

## ABSTRACT

Title: THE TUDOR ANTICHRISTS, 1485-1603  
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The sixteenth-century Antichrist often dons the papal tiara, and he occasionally wears the Spanish crown. He hides in German clerics, and he appears as the Grand Turk, an Eastern harbinger of a not-so-distant Doomsday. While scholars acknowledge the persistence of this figure in Reformation polemic, no critical study examines its multiple rhetorical, linguistic, and metaphoric functions in sixteenth-century texts. My dissertation fills this gap. I examine the figure of the Antichrist in the theological, political, and literary works of Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, Thomas More, William Tyndale, John Bale, Thomas Kirchmeyer, Francis Davison, John Jewel, Thomas Harding, Edmund Spenser, and others. These sixteenth-century writers adapt medieval Antichrist lore to accommodate a new understanding of the figure—one that is increasingly political and tied to emerging notions of English national identity. The Antichrist in particular reveals the inherent difficulty of considering late sixteenth-century texts in isolation from the traditional Middle Ages, and my study joins the ongoing conversation about the putative

medieval/early-modern period divide. I argue that the depth of Reformation writers' religious and political arguments derives in good measure from the afterlife of early exegetical traditions. Hence, in the figure of the Antichrist, latent medieval apocalypticism intersects with sixteenth-century notions of eschatology and millennialism, imperialism, and nascent Orientalism.

THE TUDOR ANTICHRISTS, 1485-1603

By

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Antechrist, nowe ys comyn thy day.  
Reigne no longer thowe ne maye.  
    He that hath ladd the alwey,  
    nowe hym thowe most go to.  
No mo men shalbe shente by the.  
My lorde wyll dede that thou be.  
He that hath gyvon the this poste  
    thy soule shall underfoe.

Chester, *The Coming of Antichrist*, ll. 625-632

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## INTRODUCTION

The Antichrist (from the Greek, *ἀντί χριστός*, meaning “against Christ”) was a veritable celebrity in the sixteenth-century imagination. As Protestant Bishop John Jewel suggests in a mid-century sermon, there was “none, neither olde nor yong: neither learned nor unlearned, but he hath heard of Antichrist” (*Certaine Sermons*, sig. Tv r). Antichrist’s notoriety was due in large part to the significant role he played in the Reformation: as Howard Hotson has noted, the period understood the reform debate as “the culmination of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan” (162). As Satan’s chief Apocalyptic front man, Antichrist was at the very center of this upheaval, and “nothing could have lent itself more readily to graphic representation, vivid dramatization, or popular comprehension than the simple dualism of Christ and Antichrist” (Hotson 162). R.W. Scriber portrays this dualism as “one of the most lasting and effective creations of evangelical propaganda” (qtd. Hotson 162). Antichrist’s name peppers the writings of every major player in this great debate. Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, Thomas More, John Fisher, William Tyndale, John Bale, Matthew Parker, John Foxe, and John Jewel are among the major sixteenth-century theologians who speculate about Antichrist’s probable arrival and argue for the eschatological implications of the Reformation; and at one time or another, every sixteenth-century English monarch suggests that the Antichrist had infiltrated the realm.



Although scholars acknowledge the persistence of this figure in Reformation writing, no critical study examines the multiple rhetorical, linguistic, and metaphoric functions of Antichrist in these sixteenth-century texts. There has been thorough work on the book-ending periods: Richard Emmerson addresses late medieval depictions of the figure in his seminal work, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*; Christopher Hill investigates the Jacobean and Caroline Antichrists in his own influential study, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England*. Yet this current scholarly narrative—which explores the Antichrist’s earlier and later permutations without addressing the intermediate period—overlooks a distinct moment of transition in which the definition of Antichrist changed alongside England’s own shifting religious and political allegiances. My cultural history of the Tudor Antichrist fills this critical gap. While the sixteenth-century certainly did not invent the idea of Antichrist, it undoubtedly “reshaped and adapted it” (Bauckhan 91). Sixteenth-century writers reworked the Antichrist lore of the Middle Ages to accommodate a new understanding of the figure—one that was increasingly political and tied to emerging notions of English national identity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While there are no book-length studies of the sixteenth-century Antichrist, Richard Bauckham and Bernard McGinn have written important chapter-length studies that begin to suggest Antichrist’s elaborate and contradictory taxonomy in Reformation writing. Bauckham devotes a chapter to Antichrist in his *Tudor Apocalypse*, the only extended study of sixteenth-century apocalypticism and millenarianism. Yet while Bauckham argues that Antichrist “looms very large in the apocalyptic imagery of Tudor Protestantism,” Antichrist is not his focus (91). Bernard McGinn’s recent popular history, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, focuses entirely on the figure of Antichrist, yet he situates the sixteenth-century Antichrist on a wide-reaching timeline—one that extends from Antichrist’s earliest appearances to contemporary applications. McGinn acknowledges the importance of Reformation thought in Antichrist’s history, but the sixteenth-century Antichrist still only occupies one chapter in a more comprehensive study. In short, Bauckham and McGinn’s broader objectives necessarily (and understandably) limit their treatment of the sixteenth-century Antichrist. Yet despite the absence of an extended study of the sixteenth-century Antichrist, the recent arguments of John Parker, Peter Lake, and Michael Questier all hinge on Antichrist’s deeply rooted place in the Tudor imagination. In *The Aesthetics of Antichrist*, Parker argues that sustained familiarity with Antichrist legend shapes Christopher Marlowe’s dramatic choices and his audiences’

The Antichrist begins the sixteenth-century century as a man and ends the century as a trope. Early tracts define Antichrist as an individual—a single Apocalyptic harbinger who will wage one last campaign against God’s faithful in the days before the final Judgment. Significantly, he is a future, not a present threat. Yet over the course of the century, Antichrist seems to have already arrived, since writers argue that traditional prophecies have come to fulfillment in the actions of their ideological opponents. These writers target Catholics, Protestants, and Turks alike; thus, the Antichrist wears a variety of costumes in the sixteenth-century. He often dons the papal tiara, and he occasionally wears the Spanish crown; he disguises himself as a German cleric and appears as the Grand Turk, an Eastern harbinger of a not-so-distant Doomsday. These images of Antichristian popes, monarchs, reformers, and invaders all suggest how Reformation culture imagined a collective Antichrist, not a discreet individual. The papal Antichrist, for example, was not a single man, but an entire, corrupt institution comprised of many men. Sixteenth-century writers defined the Antichrist as a figurative body—not a literal man, but a collective evil that opposed the mystical body of Christ. At first, this figurative Antichrist was defined by institutional boundaries: Antichrist consisted of the papacy or, alternatively, a discreet group of reformers, Spanish kings, or Eastern threats. Yet notions of an institutional Antichrist quickly gave way to a more inclusive enemy—

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perception of them; in *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat*, Lake and Questier argue that familiar binaries of “order and disorder, vice and virtue, and Christ and Antichrist” frame depictions of evil in Elizabethan and early Stuart cheap print, pamphlets, sermons, and drama (xxvi). In other words, Parker, Lake, and Questier not only use Antichrist as a governing framework for their analyses, but they also necessarily assume Antichrist’s pervasive and nuanced presence in the sixteenth-century imagination— a presence that no study yet explores in sustained and specific terms.

one who was not confined to a particular institution—but who comprised everyone who abetted or embraced the false church.

Antichrist's transition from individual to aggregate is particularly evident in the opening banns of the Chester Mystery Cycle (c. 1400)—the only extant English cycle to include an Antichrist play.<sup>2</sup> As David Mills suggests, the two versions of the Chester banns reveal that performances of the Dyers' *The Coming of Antichrist* may have differed significantly over the course of the cycle's extended stage history. The pre-Reformation banns announce simply that the Dyers will mount a play of Antichrist on a rather impressive pageant wagon: "The Hewsters that be men full sage / They bring forth a worthy carriage; / That is a thing of grett costage— / *Antycryst* hit hight" (ll. 140-143). The post-Reformation banns offer more detail about the content of the Dyers' production: "And then, you Dyers and Huesters, *Antichrist* bring out— / first with his Doctor, that goodly may expound / who be Antichrists in the world round about" (ll. 173-175).<sup>3</sup> The later banns advertise an exposé of sorts: the Chester Doctor will, presumably, suggest that the Antichrist is not merely a future threat, but a contemporary one; and he will, it seems, identify these contemporary Antichrists by name.

We will never know for certain who fell prey to the Doctor's reproofs. The extant play makes no such denunciations, leaving scholars to suggest that the Dyers' drama must have undergone a revision, now lost, in the wake of the Reformation.

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<sup>2</sup> The earliest known reference to the Chester plays dates to 1422, but as Mills acknowledges in the introduction to his modern-spelling edition, this reference cites "a play already well-established" (xiii). The extant Chester manuscripts are all from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

<sup>3</sup> References to the pre-Reformation banns refer to the *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, edited by Lumiansky and Mills. The post-Reformation banns are taken from Mills' edition, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition with Moderized Spelling*.

Yet the revision of the Chester banns is nonetheless significant for the study of sixteenth-century representations of the Antichrist: the post-Reformation banns suggest that a change took place in the way writers used the figure. The Chester play instructs its audience in the “tokening / of this thief’s coming” (l. 273) and illustrates aspects of Antichrist’s malicious character: Antichrist is a hypocrite and a tyrant who uses false miracles, bribes, terrors, and eventually torture to persuade or coerce many to worship him as the true Christ. He is a dangerous, future counterfeit; he is not, significantly, a contemporary person. As Richard Emmerson notes, in the pre-Reformation banns and the play itself, “Antichrist is Antichrist—an eschatological deceiver who need not be identified” (“Contextualizing Performance,” 90). But the post-Reformation banns suggest the Chester Antichrist later became a polemical weapon: the revised play would not only illustrate the Antichrist’s “tokens” but would also identify particular people as Antichrists in the “world round about.” This post-Reformation Antichrist was now present (not future) and plural (not singular).

In this way, sixteenth-century polemical applications of the Antichrist are distinct from the prevailing conceptions of the Antichrist in the late Middle Ages. Imagining an aggregate or figurative Antichrist—one comprised of many individual members—“required modification of the received interpretation” of traditional Antichrist legends (Hotson 161). This study explores these modifications and considers what they reveal about sixteenth-century cultural and ideological transition. That being said, this study also reveals numerous ways early uses of the Antichrist resonate in later, seemingly different, applications of the figure. The depth of Reformation writers’ religious and political arguments derives in good measure from

the afterlife of early exegetical traditions. John Bale, for example, reveals the complicated ways that the pre-Reformation Antichrist tradition remains latent in the emergent polemical one. Bale's play *King Johan* relentlessly portrays the Pope as a tyrant Antichrist who tries to seize political control from England's twelfth-century king; however, King John detects the Antichrist precisely because Bale's papal figure, Usurped Power, performs many of the signs highlighted in early exegetical texts. While Bale's polemical application of Antichrist differs in many ways from pre-Reformation depictions of the figure, his portrayal of Usurped Power nonetheless reinforces the Antichrist tradition of the Middle Ages—a tradition doubtlessly ingrained in the sixteenth-century cultural imagination.<sup>4</sup>

This tradition featured Antichrist in prophecies about the end of the world, and the sixteenth century also inherits a medieval Apocalyptic discourse—one that not only uses Antichrist as its avatar but that also evokes terror and urgency (even, at times, hysteria) regarding a potential Doomsday. Reformation writers frequently debate whether their theological and political strife signals the imminent end of days, and in this way, medieval apocalypticism intersects with sixteenth-century notions of eschatology and millennialism, imperialism, and nascent Orientalism. Martin Luther's apocalypticism—shared by English Reformers like Bale and John Foxe—is at least one of the ways the Middle Ages haunt the Renaissance. At the same time, Luther's preoccupation with the end time ultimately separates him from those like Erasmus

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Emmerson notes the influence of medieval conceptions of the Antichrist upon the sixteenth-century "popular imagination": "Although many specifics of the legend never became specific doctrine, Antichrist—like the Fifteen Signs of Doomsday and the antics of demons during the Last Judgment—was a lively part of the popular imagination fascinated with the last things. This shared understanding of the Antichrist is evident in many accounts, Latin and vernacular, addressed to both religious and lay audiences, and inscribed in both deluxe manuscripts and delivered in sermons" ("Contextualizing Performance," 100).

who dismiss apocalyptic speculation as rhetorical hyperbole. Erasmus's skepticism tempers Luther's apocalyptic urgency, and this study also suggests how Doomsday fears abate over the course of the century. As Antichrist transitions from an individual to an aggregate evil, he simultaneously moves from being indomitable to being resistible, if not conquerable. In this way, Antichrist paradoxically becomes more manageable as he grows more diffuse: his emerging figurative stature seems to empower human volition, in the same way that Renaissance humanism found empowerment in the figurative and the literary. Doomsday was still inevitable, but it could be postponed.

The medieval Antichrist tradition adapted by sixteenth-century writers originates in Biblical exegesis. Richard Emmerson cites I John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3; and II John 7 as the four passages that "form the basis for the medieval understanding of Antichrist," but he notes that "the numerous features of the medieval Antichrist legend obviously are not limited to the direct references to Antichrist found in I and II John" (*Antichrist*, 36). Other passages that refer to Antichrist-like figures include 2 Thessalonians 2: 3-11, Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and Acts 8. All of these passages provide details about lawless men who act in Christ's place to deceive the faithful. Specific images in the Book of Revelation also comprise Antichrist's Biblical origins, particularly the locusts in chapter 9, which are often identified as AC's forerunners; the beast of the abyss that attacks the two witnesses in chapter 11; and the seven-headed beast of the sea in chapter 13. Exegetes also address the possible relevance of the Book of Daniel to the understanding of Antichrist, although the meaning and relevance of Daniel's opaque imagery is frequently disputed in both

medieval and sixteenth-century exegesis. Behemoth and Leviathan of Job 40 and 41 are also frequently glossed as images of the Antichrist, as are Gog and Magog in Ezekial 38 and 39.

