

Citation for the published version:

Pritchard, P. (2018). Young Saints and the Knots of Satan: Moral Exemplarity, Ministry and Youth in Early Modern Dissenters' Writing. *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. DOI: 10.1111/1754-0208.12526

Document Version: Peer reviewed accepted version

This is the peer reviewed version which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/1754-0208.12526>

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

General rights

Copyright© and Moral Rights for the publications made accessible on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners.

Please check the manuscript for details of any other licences that may have been applied and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights. You may not engage in further distribution of the material for any profitmaking activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute both the url (<http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/>) and the content of this paper for research or private study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, any such items will be temporarily removed from the repository pending investigation.

Enquiries

Please contact University of Hertfordshire Research & Scholarly Communications for any enquiries at rsc@herts.ac.uk

Penny Pritchard

Young Saints and the Knots of Satan: Moral Exemplarity, Ministry, and Youth in Early Modern Dissenters' Writing

The complicated interrelationship between secular and religious writing, for dissenters, poses fundamental questions concerning the spiritual “usefulness” to be derived from others’ lives. Both G. A. Starr and Michael McKeon consider the cultural value of “lives” for early modern Christian readers by which an “interchangeable” concept of human experience means that “the individual Christian was assisted by all accounts of similar endeavours.”¹ Starr’s analysis of Defoe’s early novels is predicated on this, though he simultaneously expresses doubt that this perspective is exclusively nonconformist.² This investigation concurs; dissenters’ writing extends far beyond distinctions between established church and nonconformism, or even secular versus religious, to encompass wider questions about identity and how humans should behave. Two nonconformist ministers, Thomas Brooks and James Janeway, as well as Defoe, will be considered here. All contributed to a diverse contemporary canon of ostensibly religious writing which takes up the popular motif of portraying morally exemplary, even saintly, children.³ Janeway and Brooks offer portraits of actual children or advice for them, whereas Defoe’s *The Family Instructor* is consciously presented as a work of fiction, yet all reveal striking parallels in terms of characterisation. This is not to suggest nonconformists were necessarily united concerning the cultural status of imaginative, or fictional, writing; Neil Keeble describes nonconformist literature encompassing imaginative and fictional as well as religious writing but whose universal “virtue resided in their potential to transform lives”:

Nor was [the nonconformists’] an exclusively utilitarian aesthetic which tolerated only the didactic and homiletic. [...R]ather than reject any literary genre *per se* they

¹ G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), 18; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 83, 319.

² Starr, *ibid.*

³ See Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey, ed., *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Ralph Houlbrooke, “Death in Childhood: The Practice of the ‘Good Death’ in James Janeway’s *A Token for Children*,” 37–56. See also Diana Wood, ed., *The Church and Childhood* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Susan Hardman Moore, “‘Such Perfecting of Praise out of the Mouth of a Babe’: Sarah Wight as Child Prophet,” 313–24; Anthony Fletcher, “Prescription and Practice: Protestantism and the Upbringing of Children, 1560–1700,” 325–46.

distinguished between the prevailing literary temper of Restoration society and the use which might be made, and had in the Bible been made, of metaphor, parable, story and poetry. [...] In their apologetic prefaces and by their practice, nonconformist authors sought to persuade their readers imaginative literature might indeed serve these ends.⁴

Many nonconformist authors maintained a cultural “distance” between their work’s function and more secular writing while tacitly acknowledging the latter’s value through emulation of its imaginative innovation. Defoe’s *Family Instructor* (with two volumes in 1715 and 1718) may readily be categorised as “religious writing” even while its fictional narratives push the conventional parameters of literary genre to their limits.⁵ As yet untrammelled by self-imposed generic boundaries which would later be “stretched” so imaginatively by novelists like Sterne, Defoe’s *Family Instructor* anticipates some of the early novel’s formative processes while making palpable efforts to rein its burgeoning fictional narratives.

The third dialogue of Part III offers a case in point. It describes the inner turmoil of the family’s eldest daughter struggling to be reconciled to her husband’s **household religious regime**. A bitter argument and the husband’s departure precede the following passage. Ostensibly forming part of the dialogue, its significance lies in its scrutiny of the wife’s internal emotional state:

When her Husband was gone, and she had sat a while, and mused upon what she had done; her Passion began to abate, and Reason to take Place again in her Soul; and first her Unkindness to her Husband began to shew it self to her; I believe (she says to herself), I have anger’d him heartily; well, it can’t be help’d now, let him ev’n take it if he will.

But a little further thinking brought her more to her self, and then her Affection to him stirred in her, and she breaks out again. [. . .] Looking out at the Window, she saw him at a Distance walking away very melancholly in some Fields near the House

⁴ N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 135, 153. Keeble’s reference is from John Bunyan, *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Richard L. Greaves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 254.

⁵ See Paula R. Backscheider’s introduction to Volume One of *The Family Instructor. A Facsimile Reproduction* (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1989), 8; Laura A. Curtis, “A Case Study of Defoe’s Domestic Conduct Manuals Suggested by *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature* 10 (1981): 409–28.

all alone by himself. [...]he run [sic] out into the Garden to meet him, but the Boy brought her Word again he was gone, and he could not find him.

