference” toward the small and benign Jewish community in England (169, 182). All great actors have motivation for their actions and inactions, and the Stuart King is no exception.

This study attempts to read this absence of anti-Semitic legal actions and representations in the dramatic works of the early Restoration as more than a silence. It is a silencing—an act suppressing religious persecutions—enforced by a King who covertly endorsed Catholicism through protecting Judaism. In a religiously intolerant Protestant country, Charles II surrogated his politically dangerous desire of Catholic indulgence for Jewish indulgence. This created an ironic situation in which the King could not speak freely of Catholic tolerance and so, instead, spoke through the idea of Jewish tolerance, while the Tories—the King’s own party, who were

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against the readmission of the Jew—were not permitted to freely speak of anti-Semitic propaganda and so, instead, spoke through anti-Whig propaganda. It is this kind of silent dialogue—the Jew as the Catholic and the Whig as the Jew—that is heard throughout much of the politics and plays of the Restoration. This is not to say, for example, that a Jew was seen with a rosary or a Whig with a yarmulke, but that these discourses were censored in their original form, and, instead of dying, were transferred into politically acceptable outlets.

The relationship between Charles II and the Jews of England began during the Interregnum. After the regicide of Charles I and the exile of his son, the Puritan-ruled Commonwealth came into power. At this time, Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, brought back into the country a small number of Jews to assist the economy and to help bring about the millennium. The millennium, it was believed, would not occur unless Jews were populated throughout all lands. However, merchants and Royalists – the future Tories – opposed Jewish readmission because it brought unfavorable competition to English commerce, and because they were generally intolerant of Cromwell’s policies. During the Whitehall Conference (1655), their opposition successfully blocked the readmission of Jews, but Cromwell continued to give unofficial sanctions to establish Jewish communities in, primarily, the East End of London. These communities, for the most part, were allowed to develop undisturbed (Adler 192).

After the Lord Protector’s death in 1658, the tolerance of Jews under Richard Cromwell’s shaky rule was threatened. Before Oliver Cromwell’s body was cold, the London merchants presented his successor with *The Merchants’ Humble Petition and Remonstrance*, which advocated the expulsion of the Jews and the confiscation of their property. In addition, committees were quickly set up “to provide against [...] superstitious ceremonies with particular attention to suppression of [...] the setters up of Jewish worship” (Rubin 27). In short, as the Commonwealth dissolved, Puritan sympathy toward the Jews also dissipated and was replaced by growing anger and intolerance. As a result, wealthy Jews in England and in exile gave considerable sums of money to help restore the monarchy, with the hope of setting up better relations in the future. For example, Charles II, during his time abroad, received a loan from the Jews of Amsterdam, and, in return, he promised their protection when the monarchy was restored:

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They [the Jews] shall find that when God shall restore us to the possession of our rights and to that power which of right does belonge to us we shall extend that protection to them which they can reasonably expecte and abate that rigour of the Lawes which is against them in our several dominions. (Roth 169)

When Charles II reclaimed the throne, there were about one hundred and fifty Jews in the London community (Wolf 12). Despite their low population, it is a misconception to believe, as some scholars do, that “in the period of the Restoration there was little awareness of the Jews” (Rubin 48). The Jews, in fact, were a strongly visible and unwanted presence. During their exile, centuries of anti-Jewish work, such as the Medieval Corpus Christi plays, kept the superstitions, fears and hatred of Jews virulently alive in England. For example, on October 14, 1663, Samuel Pepys visited a Jewish service—a fashionable venture for many curious Christians—and wrote the following in his diary:

But, Lord! To see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more: and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this. (178)

Pepys failed to observe that he was visiting one of the most festive Jewish occasions, Simhat Torah, the time of rejoicing for receiving the Torah scrolls. In short, when the Jews returned to England, they returned to the same anti-Semitic phobias that were present at the time of their expulsion. The difference, however, was that this time they had a protector.