Despite these multiple allusions to Antichrist across both Testaments, John's epistles are the only books to identify Antichrist explicitly by name. The most frequently cited passage is I John 2:18, which suggests that Antichrist is both a present and a future threat: "... it is the last time, and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists whereby we know it is the last time."<sup>5</sup> Medieval authors generally acknowledge both aspects of this bipartite definition, distinguishing between two kinds of Antichrists, yet they often emphasize one aspect of this definition over another. On one hand, chroniclers like the tenth-century French Abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der (d. 992) emphasize the predicted life and signs of a great, future Antichrist who will precede Christ's Second Coming.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Augustine downplays an Apocalyptic threat, insisting in *De Civitate*

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<sup>5</sup> Biblical references always refer to the 1560 Geneva translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> The anonymous sixteenth-century pamphlet *Here begynneth the byrthe and lyfe of the moost [false] and deceyfull Antechryst* (Wynkyn de Worde, c.1525?) is based in large part on Adso's tenth-century biography of the Antichrist, *Libellus de Antichristo*. *Here Begynneth* epitomizes the traditional lore about the capital Antichrist—legends that endured in the sixteenth-century and that Protestant polemicists both challenged and incorporated. To summarize the general legend: Antichrist will be conceived in sin (in the *Here Begynneth* version, as the result of an incestuous relationship between a sinful father and his depraved daughter) and born in Babylon into the lost Tribe of Dan; he will be raised as a Jew; as a child, he will be taught magic and illusion, which he will later use to deceive faithful; he will eventually seize political power through bribery and torture; and only two witnesses, identified as Enoch and Elijah, will see through his skillful charade and attempt to warn the faithful. Antichrist will murder these two prophets, but God will resurrect them and eventually order Antichrist's own destruction at the hands of the Archangel, Michael. After reigning for three and one-half years, Antichrist will attempt a mock-Ascension, but will instead be carried, body and soul, into hell. The destruction of the earth will shortly follow, an event that will usher in the Final Judgment and, eventually, the establishment of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, as prophesied in Revelation 20. Protestant reformers who posited a wholly new vision of a collective capital Antichrist needed to square their definition against these traditional expectations, explaining how legends about a single, literal Antichrist pointed instead to a figurative villain who would not be born at specific time in a specific place to particular parents.

*Dei* that “the time of the final persecution has been revealed to no human being” (838). Rather than focus on the end time, he stresses the persistent and recurring Antichrists that plague the everyday believer. Adso writes of the capital Antichrist, and Augustine of that figure’s forbearers. Put another way, Augustine emphasizes the Antichrists who are “already,” and Adso highlights the one who is “not yet.”<sup>7</sup> The thirteenth-century Italian theologian Peter Olivi describes this as the difference between *Antichristus mysticus* and *Antichristus magnus*; other authors frequently distinguish “common” Antichrists from the “capital” or “notorious” Antichrist.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the terminology used, there is an emphasis on two discreet kinds: one whom Augustine highlights as recurring, synchronic, typological; and the other whom Adso stresses as finite, diachronic, and teleological. Yet not all sixteenth-century writers are so careful to qualify their use of “Antichrist,” and writers and readers frequently dispute the meaning of “Antichrist” just as intensely as they wrangle over his identity. Unsurprisingly, readers were then left to consider what exactly it meant when an author used the term.

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<sup>7</sup> Exegetes used John’s epistles to characterize the Antichrist as both “already” and “not yet”; however, it is important to note that John himself actually suggests that the singular Antichrist and his many counterparts exist concurrently in the present. He explicitly specifies that the many general Antichrists are an indication that the end time has arrived: “even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last time” (2:18). Yet because this end obviously did not come, exegetes tended to interpret the passage as describing a distinct teleology— one in which a series of historical Antichrists prefigure a final Antichrist who will arrive at some undetermined, future time. In other words, the many Antichrists whom John describes are part of a trajectory of evil that points toward a future, final Antichrist. Emerson admits that the passage itself “stresses the end of time, which can be confidently identified as the present because of the appearance of Antichrist,” but it “is also the source of the medieval belief in multiple Antichrists, the representatives of evil who already plague the church” (*Antichrist*, 36).

<sup>8</sup> See Bernard McGinn in “Angel Pope and Papal Antichrist” for a discussion of Peter Olivi (c. 1248-1298) and his apocalyptic theology.



The first chapter uses these problems of definition to launch its discussion of early reform writers Erasmus, Luther, More and Tyndale. It establishes the early sixteenth-century Antichrist as a lively and adaptable figure that lends itself to elaborate and often contradictory taxonomies in early Reformation writing. Like Adso, Luther uses the term to identify the capital Antichrist; like Augustine, Erasmus tends to downplay the Apocalypse and focuses instead on a general threat that was indicative of corruption and sinfulness, but not necessarily Doomsday. I argue that Luther embraces a literal definition of the term “Antichrist” while Erasmus asserts a figurative one. These continental uses of Antichrist frame the chapter’s concluding discussion of the English writers Thomas More and William Tyndale.

It is not long, though, before sixteenth-century writers complicate these neat distinctions. These complications result in part from a fundamental breakdown in the traditional interpretation of John’s epistles. Bernard McGinn suggests that during the Reformation, there “was no longer a question of multiple forms of Antichrist beliefs (Antichrist as one or many, as present or future, as mystical or great) coexisting within a common frame of reference; it was rather a sundering of mutually exclusive conceptions fundamentally at odds with one another” (*Antichrist*, 200). This sundering emerged as Protestant polemicists began to conceptualize the capital Antichrist as a figurative body that was one *and* many, present *and* future, mystical *and* great. In this way, Luther’s capital Antichrist is not exactly the same as Adso’s: while Luther, like Adso, describes an Apocalyptic villain, his papal Antichrist does not share Adso’s traditional biography.

The second chapter argues that in order to align the papacy with Antichrist, Luther must challenge and reinterpret the very legend that Adso advocated. While Adso and other medieval exegetes had maintained that the capital Antichrist “shulde be one onely man” (Bullinger, A Commentary, fol. 16r), Luther wrestled with a new definition that imagined a collective capital Antichrist—a “whole succession of many men” (Dove, sig. C8 v) that would together usher in the Apocalypse. John Dove argues, for example, that “by a Synecdoche” the term ‘Antichrist’ signifies “the head & prince of an entire Antichristian Apostacie and rebellion” (Dove, sig. C8 v). By considering John’s epistles figuratively, Luther and other polemicists could envisage the capital Antichrist as “an whole kyngedome and an whole bodye which shuld fughte against Christe” (Bullinger, A Commentary, fol. 16r). What emerges is a radical, new understanding of the Antichrist that redefines the literal Antichrist in figurative terms. Reformers argued that the pope was, finally, Antichrist, not because he was this corrupt person or that corrupt person, but because he embodied an institution that was itself spiritually corrupt. Luther proposes a collective, capital Antichrist—one who is not a single man, or even a single pope, but the entire institution of successive papal Antichrists.<sup>9</sup> In this, Luther fuses the bipartite definition with which he and Erasmus wrestle in their early writing: those many Antichrists collectively form the figurative body of the capital one.<sup>10</sup> Strictly

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<sup>9</sup> As Howard Hotson notes, “Protestant reformers were not of course the first to associate the papacy with Antichrist: they themselves were fond of citing figures ranging from Dante, Petrarch, and Bernard of Clairveaux to Joachim of Fiore, Savonarola, Wyclif, and Hus” (163, n. 10). Yet these earlier writers implicated individual corrupt popes; reformers were the first to associate the Antichrist with the entire papal institution.

<sup>10</sup> In this, Luther adopts something in between an Adsonian approach to the Antichrist legend and a Tyconian one: while Adso warned of an Antichrist who was a single, historical figure who would usher in the end time, the fourth-century African Donatist, Tyconius, argued that “the Antichrist

speaking, there is only one capital Antichrist at a time—that is, one man who, at any given time, is bishop of Rome—but as an historical institution, the successive popes collectively bring about the literal Doomsday. Thus, Luther’s capital Antichrist is, at once, both many and one, already and not yet. This new conception of Antichrist defines all future discussion, particularly as the Antichrist makes his way to England in the polemic of William Tyndale and others.<sup>11</sup>

The conclusion of the second chapter considers sixteenth-century polemical Antichrist drama, which actualizes the abstract theology of contemporary prose tracts and thus forms a critical part of Antichrist’s history in the sixteenth-century. The stage has no choice but to render Luther’s highly abstract definition in concrete visual terms, and Thomas Kirchmeyer’s Latin drama *Pammachius* (Wittenburg, 1538)—arguably the first Protestant Antichrist play—gives us the first glimpse of Luther’s figurative, institutional Antichrist in action. Kirchmeyer, like Luther, wrestles with a complex theology that supplants traditional prophecies about a single Antichrist with a Protestant vision of an institutional one; but as a dramatist, Kirchmeyer faces the vexing challenge of having to give concrete, visual form to this new figure.

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represents the aggregate body of evil within the church” (Bostick 20). Luther suggests that the papal Antichrist is itself the “aggregate body”—or institution—that collectively ushers in the end time. See Curtis V. Bostick for a discussion of the Lollard appropriation of Tyconian thought and the degree to which Luther is indebted to early Lollard discussions of a papal Antichrist. I am interested in the ways that Luther popularizes this conception of the corporate Antichrist, and in turn, the ways in which his writings directly influence early English Protestant conceptions of the Antichrist.

<sup>11</sup> As Howard Hotson has noted, “Wherever the Protestant rejection of the Roman church spread . . . the notion of the papal Antichrist spread with it, not in the least because it was one of the most potent bearers of that message. In a wide range of documents—including Melanchthon’s apology for the Augsburg Confession, Luther’s Schmalkald Articles, and confessions of the Bohemian Brethren and the English, Scottish and Irish churches—we find the identification of the papacy as the Antichrist treated as an article of faith” (162).

Chapter three addresses how English reformer and dramatist John Bale tackles a similar problem in *King Johan* (1538). Bale's solution is to appropriate popular pre-Reformation Antichrist tableaux and re-contextualize traditional Antichrist lore to accommodate Luther's institutional vision of the figure. At the same time, Bale demonstrates how quickly the collective Antichrist can expand outside these institutional boundaries. He presents a dramatic Antichrist who emerges as a kind of epidemic that dangerously spreads from one individual to the next. This mid-century polemic offers a palpable sense that there is no limit to the number of members who can join Antichrist's figurative body. Mid-century polemicists like Bale suggest that spiritual complicity with the Antichrist is a matter of the individual will; thus, Antichrist's villainy can spread seemingly uncontrollably among the complacent and the weak-willed. At the same time, Bale and others explore the possibility that Antichrist's members can reform or be reformed: the faithful will not yield without a fight, and the reform effort specifically seeks to curb the expansion of Antichrist's spiritual empire. English polemicists like John Bale increasingly depict the battle against Antichrist as England's own manifest destiny. Bale depicts an aggregate villain who is not only an enemy of the Church, but who is specifically the enemy of England. Hardly resigned to succumb to the Antichrist, England (led by its divinely appointed monarch) is called to resist and overcome him.

The final chapter seizes upon this sense of England's role in Antichrist's teleology and expands on Bale's sense of Antichrist's ever-growing membership. The chapter examines the figure of Homer's shape-shifting sea god, Proteus, whom Elizabethan writers frequently link to the Antichrist. Proteus transforms successively into innumerable shapes much like Antichrist manifests in multiple, ever-changing

exteriors. Proteus is also the mythic king of the Egyptians, and this chapter demonstrates the ways in which writers similarly cast the Antichrist as a foreign outsider, evoking Antichrist's exoticism in a debate about English nationalism. Bale had urged his audience (and his King) to be wary of Antichrists within England, specifically those lurking among the nobility, clergy, and even the commonality—those whose complicity with the pope could endanger themselves, not to mention their monarch and their nation. For Bale, the fight against Antichrist is internal and introspective; he urges his English audience to weigh whether their own lingering papal allegiances have made them part of Antichrist's mystical body. Yet late-century texts like Francis Davison's *The Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* (1599) locate the Antichrist not within England, but outside of it—specifically in Spain. Protestant Bishop John Jewel and Catholic recusant Thomas Harding additionally use images of an Eastern Antichrist to reassign the national identity of their English opposition. These writers consistently characterize Antichrist as non-English: their Antichrist is an outsider—one whom they sometimes describe as Spanish, Persian, and Turkish, but invariably cast as “Other”—whose foreign nationalism is distinctly at odds with “Englishness.” Late-century writers like William Averell, Robert Greene, and George Peele all reveal that the Antichrist was a key player in the formulation of mid-sixteenth-century notions of English identity that underwrite seventeenth-century conceptions of nationhood.

## CHAPTER 1:

### ANTICHRIST IN EARLY REFORMATION POLEMIC

In 1528, Strasbourg printer Johann Schott published one of the earliest Protestant tracts in English: an inflammatory anticlerical work provocatively titled *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*.<sup>1</sup> In not so subtle terms, its anonymous authors (generally thought to be the English exiles Jerome Barlowe and William Roye) blast Cardinal Wolsey, the Mass, clerical celibacy, and church corruption in general.<sup>2</sup> They are, in fact, the first

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<sup>1</sup> I cite Douglas Parker's edition, which titles the tract after its opening lines: "Rede me and be nott wrothe, / For I say no thyng but trothe." However, Parker also acknowledges A.G. Dickens and E. Gordon Rupp, both of whom argue for the pamphlet's popular title, *The Burying of the Mass*. A 1530 English proclamation lists *The Burying of the Mass* among those books banned by the government. Yet as Parker suggests, the tract "deals with a wide variety of subjects, only one of which happens to be the mass" (5).