Now she began violently to reproach her self with her ill Usage of her Husband, and shutting her self into her Chamber, she reflected bitterly on her self [. . .].⁶

A further page of her self-recriminations follows, presented as internal monologue within the third-person dialogue format. Whereas its didactic purposes could be served by a single line, Defoe's detailed portrait surely illustrates Watt's observations concerning the novel's realism, specifically, "the novel is surely distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment."⁷ By 1715 Defoe's rendering of subjective identity and point of view—concepts now more readily associated with literary analysis of the novel—are becoming increasingly nuanced to focus on the substantive notion of the individual. Individualism, a highly attractive social concept informing Western notions of modernity and sociopolitical progress as well as cultural forms such as the novel, also implicitly challenges older, community-centered, cultural models and revalues the nature of duty, or social responsibility, incumbent upon participants. Defoe's *Family Instructor* articulates the tensions Christopher Flint discovers at the heart of the concept of individualism, both in terms of form and the portrayal of subjective experience. For Flint, authors like Defoe were both invested in the emerging notion of the individual, whilst also "wanting to diminish some of the power of the individualism they were, in theory, promoting".⁸

Defoe's *Family Instructor* and Contemporary Conduct Literature

The Family Instructor sets new precedents for the genre; Backscheider suggests that "conduct books written after it were more often cast as stories, and the characters and their language became more realistic."⁹ Earlier conduct dialogues, such as William Darrell's *The*

⁶ Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor. In Three Parts* (London, 1715), 379–80.

⁷ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Penguin Books, 1957; repr. 1970), 18.

⁸ Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688–1798* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 14; see also Alexandra Walsham, "Holy Families: The Spiritualization of the Early Modern Household Revisited" in *Religion and the Household*, eds. John Doran, Charlotte Methuen, and Alexandra Walsham (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 122–60.

⁹ Backscheider, introduction to *The Family Instructor*, 6.

Gentleman Instructed (1704) and Richard Baxter's *Poor Man's Family Book* (1674) are considerably shorter and simpler. Defoe's "new form" of conduct work required explication to readers. The preface to Volume Two justifies inclusion of "new" and diverting content on the grounds of pandering to readers' tastes, even as Defoe indirectly berates them for their "modern vice":

If Novelty, the modern vice of the reading palate, is to judge of our Performance, the whole Scene now presented is so entirely differing from all that went before, and so eminently directed to another Species of Readers, that it seems to be as new as if no other Part had been published before it.¹⁰

Why "another Species of Readers" is intended for the second volume is not elaborated. Defoe speculates, however, that if the second *Family Instructor* "fails of running the same length with those looser Works" (solely offering entertainment), this will be due to its didactic content, since "we have less Pleasure in Things instructing, than in Things merely humouring and diverting."¹¹ Undoubtedly, Defoe's is one of those "apologetic prefaces" Keeble alludes to as representing nonconformists' deployment of imaginative literature for spiritual purposes. The complex, even contradictory, stance adopted here speaks both to authors' increasing interest in popular readership as well as the spiritual ends by which Defoe seeks to attribute superior moral authority to this work.

Both popular and spiritual interests are further reflected in the text's relatively unusual structure, a series of interconnected dialogues between members of an extended family, mostly preceded by authorial explanations concerned with the establishment of setting (time and place) and family relationships. Dialogues are followed by further explanatory "Notes" by which the author guides readers' interpretation. Cumulative dialogues add plot complexity, as does the broadening scope of the setting (time frames shift forward and back; separate dialogues occur simultaneously in different rooms of a household); the supporting framework of authorial "Notes" must subsequently increase to accommodate the burgeoning narrative perceived by the reader.

This is demonstrated in the four and a half pages of preliminary contextual material preceding the previously-discussed episode. Its purpose is to inform readers of the eldest daughter's progression since her previous appearance. The author explains that the interceding

¹⁰ Daniel Defoe, preface to *The Family Instructor. In Two Parts* (London, 1718), iii–v.

¹¹ Ibid.

dialogues took place “some time past, in order to introduce this part, and preserve the Connection of the History. The Daughter is now to be talked of, as having been married some Time. The Son was gone to Travel.”¹² Defoe’s cumulative narrative gains the momentum of an extended work of fiction **even** while being actively constrained by its structure. Authorial “Notes” reorient readers at regular intervals through a burgeoning fictional narrative, reminding them of its didactic function. Simultaneously, the reader’s interest is drawn to other aspects of Defoe’s narrative **technique**.

Notwithstanding this increasingly literary sensibility, Defoe **does not neglect the text’s function in terms** of religious didacticism, **seen for example, in his depiction of** young children serving as agents of conversion for their elders.¹³ *The Family Instructor* embraces the **well-established** tradition of child saints. **In** the fifth dialogue of Part II, Defoe presents a vivid portrait of a mother making an anguished self-realisation of sin through her child’s innocent conduct:

So Stupid a Fool was I all this while, that I could not yet imagine what the Child meant. So it said again, *Down here Mamma*, and points to the floor. Not dreaming yet what she meant, I laugh’d at her; *What, must I sit upon the Floor?* [...] With that the Child looking mighty grave, and a little tending towards crying, says to me, *Down so, Mamma*, and claps down upon its Knees. This a little startled me: *O my Dear*, said I, *I did not understand thee: Come then, kneel down and say your Prayers*. It would not do yet, this was not what the Child meant. *No Mamma*, says the Child, *You kneel down, say Prayers*. [. . .] ‘twas such a Reproach to me, my very Blood and Bowels turn’d within me, and I knew not what to say or do[.]¹⁴

The dramatic significance of the mother’s self-recognition is heightened through the scene’s physicality (seen when the child “claps down upon its Knees”). Moreover, the scene’s emotional resonance is in inverse proportion to the (unspecified) youthfulness of the child; the younger the child, the more a rebuke its words and actions would serve to be for the self-berating mother.

¹² *Ibid.*, 358.

¹³ Children serving as spiritual agents of conversion is discussed by G. A. Starr, *Defoe and Casuistry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 4, 37–8; see also Flint, *Family Fictions*, 138ff.

¹⁴ Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor in Two Parts*, vol. 2 (London, 1718), 371.