On February 26, 1663, Charles II blocked the House of Commons’ attempt to create a committee “to prepare and bring in laws to prevent encroachments in trade by the Jews or French or any other foreigners” (Roth 170). In 1664, in response to the Conventicle Act that prohibited assemblies of prayer not in accordance with the Church of England, the King stated that the Jews might “promise themselves the effects of the same favour as formerly they have had, soe long as they demeane themselves peaceably & quietly with due obedience to his Majesty’s Lawes & without scandal to his Government” (Roth 171). In 1673, a year after the fierce public outcry that overturned the Declaration of Indulgence—the King’s decree that allowed the right of public worship to Roman Catholics and Dissenters—the Grand Jury indicted the leaders of the Jewish community for congregating for a synagogue service. The King quickly issued an Order in

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Council, which commanded the Attorney General to “stop all proceedings at Law against The Petitioners [the Jews]” (Roth 181). Near the end of the King’s life, the Bishop of London and Sir Peter Pett, a prominent lawyer, attempted to segregate the Jews into a ghetto system where they would be taxed and supervised by a Justiciar. When it was brought to the attention of the King, the Privy Council announced that the matter should be dropped immediately. In sum, throughout the reign of Charles II, Jews lived under the protection of the crown. This protection, it can be argued, was not just an act of leniency toward the Jews, but a self-serving political maneuver by the King.

The unpopular political actions taken by Charles II to protect the Jews were too politically dangerous to interpret as payback for the financial aid the Jews gave the King while in exile. These actions, in addition, were too risky in an unsteady climate of religious intolerance and absolute monarchical rule to dismiss as mere religious indifference. England, at this time, was caught in a storm of religious and political transition and upheaval. With the collapse of the Puritan Commonwealth, the Protestants were constantly trying to squash Catholic attempts at power and secure their own supremacy in England. At the same time, the Whigs—specifically during the Exclusion Crisis, which lasted from March 1679, to March 1681—were trying to curb the restored monarchical powers of the King and prevent the royal succession of Charles’ Catholic brother, James, the Duke of York. To say, therefore, that when Charles II came to the throne “religion was to him a matter of minor consequence” is a gross understatement (Roth 169). To Charles II, religion—specifically the Catholic religion—was of prime importance. This was most notably seen in his attempt to grant Catholic clemency, tactfully packaged with clemency for other dissenters, in his Declaration of Indulgence. The acts of Charles II to protect the Jews were the actions of a Catholic sympathizer censored by a Protestant country from speaking freely of Catholic tolerance; therefore, the King tried to guide the country toward general religious freedom, using Jewish leniency as a stand-in for Catholic tolerance.

In the royal house, Catholicism flourished during the reign of Charles II. In 1662, Charles II married a Roman Catholic, Catherine of Braganza, the daughter of King John IV of Portugal. In 1670, Charles II, in order to solve his financial difficulties and to gain more independence from the Whig-controlled parliament—that fervently tried to block James, the Catholic Duke of

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York from the throne—secretly agreed to the Treaty of Dover. Under this treaty, Louis XIV of France would pay him £ 200,000 a year if Charles would supply him with troops and agree to the secret clause, "The King of Great Britain, being convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith, is determined to declare himself a Catholic as soon as the welfare of his realm will permit" (BBC 1). Lastly, in the royal court, Catholicism had a strong presence.

The Queen kept fourteen priests in her household, and the duke of York and his second Catholic, wife Mary of Modena, maintained several more; where lay Papists were freely employed; and where the leading royal mistress for much of the decade, Louise Duchess of Portsmouth, was a Frenchwoman 'of the Roman persuasion.' Under the apprehensive eyes of the Parliament-men who gathered in town for their autumn or spring sessions, masses were regularly said in the private chapels of wealthy Catholic peers, and [...] London recusants flocked to the services held in the chapels of foreign ambassadors. (Holmes 121)

All of this occurred while, outside the royal house, Pope-Burning Pageants filled the streets with anti-Catholic fervor, newspapers launched the latest Catholic plots—such as the Gunpowder Plot and the Popish Plot—and anti-Catholic hysteria dominated much of the literature. During these events, the Jews lived in relative protection—because of Charles II—and this protection was clearly seen in the plays of the time.

The dramatic works during the reign of Charles II seem to pay almost no attention to the Jews. Occasional stereotypical Jewish euphemisms—such as in John Wilson's *The Cheats* (1662), where Alderman Whitebroth is referred to as "A Jew indeed"—appear in dramatic works, but for the most part, the stage-Jew is absent (1:2). The failed anti-Semitic legislation and near absence of Jews in the plays clearly suggest that royal protection extended to dramatic works as well. This is not to say that anti-Semitic representation did not occur elsewhere. Works from the past—such as Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, which was in its third printing—were still in circulation, and playwrights were finding other forms to express their anti-Semitic ideas. In John Dryden's poem *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), for example, contemporary Jews are distastefully portrayed.