<sup>2</sup> The pamphlet was published anonymously, no doubt because of its inflammatory content. For a concise discussion of authorship see Parker's introduction, pp. 29ff. Some suggest that Jerome Barlowe was the lone author. (See, for example, E. Gordon Rupp's seminal work in *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition*, pp. 55ff; and Anthea Hume's subsequent study, pp. 100ff.) However, Parker argues convincingly that "it would be unwise to exclude Roye on such slim evidence" (33); see pp. 33ff. In terms of biography: both Jerome Barlowe and William Roye were apostate Observant Franciscans (Foley and Miller xxvii). As Parker notes, Roye is best known through his association with William Tyndale during the production of his English New Testament. For more on Tyndale and Roye's apparently strained relationship, as well as Barlowe's activities in Cologne, see Parker pp. 30ff. Apart from serving briefly as Tyndale's research assistant, Roye authored the first Protestant theological tract in English, *A Breve Dialogue between a Christen Father and his Stobborne Sonne* (1527), a translation of Wolfgang Capito's *De Pueris Instituendis Ecclesiae Argentinensis Isagoge*, published in Latin and German in 1527 (Parker and Krajewski 3). Roye's English tract "launched an anticlerical attack on the understanding of the sacraments as good works valid by their mere performance, explaining that baptism and the Eucharist were outward means of effecting an inward spiritual process" (Foley and Miller xxvii). *Rede Me* continues in this vein although, as Foley and Miller note, its incidental engagement with the sacramentarian controversy, perhaps further denigrated by its cheeky rhymes, "does not constitute a serious presentation of sacramentarian theology" (xxvii). Apart from scattered biographical information, mostly preserved in Tyndale's own writings, little else is known of Roye. Even less is known of Barlowe. He presumably joined Roye in Strasbourg after Roye parted ways with Tyndale. He was identified by A. Koszul as one "William Barlo" who acknowledges authorship of "The Treatyse of the Buryall of the Masse" in a written confession to Henry VIII in 1533; see also M.M. Knappen. Andrew M. McLean believes that the handwriting of this document matches exactly with Bishop William Barlowe's hand in a letter to Cromwell one year later. Bishop Barlowe, as McLean succinctly recounts, "served as a diplomat and bishop under Henry VIII and bishop under Edward VI, went into exile during Mary's reign, returned when Elizabeth became queen and consecrated her first archbishop [Matthew Parker]" (McLean, ed. 156). However, E. Gordon Rupp takes issue with Koszul and his elision of Jerome and William. More recently, both Parker and McLean have likewise argued that the two were certainly different

English reformers to associate the pope with the Antichrist, alleging that “Antichrist so inveterate [is] / Called the pope of Rome” (l. 2357, sig. f8r) with “his keys, lock, chains, and fetters ... and his golden three folded crown” (ll. 90, 96, sig. a7r).<sup>3</sup> Not only do they denounce the pope outright, but they further designate Wolsey as “Antichrist’s chief member” (l. 3533, sig. i5r), friars as “antichrist’s godsons” (l. 1720, sig. e4v), and preachers as his sworn confederates (l. 2356 f., sig. f8r). Barlowe and Roye mention “Antichrist” nearly twenty times over the course of their roughly four thousand lines, warning variously against his “reign” (l. 403, sig. b4v), his “estate” (l. 625, sig. b8v), his “sect” (l. 759, sig. c3r), his “members” (l. 1332, sig. d5r), and his “bonds so thrall” (l.1611, sig. e2v)—all of which they associate with the Roman church, its leaders, and its adherents. Indeed, “Antichrist” is even the last word of the tract: the final printed page depicts the papal coat of arms, and the caption

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individuals, emphasizing that Jerome was a Greenwich friar, while William was identified specifically as an Augustinian canon on the title page of his *Dialogue Against the Lutheran Factions*. See Parker pp. 31ff. and McLean, ed. 169ff. Yet G.E. Duffield has recently reexamined Koszul’s argument and made a provocative (if admittedly tentative) case that Jerome Barlowe and Bishop William Barlowe are one and the same man, with “Jerome” being the Bishop’s pseudonym. He cites the matching handwriting, as well as some interesting (and speculative) associations between Jerome/William with Thomas More. See his chapter “Authorship: An Alternative View” in McLean’s edition.

<sup>3</sup>Of course, Wyclif had discovered the Antichrist in Rome long before Barlowe and Roye had alleged the same. Here, I distinguish Lollard writings from Barlowe and Roye’s Lutheran polemic. Yet, as Curtis V. Bostick notes, it is important to recognize the influence of Lollard polemic upon the early reformers. Wyclif’s *Twenty-five Points* (c. 1388) begins by calling the pope Antichrist (McGinn, *Antichrist*, 182). The sixteenth-century printing of the fifteenth-century Lollard tract *Here begynethe the lanterne of lyght* (1535) also recounts Lollard tenets on the Antichrist, c. 1410. For a comprehensive discussion of Lollard teachings on the Antichrist see Bostick. See also Bernard McGinn’s overview in *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, pp. 181ff. For a discussion of Luther’s consideration of Lollardy and the influence of Lollard doctrine and reform strategy on sixteenth-century reformers, see Bostick, p. 54-6, and Scott H. Hendrix.

condemns “Pope Clement, the son of a whore” (l. 3714, sig. i8v) and “the tyranny of the murderer Antichrist” (l. 3719, sig. i8v).<sup>4</sup>

Barlowe and Roye, in short, have a penchant for Apocalyptic name-calling. But their no-holds-barred approach was nothing new, even in these early years of the Reformation. By the late 1520s, the papal Antichrist was ubiquitous in early continental reform polemic. Martin Luther had hinted at a Romish Antichrist since early 1520, finally accusing the pope outright in 1521.<sup>5</sup> Other reformers had quickly followed suit, leaving Erasmus to wonder if the only way to “become a great theologian” was to “cram in all the time that the pope is Antichrist, that decisions handed down by men are heretical, ceremonies are an abomination, and more of the same sort” (1510, 412).<sup>6</sup> In a 1524 letter to Caspar Ursinus Velius, Erasmus

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<sup>4</sup> On this papal coat of arms, see Parker, pp. 45-47. Barlowe and Roye use a similar device at the beginning of the book, presenting a fictional coat of arms for Wolsey and offering a similarly scathing description of it, cf. sig. a1r.

<sup>5</sup> In his 1521 tract *Against Latomus*, Luther affirms, “I give thanks to my Lord Jesus Christ who, on account of this assault, has repaid me a hundred times with the knowledge—of which I am now convinced—that the pope is the Antichrist, the sign of the end prophesied throughout the Scriptures” (141). I take this to be Luther’s first definitive published assertion of a papal Antichrist although, as I discuss in Chapter Two below, other critics designate earlier declarations. Despite this slight disagreement, critics agree that Luther’s opinion of the papacy changed markedly in the three years after he published his Ninety-Five Theses. Certainly, by the time he published his *Passional Christi und Antichristi* in 1521, Luther had come to the definitive conclusion that the institution of the papacy was the Antichrist. As Jaroslav Pelikan has noted, the *Passional’s* “apocalyptic portrayals of the antithesis between Christ and his alleged Vicar,” the pope, reveals that in a short time, “Luther’s thought had evolved on many issues, but perhaps on none so drastically as on the status of the Pope” (“Some Uses” 84). Pelikan cites Luther’s 24 February 1520 letter to Lorenzo Valla as evidence that Luther suspected the pope was Antichrist by the early months of 1520: “I am so oppressed that I have virtually no doubt that the Pope is really and truly that Antichrist for whom, by the commonly accepted view, the world is waiting. His way of life, his actions, his statements, and his ordinances fit all of this so well” (qtd. Pelikan 85). I would clarify that the letter to Valla reveals that Luther had clearly begun to speculate seriously about the identity of the pope, but his admission to Valla is still not definitive. Luther has “virtually no doubt,” suggesting that some doubt (however slight) still remains. Luther seems to hedge his bets until *Against Latomus*, where he finally specifies that he is “now convinced,” thus leaving no room for the kind of equivocation that tends to characterize earlier allusions to a papal Antichrist.

<sup>6</sup> Citations for Erasmus’s letters refer first to the epistolary number assigned by editor Peter G. Bietenholz and then to the page number in Bietenholz’s edition.



characterizes the Antichrist epithet as typical reform jargon: he reports on the activity of continental reformer Michael Bentinus, explaining that Bentinus “wandered round from one schoolmaster to another, instilling the teaching of our new gospel into the children: the pope is Antichrist, his decisions are heretical, and so on—you know the form” (1514, 420). Of course, Lutheran reformers were not the only ones speculating about Antichrist’s identity; polemicists on all sides of the debate often imagined themselves facing down the Antichrist. In a 1521 sermon, Bishop John Fisher suggests that Luther’s heresies—not the pope’s alleged corruption— might be a sign of the Antichrist’s imminent arrival: “Before the comynge of antichrist there shall be a notable discessyon and departing fro[m] the faythe of the chirche. And it is not vnylyke to be at this same tyme by the occassyon of this moost perilous heretyke. Here Martin Luther for his shrewed brayne wyll some thing wrastell against vs” (sig. D ii v).<sup>7</sup> In 1523, Thomas More goes even further: while Fisher imagines Luther and other early reformers as Antichrist’s false prophets, More suggests that Luther could very well be recognized “either as the alpha of heretics, or as Antichrist” himself (*Responsio*, 191).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Taken from Fisher’s sermon “Against the Pernicious Doctrine of Martin Luther,” published in 1522 but delivered in 1521. See Cecelia Hatt’s edition for context, pp. 48ff. See also E.E. Reynolds’ biography, pp. 74ff. This sermon was an important prelude to Henry VIII’s publication of his *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (1521), which responded directly to Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). There Luther himself speculates about a papal Antichrist while writing against the seven sacraments. Accounts suggest the Fisher waved a copy of the king’s tract during the sermon.

<sup>8</sup> To be fair, More only calls Luther the Antichrist in the context of a hypothetical. See the Yale edition of his *Responsio ad Lutherum*, pp. 187ff. To my knowledge, this is the only instance of More accusing anyone—including Luther—of being the Antichrist. Elsewhere his use of the term is much more cautious; like Fisher, he typically only imagines Luther and other early reformers as Antichrist’s false prophets, if he even evokes the term “Antichrist” at all. In general, More is much more likely to use the term “heretic” against Luther and other reformers than “Antichrist.”

Barlowe and Roye, then, rehearse a polemical commonplace. Yet the term's widespread use did not necessarily inspire widespread appeal, especially in these early days of the English Reformation. London was no Strasbourg, and a still religiously conservative English readership was certain to bristle at *Rede Me*'s anticlerical content, not to mention its Antichrist polemic.<sup>9</sup> Barlowe and Roye anticipate this likely opposition when, in the first lines of their tract, they attempt to reassure an unsympathetic reader: "Rede me and be not wrothe / For I saye no thyng but trothe" (sig. a1r). Contemporaries like John Frith make similar appeals, apparently not expecting English readers readily to embrace the reforms that were flourishing on the continent. In the concluding lines of his 1529 *Revelation of Antichrist*—an English translation of Luther's 1521 *Responsio* to Ambroisus Catharinus—Frith asks his reader to respond charitably to his bold polemic: "Here endeth the Revelation of Antichrist which (although it be som deale ferse against the pope and his adherents) yet good christen brother read it charitably. Move not thy patience. Overcome them rather with the good and virtuous lyvige than with force and exterior power" (Fol. lxxxvii v).<sup>10</sup> Somewhat ironically, Frith petitions his readers to be charitable even though his own prose, being "som deale ferse," is not.

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<sup>9</sup> Strasbourg was an early Reformation hotbed, home to reformers like Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito. For more on the German reformation and the Lutheran reformers, see especially Scott H. Hendrix.

<sup>10</sup> These are Frith's own words, not part of his translation of Luther. Frith published the *Revelation* under the pseudonym Richard Brightwell; however, this apparently did little to protect his identity. Thomas More exposes Frith in his *Answer to a Poisoned Book*, suggesting that Frith's critique of Lenten fasting was inspired by Satan: "And as for Lent, Father Frith vnder name of Brightwell in the revelacyon of Antichrist calleth it the fo[o]lish fast which jeste was undoubtedly reveled to Father Frith by the spirit of the devil himself, the spiritual father of Antichrist" (*The answer*, fol. cclvii r). Frith's text is divided into three sections: the first, "A pistle to the Christen reader," is a brief letter addressed from Richard Brightwell to the reader; the next section, "The Revelation of Antichrist," is a translation of Luther's *Ad Librum Ambrosii Catharini ... Responsio Martini Lutheri cum exposita uisione Danielis. Viii. De Antichristo*. Luther's Latin can be consulted in *Werkes* 7, pp. 705-78. Frith

This tension between charity and ferocity was not lost on Barlowe and Roye. *Rede Me* begins with dialogue between a talking Treatise and its Author in which the Treatise acknowledges that the Author's ribald polemic sets a poor example for its audience and risks offending more readers than it persuades. The Treatise insists that the Author's frequent assertions about the Antichrist are particularly degenerate, and it urges the Author to express his critique in more measured terms.<sup>11</sup> The quirky exchange begins with the Author delivering a pep-talk of sorts: he urges his "little treatise" to "go forth" (l. 1, sig. a5v) and "put the Antichrist out of his kingdom" (l. 39, sig. a6r).<sup>12</sup> The idea that a treatise could rout Antichrist is itself striking, but equally remarkable is the Treatise's response. The Treatise, not eager to spar with Church authorities, insists that the Author's clerical exposé will never get past the

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translates pp. 722-72, as well as part of p. 778 (Schuster 1195). Luther's *Responsio*, purportedly one of the first places he denounces the pope as Antichrist, relies chiefly upon the exposition of Daniel 8. The final section of the *Revelation*, "Antithesis wherein are compared to geder Christes actes and oure holye father the popes," is Frith's own, but likely based on Luther and Cranach's *Passional Chrisit und Antichristi* (1521). For more on Frith's *Revelation*, see William A. Clebsch, pp. 75-86.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that the tract's title and its opening dialogue are marketing tactics, even if the tract's content does inevitably antagonize orthodox readers as the prefatory material suggests it will. "Contents shocking!" translates easily into "You won't want to miss this!" The preface repeatedly warns that the book will be banned, providing an even greater impetus to "rede" it as soon as possible. Along the same lines, Erasmus suggests in a 1521 letter to Arkleb of Boskovice that denouncing Luther's book as heretical—or as written by a heretic—will prompt many to scramble to get their hands on it: "I have never approved the savagery and the uproar of those who before they have even read his books declaim against him so foolishly before public audiences, using words like donkey and stork and blockhead and heretic and Antichrist and universal pest ... the sole result of all their uproar is to make more people buy Luther's books and read them more readily" (1183, 152).

<sup>12</sup>This greeting to the "little treatise," together with the rhyme royal stanzas, pays no small homage, it seems, to Chaucer's own dedication at the end of his *Troilus and Creseyde*. I am grateful to Kent Cartwright for noting the resonance between Barlowe and Roye's stanza and Chaucer's own. Barlowe and Roye's opening stanza reads: "Go forth little treatise no thing afraid / To the Cardinal of York dedicate / And though he threaten thee be not dismayed / To publish his abominable estate / For though his power he doeth elevate / Yet the season is now verily come / *Ut inveniatur iniquitas eius ad odium*" (ll. 1-7). Chaucer's dedication reads: "Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye, / Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye, / So sende myght to make in som comedye! / But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie, / But subgit be to alle poesye; / And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace / Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace" (ll. 1786-92). Chaucer, of course, does not afford his "litel bok" a response; however, Barlowe and Roye's treatise counters with several, skeptical rejoinders.

censors: “All the clergy ... with furious sentence they will me chace / Forbidde yge  
eny persone to rede me” (l. 14f., sig. a5v). The Treatise then objects in particular to  
the Author’s use of words like “Antichrist,” which he argues will invariably  
compromise the reform campaign’s public-image:

Well yet there is great occasion of grudge  
Because I appear to be convicious  
Without fail the clergy will me judge  
To proceed of a sprite presumptuous  
For to use such words contumelious  
It becometh not Christian charity.

Wherefore my dear author it cannot be. (l. 41 ff., sig. a6r)<sup>13</sup>

The Treatise suggests here that words like Antichrist are railing and abusive and, as  
such, will offend already begrudging clerical readers. Offending the clergy is  
problematic because, as the Treatise warns, the clergy can cripple the reform  
campaign by limiting public access to the tract and punishing its supportive  
readership: “In hell and heven they have preeminence” (l.78, sig. a6v) and “shall  
course and banne with cruel sentence / All those which have to me eny favoure /  
Ether to my saynge geve credence” (l.76, sig. a6v).