In failing **here** to specify the child's **age**, Defoe also reflects a **more general** contemporary **aspect of religious** writing about children.¹⁵ Such writing **articulates** what Lawrence Stone notes in terms of a cultural preponderance of early modern attitudes of adults *toward children*.¹⁶ As social subordinates, like women or the poor, children's "values, attitudes, and feelings" in this period "are largely excluded from the official record and can only be discovered if they are excavated by the historian."¹⁷

Stone, Keith Thomas, Linda Pollock, Ralph Houlbrooke, and others have excavated extensively within the historical record to consider the representation of early modern childhood, acknowledging its necessarily pluralistic **nature** (in that the experience of poor boys in urban locations, for example, differs widely from that of affluent girls in the countryside).¹⁸ A seemingly unbridgeable gap remains between this scholarship and more literary questions about *how and why* children are depicted in early modern writing, particularly those youthful saints so frequently commemorated by nonconformist ministers.¹⁹ The popularity of Thomas Brooks's and James Janeway's works from the latter half of the seventeenth century **precedes not only Defoe's adoption of the saintly child motif in *The Family Instructor* but also its later, further, prevalence in Victorian writing; this cultural longevity merits scrutiny of the motif beyond the parameters possible in this investigation.**²⁰

Child Saints: Exemplarity and "Credibility"

¹⁵ See Hannah Newton's introduction to *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580–1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–30; Françoise Deconinck-Brossard, "Representations of Children in the Sermons of Philip Doddridge," in *The Church and Childhood*, 379–80.

¹⁶ Keith Thomas alludes to Stone's point in "Children in Early Modern England," in *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, eds. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 47. See also Lawrence Stone, *The Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), 229.

¹⁷ Thomas, *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71. See also Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977); Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450–1700* (London: Longman, 1984).

¹⁹ See in particular Ralph Houlbrooke, "Death in Childhood: The Practice of the 'Good Death' in James Janeway's *A Token for Children*." See also Gillian Avery and Elizabeth Clarke in Gillian and Reynolds, *Representations of Childhood Death*, 65–86 and 87–110.

²⁰ Avery and Jay, *ibid.* See also Aileen Fyfe, "Reading Children's Books in Late Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Families," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 2 (June 2000): 453–73; Diana Walsh Pasulka, "'A Communion of Little Saints': Nineteenth-Century American Child Hagiographies," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 51–67.

Many early modern portraits of youthful piety strike readers as incongruously mature or implausible. Thomas tellingly alludes to such writing in biographical portraits of exemplary youths “who were too good to live . . . [in which] children are depicted spending much time in the company of adults, and displaying largely adult thoughts and emotions.”²¹ Hannah Newton, similarly, observes “authors sometimes exaggerated certain aspects of children’s piety” but suggests this is inherent in the **religious didacticism of nonconformist culture**, since “biographies of pious children share this religious slant: most of the child subjects were from puritan backgrounds [. . .and] it was hoped that the child’s exemplary life would encourage other Christians to live and die in a similarly pious manner.”²²

The extent to which such depictions seem “too saintly” or “exaggerated” is implicitly a matter of readers’ cultural expectations, then or now, concerning normative models of children’s behaviour. **The questions with which Gillian Avery and Kimberley Reynolds conclude their introduction to *Representations of Childhood Death* are pertinent to this context:** “How far is our way of dealing with childhood death based on residual aspects of Romanticism, Puritanism and Evangelicalism, and how far is it possible to make the death of the young meaningful in an age which values achievement?”²³ **Perhaps, instead, we might wish to consider if the early modern child’s death after a holy life constitutes a triumphant spiritual achievement in its own right, or if the portrait of such children is intended to fulfil purposes wholly removed from the question of ‘credibility’ altogether.**

The spectrum of dissenters’ writing offers a broad range of responses to all of these questions but also consistent indication that the *exemplum*, or moral example, as a literary device remains powerfully important.²⁴ In a contemporary sermon from the *Morning-Exercises*, Samuel Annesley observes that “We are much drawn by Examples. Examples they are not only Arguments but Wings. They give us a demonstration, that Precepts are practicable.”²⁵ **The sustained** cultural influence of the *exemplum* in general (and the saintly

²¹ Thomas, “Children in Early Modern England,” 49.

²² Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England*, 18.

²³ Avery and Reynolds, introduction to *Representations of Childhood Death*, 9–10.

²⁴ For “example” defined as device, see Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1991), 188. Aristotle’s original two-part definition (*narratio/inventio*) of the term reflects its relevance in both factual and fictional accounts; see H. C. Lawson-Tancred, trans., *The Art of Rhetoric* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 188ff.

²⁵ Samuel Annesley, *A Supplement to the Morning-Exercise at Cripplegate* (London, 167), 167. The powerful influence of collected exemplary “Lives” such as John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* in this context is discussed in McKeon, *The Origins of the English*

child in particular) on the early English novel exemplifies the relatively arbitrary nature of genre distinctions such as fiction versus nonfiction, or religious versus imaginative writing.²⁶

Put another way, the *value* (in terms of morality, instruction, spirituality, entertainment, or any combination of these) placed on exemplary children in religious writing is predicated on readerly self-recognition and thus the capacity to put such examples to practical application.²⁷ In the context of writing about children, this is even more so; a child represents a figure both recognisable and alien to adult readers. Comparably familiar *and* distanced from any adult who cares to recall their own experience of childhood, the saintly child is an unknown and unknowable moral entity manifested as a projection of the reader's own estimation of what is spiritually (and humanly) achievable. The spiritual or physical welfare of "real" children play little or no part in this act of imaginative self-projection. More than a century and a quarter before Wordsworth's more famous reflection that "the Child is the Father of the Man," John Flavel observed, concerning the extent to which adults identify themselves with and through children, "for what are children but the parent multiplied: a child is a part of the parent made up in another skin."²⁸

The Cultural Relativity of Childhood

Flavel's observation is of course contingent on his own cultural perspective concerning the status of children. Anna Davin's study of the representation of children from the eighteenth century to the present articulates the particular challenges of applying the term "child" in any way other than a culturally subjective one:

We have all been children; we all know children; some of us have had children, brought them up or taught them. We all "know" what we mean by child and childhood [. . .] Yet its properties are multiple and elusive; its limits elastic. There is no absolute definition of childhood, whether subjective or official, because it is always lived and defined in cultural and economic contexts. So its character and ideology cannot be taken for

Novel: 1600–1740, 90–6; see also J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 251–73.6), 22.