The Jews, a Headstrong, Moody, Murmuring race,  
As ever try'd th' extent and stretch of grace;  
God's pamper'd people whom, debauch'd with ease,  
No King could govern, nor no God could please. (lines 45-48)

This point raises the question of why other artistic forms had a freer voice, while plays were more heavily censored. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the theater and the King shared a close relationship. When Charles II restored the monarchy, he also reopened theaters that had been closed in 1642 by the Commonwealth. The King was a strong theater patron and, as a result, brought to the theater royal prestige and aristocratic support. The playwrights of the time were generally members of the Court who were directly under the power and influence of the King. Therefore, the subject matter of the early Restoration plays—what was seen and what was not seen—was largely a reflection of the King.

It is important to note that though there were few negative representations of Jews in Restoration plays, there were also hardly any Jewish characters included at all. Playwrights could have included more benevolent representations of Jewish characters in their plays, but chose, instead, to remove them from the stage altogether. It appears as if playwrights refused to portray Jews unless they were traditionally and stereotypically presented. The near absence of Jews in Restoration plays, therefore, does not suggest a sudden ameliorative turn in the English conscience, but rather a continual defiance to sympathetically portray a Jew on the stage. (Others have argued that the audience for restoration drama was a small coterie audience of people with leisure who essentially wanted to see themselves on stage; thus there would be no reason to portray Jewish characters at all, benevolently or otherwise. Though this idea is tempting, it does not take into account why this same type of audience chose—or were allowed—to see Jewish stage characters prior to the reign of Charles II and not during the Restoration.)

It can, however, be argued that there is a Jewish presence in early Restoration plays. It is difficult, if not impossible, to altogether eliminate a presence or idea without leaving a trace. When ideas are unattractive to power and, as a result, become censored in their original form, instead of dying, they can be transferred into a new politically acceptable outlet. For example, in Odai Johnson's work *Rehearsing the Revolution*, he clearly demonstrates that in John Crowne's *City Politiques*, sexual politics is a surrogate for unpopular civic politics. If one can decode these highly coded early Restoration dramatic works, then the image of the Jew can become present. Anti-Semitic representations of the Jew in early Restoration plays were not entirely suppressed and silenced but were surrogated in a new form, the form of anti-Whig propaganda.

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During the Restoration, Whigs were closely associated with Jews. Traditionally, Whigs were liberal on issues of Jewish immigration and naturalization, while the Tories—who were made up of city merchants and clergy that feared Jewish competition in business and in the Protestant faith—were exclusionists. Tory attacks often took the form of “substituting the word *Jew* for *Whig*” (Perry 74). This close association between Whigs and Jews was prevalent in political considerations, which is evident in a conversation between a Whig politician and a Whig lawyer: “What a pretty Christian confession of faith it is to hear a curate cry, G-dd-n me, I am of the Church of England, and all the Whigs are sons of whores, Jews, and friends of the circumcision” (Perry 119). In the plays of the Restoration, such as John Crowne’s *City Politiques* (1682)—a Tory response to the Expulsion Crisis (the Whig attempt to give the Parliament the power to decide the succession of kingship)—the Whigs are the perilous Other, the ones who pose a threat to England; at the same time, the Whigs can be interpreted as a surrogate for the Jews, signifying to the Tories the Jewish economic and religious threat to England (Johnson 33).

This is perhaps most notably seen in the character of Bartoline, the greedy and corrupt lawyer in *City Politiques*. The play centers on the character of Florio who, in order to be near his love-interest Rosaura, the Podesta’s wife, pretends to be “dying of the diseases that his vices brought upon him” and helps win the Podesta’s election (*Commedies* 185). Bartoline seeks the aid of the Podesta—“a factious, proud, busie, credulous, foolish, rich citizen [a Whig]”—to keep an eye on his wife so she remains faithful. The Podesta ends up hiring Bartoline for legal council against the Governor—“a man of honour and worth [a Tory]”—who insists that the Podesta not “disturb and frighten the City by raising the Town forces to no purpose” (3.1.90-91). The Podesta has built up an army in order to rebel against the Governor. Meanwhile, Bartoline has also deceptively hired out his services to the Governor to legally challenge the Podesta. The play concludes with Florio, the Podesta and Bartoline revealed. Florio’s cuckoldry is discovered; the Podesta’s deceitfulness is shown when he betrays his party by accepting a false position in the Governor’s court; Bartoline’s double-dealing treachery is exposed.

Several editors have suggested that Bartoline represented a specific person. One such person may have been Sergeant John Maynard, the unpopular Whig lawyer who held judicial

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office during the Interregnum (*Comedies* 169). Samuel Pepys acknowledged the general public distaste for the lawyer in his diary entry on April 23, 1661.