It is important to emphasize that the Treatise does not necessarily object to  
*what* the Author says but *how* he says it. In fact, the Treatise is an explicit proponent  
of reform. In the example above, the Treatise anticipates a “cruel” clergy and

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<sup>13</sup> It is reasonable to argue that these “words contumelious” are the Author’s use of “Antichrist.” The  
Author orders the Treatise to “put Antichrist out of his kingdom” in the lines immediately preceding  
the Treatise’s rebuttal.

cheekily implies that the Church's spiritual "preeminence" is presumptuous; he readily admits elsewhere that Cardinal Wolsey "of all people is hated" (l. 25, sig. a5v) and attests that there are "secret matters" (l. 59, sig. a6v) that will reveal the "faultes" (l. 61, sig. a6v) of the clergy. The Treatise objects instead to the reformers' style, urging the Author to divulge clerical corruption without using words like "Antichrist." Any number of less provocative terms could express the same complaint without, as Erasmus puts it elsewhere, having to "stir up a hornet's nest" (1342, 398).

Yet the Author already knows that his are fighting words, and he refuses to soften the edge of his Apocalyptic polemic in large part because coming to blows with the clergy is exactly how he intends to expose the Antichrist. The Author first insists that it is "goddess iudgement / So to recompence their madde blasphemy" (l. 49-50, sig. a6r), apparently reserving the right to use "such words contumelious" against the Church. Then, affording himself the final word in the exchange, he evokes "Antichrist" again. He counter-argues that using the term will actually facilitate reform by baiting the Antichrist to discover himself: "O treatise let Antichrist cry and roar / Manassing with fulminations / His cruelte shalbe feared no more / Men knowing his abominations" (ll. 81-85, sig. a6v-a7r). Here, the Author responds to the Treatise's warning against the clergy's "cruel sentence" (l. 75, sig. a6r); he assures the Treatise that these "roaring" objections will work to the reformers' advantage by allowing men to see Antichrist's "abominations" first hand. The author acknowledges that many will be offended or irritated by his provocative polemic, but he considers that their "outrageous furoure" (l. 74, sig. a6r) is an

observable sign of Antichrist's corruption. The Author imagines that his polemic will smoke out the Antichrist by implicating the very individuals who object to it. These furious, fulminating clergy are, for the Author, the Antichrist himself.

The reasons that the term might be particularly repugnant to these imagined readers derive from what the term means—or, at least, what the Treatise and the Author take the term to mean. As we have seen in the Introduction, the term “Antichrist” has no simple definition. Biblically, it is used in at least two distinct ways: it refers both to a dreaded, singular harbinger of an imminent Apocalypse and to a plurality of worldly evils that already serve as its portents. Antichrist is, maddeningly, both present and future; already and not yet. Exegetes typically acknowledge both aspects of this paradoxical definition, and early writers like Adso and Augustine frequently specify which Antichrist they mean when they use the term, distinguishing between *Antichristus mysticus* (those who comprise the general body of evil) and *Antichristus magnus* (the final, singular Apocalyptic harbinger).<sup>14</sup> Yet not all authors are careful to qualify their use of the term, particularly in early sixteenth-century polemic, and readers were often left to consider what it meant, exactly, when the Author above—or Barlowe, Roye, Luther, Fisher, or More—suggested that the Reformation had something to do with the Antichrist.

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<sup>14</sup> Thirteenth-century exegete Peter Olivi (c. 1248-1298) was the first to use these two terms in tandem to discuss Antichrist's dual nature. As McGinn notes: “Building on Joachim and also upon earlier Franciscan exegesis of the Apocalypse, Olivi interprets this Antichrist as twofold—the *Antichristus mysticus* and the *Antichristus magnus*. The terms *magnus* and *maximus Antichristus* are found in Joachim, but Olivi appears to have been the first to speak of an *Antichristus mysticus* or *mysticus*. Basically, Olivi argues that the two Beasts of Apocalypse 13 signify both Antichrists or rather the dual aspect of each Antichrist: ‘Know that anywhere in this book [the Apocalypse] where it treats of the Great Antichrist in prophetic fashion, it also implies the time of Mystical Antichrist preceding him.’ The Mystical Antichrist, whose persecution Olivi sees as active in the present moment, is the body of evildoers within Christianity, consisting of both evil laity (carnal Christians and their leaders) and also wicked clergy (false religious and false prophets)” (*Antichrist*, 159).

Did “Antichrist” refer precisely to that final, capital Antichrist who would usher in the Second Coming? That is, did polemicists mean, as Fisher apparently does, that the end of the world was actually at hand? Or, did polemicists use the term’s eschatological connotations to attract attention to the reform cause rather than to announce a literal Doomsday? Perhaps the polemicists’ “Antichrist” was not the final Antichrist, but one or more of those innumerable general Antichrists who would appear throughout history and would comprise the other half of the term’s dual definition. The contexts for the term’s use in early Reformation polemic suggest all of these possibilities. The Antichrist is capital in some contexts and general in others; he is alternatively diachronic and synchronic, teleological and typological. In some contexts, he is both at once: Martin Luther and other early reformers like William Tyndale suggest that the institution of the papacy, with its many successive popes, compromises the single body of the capital Antichrist. Their corporate, capital Antichrist, unites the seemingly incongruous halves of Antichrist’s dual identity.

This chapter chronicles the Antichrist hermeneutic of the early sixteenth-century, demonstrating the vitality of a figure that lends itself to an elaborate, often contradictory taxonomy in early Reformation writing.<sup>15</sup> The following analysis considers what the term “Antichrist” signified to early sixteenth-century readers and writers. I investigate the varied contexts for its use in early reformation polemic and demonstrate the ways in which traditional definitions are articulated and adapted. In particular, I argue that the term’s unqualified use allows different readers to

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Emmerson and Bernard McGinn define a “grammar of the Apocalypse” that catalogues the images, motifs, objects, and associations related to representations of the end times in the art and literature of the Middle Ages. See *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, p. 300. I construct a similar catalogue as I establish the various aspects of the sixteenth-century Antichrist tradition.

understand it in a variety of ways—ways sometimes at odds with apparent authorial intentions. Indeed, sixteenth-century writers' responses to prior tracts reveal the degree to which they misconstrued—or even outright rejected—each others' use of the term.

The exchange between Barlowe and Roye's "little treatise" and the Author provides an apt point of departure for this discussion, particularly because their rift demonstrates a fundamental tension between two competing definitions of Antichrist. I argue below that the Treatise and the Author never achieve consensus on the use and abuse of "Antichrist" because they interpret the term differently in context: the Treatise reacts to "Antichrist" as a euphemism for broader notions of heresy and corruption; he assumes, in other words, that the Author asserts a general and metaphoric Antichrist and takes advantage of the term's Apocalyptic connotations for rhetorical effect. Yet the Author's response suggests that his Doomsday warnings are literal, not figurative: he warns not against general corruption, but indeed asserts the presence of the single, capital Antichrist. In *Rede Me*, the Antichrist emerges familiarly as many and one, and the debate properly establishes the two poles of interpretation that governed conceptions of Antichrist in the early sixteenth century. Their parley simulates, too, the kind of back-and-forth about the Antichrist that characterized the published exchanges between early sixteenth-century writers like Erasmus and Luther, More and Tyndale. Linguistic, poetic, even epistemological distinctions come to the fore: is Antichrist figurative or literal? Is it possible that he can be both? Emerging humanist theories about language and literary representation necessarily inform early sixteenth-century conceptions of the Antichrist: definitions



of Antichrist help to illustrate the closeness that the literal and the figurative can have in the sixteenth-century—a closeness that is typical of that period but rather different from the distance that modernism tends to put between the actual and the metaphoric. Additionally, discussions of the Antichrist help define an Erasmian hermeneutic that evaluates language based on the moral consequences of its use.

### **‘WORDS CONTUMELIOUS’: ERASMUS AND THE ANTICHRIST**

At first reading, Barlowe and Roye’s fictive pundits provide an unusual introduction to what subsequently proves typical reform polemic. Yet talking treatises aside, this opening dialogue is actually nothing new: like Barlowe and Roye’s own aggressive critique of the Church, the *Treatise* and the *Author* participate in a debate about the use of “Antichrist” that had been taking place between continental humanists and reformers alike since the early 1520s. Thus, Barlowe and Roye are not only among the first to bring the continental reform message to English readers, but they are also among the first to reproduce the broader rhetorical context for these debates. Perhaps fittingly, the *Treatise* emerges as distinctly Erasmian: its objections are akin to Erasmus’s own reservations about the railing tenor of the early reform movement. The *Author*, by contrast, gives voice to rebuttals made by reformers like Martin Luther—reformers who flouted Erasmus’ advice with persistent allegations of a papal Antichrist.

Like the *Treatise*, Erasmus insists that “prating of Antichrist and heresy and other such histrionic stuff” is dangerously counter-productive, not in the least because such language presents already controversial reforms in equally contentious terms

(1006, 54.) In a 1521 letter to Justus Jonas, Erasmus explains: “For seeing that truth of itself has a bitter taste for most people . . . it would have been wise to soften a naturally painful subject by the courtesy of one’s handling than to pile one cause of hatred on another”(1202, 202).<sup>16</sup> The medicine of reform could, in other words, use a spoonful of sugar, and Erasmus repeatedly advises reformers that “one gets further by courtesy and moderation than by clamour” (980, 391). Erasmus suspects that Luther (and, presumably, others like him) will “burden . . . himself with unpopularity” without tactical modification, repelling the skeptical readers that he might otherwise persuade.<sup>17</sup> Yet for both Erasmus and the Treatise, Apocalyptic name-calling is more than just impolite; it is also morally dubious.

The Treatise suggests that this kind of mud-slinging “becommeth not christen charite” (l. 47), making it ironically at odds with the Christian gospel it serves to advance and, as such, an especially inappropriate medium for theological debate. Engaging in what the treatise terms “diffamacion” (l. 60) makes one just as anti-Christian as those who stand accused and, thus, compromises the moral authority of

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<sup>16</sup> Jonas was a friend and admirer of Erasmus. Editor Peter Bietenholz suggests that this letter is “one of the finest of this period” where Erasmus expresses his “alarm at seeing [Jonas] side with Luther” (1202, 201). Here, Erasmus develops his theory that truth should be advanced in a “measured way,” a tactic which often involves withholding information, as he believed Sts. Paul and Augustine had done (and as was recommended by Plato). He critiques Luther for having “poured it out all at once” (203). In a letter to Melancthon, Erasmus elaborates: “Now supposing we grant that Luther’s teaching is true . . . Plato, in imagining his ideal republic, realized that people could not be governed without lies. Far be it from a Christian to tell a lie, and yet it is not expedient to tell the whole truth to ordinary people no matter how it is done” (1523, 443-4). Elsewhere, Erasmus specifically addresses the efficacy of auricular confession, explaining that even if this practice is not found in the gospel, he would not acknowledge this to the everyday faithful, for whom the practice remains efficacious and worthwhile.

<sup>17</sup> Erasmus suggests elsewhere that those who use this kind of language “are of such a character that, if I had to enter into a contest, I would rather do business with papists than with them” (1523, 443), again suggesting that words like Antichrist can backfire, deterring potential allies and, in turn, bolstering support for the orthodox church. Slanders like “Antichrist” make Erasmus want to stick with the devil he knows.

both the polemicist and his call for reform. Likewise, Erasmus suggests that such linguistic practice sets a scandalous example for its audience, modeling impiety rather than holiness. He wonders similarly if “there is anything which is less likely to foster Christian piety than for ordinary, uneducated people to hear, and for young people to have it drummed into their ears, that the pope is the Antichrist, that bishops and priests are demons ... ?” (1523, 443-4) According to Erasmus, the potential “corruption of public morals” makes the reformers’ tactics decidedly incompatible with the gospel: “Whatever these men [reformers] teach ... their way of teaching sometimes stirs up subversion, not the gospel” (1510, 412). What Erasmus finds particularly objectionable is that polemicists rely upon the term’s biblical connotations to mislead their audience, justifying subversion under Apocalyptic pretences.

Erasmus suggests that polemicists stir their audience to action by using a term of grave theological consequence, establishing a sense of urgency that fuels unrest. He further emphasizes that suggestions about the end of the world establish false exigency and insists that these are strategic exaggerations that exploit the Apocalyptic connotations of the term “Antichrist.” The term garners attention precisely because it calls to mind an event of matchless import, but in context, polemicists actually make another point unrelated to the Apocalypse and sometimes even theology itself. In one instance, Erasmus laments that some writers blast humane learning with language lifted from the reformation debate, suggesting that emerging humanism is symptomatic of “Antichrist.” Erasmus objects not only to the censure of humanist

studies but also to the polemicists' use of "fearsome words" to frame their critique—a rhetorical strategy which he characterizes as hyperbolic and manipulative:

So they confine themselves to noisy protests before the illiterate public and foolish women, who are easily imposed on, especially under the pretext of religion, which they counterfeit with the greatest skill. They put up a screen of fearsome words like 'heresy' and 'Antichrists.' 'The Church is in danger,' they cry, 'and religion is tottering,' theirs being of course the only shoulder that can support it, and with this stuff, so loaded with prejudice, they slip in remarks about language and humane learning. (1007, 57)<sup>18</sup>

Erasmus' point is that his opponents are abusing the pulpits by suggesting that humane learning is a moral threat contributing to Church decline. Yet Erasmus' critique also implicates polemicists' broader rhetorical strategy. He suggests that writers who evoke "Antichrist" engage their audiences under the false "pretext of religion" (57) and the fearful suggestion of an imminent Doomsday. These polemicists, he argues, really only designate a general corruption—that is, clerical abuse and, occasionally and offhandedly, an emerging secular humanism—not the

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<sup>18</sup> This passage comes from Erasmus' 1519 letter to Pope Leo X on the occasion of Erasmus' publication of his revised New Testament, of which Leo approved. Erasmus recounts the attitude of those who objected to his New Testament—those who, upon its publication, "saw a threat to their dictatorship, some even to their finances" (57). He explains, "What their own convictions may be, I do not know; but at least they try to convince the ignorant and unlearned that the study of the ancient languages and of what men call the humanities is opposed to the pursuit of theology, while in truth theology can expect more distinction and more progress from them than from any other subjects. ... These things, they say, that we shudder to mention, take their rise from poetry; for poetry is the misleading name they give to all enlightened studies—to all, that is, that they have not learnt themselves. This sort of rubbish they are not ashamed to vomit even in their sermons, and expect to be regarded as the heralds of the teaching of the Gospel" (57ff.). Erasmus notes that those opposed to his New Testaments are frequently opposed to Luther's calls for reform, as well. In fact, one of the reasons Erasmus seems so bent on Luther adopting more moderate polemic is because he argues that "storm of protest" against humanism is often fueled by the tenor of Luther's harsh attacks, particularly his accusations of a papal Antichrist.

actual Apocalypse.<sup>19</sup> They use the term's more severe connotations to their advantage, choosing a word that can also identify the worst kind of evil. In this way, Erasmus imagines polemicists as deliberately overstating the case, misleading believers into thinking circumstances are graver than they are—or, at least, graver than Erasmus takes them to be—so as to increase support for the reform cause. Apocalyptic name-calling is, in other words, nothing more than fear-mongering.<sup>20</sup>

Erasmus worries about the consequences of this rhetorical exaggeration.<sup>21</sup> “Some people,” he writes, “spred such ideas abroad without qualifying them in any way”; he fears that “wicked men” will take up these ideas about the Apocalypse “and turn them to evil ends” (1523, 444). Erasmus defines his hermeneutic here and elsewhere by evaluating the moral consequences of language use. As Manfred Hoffman helpfully summarizes, Erasmus maintained that

while good language is the medium for forming concepts in correspondence with reality and for framing opinions that inform responsible action, it can be so perverted as to turn into a medium of evil, with the devil using it for

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<sup>19</sup> He explains elsewhere that reformers who use abusive terms put “some of these things forward in language that [is] bound to give even more offence at first sight than when regarded steadily at close quarters” (1202, 202), suggesting along the same lines that their message, upon first hearing, seems more extreme than a closer examination of their points ultimately supports.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas More's published exchange with William Tyndale suggests a similar attitude toward “Antichrist.” Most of the instances of “Antichrist” in the *Confutation* are contained in quotations from Tyndale's *Answer*; More typically quotes Tyndale and then responds directly to the quoted passage. More, however, never addresses Tyndale's arguments about the identity of the Antichrist—that is, he does not argue why the pope is not the Apocalyptic harbinger or concern himself with issues of exegesis. Instead, More addresses Tyndale's broader concerns about Church corruption and theological error. For More, the larger issues surrounding the use of the term “Antichrist” were primarily (if not entirely) related to clerical and doctrinal disagreements, not the assertion of a literal eschatology.