²⁶ Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*; John Richetti, *The English Novel in History 1700–1780* (London: Routledge, 1999), 56.

²⁷ McKeon, *op cit*.

²⁸ John Flavel, *A Token for Mourners* (London, 1674), 3. See Wordsworth's familiar poem "My Heart Leaps Up" (1802).

granted as “naturally” or “normally” this or that: when set beside the experience of specific children in specific contexts they are full of ambiguity and contradiction.²⁹

The importance of Davin’s argument is echoed in a different but complementary analysis of our deep-seated cultural tendency to assume that adults “know best”; one still-emerging field of scholarly enquiry, prejudice studies, recognises the global cultural bias of “childism,” or, “a prejudice against children on the ground of a belief that they are property and can (or even should) be controlled, enslaved, or removed to serve adult ends.” Elisabeth Young-Bruehl elaborates on the agreement among researchers in prejudice studies that prejudice generally constitutes ‘projections outward of hatred or feared traits, aspects, functions, or fantasies of the prejudiced person’s own psyche or history’ and as such, ‘Children or animals could be used to represent symbolically the unhealthy or sinful past that should not be allowed to carry into the future.’³⁰

As cultural and imaginative outward ‘projections’ of early modern adults, contemporary portraits of saintly children tell us much far more about adults than about children’s faith in that period. Marcia Bunge observes how little has really changed in this context:

Despite the rising concern for and curiosity about children, scholars of religion, theologians, and ethicists across religious lines have had little to say about children, and they have had little to contribute to the growing political and academic debates about children or our obligations to them. Many have not treated childhood as a topic meriting serious attention, and they have not sought to articulate robust religious understandings of children themselves.³¹

The distinction Bunge makes here between ‘political and academic debates about children’ and ‘religious understandings of children themselves’ is also reflected in early modern writing. In Part Two of *A Token for Children* James Janeway does not revisit his original account of a saintly child depicted in Part One, but he vociferously defends the account’s authenticity. The unnamed child in question (who died aged around five or six) was first

²⁹ Anna Davin, “What Is a Child?” in *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 15.

³⁰ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (New York: Yale University Press, 2012), 37–39.

³¹ Marcia J. Bunge, “The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood,” *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 4 (October 2006): 549–50; see also Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1962).

“admirably affected with the things of God, when he was between two and three years Old.”³²
In response to accusations of implausibility, Janeway defends his own credibility and moral authority with countering questions about readerly self-recognition:

I am persuaded by some, that one Example in the former, (viz. that of a Child that began to be Serious between two and three years old) was scarce credible, and they did fear might somewhat prejudice the authority of the rest [...] They which make this Objection are either good or bad; if bad, I expect never to satisfie them, except I should tell them of a Romance or a Play, or somewhat that might suit a carnal mind; it is like holiness in older persons, it is a matter of contempt and scorn to them, much more in such as these I mention.

[...] But hold sinner hold, never hope it, Heaven shall never be turned into Hell for thy sake, and as for all thy Atheistical Objections, Scoffs and Jeers, they shall ere long be fully answered; and the Hosannah’s and Hallelujah’s of these Babes shall condemn thy Oaths, Blasphemies, and Jeers, and then thou will be silenced, and accepting converting Grace turn thy heart quickly, thou wilt for ever rue thy madness and Folly, when it is too late to remedy it.³³

Here, Janeway’s estimation of the “bad” readers who reject the credibility of his account of the saintly toddler describes two distinctly different interpretations of the text in question. Either, on the one hand, their “carnal minds” will not accept such a phenomenon of extremely early piety unless it is contained within the more fantastical realm of secular fiction (“a Romance or a Play”), or on the other, their “Atheistical Objections” are directed more generally at depictions of holiness in *all* humanity, including “older persons,” though this is “much more” the case for young children.

At this prefatory stage of the text, even in the unlikely event that any of Janeway’s readers were content to categorise themselves in either of these two positions, they would now be free to desist from reading further, since he has already made clear that he expects “never to satisfie them.” Any remaining readers determined to persist in their doubts concerning Janeway’s account may then be reassured that “if the Persons that make this Objection be godly, I question not but that I may give them reasonable satisfaction”; Janeway cites his source as the testimonial of (the clearly notably pious) Mrs. Jeofries of Long-Lane in Mary

³² Janeway, *A Token for Children* (London, 1676), 19–26.

³³ Janeway, “A Preface to the Reader,” in *A Token for Children* [. . .], *The Second Part* (London, 1673).

Magdalen Bermondsey Parish. This citation is followed by further examples of very young saints dead through illness or martyrdom in other devotional literature before Janeway concludes with a powerful rhetorical question concerning the nature of spiritual conversion in general: “What is too hard for the Almighty? [...] I believe that Silence, or rather Praise, would better become Saints, than questioning the truth of such Things [. . .].”³⁴ The correlative to Janeway’s rhetorical question is that any child may be inspired to follow the precedent of pious conduct set by these saintly examples of youthful piety. Notwithstanding the fact that Janeway’s “young saints” make eminently clear their preference for God over friends and family, they still serve as a highly beneficial example for other children and their parents.

