Dissolution, Opposition, Accommodation
Martin Heale

This chapter examines the actions and attitudes of superiors during the Dissolution, when the large majority surrendered their monasteries to the Crown. A number of monastic heads took part in the Pilgrimage of Grace, but apparently with some reluctance, and others actively contributed to the rebellion’s suppression. Similarly, when they were called upon to surrender their houses to the Crown in 1537–40, the large majority of abbots and priors gave way with little overt opposition. This response was partly the product of the regime’s strong-arm tactics, but can also be attributed to the active loyalism of abbots and priors, the internal destabilization that Cromwell’s interventionism had promoted, the generous pensions offered by the regime, and the absence of secular support for opposing the surrenders. Their collective compliance eased the Dissolution, as they modelled conformity to their own communities—conditioned to obey their superiors—and to their lay neighbours alike.

The Sample and the Sources of Evidence
Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone

This chapter argues that the years 1540 and 1880 are terminal dates and were in many ways self-selecting. The year 1540 was the moment when the impact of the Dissolution of the Monasteries first began to make itself felt. The transfer during the 1540s and the early 1550s of perhaps a quarter of the land of England from institutional to private hands,
and the throwing of it upon the private real-estate market, profoundly
affected the whole evolution of English landed society until the end of
the nineteenth century and later. The year 1540 was also about the
time when the Tudor state had reached the point where it could provide
reasonable physical security from armed conflict in the countryside, and
at any rate in the Lowland Zone. The country elite, which are the concern
of this book, were composed of three overlapping groups. The first was
the local power elite, the second was the local status elite, and the third
was the local elite of wealth. The country elite therefore include all those
from whose ranks such persons might be drawn.

From Supremacy to Tyranny, 1533–40
Greg Walker

in Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation
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Item type: chapter

This chapter focuses on two of Elyot’s later dialogues: his translation of
a sermon of St. Cyprian counselling the faithful in times of persecution
and his collection of adagia, The Banquet of Sapience, each of which
seems designed to reflect upon the increasing pressures placed upon the
regular religious and critics of the royal supremacy and break with Rome
in these years.

Cain’s Castles
Alison Milbank

in God & the Gothic: Religion, Romance, & Reality in the English Literary
Tradition
Published in print: 2018 Published Online: November 2018
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Item type: chapter

In Chapter 1, the Reformation is presented as the paradigmatic site
of Gothic escape: the evil monastery can be traced back to Wycliffe’s
‘Cain’s castles’ and the fictional abbey ruin to the Dissolution. Central
Gothic tropes are shown to have their origin in this period: the
Gothic heroine is compared to the female martyrs of Foxe’s Acts and
Monuments; the usurper figure is linked to the papal Antichrist; and the
element of continuation and the establishment of the true heir is related
to Reformation historiography, which needs to prove that the Protestant
Church is in continuity with early Christianity—this crisis of legitimacy is repeated in the Glorious Revolution. Lastly, Gothic uncovering of hypocrisy is allied to the revelation of Catholicism as idolatry. The Faerie Queene is interpreted as a mode of Protestant Gothic and Spenser’s Una provides an allegorical gesture of melancholic distance, which will be rendered productive in later Gothic fiction.

The Abbots and Priors of Late Medieval and Reformation England
Martin Heale

The importance of the medieval abbot needs no particular emphasis. The monastic superiors of late medieval England ruled over thousands of monks and canons, who swore to them vows of obedience; they were prominent figures in royal and church government; and collectively they controlled properties worth around double the Crown’s annual ordinary income. As guardians of regular observance and the primary interface between their monastery and the wider world, abbots and priors were pivotal to the effective functioning and well-being of the monastic order. This book provides the first detailed study of English monastic superiors, exploring their evolving role and reputation between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Individual chapters examine the election of late medieval monastic heads; the internal functions of the superior as the father of the community; the head of house as administrator; abbatial living standards and modes of display; monastic superiors’ public role in service of the Church and Crown; their external relations and reputation; the interaction between monastic heads and the government in Henry VIII’s England; the Dissolution of the monasteries; and the afterlives of abbots and priors following the suppression of their houses. This study of monastic leadership sheds much valuable light on the religious houses of late medieval England, including their spiritual life, administration, spending priorities, and their multi-faceted relations with the outside world. It also elucidates the crucial part played by monastic superiors in the dramatic events of the 1530s, when many heads surrendered their monasteries into the hands of Henry VIII.
The City of God in history
Kathryn Walls

in God's only daughter: Spenser's Una as the invisible Church

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In cantos ii-iii Spenser allegorizes the history of the heavenly City’s relationship with the visible institutions that have failed to accommodate it: Abessa’s flight represents the rejection of the gospel by the Synagogue; Una’s miserable night in the house of Corceca represents the fate of the redeemed in a superstitious pre-Reformation Church. Joined by Archimago, and attacked by Sans Loy, Una represents the abiding predicament of the redeemed. The allegory of Christ’s life (and death) on earth incorporates a quasi-prophetic allegory of the history of the Church under Henry VIII: the lion’s slaughter of Kirkrapine, for instance, alludes both to Christ’s expulsion of the money-changers from the Temple and to the dissolution of the monasteries.