<sup>21</sup> Apocalyptic name-calling is the work of firebrands not theologians: “Climbing into the pulpit and calling someone a beast or an Antichrist at the top of your voice,” Erasmus writes, “does not need a theologian, for any buffoon can do it” (1153, 71).

diabolic ends and the perversion of order, issuing in chaos. ... The faculty of speech places human beings ultimately between God and the devil, good and evil, and pulls them up or down depending on its positive or negative use. (70-1)

Erasmus fears the chaotic effects of Luther's bold polemic—polemic that had already attracted the attention of England's king. In a letter to Luther himself, Erasmus warns that Henry too has “expressed a wish that you [Luther] had written some things with more prudence and moderation” precisely because brazen name-calling challenges “men who cannot be overthrown without a major upheaval” (1127a, 21). “I fear upheavals of that kind all the more,” Erasmus writes, “because they so often burst forth from what was intended. If a man lets in the sea, it is not in his power to control where it should go” (21). King Henry and Erasmus both worry that some might take exaggerated bombast as license to subvert and reject traditional authority more aggressively than Luther, perhaps, initially intended. Henry goes so far as to suggest that Luther's rebel-rousing will lead to the demolition of the Church entirely. In his *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, he suggests that Luther “excites ... them against him [the pope]” not simply to reform the Church but in order to establish a completely new one: “Indeed I believe, 'tis for no other end, than to procure to himself the good esteem of such Malefactors ... that so they might choose Him [Luther] for their Head, who now Fights for their Liberty, and demolish Christ's Church so long founded upon a firm Rock, erecting to themselves a new Church, compacted of Flagitious and Impious persons” (fol. 55).<sup>22</sup> Erasmus never goes as far

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting here that Henry essentially implies that Luther is the Antichrist: he portrays him as seeking the leadership of an anti-Church opposed to God's own. Henry's hesitance to call Luther the

as the king does here, but he certainly suggests that Luther's aggressive language jeopardizes his ability to achieve limited reforms. Luther makes the situation seem so grave and terrifying that he risks an all-or-nothing response from his constituents, a too-aggressive stance that might lead to changes that lie dangerously beyond the scope of Luther's initial arguments. Erasmus is concerned, in other words, that Luther's vitriol distracts from what may be perfectly reasonable complaints, especially those regarding the abuses of the Church hierarchy and their opposition to the gospel. He is concerned that Luther's form obscures his content.<sup>23</sup>

Erasmus wants Luther to dispense with bombast and to focus instead on articulating the theological grievances that underlie his flashy accusations in the first place. Writing to Albert of Brandenburg in 1519, he urges Luther to "publish no sedition, nothing derogatory to the Roman pontiff, nothing arrogant or vindictive, but ... preach the gospel teaching in sincerity with all mildness" (1033, 110). By rooting his quarrels firmly in the gospel, Luther might not only set a more tempered example for his readers, but rhetorically speaking, might also craft a more persuasive argument. By setting the words of Christ next to those of the Church's leaders, he

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Antichrist outright is symptomatic of an early Reformation tendency that I discuss in greater detail below.

<sup>23</sup> Erasmus frequently distinguishes between Luther's form and his content, admitting in his letter to Justus Jonas that he had not yet read any of Luther's books, but knew only of his notorious style: "Luther's books I have not yet had the leisure to read; but to judge by the samples I have taken, and from what I have sometimes picked up in passing from the accounts of others, though it was perhaps beyond my meager attainments to pronounce on the truth of the opinions he put forward, at any rate his method and the way he sets to work I could never approve" (1202, 203). Of course, once Erasmus has the chance to read Luther's work, he provides ample theological rebuttal, not the least of which is evident in his writings on the freedom of the will. He is already skeptical of Luther's positions in his letter to Jonas: "Had all he [Luther] says been true—and those who examine what he has written declare that the case is quite otherwise—once he had challenged so many people, what other outcome was to be expected than what we see now" (202-3).

can provide tangible evidence for the corruption that he alleges, opening the door for civilized debate and organized reform.

What is particularly important to recognize about Erasmus' advice is that it assumes "Antichrist" is a euphemism for corruption and not a substantive claim about an imminent Apocalypse. Indeed, he indicates in his early correspondence that he understood polemicists' use of the term as a rhetorical placeholder that solved a signification problem caused by the overuse of the word "heretic." In the same 1519 letter to Albert of Brandenburg quoted above, Erasmus complains that the term "heretic" is so widely applied that it has lost the severity of its meaning: "In the old days a heretic was one who dissented from the Gospels or the articles of faith or the things which carried equal authority with them. Nowadays if anyone disagrees with Thomas, he is called a heretic – indeed, if he disagrees with some newfangled reasoning thought up yesterday by some sophister in the schools. Anything they do not do themselves is heresy" (1033, 115). Here, Erasmus suggests that "heretic" is used so often and in so many varied contexts that it means very little; the most severe heresy is diminished when described by a term that is also frequently applied to lesser offences. This denotative shift leaves polemicists in a linguistic quandary: if "heretic" is no longer sufficient, what term should be used to denote the worst offences?

Erasmus suggests that St. Hilary, for one, picked "Antichrist." In his introduction to St. Hilary's writings, Erasmus argues that Hilary uses "Antichrist" in place of "heretic" to characterize Arius and his followers. Erasmus explains: "How great is the anger with which he attacks the Arians, again and again calling them



impious, diabolic, blasphemous, devils, plagues, Antichrists! For already the label heretic is too weak.” In Erasmus’ reading, Hilary does not use “Antichrist” to designate Arius and his followers as Apocalyptic harbingers; instead, he uses this term (and others) for emphasis. Hilary resorts to “Antichrist” to characterize the Arians’ theological dissent, using the term to describe a kind of corruption that could have, at one time, been alternatively designated as “heretical.”

Notably, Erasmus— not Hilary—suggests that “Antichrist” stands in place of “heretic.” Hilary himself does not explicitly define “Antichrist” in the passages that Erasmus presents; instead, Erasmus makes an assumption about what Hilary means by the term. He assumes that Hilary asserts the general definition of Antichrist over the particular one—that is, he assumes that “Antichrist” is meant as euphemism for heresy, corruption, or theological error, not as a proper warning about the end of days. It is this assumption that fuels Erasmus’ critique of Hilary and underlies his recommendation that Hilary use a still *different* word to describe the Arians. Indeed, Erasmus balks at Hilary’s use of “Antichrist” because Hilary chooses the severest of terms to describe what Erasmus considers to be *not* the severest of offences. “I would have recommended that anyone in agreement with Arius be admonished and instructed,” he writes, “But I would not immediately have called him Satan or Antichrist. Indeed if these accusations must be hurled against anyone who errs on some point, what shall we do with our Hilary himself, not to mention many outstanding Doctors of the church” (1334, 261). Erasmus suggests that if one might be an Antichrist simply for erring on a point of faith then, by extension, Hilary and the other Church Doctors might be called Antichrists, too—leading to the same kind

of absurd over-application that stripped “heretic” of its proper meaning in the first place.

The critique here is reminiscent of the Treatise’s advice to the Author, as well as Erasmus’ own advice to Luther above. The Treatise similarly assumes the Author’s arguments have little to do with announcing an inescapable Apocalypse and more to do with designating general Church corruption. As such, the Treatise offers the Author rhetorical counsel, articulating the consequences of word choice and questioning whether designating this corruption as Antichrist’s own is the most decorous and, as such, most persuasive way to frame the Author’s arguments for reform. Just as Erasmus second-guesses Hilary’s word choice and likewise urges Luther to use more “courteous language” (1342, 398), so too does the Treatise urge the Author to avoid “such words contumelious” (l. 46, sig. a6r). Together, they insist that polemicists find other words to use in place of “Antichrist.”

Their counsel is contingent on the fact that another term *can* replace “Antichrist”—that “Antichrist” does not properly refer to the Apocalyptic harbinger himself but instead identifies a general corruption that might be alternatively designated without reference to a literal Doomsday. Both Erasmus and the Treatise imagine the Apocalypse to be an expendable part of polemicists’ rhetoric. This attack on terminology distinctly downplays (and perhaps even transforms) the nature of the polemicists’ critique by considerably lowering the stakes. There is a significant difference between the capital and general Antichrist: one is indefatigable and damned from the start, but the other is guilty of a human corruption that can presumably be managed and overcome. Erasmus in particular frames Hilary’s

critique of the Arians as a matter of pointing out sacramental or theological error, with the implicit, accompanying notion that doctrine is so complicated that anyone could make a mistake. Erasmus explains:

There were men in the Arian faction who were convinced that their preaching about Christ was true and devout. Their doctrine rested on many and important authorities. Some passages in Holy Scripture gave the appearance of supporting it, and rational arguments were not lacking which displayed some semblance of truth. ... Finally, it was a controversy about matters far beyond human comprehension. (1342, 398)

For Erasmus, doctrinal error can be the unfortunate consequence of well-intended but fallible clergy; it need not be the end of the world for there to be church corruption.

One cannot help but wonder, though, if Erasmus' reading of Hilary is a fair and accurate one. What if Hilary *does* warn about an imminent Apocalypse? Certainly, Erasmus rescues Hilary from the posthumous embarrassment of having asserted a Second Coming that never came. But, in another, less flattering sense, Erasmus' reading is reductive; it softens the edge of Hilary's critique by assuming that Hilary does not properly refer to the capital Antichrist. Significantly, the degree to which Erasmus may misrepresent Hilary helps to contextualize Erasmus' commentary on early reform polemic. We may never know for certain what Hilary meant by "Antichrist" in context, or whether the Arians were, for him, a sign of the actual Apocalypse. Yet, it seems clear that for Luther, as well as for Barlowe and Roye's Author, "Antichrist" is not a rhetorically convenient exaggeration. Luther is

explicit about what he means when he uses the term “Antichrist” against the pope: he unequivocally designates the pope as nothing less than the capital Antichrist himself. Of course, no matter how explicit Luther seems to be, Erasmus unfailingly treats these literal assertions as figurative—that is, as provocative metaphors for another, different point about general church corruption. (One wonders further, given Erasmus’ penchant for moderation and doubt, if it is even possible for him to entertain the notion of a capital Antichrist.) As a result, the two consistently argue at cross-purposes: Luther depicts an unfolding eschatology that Erasmus then reduces to exaggerated rhetoric. While Erasmus suggests that there are far more diplomatic ways to denounce general corruption, Luther insists that there is no other way to assert the identity of the *capital* Antichrist than by calling him exactly that.

In this way, we might consider Erasmus’ rendering of Luther to be itself a kind of rhetoric—one that deliberately misreads Luther in order to make the reformer’s polemic more palatable to those who would find a contemporary Protestant eschatology less than convincing. Erasmus worries that Luther’s radicalism overshadows discussion of necessary and reasonable clerical reform, thereby alienating otherwise sympathetic readers. He emphasizes that the King’s plea for moderation is “shared, my dear Luther, by those who wish you well” (1127a, 21), and general use of “Antichrist” would certainly make it easier for these potential allies to agree with (and advocate) Luther’s polemic. Whether or not Luther initially used the term figuratively is irrelevant; Erasmus sets Luther up for a clarification that would preclude a literal reading. He seems to say, “I am sure that you, Luther, only meant this term in the most innocuous way possible. Confirm this now and reassure

the King and your skeptical English constituents that you meant nothing worse.”

Erasmus encourages Luther to acknowledge “Antichrist” as a figure of speech (and an indecorous one at that) as a way of calming critics and saving face—and perhaps even salvaging his increasingly tenuous relationship with the papacy.<sup>24</sup> Yet Erasmus’ critique may well have provoked Luther to take the opposite tract and to refine his interpretation toward the literal.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Luther refuses to take Erasmus’ bait. He instead embraces a radical literalism that leaves little room for courtesy or equivocation.

## LUTHER AND THE APOCALYPTIC ANTICHRIST

Luther infamously rejected Erasmus’ rhetorical counsel no less vociferously than Barlowe and Roye’s Author flouts the Treatise’s advice. But, perhaps surprisingly, neither the Author nor Luther responds directly to his opponent’s stylistic chiding by defending “Antichrist” as a decorous figure of speech. Instead, they only reiterate accusations of a papal Antichrist. For these reformers, rhetorical decorum is

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<sup>24</sup> In his letter to Jonas, Erasmus explains, “You will ask me, dearest Jonas, why I spin this long complaint to you [about Luther] when it is already too late. For this reason first of all, that though things have gone farther than they ought to have, even now one should be on the watch, in case it may be possible to still this dreadful storm. We have a pope most merciful by nature, we have an emperor whose spirit is mild and placable ...” (1202, 210).