Janeway’s suggested correlative is that those who doubt the narrative’s truth also doubt the truth of divine power. This is therefore a stark choice for Christian parents, bound up intrinsically with the spiritual benefit to be derived from the example of saintly children; as David Stannard has observed,

if conversion was unlikely at an early age, it was at least possible. Given the alternative, then, of apathetic acceptance of their children as depraved and damnable creatures, it is hardly surprising that Puritan parents urged on their offspring a religious precocity that some historians have interpreted as tantamount to premature adulthood.³⁵

Stannard notes that accounts of children’s religious piety, and exhortations for other children to follow these examples, need to be considered alongside **what many contemporary parents would have seen as the only alternative**, namely, their children’s eternal condemnation. This choice is often articulated in early modern works which reflect specifically on the moral condition of youth, as in Robert Russel’s *Little Book for Children and Youth* in which he posits the question directly to his youthful readers in no uncertain terms:

Now my dear Child, what art thou resolv’d to do? Wilt thou practise these Nine Lessons that I have here taught thee, that thou mayest be God’s Child, and go to Heaven? Let me ask thee, my dear Child, which of these two hadst thou rather be, a Child of God, or a Child of the Devil? Which place hadst thou rather go to at last, to Heaven, or to Hell?³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ David E. Stannard, “Death and the Puritan Child,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 5 (December 1974): 461.

³⁶ Robert Russel, *A Little Book for Children and Youth* (London, 1693).

The same ultimatum is mooted, albeit more hopefully, in both the title and structure of Thomas Brooks's earlier and highly popular work *Apples of Gold for Young Men and Women, and a Crown of Glory for Old Men and Women*. Brooks's initial chapters consider, in turn, "the desirability of young men [. . .] to be really good," the "Honour of an Old Disciple," the "Evils of Youth," and then he offers a concluding "Exhortation to Youth," which serves to counter any potential arguments against the urgency of youthful repentance.³⁷ His Epistle Dedicatory lists seven different reasons why **his work is dedicated** to the spiritual improvement of the **young, ranging from a general desire "to help forward your everlasting salvation,"** to the more specific acknowledgement that **"there is most hope of doing good amongst you,"** and the fervent wish **"to countermine the great underminer of your souls,** whose great design is to poison you, and possess you in the morning of your dayes."³⁸ It is Brooks's concluding reason for dedicating his work to the salvation of the young, however, which strikes the most ominous note:

Seventhly, and lastly, because there are very many that do lye in wait to deceive, corrupt, and Poyson young Persons with God-dishonouring, Christ-denying, conscience-wasting, and soul-damning opinions, Principles, and blasphemies. **[. . .D]**oubtless many wretches, many monsters there be among us, who make it their business, their glory, their all, to delude and draw young persons to those dangerous errours and Blasphemies that leads to destruction, Errour and folly (saith one very well) be the Knots of Satan wherewith he tyes children to the stake to be burnt in hell.³⁹

Despite the gravity of Brooks's prefatory description of the hellish terrors **awaiting the young,** *Apples of Gold* as a whole presents a broadly exhortatory and even optimistic sense of the moral condition of youth. In his first chapter concerning the desirability of young men to be good, Brooks points to the youthful advantage of having committed fewer sins; elsewhere he alludes not only to youth's innocence but also its capacity to love deeply. If converted early, Brooks observes, the young have a greater capacity to retain goodness.⁴⁰ He even offers several catchy aphorisms concerning the relative advantages of an early conversion to readers ("Though true repentance bee never too late, yet late Repentance is seldome true" and "Young

³⁷ Thomas Brooks, *Apples of Gold for Young Men and Women* (London, 1657).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Epistle Dedicatory.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20–21. See also John Flavel, *A Token for Mourners* (London, 1674), 24–5.

Saints often prove Old Angels, but old sinners seldome prove good Saints”). Perhaps his most persuasive arguments concerning youthful goodness, however, can be found in the myriad scriptural examples he offers, culminating with the ultimate moral exemplar in his final exhortatory chapter:

Ah! young men, remember this, when Christ was young hee was tempted and tried, when hee was in the morning of his dayes, his wounds were deep, his burden weighty, his cup bitter, his sweat painfull, his agony and torment, above conception, beyond expression [. . .]. All these great and sad things did Jesus Christ suffer for you, in the prime and flower of his daies [...].⁴¹

In this and the rest of the prominent scriptural exemplars Brooks employs concerning youthful virtue, his specific focus is on young saints who manage not only to repel successfully the corrupting trials and “knots of Satan” described so vividly in the Epistle Dedicatory, but those who have done so in circumstances where corruption is associated with the incumbent civil authority or even the parents of the youth in question. Christ’s virtue is superimposed against the backdrop of Herod’s trials and Roman oppression. Brooks’s text proper then begins with a lengthy exegesis of the latter part of I Kings 14:13-15 (regarding Abijah, “one of grace and prudence,” despite being a child and with parents “set upon evil”), and this example is quickly followed by many more:

To be a Jonathan in Sauls Court, to be an Obadiah in Ahabs Court, to be an Abedmelech in Zebedichias Court, and to be an Abijah in Jeroboams Court, is a wonder, a miracle. To be a Lot in Sodome, to be an Abraham in Chaldea, to be a Daniel in Babylon, to be a Nehemiah in Damasco, and to be a Job in the land of Husse, is to be a Saint among Devils, and such a One the young Man in the Text was.⁴²

This passage on Abijah then extends into the opening of the first chapter when Brooks considers Josiah, who succeeds his father, King David, to the throne at the age of eight and later purges Jerusalem of heresy. The continuing popularity and influence of Brooks’s work after the Restoration encourages reconsideration of how nonconformist ministers deploy examples of young saints, both scriptural or contemporary, in the period after the 1662 Act of

⁴¹ Brooks, *Apples of Gold*, 21, 109–10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 9–10.