Thus did the day end with joy everywhere; and blessed be God, I have not heard of any mischance to any body through it all, but only to Serjt. Glynne, whose horse fell upon him yesterday, and is like to kill him, which people do please themselves to see how just God is to punish the rogue at such a time as this; he being now one of the King's Serjeants, and rode in the cavalcade with Maynard, to whom people wish the same fortune. (74)

Other editors pick as the intended representative Aaron Smith, a barrister-at-law who was known for his cases of forgery and for defending Titus Oates, the infamous plot-detector who instigated the Popish Plot. In the *Life of the Lord Keepers* it is written, “[Aaron Smith] was a violent monster, and his friends for his excuse used to say he was half made” (*Dramatic Works* 85).

Whether or not the character of Bartoline was designed for a specific person is, at best, speculative. In the Preface to the Reader, John Crowne explains that Bartoline was “of his own invention” and not intended to be associated with someone in particular (*Comedies* 180). If the character, instead, can be interpreted as representing a symbolic type of Whig and, at the same time, a symbolic type of Jew, a more interesting read surfaces.

In *City Politiques*, Bartoline shares many characteristics of the stage-Jew. In fact, he semiotically refers to Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that still resonated in Restoration England. Bartoline, like Shylock, is sly, lecherous, avaricious and has speech that is barely comprehensible.

A man of foashco?—yersh no shuch thing, yer are boysh of foashsco—if you will, after ‘hreesheco we ought cho go in long coatsh, for breechesh are imposh—churesh and prehend cho what yey ha’ not. I believe my Lord Pashta you are behind-hand wi’ your wife, ash well ash I, I believe sho—ha! (2.1.447-452)

Bartoline is described as being toothless, the cause of his way of speaking. The Podesta chides him by saying, “You ha’ never a tooth in your head” (2.1.440-441). His toothlessness signifies difference or Otherness and, at the same time, suggests a harmless nonsensical fool or buffoon. The real threat of the Whig/Jew in England is comically subverted in *City Politiques*, just as the early portrayals of Shylock, a murderous merchant, were treated as comedic Pantalone characters.

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To carry the analogy further, Bartoline, like Shylock, takes advantage of the misfortunes of others to fill his purse. He preys on both Whigs and Tories who seek his legal help to deal with their grievances. Bartoline's only concern is himself and his profits. For example, he lends his wife to care for Florio, with the hopes of gaining a rich inheritance after Florio dies from his supposed diseases. A further example is when Bartoline's brother has killed a man and seeks Bartoline's legal aid. Instead of aiding his brother, Bartoline sides with the murdered man's widow, who has offered him ten more pounds.

Lucinda: Will you hang your brother for ten pound?  
Bartoline: You shou'd ashke me if I wou'd hang him for chenne shillingsh, yen I might conshiger it, but chenne poun' ish a great yeale o' money, tish a great yeale of money. (3.1.70-74)

One last comparison comes at the end of the play when Bartoline 'rightfully' loses his wife to Artall, a member of the Court, who declares that, "I can better serve the ends of your lady than you can, so I lay claim to your lady" (5.3.179-82). This is similar to how Shylock 'rightfully' loses his proselytized daughter to a Christian. In both cases, Bartoline and Shylock lose the support of their families and are abandoned. The wife has left Bartoline for the greater good (the Tories), like the daughter has left Shylock for the greater good (the Christians).

In short, it is difficult to read the character of Bartoline without seeing the character metaphorically wearing a false protruding nose. Of course, there could not be a large hooked nose appearing on stage at the time of Charles II. Crowne realized this when, in his Preface, he acknowledges that to avoid trouble he "must not bring a villain on the stage with a nose" (*Comedies* 180). He, therefore, substituted the iconography of the *Whigs* for the traditional anti-Semitic Jewish iconography—false nose, red beard and a red *wig*—seen on the pre-Restoration stage.

The absence of overt Jewish mistreatment in early Restoration society and dramatic works carries a strong presence, a loud silence that calls for a readership that can understand the specific codes operating in the culture. To interpret these absences as a period of religious tolerance and indifference toward the Jews by the King and playwrights is to construct a

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perspective that lies outside of Restoration culture. This was a period of religious and political unrest and severe censorship—when a King could not speak of Catholicism, and a Tory could not speak of Jews. Instead, a surrogated language was developed that demanded a specific lens to read the politics and plays of the early Restoration. This new language was only briefly spoken. After the death of Charles II, anti-Semitic iconography and intolerance made an immediate powerful reappearance in the English culture and dramatic works.

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