<sup>25</sup> In *De servo arbitrio*, Luther blames Erasmus for polluting his thought with too great a concern for decorum. As Victoria Kahn argues in *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance*, “While the impossibility of knowing the divine will makes Erasmus cautious about assertions, Luther views this caution, or prudence in the modern sense of the word, as an all-too-human and hubristic attempt to bind God to the rule of decorum and to mitigate the uncompromisingly offensive meaning of Scripture. ‘He is God’ Luther declares, ‘and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things.’ And when Erasmus argues that it is not always expedient to speak the truth, Luther inquires: ‘Who had empowered you or given you the right to bind Christian doctrine to places, persons, times, or causes when Christ wills it to be proclaimed and to reign throughout the world in entire freedom? “The word of God is not bound,” says Paul [2 Tim. 2:9]; and will Erasmus bind the Word?’” (94). cf. Rupp and Watson, pp. 236, 132 quotes passages from *De Servo Arbitrio*.

irrelevant; “Antichrist” is not meant figuratively at all, but refers literally to the capital Antichrist himself. In his response to the Treatise, the Author identifies the pope as the dreaded, singular Apocalyptic harbinger whose behavior fulfills prophecies about Antichrist’s life and work. In subsequent stanzas, the Author describes the pope’s leadership as prophetically corrupt; his apparent tyranny and feigned majesty, anticipated by exegetes, serve to confirm his identity. Barlowe and Roye themselves similarly associate the pope with the capital Antichrist who will usher in the Second Coming: their final epithet in *Rede Me* specifically aligns Pope Clement, “the sonne of an whore” (l. 3715, sig. i8v) with the “great whore” of fallen Babylon in Revelation 17—she whom exegetes often identified as the final Antichrist. Thus, Barlowe, Roye, and their Author appear to mean something properly eschatological when they refer to Antichrist: the pope is not a general Antichrist, but the capital one, and his tyranny signals nothing less than an imminent Doomsday.

In the body of their tract, Barlowe and Roye carefully distinguish between the general and the capital in a dialogue between two reformist friars, Jeffry and Watkyn. Jeffry makes an ardent case for the Antichrist’s presence in the contemporary ecclesiastic hierarchy; while he describes corrupt preachers as “confederate / With Antichrist” (ll. 2356f., sig. f8r), he notably reserves the name “Antichrist” for the papacy alone, insisting that Antichrist is exclusively “called the Pope of Rome” (l. 2358, sig. f8r). Similarly, he refers to friars as “soldiers / And antichrist’s own mariners” (ll. 1726f., sig. e4v); these friars are not the Antichrist proper, but their corrupt dealings support him, “his ship forward to convey” (l. 1728, sig. e4v). So too

is Cardinal Wolsey only “Antichrist’s chief member” (l. 3533, sig. i5r), not the Antichrist himself. Admittedly, the tract’s title page seems at first to suggest otherwise, having prominently featured Wolsey’s coat of arms and an accompanying caption that implicates Wolsey as the Antichrist. The caption mock-quotes Wolsey as professing goals very similar to those of the prophesied Antichrist who will ascend the ranks of power and seize temporal authority: “I will ascende, making my state so hye, / That my pompous honoure shall never dye” (ll. 3f., sig. a1r). The description that immediately follows the depiction of the arms explicitly recalls both this prophecy and the familiar warning that the Antichrist will systematically secure the crowns of kings and princes: Wolsey’s crest “signifieth playne his tyranny ... wherin shalbe fulfilled the prophecy” (ll. 21, 23, sig. a1v). It also suggests that Wolsey is like a mastiff “gnawynge with his teth a kynges crowne” (l. 20, sig. a1v). Later, Jeffry himself identifies Wolsey as the “patriarche of all wickedness” (l. 441, sig. b5v) and similarly worries that England’s king is already “by the Cardinall ruled” (l. 854, sig. c4v). However, Watkyn is quick to specify that Wolsey and his “stately thronge,” are ultimately subject to Rome, “their hedde principall” (l. 450, sig. b5v). He suggests that while their actions may recall prophecies about the final Antichrist, they only represent in microcosm what the Pope accomplishes on an even grander scale. Wolsey and his constituents make up a sect “variable and vayne” that is “vnder antichrists raygne” in Rome (ll. 404, 403, sig. b4v); as ministers to the English church and crown, they govern only one part of the Antichrist’s larger dominion. In this way, Barlowe and Roye suggest how Wolsey and the clergy embody the nature and

actions of the prophesied Antichrist; but they distinguish between the capital Antichrist and his corrupt, general accomplices like Wolsey and others.

Luther makes the same, careful distinctions in his early sermons on the first epistle of John.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen above, I John 2:18 is the source for the dual definition of the term, with John having specified both a single, future Antichrist and many, general Antichrists who will come before the capital villain. Luther's commentary throughout the epistle explicitly addresses this distinction; like Barlowe and Roye, he designates the pope as the capital Antichrist—*not* one of his general forbearers. In his commentary on 4:3, Luther definitively acknowledges that there are multiple Antichrists. He translates the verse as "*Et omnis spiritus, qui solvit Iesum, ex Deo non est et hic est Antichristus*" ("Brief," 729) or "And every spirit that severs Jesus is not of God; and this is the Antichrist" ("Lectures," 287). This verse is somewhat confusing because it implies that many evildoers comprise a single *Antichristus*, but Luther clarifies this seeming paradox in his commentary, specifying that "*multi sunt Antichristi et Pseudoprophetae*" ("Brief," 729)—that is, "many are antichrists and false prophets" ("Lectures," 287). In this way, Luther emphasizes that anyone opposed to Christ can be considered an Antichrist.

Yet Luther is careful to indicate that not all Antichrists are equal. He notes a difference of degree when he distinguishes between the "*particulares Antichristi*" and the "*verus Antichristus*." "The heretics are antichrists in part," he notes, "but he who is against the whole Christ is the only true Antichrist" (288). Luther specifies that

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<sup>26</sup> Pelikan and Hansen date these sermons from August 19 to November 7, 1527, based on detailed information about Luther's lectures in a manuscript of Rörer. See their introduction to Vol. 30 of *Luther's Works*, pp. x-xi.



these partial Antichrists only display the “first fruits” of the true Antichrist—that is, the greater, singular Antichrist “who will precede Christ’s glorious coming” (288). Here, Luther makes a familiar distinction, albeit in idiosyncratic terms: he refers to general Antichrists as *particulares Antichristi* and designates the capital Antichrist as the *verus Antichristus*. (“Brief,” 730).<sup>27</sup> These categories are consistent with those he maintains in his larger body of writings on the Antichrist, where he repeatedly and deliberately distinguishes between the Apocalyptic Antichrist and his general forbearers. As David M. Whitford has recently demonstrated, Luther’s German corpus makes this distinction particularly clear: “Luther used two terms to describe the Antichrist, the apocalyptic *Endchrist* and the more direct translation *Widerchrist*” (36). *Endchrist* literally means “final Christ” and refers to the Antichrist of the Apocalypse while *Widerchrist* identifies a more general threat, referring literally to anyone who is “against Christ.” It is easy to see how Luther’s definitional precision could get lost in translation: German uses two distinct nouns to designate what Latin achieves separately with adjectives, and the Latin adjectives are not nearly as suggestive as the German prefixes. The prefix *End-* asserts a definitive teleology that the Latin “*verus*” does not. In this context, it is useful to note that Luther often refers to the “*rechte Endchrist*,” or the “right” or “true” final Christ when he uses the term against the papacy.<sup>28</sup> Luther’s use of *rechte* provides a crucial gloss on his Latin

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<sup>27</sup> Luther’s distinction between ‘partial’ and ‘true’ is itself an odd opposition. Luther seems to use “true” in the sense of “whole” or “entire”: he indicates that the “*verus Antichristus*” are those “*qui est contra totum Christum*,” or who are against the whole Christ (“Brief,” 730).

<sup>28</sup> For example, in *To the Christian Nobility*, Luther implicates the papacy: “*Wen fein ander boker tuct were der do beweret das der Bapst der recht Endchrist sen ko weeer eden dikes stuct gnugham das zu bewere*,” (“*An Den Christlichenn*,” 408) or “If there were no other base trickery to prove that the pope is the true Antichrist, this one would be enough to prove it” (“*To the Christian Nobility*,” 193-4).

*verus Antichristus*: the fact that he refers to the *Endchrist* as the “true” Antichrist substantiates his *verus Antichristus* as the final, capital Antichrist.

Luther’s tendency to refer to the papacy as the “true Antichrist” in both German and Latin, moreover, underscores his belief that the pope was this final Antichrist—not one of the general forebearers. Whitford notes that Luther almost always uses *Endchrist* when he refers to the pope (36), and Luther’s Latin commentary on John 2:18 confirms what is clear from Luther’s German—namely, Luther’s dual designations are not interchangeable. On 2:18, Luther offers a more detailed description of the “*Antichristi partials*.”<sup>29</sup> He describes them as those who oppose various, separate aspects of Christ and contrasts them with the *verus Antichristus* who opposes the “whole Christ.” Here Luther clarifies his use of the term as he applies it to the pope and specifically implicates him as the capital Antichrist:

For one antichrist was contending against the Person of Christ, another against His humanity, another against His divinity. These are antichrists in part, as the fanatics are. Another opposes the whole Christ, and he is the head of all, as the papacy is. For the chief article of the Christian doctrine is this, that Christ is our Righteousness. He who is now attacking this is taking the whole Christ away from us and is the true Antichrist. The others are giving him assistance. (“Lectures,” 252)

In this, Luther further defines the relationship between the general and the capital Antichrist: like Barlowe and Roye, he casts papal adherents as the capital Antichrist’s

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<sup>29</sup> Luther’s modern English translators translate both *particulares Antichristi* and *Antichristi partials* as “Antichrists in part.”

accomplices. He admits that papal adherents might be considered lesser antichrists (and identified as such), but he insists that the pope is superlative and the only capital Antichrist: as he warns in his commentary on 4:3, “no one has filled the ranks of the Antichrist so craftily and so astutely as the pope has done. . . . But the spirit of the pope is the subtlest” (“Lectures,” 287).<sup>30</sup> In short, there two distinct kinds of Antichrists for Luther, and the pope is specifically the capital one.

### **THOMAS MORE: HERALDING THE CAPITAL ANTICHRIST**

Whereas Erasmus insists upon a general Antichrist and Luther upon the capital one, Thomas More emerges someplace in between these two positions. Like Erasmus, More objects to early polemicists’ inflammatory language and particularly to their use of the term “Antichrist.” Yet More acknowledges that the polemicists anticipate a capital, not a general villain: moving beyond Erasmus’ critique of figurative bombast, he combats flawed eschatology. Interestingly, More does not necessarily exonerate the polemicists’ targets but instead challenges the legitimacy of the term’s literal use in the first place. He argues that no one—the pope, Erasmus, not even Luther himself—can with certainty be recognized as the capital Antichrist because his identity is by nature unknowable. More, then, comes to the same conclusion as

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<sup>30</sup> This is a distinction that Luther’s English adherents uphold in their own early commentaries on the papal Antichrist. Frith, for example, addresses the pope as the capital Antichrist in the final section of his *Revelation of Antichrist*. He acknowledges John’s distinctions between the general and capital Antichrist, and like Luther, he identifies the pope as the “head” Antichrist. However, he still acknowledges that “Sanct Joan sayed that there were many antichrists” and the pope’s capital villainy can be “verified thorow all his members,” which include “cardinals, bishops, suffragans, archdeacons, deacons, officials, parsons, abbots, deans, friars, summoners, pardoners, papal notaries, monks, canons, anchorites, hermits, nuns, and sisters” (sig. [L8] v). Here, Frith’s use of “members” (a term Luther also uses) can be understood as referring to the general Antichrists, while the term “head” is reserved for the capital Antichrist.

Erasmus—the term “Antichrist” is only properly used in its figurative sense and, even then, only rarely—but he does so by meeting Luther and the other polemicists on their own terms. In the process, More addresses the theological implications of Apocalyptic name-calling that Erasmus side-steps.

More himself wonders repeatedly in his writings if the end of the world is near at hand. As editor Louis Schuster notes, “Imagery related to the Antichrist springs readily to More’s pen” (Confutation 1338). This tendency is particularly evident in More’s *Confutation to Tyndale’s Answer* (c. 1532-3), where More not only offers an extended description of the Second Coming of Christ but also twice suggests that Antichrist’s own coming seems imminent, noting that “Antycryste shall come hymselfe whyche as helpe me god I fere be very nere hys tyme” (271).<sup>31</sup> Schuster further notes that in More’s polemical writings, “there is a sense of something near at hand,” and he suggests that More “must have felt himself to be a small player on a stage where a cosmic drama was being enacted, a drama whose closing lay wrapped in the infinite and inscrutable power of God” (1340). This being said, it is precisely this inscrutability that keeps More from definitively asserting the identity of any of the players in this Doomsday drama. It also fuels his critique of those who do.

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<sup>31</sup> On the coming of the Antichrist, More later similarly specifies: “Antychryste shall come hym selfe whyche as helpe me god I very greatly fere is now very nere at hande” (Confutation, 479). More also describes the Second Coming: “And when yt shall come to thextremite, Cryste shall come downe from his high mounthe himself, and gather blaste of hys own blessed mouth shall ouerthrow and destroy the strong captayne of all these heretykes Antichryste himself, and shall rule those ragyouse rebellious scysmatykes wyth an iron rod, and all to frush & to breke those erthen pottes and shall holde his dome day, and brynge thereto and from yt vnto heuen, no smale number yet of those that shall then be lefte of whom Saynt Poule sayth, then we hat lyve and remayne shall be taken vpe with them also in ye cloudes to mete our lorde in the ayer, and so shall we for euer be wyth out lord” (794).

More is intensely skeptical of polemicists' Apocalyptic exegesis—but not simply because he is a staunch advocate of papal authority.<sup>32</sup> More insists broadly that one can rarely, if ever, be certain, when accusing someone of being the Antichrist, and he suggests further that those who name names in their Apocalyptic exegesis are often inconsistent. In a letter to an unidentified monk in 1520, More recounts the monk's "shockingly heated attack" against Erasmus: "You belittle his learning, rave against his lifestyle, call him 'vagrant' and 'psuedo-theologian,' cry 'slanderer' at him, and brand him a 'herald of the Antichrist' ("Letter to a Monk," 203-5).<sup>33</sup> More specifically chastises the monk for casting Erasmus in an unfolding eschatology—that is, for pronouncing him a "herald" and one of the lesser villains who, according to the Book of Revelation, will immediately precede the final Antichrist.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the monk's name-calling, More takes particular offence at the way the monk tries to "hedge" his allegation (203). The monk's strategy is to

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as much as More defends the papal office, he by no means defends its corrupt practices, and frequently admits that the papal office is in need of serious reform. In his *Responsio ad Lutherum*, he likens the papacy to a child being beaten deservingly for wrongdoing; interestingly, Luther is the rod—the scourge of God—being used to expose and punish the Church: "But God, Luther, will not abandon his vicar [the pope]. He will one day be mindful of him and is perhaps mindful of him now as He scourges the father by means of the anguish which he suffers from his most profligate son. For I think, Luther, that you are clearly the scourge of God, to the great good of that See, but to your own great harm. God will act as a devoted mother is wont, who when she has whipped her son wipes away his tears and, to satisfy the boy, immediately throws the hated rod into the fire" (*Responsio* 141).