Uniformity.⁴³ Whether or not such popular longevity can be attributed to some kind of collective nonconformist response to the stringent measures which reduced their civil liberties so dramatically after 1662 is a subject itself worthy of exploration beyond these parameters.

Brooks's maxim that "old sinners seldome prove good Saints" takes on further resonance in light of ministers' frequent references to the precious resource lost in the early deaths of young nonconformist ministers.⁴⁴ Their dwindling numbers is a theme found in myriad funeral sermons, such as that commemorating Henry Forty, for whom Benjamin Keach laments, "O how many of late have we lost? and how few raised up in their stead? [...] one drops here, and another there." Similarly, Matthew Mead lists by name eight of the "many Faithful Ministers, Eminent Servants of Christ [...] taken away in a few Months" in the margin of the last page of his funeral sermon for Timothy Cruso.⁴⁵

Nowhere is this theme more apparent than James Janeway's spiritual biography for fellow-minister and brother John, who died aged of twenty-three. Richard Baxter modestly observes in his preface,

I am ashamed [. . .] to find that at almost sixty years of age, I am much below what he was raised to at the age of twenty-three. O that God would give my frozen age, such warm reflexions from these his remains, that (according to my need) I may receive more from him that is dead, than ever he had from me alive!⁴⁶

One inference here is that the spiritual value of Janeway's exemplary life outstrips not only secular literature, but possibly even other religious writing such as sermons, both in terms of its capacity to entertain and to prove useful to the reader. This is by no means the only time that Baxter makes this point; in his preface to one of the most popular spiritual biographies of

⁴³ According to his *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB) entry, "[i]n the spectrum of puritan thinkers Brooks may be placed on the radical side of Independency." His "*Apples of Gold for Young Men and Women* (1657) reached seventeen editions by 1693," Tai Liu, "Brooks, Thomas (1608–1680)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3567>.

⁴⁴ The Bartholomean ejections were widespread expulsions of Protestant ministers from the established church for refusing to endorse publicly the revised Book of Common Prayer, which took place on St Bartholomew's Day (17 August) 1662. "Silenced" ministers thus gained their nonconformist identity through an act of noncompliance: see John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603–1689* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998). See also David J. Appleby, *Black Bartholomew's Day: Preaching, Polemic and Restoration Nonconformity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant* (London, 1693), 44; Matthew Mead, *Comfort in Death* (London, 1698), 33.

⁴⁶ Richard Baxter, "Preface to the Christian Reader," in James Janeway, *Invisibles, Realities, Demonstrated in the Holy Life and Triumphant Death of John Janeway* (London, 1673).

the seventeenth century, Theodosia Alleine's *Life* of her husband Joseph, Baxter similarly observes that "the Lives of Holy Men" provide the reader with "God's Image [...] not only in Precept, but in Reality and Practice; not Pictured, but in the Substance . . . the real Impress and Holiness in the Soul, is that living Image of God."⁴⁷ Regarding the earlier and more premature death of John Janeway, Baxter asserts that the lives of exemplary saints can prevail not only over sermons and other religious texts but can even be as "pleasant and profitable" as secular literature (though he does not indicate how or why this might be the case). Moreover, the exemplary life of a young minister like John Janeway might even prove more profitable for readers than - if he had lived longer - more preaching of his own sermons:

We think it great pity, that he lived to preach but two Sermons in the world! [. . .] But who knoweth yet that this One Narrative of his holy exemplary Life and Death, may do as much as more numerous or voluminous writings? [...] (O how much better than Play-books and Romances)! [. . .] And it was God's mercy that they who had but a short life to live, should do more than many that live to the period of natures course.⁴⁸

Janeway's biography indicates many early instances of his brother's holy piety, noting that the child John "was not a little like a young Elihu, whose words he used to excuse his freedom with persons of years, whose souls he did dearly pity," and how (at the age of twenty) he was the instrument of his own father's deathbed conversion.⁴⁹ Beyond Janeway's prolific complement of youthful saints' lives, John Vernon's *The Compleat Schollar*, a biographical narrative of his son Caleb (who died of the plague in September 1665 aged twelve) offers a further example of a saintly child manifesting early signs of ministerial acuity.⁵⁰

Also like James Janeway, John Vernon was incarcerated for his faith in 1660; it is notable how often the accounts of ejected, often imprisoned, nonconformist ministers in this period share the motif of unrealised ministerial talent so relevant in contemporary young saints' lives. Edmund Calamy records James Janeway as an ejected minister despite there

⁴⁷ Richard Baxter, "Preface to the Reader," in Theodosia Alleine, *The Life and Death of Mr. Joseph Alleine* (London, 1672), 13–4.

⁴⁸ Baxter, *op cit*.

⁴⁹ Janeway, *Invisibles, Realities*, 7, 17ff. Keeble notes an extant manuscript in the Bodleian Library gives an account of the life of James's minister brother Abraham (who died in his twenties in 1665) which might be written by James: "Janeway, James (1636–1674)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14651>. Last accessed 01/07/2017.

⁵⁰ See John Vernon, *The Compleat Schollar* (London, 1666), reprinted at least three times in its year of publication.

being, as Keeble's biography observes, "no evidence that he had taken any position in the established church."⁵¹ He is now best remembered for his selfless ministerial conduct toward London's Plague-beseiged populace in 1665, as noted in Section VI of Calamy's introduction to *The Nonconformists' Memorial*, when Janeway and his fellow ministers of the Gospel openly defied the terms of the Act of Uniformity, so "convinced that no obedience to the laws of man could justify their neglecting men's souls and bodies in such extremities."⁵² It is not too fanciful to view Janeway's efforts and writing after 1665 as a kind of response to 1662. The second volume of Calamy's 1666 *Continuation* offers a hair-raising portrait of James Janeway's death-defying exploits immediately after his ejection in 1662, thus implying a youthful minister whose popular profile, at the very least, was already well established before his heroic efforts during the London Plague epidemic. Calamy paints a vivid portrait of how, on more than one occasion, Janeway's popular reputation saved his life and liberty from the armed attacks of High Tory mobs:

[A]s he was walking once upon Redriff Wall, a Fellow shot at him, and the Bullet went through his Hat, but as Providence order'd it, it did him no farther Hurt. The Soldiers pull'd down the Place in which he preach'd, which oblig'd his People to build a larger to receive the Hearers. Soon after this new Place was built, there came a Number of Troopers to it, when Mr Janeway was preaching there [. . .]. At another time Mr Janeway preaching at a Gardener's House, several Troopers came to seize him there. They were diligent in searching for him but he lying down on the Ground, his Friends cover'd him with Cabbage leaves, and so he escap'd them.⁵³

There is a dynamism, even defiance, in Calamy's depiction which demonstrates the assiduous loyalty of Janeway's illegally-gathered followers, further borne out by the popular longevity of his writings during and after his brief lifetime (which ended in 1674 at the age of thirty-eight). Calamy's description of Janeway's heroic escape from armed militia also indicates the violent aggression meted out to some ejected ministers. Thus conceived, Calamy's heroic portrait and Janeway's own literary outlook can be comparably described. Elsewhere, Janeway catalogs numerous traumatic experiences within the providential context—London's devastation wrought by the Plague and the subsequent Great Fire, shipwrecks and seamen's rescues following violent tempests at sea, and other crises—all of which provide stark warnings

⁵¹ Edmund Calamy, *A Continuation of the Account of the Ministers, Lecturers, Masters and Fellows of Colleges, and Schoolmasters* [...], II:II (London, 1727), 962; Keeble, "Janeway, James (1636–1674)."

⁵² Edmund Calamy, introduction to *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. . . , ed. Samuel Palmer (London, 1802), 56.

⁵³ Calamy, *Continuation*, 963.

of the hellfires to come for unheeding sinners of any age.⁵⁴ Suffering provides key motifs for nonconformist literary culture throughout the late seventeenth century, and further scope for the heroic depiction of nonconformist ministers who valiantly maintained their religious conscience under duress.

Even during his lifetime, the motifs of suffering in his works gained Janeway nicknames such as “Crying Jeremy” and “the Seaman’s Preacher,” attesting to his role as spiritual eyewitness and chronicler of this tumultuous period of pestilence, conflagration, and heated division within English Protestantism throughout the 1660s.⁵⁵ Nor was “Crying Jeremy” alone in deploying such metaphors; the preface to John Vernon’s 1666 spiritual biography of Caleb compares the vulnerable souls of children facing mortal destruction to a ship tossed on stormy seas. At the same time, the passage below demonstrates how nonconformists invite readers to profit through the exemplary lives of young saints by becoming “as little Children”:

How far it may concern your selves to become as little Children (in the sence of I Corinthians 14.20 and Matthew 18.3) like the little Subject of this Discourse, I leave to your Consciences [...]. Beware lest your want of wisdome herein expose your tender vessels, newly launched with variety of Natures endowments, to miscarriage in their great Voyage Heaven-wards, for want of your skilful steerage of them amongst those Rock and Sands, on which so many have suffered shipwrack to their utter undoing, through their over-bold adventure thereby, against such fair warnings[.]⁵⁶

There is a complex duality here by which Vernon represents children in this passage. On one hand, they offer the ideal model of innocence to be emulated by adult readers, but are also the “tender vessels” requiring adults’ “skilful steerage”. Vernon exhorts his readers to replace their “want of wisdome” with a “wisdome which is from above,” one already in the possession of godly children who, like his son Caleb, die prematurely but leave behind the legacy of their godly lives. The exemplary union of youthful innocence with godliness seems at its most powerful when the exemplar has died prematurely.

This is equally prevalent in James Janeway’s 1669 funeral sermon for twenty-one-year-old London apothecary Thomas Mowsley when he encourages “the younger sort” of readers to

⁵⁴ See also Janeway’s 1667 sermon collection, *Heaven Upon Earth, or the Best Friend in the Worst of Times* (reissued seven times by 1685) as well as his posthumous *Legacy* to his friends, first published in 1674 (the year of his death) and reprinted at least five times by 1698.

⁵⁵ Keeble, “Janeway, James (1636–1674).”

⁵⁶ Vernon, preface to *The Compleat Scholler*.

falsify that proverb of “young saints and old devils.” This reference, also employed by Brooks in *Apples of Gold* in 1657, recalls a late medieval proverb cited in William Dunbar’s fifteenth-century poem entitled “The Merle and the Nightingale,” in which a traditional allegorical debate between two birds concerning the superiority of religious versus earthly love or, as the nightingale more succinctly puts it, “All love is lost but upon God alone.”⁵⁷ Janeway’s entire oeuvre offers a consistent model of utterly pious yet (necessarily) ephemeral youth embodying a spiritual purity that never survives long enough either to prove or refute this particular proverb.