<sup>33</sup> Erasmus attests that writers often used their objections to Luther as an excuse to implicate emerging humanism—and Erasmus himself—as an additional indicator of an imminent Apocalypse. See above where Erasmus defends humanism against critics who speculate it is the work of the Antichrist. Elsewhere Erasmus attests that a "hatred of ancient tongues and of humane studies" is often the "true motive behind" early attacks on Luther (1167, 111). In a 1520 letter to Lorenzo Campeggi, Erasmus describes how those protesting against Joahnn Reuchlin, a prominent early humanist, found renewed vigor in a particularly scathing tone against the Church: "Their project was not yet going as they had hoped, when there appeared some pieces by Martin Luther, written, it would seem, in an unhappy hour, and their spirits rose at once: here was a weapon, put into their hands, with which they could finish off the tongues and the humanities, and Reuchlin and Erasmus into the bargain ... to deliver astonishing tirades against liberal studies, making them share the burden of odium attached to Luther's name, which they were trying to make as hateful as they could, and proclaiming that liberal studies are the source of heresies, of schisms, and of Antichrists" (1167, 111).

<sup>34</sup> See Revelation 11.

accuse Erasmus by *not* accusing him, thereby maintaining some semblance of modesty. “I do not call him a heretic,” More paraphrases, “but whoever acts thus is a heretic. I do not proclaim him schismatic, but whosoever acts thus is a schismatic. I do not pronounce him a herald of the Antichrist, but what if this very assertion concerning Erasmus had come straight from God?” (203). It is in this way that More suggests the monk attempts to defame Erasmus without substantiating his claim: “as you make such an outrageous accusation, you say you do not want to make it” (203)—a tactic that allows the monk to “recit[e] it to us with such sanctimony, as if by divine revelation” (205) without actually producing evidence of such a marvelous disclosure.

More suggests that the monk’s tactics are necessarily evasive because this evidence is impossible to obtain. According to More, even an apparent revelation could not substantiate the monk’s claim about Erasmus:

Even if you had openly stated that it was your own revelation, even if you had mentioned the name of the angel or demon who brought you the message, it being one I would not have believed even from a sworn witness. Rather, I would have warned you against being too quick to believe every spirit, especially that one, for however brightly he had shone with false light he would still have betrayed himself as an angel of darkness by his buzz of detraction and slander, as sure a mark of Satan. (205)

More’s is a powerful skepticism: even supernatural revelation could not categorically prove Erasmus’ identity as the Antichrist’s herald because the messenger could be either an angel or a demon. More admits that he would be more inclined to suspect

the latter if only because slander seems so opposed to virtue. More, like both the Treatise and Erasmus above, interprets detraction as a sure sign of an unholy messenger. He may show himself capable of his own hyperbole, but More at least reminds the Monk that the same prophecies that warn against Antichrist's heralds also warn against false prophets. These prophets, in the last days, will depart from the faith of God and accuse innocents of hypocrisy in order to distract the faithful from Antichrist's own well-masked villainy:

I would rather have countered by echoing that verse from Paul, 'In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, hearkening unto spirits of error and the doctrines of devils who speak lies in hypocrisy and have consciences seared with a hot iron,' and also that other verse of his, 'Let no man lead you astray in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding vainly into things he has not seen, puffed up by his carnal conceit.' (205)

On one hand, More warns the Monk against being led "astray" by Antichrist's cohorts—including those who might try to convince the monk of Erasmus' villainy. On the other hand, More implies that the monk himself is leading others astray with his "voluntary humility." He scoffs at the monk's insistence that he "would forebear" the charges against Erasmus "out of modesty" (205): "Would to God it were as certain that each of us felt truly humble" (205).

In mocking the monk's humility, More suggests that any accusation about the identity of the final Antichrist necessarily positions the *accuser* in eschatological history at the same time it positions the accused. In asserting the identity of the Antichrist's false prophet, the monk presumes to be God's prophet—one of the divine

messengers, often identified as the two witnesses, Enoch and Elijah, who will be armed with the knowledge of Antichrist's identity and will expose him in an attempt to protect the faithful. But if the monk asserts an unsubstantiated and ultimately inaccurate eschatology, he himself—not Erasmus—is the false herald and Antichrist's accomplice. This is an eschatology that William Tyndale describes in his 1526 translation of Revelation: he offers only one substantive gloss in the entire book, and it specifically regards distinguishing God's true messengers from the false ones. Tyndale comments on the beginning of Revelation 7, which describes God's messenger angels who will protect the servants of God during the final persecutions. He begins with a straightforward etymology for the word "angel," explaining that it "is a Greek word and signifieth a messenger," and he continues, directly glossing the immediate passage: "the good angels here in this book are the true bishops and preachers." Significantly, Tyndale adds an additional warning about those who masquerade as God's true messengers: "the evil angels are the heretics and false preachers which ever falsify God's word, with which the church of Christ shall be thus miserably plagued unto the end of the world as is painted in these figures" (376). Tyndale's gloss—and the fact that it is the only interpretative gloss he provides on the Apocalypse—speaks to the degree to which true and false heralds were tightly linked to the revelation of Antichrist's identity.

It may be for this reason that More ultimately gives the monk the benefit of the doubt, suggesting that "we can both simply forget what was said" (211). More opts to read the monk's Apocalypticism as figurative, not literal, and thereby prevents the monk from assuming any eschatological role. Although More at first treats the



monk's claim about Erasmus as a genuine assertion of a literal apocalypse, by the end of the epistle, he evaluates the monk's use of "Antichrist" much in the same way that Erasmus does Luther's. He suggests that the monk is simply "raving" (207) and that his bold accusations are merely a provocative screen for comparatively minor offences. According to More, the monk eventually admits that Erasmus could still redeem himself, "even hinting that [he] may be willing to settle [his] feud with Erasmus on quite easy terms" (207). More notes how the monk's willingness to negotiate shatters his eschatological argument. Just as the capital Antichrist is irredeemable, so too are his heralds. By hinting that these Apocalyptic accusations are conditional, the monk admits that Erasmus was never guilty of such a "serious charge" in the first place: "In confessing that all that needs to be corrected are some minor mistakes ... thereby you confessed (somewhat bashfully, in keeping with your modesty, but still truthfully enough to disburden yourself of such a criminal lie), you confessed, I repeat, that all the intemperate charges with which you began about heresy, schism, and the heralding of the Antichrist were all pure fabrications" (209). More accuses the monk of undercutting his Apocalyptic claims in order to "disburden" himself of the consequences; by refusing to accuse Erasmus outright, the monk neither presumes to be God's witness or risks being Antichrist's.

More essentially accuses the Monk of trying to have it both ways—that is, the monk suggests a literal apocalypse at the same time he uses figurative meaning as a defense mechanism designed to distance himself from such a suggestion. But if the monk is guilty of equivocation, so too is More. The only published instance in which More accuses anyone—including Luther—of being the Antichrist is similarly

guarded. In his *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523), More identifies Luther as the “Antichrist” within the context of a hypothetical, and it is even one of his fictional characters, not More himself, who does so. More identifies a character, whom he names “A,” with Luther; he designates characters “B,” “C,” and “D” as Luther’s hearers. Character “E” is someone seeking the true faith who has witnessed other congregations in “many Christian nations.” He explains:

When E sees among A, B, C, and D many extremely absurd teachings on most important topics, which are not only contrary to that catholic church, but also utterly destructive of public morals, it cannot but happen, I say, that E will understand with certainty that the church of A, B, C, D is not the church of Christ nor an assembly of good men, but that it is the hovel of the most corrupt buffoons and brothel of Satan; and then from these facts he would recognize A either as the alpha of heretics, or as Antichrist.” (*Responsio*, 191)

In this way, More associates Luther with the capital Antichrist, but the hypothetical wording protects More from making a direct accusation. Earlier in the *Responsio*, More stops short of calling Luther Antichrist and instead calls him “the scourge of God”—an appellation that certainly brings to mind notions of the Apocalypse, but that does not necessarily implicate Luther as the capital Antichrist *per se* (141). More often likens Luther to the beast of Apocalypse 13—a figure frequently identified by exegetes as the Antichrist—yet he never explicitly states the Luther *is* the Antichrist.<sup>35</sup> Much like the monk he addresses, More leaves to his reader the task of making the connection between the two.

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<sup>35</sup> In his *Responsio*, More responds to Luther’s assertion that the authority of Christ opposes the Pope: “Behold, reader, the truly accursed beast of which the Apocalypse 13 says, ‘Who is like to the beast,

These kinds of ambiguous semantics abound in early reformation polemic, and Luther's own writings against the Pope are no exception. Although Erasmus chides Luther for his no-holds-barred approach, it is important to note that Luther's initial attacks on the pope are often just as delicately worded as the monk's and More's. Particularly in his early writings, Luther seems agonizingly aware that by accusing the pope, he necessarily casts him in an unfolding apocalypse that included both true prophets *and* false heralds. These consequences are enough to give Luther pause as he weighs whether or not to accuse a papal Antichrist openly. Throughout his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (1521), Luther's posits plenty of reasons why he is neither God's prophet nor Antichrist's false herald—protestations that make him seem more than a little self-conscious about the weight of his accusations and the eschatological consequences he faces if he is wrong.<sup>36</sup> He is quick to deny claims that he is God's witness, insisting explicitly, "I do not claim to

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And who will be able to fight with it? And there was given to it a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies. And it opened its mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. But the time will come when the beast shall be cast into the pool of burning fire and sulphur.' Meanwhile, as God foresaw, it is well that this unsubdued and accursed beast should always contradict himself. He admits that the church is certain, yet discusses her in such a way as to render her most uncertain; and he is not content to judge in a human manner; while pursuing and manifesting a kind of concealed and hidden wisdom, he reduces the palpable and commonly known church to an invisible one, from an external to an internal one, from an internal one he utterly reduces her to no church at all, as you shall immediately see proved" (147).

<sup>36</sup> Luther suggests instead that his opponents are the false teachers. In a somewhat counter-intuitive move, he expresses relief that so many object to his Articles, as this seems to confirm that what he says is probably true: "That many of the bigwigs hate and persecute me for this reason does not frighten me at all. It rather comforts and strengthens me since it is clearly revealed in the Scriptures that the persecutors and haters have usually been wrong and the persecuted have usually been right. The lie has always had the greater following, the truth the smaller. Indeed, I know if only a few insignificant men were attacking me, then what I have taught and written were not yet from God. St. Paul caused a great uproar with his teaching as we read in Acts, but that did not prove his teaching false. Truth has always caused disturbances and false teachers have always said, 'Peace, peace!' as Isaiah and Jeremiah tell us. Therefore, without regard to the pope and his great following, I will gladly come to the rescue and defense of the articles condemned in the bull, as God gives me grace. I trust, by God's grace, to protect them against the wrong that has been done them ..." ("Defense," 12).

be a prophet” (“Defense,” 9-10). He also defends himself against the alternative charge of false herald—an accusation made not only by Bishop John Fisher, but also by More and King Henry himself. Luther insists that “even if I am not a prophet,” he is not automatically Antichrist’s messenger: “as far as I am concerned I am sure that the Word of God is with me and not with them, for I have the Scriptures on my side and they have only their own doctrine” (9-10). Luther describes himself as somewhere between divine prophet and false herald.<sup>37</sup> Luther’s early depictions of the pope are similarly reluctant, and he frequently describes a pope who is *almost* Antichrist.

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<sup>37</sup> It is only later, in his letter *To the Christian Nobility*, that Luther finally decisively admits his belief that God compels him to expose the pope’s villainy: “I would rather have the wrath of the world upon me than the wrath of God. ... In the past I have made frequent overtures of peace to my enemies, but as I see it, God has compelled me through them to keep on opening my mouth wider and wider ...” (217).

## CHAPTER 2:

### THE INSTITUTIONAL ANTICHRIST

Critics often cite *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) as Luther's first definitive attack on a papal Antichrist.<sup>1</sup> Yet like More's monk, Luther hedges his bets in the *Captivity*. He seems to leave little room for argument in the opening pages: "I now know for certain," he writes, "that the papacy is the kingdom of Babylon and the power of Nimrod, the mighty hunter" (12). Yet he later qualifies this assertion, suggesting that the pope is the Antichrist *only* if he refuses to reform: "Unless they will abolish their laws and ordinances, and restore to Christ's Churches their liberty and have it taught among them, they are guilty of all the souls that perish under this miserable captivity, and the papacy is truly the kingdom of Babylon and of the very Antichrist" (72). Luther allows for a "reformable" Antichrist—even though the

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<sup>1</sup> Contemporaries also treat the *Captivity* as one of the first places Luther asserts a Papal Antichrist. Bishop John Fisher's *Sermon Against the Pernicious Doctrine of Martin Luther* (1521) takes *The Babylonian Captivity* as its point of departure, and as Cecilia Hatt notes, it is the only one of Luther's early works to be mentioned by name in the sermon (Hatt 62, 78). Henry VIII likewise replies to the *Captivity* in his *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (1521); Thomas More mentions the *Captivity* repeatedly in his theological writings; Bishop William Barlow cites it in his *A Dialogue Describing the Original Ground of These Lutheran Factions* and specifically addresses its mention of the papal Antichrist: "Then all his [Luther's] sermons were against the clergy, calling the Pope Antichrist, and his followers Disciples of Satan's synagogue, in whose defiance he made a book entitled, *De Capitiuitate Babilonica*, full of conuicious furies, and raynge blasphemy against the blessed sacraments, preferinge his own judgement above the holy doctors of the church. And where he had witnessed / before, that Wicklyfe, Hus, Berengarius, & such other were hereticks: than he said that they were godly men and saints, calling their condemners Antichrists and limes of the Devil" (sig. E3 v- E4 r). *The Babylonian Captivity*, in light of its reception, may well be the quintessential Lutheran Papal Antichrist work. In this regard, some critics date Luther's first printed assertion of a papal Antichrist as early as October 1520. Others date it even earlier: Joseph Koerner, for example, suggests that Luther first names the Pope as Antichrist in his 1520 *Responsio* to Ambroisus Catharinus' *Apologia* (Reformation 119). (See also Patrick Preston on Catharinus' *Apologia* and Luther's opinion of it.) As John M. Headley points out, Luther's *Responsio* "is well known for its depiction of the papacy as the Antichrist of Daniel's vision" (761). Yet, as others have noted, Luther's *Responsio* made its way to England late: Frith's translation, *The Revelation of Antichrist*, was not published until 1529. English readers encountered *The Babylonian Captivity* much sooner, as evidenced by the number of English tracts that respond to it.

capital Antichrist would have been *de facto* irredeemably evil. He makes a similar qualification in his letter *To the Christian Nobility*, published two months earlier in August 1520. Although Bernard McGinn cites this text as another early, popular source for Luther's depictions of the papal Antichrist (Antichrist, 203), in fact, Luther in it still conditionally accuses the pope of being the Antichrist. Luther only suggests that the pope "*might* also be the Counter-Christ, whom the Scriptures call Antichrist" (165, my italics). By the tract's midpoint, Luther seems to find the evidence seemingly more convincing, yet he continues to take refuge in the conditional: "They sell us doctrine so satanic, and take money for it, that they are teaching us sin and leading us into hell. If there were no other base trickery to prove that the pope is the true Antichrist, this one would be enough to prove it" (193). Even when he appears to have talked himself into a direct accusation—he still falls back on a negation: "The pope suppresses God's commandment and exalts his own. If he is not Antichrist, then somebody tell me who is!" (195).<sup>2</sup> Not until 1521 did Luther definitively assert a papal Antichrist without qualification—notably, after the issuance of *Decet Pontificem*, the papal bull that excommunicated him.<sup>3</sup> In June of 1521, Luther writes, "I give thanks to my Lord Jesus Christ who, on account of this assault, has repaid me a hundred times with the knowledge—of which I am now

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<sup>2</sup> McGinn also cites *On the Papacy at Rome* as an even earlier instance of Luther's assertion of a papal Antichrist (Antichrist, 203), but like these other instances, Luther still leaves some wiggle room in this work, again accusing the pope in the conditional: "If the pope ever came to that [establishing new articles of faith and disregarding Holy Scripture]—may God forbid— I would freely say that he is the true Antichrist of which all Scripture speaks. If these two things are granted, I will let the pope be" ("On the Papacy," 101). Luther gives the pope the peculiar opportunity to "opt out" of being the Antichrist.