Janeway’s best-known work, however, still acknowledges the terrifying potential for children to be condemned to damnation. *A Token for Children*’s dedicatory epistle alludes to the same stark choice for dead children mentioned in Brooks’s earlier and Russel’s later texts. It is addressed not to children themselves but instead to “Parents, School-masters and School-mistresses, or any that have any hand in the Education of Children,” thereby suggesting that the heavy remit for children’s soteriological destiny lies with adults since children “are not too little to dye, they are not too little to go to Hell, they are not too little to serve their great Master, too little to go to Heaven.”⁵⁸

Despite these warnings, only one of the thirteen exemplary children Janeway considers throughout *A Token for Children* was actually a “notorious wicked child” who reforms before his death at the age of nine. Janeway’s remaining exemplars, dying between the ages of five and fourteen years (many during the respective Plague epidemics in Leiden in 1664 or London in 1665) even display nascent ministerial qualities. The majority converse with ministers concerning their death in a strikingly mature and learned fashion; many serve as spiritual guides to their elders, in one instance serving as the instrument of conversion for a parent.⁵⁹ Other narratives bear witness to saintly children exhorting their siblings against immorality. Janeway’s final example combines all of these qualities.⁶⁰ Showing early maturity, John Harvy “could speak as well as other children do usually at five years old” before he was three, and is notably zealous (if somewhat precocious), both in weeping over and chiding an adult relation for drinking and gaming, and in beating a neighbour’s child for uttering profanities against

⁵⁷ See R. D. S. Jack, “Dunbar, William (1460?–1513x30),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8208>. Last accessed 01/07/2017.

⁵⁸ James Janeway, “Epistle,” in *A Token for Children* (London, 1676). Vernon makes a similar point in his preface to *The Compleat Scholler*.

⁵⁹ James Janeway, *A Token for Children* [. . .], The Second Part (London, 1673), 14–5.

⁶⁰ The narrative of John Harvy’s life comprises the last example in Janeway’s text, *ibid.*, 69–87.

God. In the face of imminent death by plague at the age of eleven, he seeks to distract his mother from her excessive grief:

a little to divert his Mother, he asked her, what she had to Supper, but presently in a divine Rapture he cried out, O what a sweet Supper have I making ready for me in glory, [. . .] But seeing all this did rather increase then allay his Mothers grief, he was more troubled, and asked her, what she meant, thus to offend God; know you not, that it is the Hand of the Almighty. Humble your self under the mighty hand of God, lay your self in the dust, and kiss the rod of God, and let me see you do it in token of your submission to the will of God, and bow down before him.⁶¹

It has previously been suggested that the notion of “authenticity” in relation to the depiction of saintly children’s conduct is contingent upon readerly expectations of normativity. It is all too easy to see, however, why such portraits of youthly piety are repeatedly questioned. As late as 1722, Defoe is still defending such depictions, and offers a similar response to Janeway concerning God’s providence, though he remains determined to restrict his apologetics in the interest of pursuing his fictional narrative:

Abundance of such Instances he gave of his early Sense of Religion, while he stay’d at this Place; insomuch, that he reformed two Girls in the Family where he was, and their Example reform’d their Mother; but their Stories are too long for this Work. [. . .] Notice may be taken how signally the Providence of GOD provided Instruction, and Opportunity for religious Knowledge in the Infancy of this Child [who] gained a Stock of Knowledge above his Years, which, added to his original Inclination, made him an extraordinary Child every way [. . .].⁶²

The impression given here is one of an abundance of young saints whose capacity to convert others extends beyond the boundaries of the fictional narrative at hand. This is a prominent theme throughout Defoe’s *Family Instructor*, including in the first volume the youngest child who inspires his father to confront his neglect of religious duties in the family household (Part I, Dialogue I) and Thomas, the good apprentice, who converts his irreligious friend Will (Part

⁶¹ Ibid., 86–7.

⁶² Defoe, *The Family Instructor*, Part II (1718), 301–2.

II, Dialogue I). In the second volume, we encounter the angelic Jacky who converts his reprobate father, sister, and servant (Part II, Dialogues III through V).

Both Defoe's and Janeway's young saints often serve as moral and spiritual examples for others but their inability to relate to "common children" is also occasionally stressed. Janeway describes John Harvy as one "much above the vanities that most Children are taken with, and was indeed too much a man to live long," while Anne Lane "could not endure the company of common children, nor play [. . .] she had a strange contempt of the world, and scorned those things which most are too much pleased with."⁶³ This "strange contempt" for seemingly innocent earthly pleasures is also seen in Janeway's brother John, described as possessing "the most earnest desires to be dissolved and with Christ that I ever saw, read, or heard of, since the Apostles time."⁶⁴ As well as chiding his own minister-father for bodily weakness, John Janeway apparently offered a series of individually tailored moral lessons to each sibling, as narrated by brother James in an intensely elaborate deathbed scene sustained over twenty pages. Undoubtedly edifying, such portraits derive their cultural significance from the exemplary value of their subjects' conduct rather than any subjective notion of "credibility."

Early modern nonconformist writing retains distinct hallmarks of dissenters' contemporary experience in their depiction of young saints. This experience is also apparent in later but important transitional works such as Defoe's *Family Instructor*. In tracing the prevalence of the saintly child motif across so many works of ostensibly different genres, this investigation wishes to draw attention to the wider functions served by these depictions of children whose early deaths are preceded by such spiritual – and often ministerial – acumen. Janeway's *Token for Children* witnesses the precocious John Sudlow contradicting an elder in observing that saints have more glory than angels since "Angels were Servants, and Saints are Children; Christ [...] took upon him the nature of Saints."⁶⁵ The superior holiness of mortal children—as spiritual agents who willingly die for their faith—over those "mere" angelic servants of God, is conveyed here by a well-known ejected minister who had made clear his own defiance of the Act of Uniformity. James Janeway's own ministerial experience, curtailed by his death in his thirties, shares with Christ's life the central theme of youth's triumph over seemingly insurmountable odds. The nonconformist tradition provides a wealth

⁶³ Janeway, *A Token for Children*, Part II (1673), 75, 15–17.

⁶⁴ Janeway, *Invisibles, Realities*, 98.

⁶⁵ Janeway, *op cit*, 7.

of exemplary lives to inspire readers accordingly, but it is the narratives of exemplary (and dead) youths themselves, whether authentic or otherwise, where the strongest inspiration is found.