<sup>3</sup> But see also David M Whitford, who addresses Luther's changing attitude toward the papacy in 1520-1. Whitford is careful to note that *Decet Pontificem* and Luther's excommunication were not the sole impetus for the assertion of a papal Antichrist.

convinced—that the pope is the Antichrist, the sign of the end prophesied throughout the Scriptures, and that the universities are indeed the ultimate in the synagogues of Satan, in which the rule belongs to those Epicurean swine, the sophistic theologians” (“Against Latamos,” 141). Luther leaves little room for debate here: he not only unequivocally identifies the pope as the capital Antichrist, harbinger of the Apocalypse, but he also takes a swipe at seemingly complicit university theologians—perhaps ones like Erasmus who had systematically urged him to hold his tongue.

Luther’s hesitations might also have something to do with the complicated nature of the Antichrist he sought to define. Luther advocates a literal Antichrist—a capital, Apocalyptic harbinger—but this literal Antichrist is not the solitary villain anticipated by medieval lore. Luther ultimately vilifies the papacy, not the pope—an institution, not an individual. As Paul Christianson notes, the notion of an institutional enemy becomes the dividing line between medieval and Reformation understandings of the Antichrist. He suggests that in the early 1530s, Cranmer still preached on the Antichrist in “medieval fashion”—that is, he “held that the *present* pope was the Final Enemy and only later expanded this to include the reformation belief in the institution of the papacy as Antichrist” (12, my emphasis). Yet even in Luther’s early anti-papal writings, the morality of individual popes was less troubling than the “ungodliness” of the office itself (“Freedom,” 335). This complicated distinction is perhaps no where clearer than in Luther’s open letter to Pope Leo X, dated September 1520 and printed as a preface to *The Freedom of a Christian*. Writing before his excommunication, an unusually deferential Luther defends Pope

Leo as “a lamb in the midst of wolves” (336) and denies claims that his earlier writing personally attacks the pope. “So far have I been from raving against your person,” Luther explains, “that I even hoped I might gain your favor and save you if I should make a strong and stinging assault upon that prison, that veritable hell of yours” (338). Luther denies *ad hominem* attack, but he admits to making a “strong and stinging assault” on the pope’s “prison”—namely, the Roman See, the Roman Curia, and the papal office itself. Rome is a city whose inhabitants provide “the worst examples of the worst of all things,” and the Roman Curia is “characterized by a completely depraved, hopeless, and notorious godlessness” (336). Yet the crux of Luther’s complaint pertains to the Church hierarchy, specifically the papal office, which he suggests enables the depravity of the Roman See.

Luther links Rome’s iniquity to the nearly boundless authority that the Curia assigns to the papacy. “Under the protection of your name they seek to gain support for all their wicked deeds in the church” (324). The Curia grants the papacy “power over heaven, hell and purgatory” (342), transforming the pope into a “lord of the world” and “no mere man but a demigod” (341). Luther argues that this inflated image is a gross abuse, if not idolatry: he depicts papal authority as edging out divine authority, and in this way, the office of pope distances the church from Christ. Luther writes: “A man is vicar only when his superior is absent. ... What is the church under such a vicar but a mass of people without Christ? Indeed, what is such a vicar but an antichrist and an idol?” (342) Luther identifies a fundamental problem with the way the office of pope is defined: he insists that the pope should be the “servant of the present Christ” not the “vicar of an absent Christ” (342). As a vicar, the pope is



granted expansive license over the Church universal; but if a servant, this authority would be reserved for God alone. Leo can presumably rescue the Church from the clutches of Antichrist by curbing the authority of his office; he can combat Antichrist even while he himself is pope. “They err who exalt you above a council and the church universal. They err who ascribe to you alone the right of interpreting Scripture. . . . Satan has already made much progress under your predecessors. In short, believe none who exalt you, believe those who humble you” (342). While Luther questions the moral character of some of Leo’s predecessors, his chief concern is not their individual scruples, but the “ungodliness” of the authority that the papal office grants to fallible leaders (335). Certainly those popes lacking scruples will be more inclined to take advantage of this authority, but the Church is essentially protected against this kind of overstepping if the authority is not granted in the first place. Luther concludes by attesting that he is Leo’s “friend and most humble subject” (343), again distinguishing between his personal affection for the pope and his disdain for the papal office.

Luther’s careful distinction between an individual and an office makes his polemic different from the anti-papal arguments of his predecessors. Luther was not the first to associate the pope with the Antichrist. As Bernard McGinn has shown, the papal Antichrist had a long history in medieval lore, appearing in manuscripts as early as the turn of the first millennium.<sup>4</sup> But as McGinn and others have argued elsewhere, there is crucial difference between sixteenth-century Protestant renderings of the papal Antichrist and its earlier, pre-Reformation incarnations. While earlier writers lampoon *individual* popes, later Protestant arguments condemn the entire

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<sup>4</sup> See McGinn, *Antichrist*, pp. 143ff.

institution of the papacy. Dante, for example, famously relegates Pope Nicholas III, Boniface VIII, and Clement V to the eighth circle of Hell, but he does not implicate every pope, only those whom he finds particularly salacious. Likewise, fifteenth-century radical Jan Hus carefully qualifies his opinion of the papacy when responding to accusations that he called the pope the Antichrist. “I did not say this,” he insists, “but I did say that if the pope sells benefices, if he is proud ... or otherwise morally opposed to Christ, then he is the Antichrist. But it should by no means follow that every pope is Antichrist; a good pope, like St. Gregory, is not the Antichrist, nor do I think he ever was” (qtd. McGinn, Antichrist, 185).

When Luther argues to dissolve the papal office, he makes no such exceptions for “good popes”—Gregory, Leo or otherwise. This is precisely what worries Thomas More, who fears that Luther wants to throw out the baby with the bathwater. More suggests that the depravity to which both he and Luther object is the result of corrupt men, not an inherently corrupt office:

Surely, as regards the pope, God who put him in charge of His church knew what an evil it would have been to have lacked a pope; and I do not think one should desire the Christian world to learn this by experience at its own risk. How much more should we desire God to make such men popes as will befit the Christian commonwealth and the dignity of the apostolic office. ... The Christian world would shortly realize from one or two such pontiffs, how much more satisfactory it is for the popes to be reformed than to be removed.

*(Responsio, 141)*

Luther was unconvinced. In his letter to Pope Leo, he cites Jeremiah 51:9: “We would have cured Babylon, but she was not healed. Let us forsake her” (“Freedom,” 337). The papacy, like fallen Babylon, had reached the point of no return. No good pope—not even Leo—could rescue the office from Satan’s clutches: “It was your duty and that of your cardinals to remedy these evils, but the gout of these evils makes a mockery of the healing hand, and neither chariot nor horse responds to the rein” (337). Thus, Luther advocates removal over reform and challenges the very legitimacy of the institution itself.

In this way, the Reformation marks an important shift in the understanding of the Antichrist and his traditional *vita*—that is, those anticipated signs that would help the faithful detect the Antichrist’s otherwise well-masked identity. Centuries of Antichrist lore had been built upon the premise that the capital Antichrist—that is, the Antichrist who would usher in the Apocalypse— would be a particular corrupt individual, a person who could be identified by any number of specific, personal characteristics, including where he born, who his parents were, and how he would act. Yet for the early Protestants, the task of identifying a papal Antichrist was not that of pinpointing specific, incriminating evidence about a particular reigning pontiff, but instead of chronicling a centuries-old history of an institution and the distance this institution had placed between Christ and his Church. The Antichrist chronicles of yore seem hardly applicable in this new context. Yet Antichrist’s traditional *vita* remained very much a lively and accessible part of sixteenth-century writing, and the success of Protestant arguments for a papal Antichrist hinged upon the reformers’ ability to square an institutional history with these traditional expectations.

Reformers needed to demonstrate how these long-standing prophecies came to fulfillment in the papacy, and they faced the complicated task of explaining how prophecies that had long been thought to point to one man in fact pointed to one institution—and a succession of many men who propagated this “ungodly” office. In many instances, Luther and the continental reformers accommodate this new understanding of the Antichrist by reinterpreting traditional lore as figurative or metaphorical. This shift in thinking about the Antichrist is facilitated by some sense that the actual and the metaphoric are not so far apart in the sixteenth-century; but there is also a sense that Luther’s definition of Antichrist necessarily privileges an understanding of the Church as the mystical body of Christ: the papacy becomes, for Luther, the mystical body of Antichrist.

### **LEGEND AND THE PAPAL ANTICHRIST**

The French Abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der was the first to summarize the popular narratives about the life of the Antichrist in his tenth-century *Libellus de Antichristo*. Adso refers to John’s dual understanding of the Antichrist, and he certainly acknowledges that “Antichrist” need not always connote the Apocalyptic: “whatever man—layman, cleric, or monk—lives contrary to justice and opposes the rule of his station in life and blasphemes the good, he is Antichrist and the servant of Satan” (102). Yet Adso also implies that this general definition may be the exception to the rule: all of Adso’s subsequent uses of the term refer specifically to the coming of the capital Antichrist, and the later reiterations of Adso’s narrative similarly leave little room for ambiguity. Early English tracts like the anonymous pamphlet *Here*

*begynneth the byrthe and lyfe of the moost [false] and deceyfull Antechryst* (c. 1525?) treated the Antichrist in explicitly eschatological terms, with its narrative and accompanying illustrations detailing “the tokens and sygnes that shall falle before the comynge of oure lorde Jesus cryst to the generall Jugement” (sig. Aii r). This English pamphlet not only retells Adso’s narrative, but it also extends the already prominent continental tradition extant in late-fifteenth century German blockbooks—a tradition that similarly illustrates lore about a single, Doomsday Antichrist in sequential, captioned woodcuts.<sup>5</sup> Both provide strikingly specific details about the birth, youth, and perverse public ministry of the capital Antichrist.

Luther’s polemic extends this tradition to the extent that he emphasizes the Apocalypse, yet it is important to note that Luther does not adopt this medieval tradition wholesale, particularly with regard to the Antichrist’s traditional vita. In keeping with his developing doctrine of *sola scriptura*, Luther rejects extra-biblical details about the life of the Antichrist. Luther’s arguments certainly hinge upon his ability to demonstrate how long-standing prophecies come to fulfillment in the

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Der Antichrist und die Fünfzehn Zeichen* (Nuremberg?, c. 1467), reproduced in a two volume facsimile edited by H. Th. Musper. In the introductory note to the English translation, Manfred von Armin notes that only a few printed Antichrist blockbooks are extant although there is evidence that these proliferated: “By the second half of the fifteenth century, the story [of the Antichrist], often followed by the Fifteen Signs [of Doomsday], found its way into print in popular editions, which must have been read to pieces. Schreiber records four issues of three blockbook editions, known by single complete copies or some fragments only. The *Gesamtkatalog* cites ten incunabula editions in different languages, six of them known by unique copies. In addition, the *Gesamtkatalog* mentions one or two French editions no longer traceable. We may therefore assume that more editions were printed than are actually known today” (1). With regard to the depiction of the capital Antichrist, Musper notes that the term “Antichrist” in the blockbooks is specifically “the name for the antithesis of Jesus Christ whose appearance and activity are supposed to precede as a warning of the end of the World and the second advent of the Lord” (1). Neither Musper nor the blockbooks make reference to general Antichrists.

papacy.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Luther is careful to distinguish between biblical prophesy about the Antichrist and the stories that grew out of these prophesies, and he rejects many aspects of traditional lore as unreliable when they do not emerge explicitly from biblical evidence. As Bernard McGinn suggests, “The reformer’s rejection of the legendary accretions to the scriptural picture of Antichrist ... distinguish him from any medieval view, even those that identify the institution of the papacy with the Last Enemy” (*Antichrist*, 207). In his lectures on Genesis, for example, Luther combats the oft-repeated warning that the Antichrist will be born in Babylon from the tribe of Dan—a detail that Adso explicitly articulates and, by Luther’s own account, that contemporary retellings likewise reiterate. Genesis 49:17 warns that “Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels, so that his rider falls backward” (“Lectures on Genesis,” 280). The viper is commonly glossed as the Antichrist and, by extension, exegetes predict that the Antichrist will originate from the tribe of Dan and will be born in Babylon—a reading, Luther attests, that “has spread through all the churches, to such an extent that I have often wished that our ancestors had been more inclined to inculcate the doctrine concerning Christ with such diligence and zeal” (283). Luther challenges the legitimacy of the gloss, insisting that “it is altogether foreign to this passage and completely false” (282). He suggests that details about Babylon as the birth place of the Antichrist read too much into the verse, which, he asserts, does not make explicit reference to the Assyrian city or any other aspect of the Antichrist’s life or origin: “According to the letter,” he

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<sup>6</sup> Luther would have found it necessary to combat legendary accounts of the Antichrist because this traditional eschatology was still circulating widely on the continent. The traditional legend of the Antichrist was prominent enough to be among the earliest publications in English, with the printing of the *Here Begynmeth* pamphlet in the early sixteenth-century.

explains, “no one could be right in thinking that the Antichrist has to be born of Babylon and must be circumcised in accordance with the Jewish custom” (283). Luther suggests further that the gloss relies upon a dubious rendering of Genesis in the first place—one that understands Dan as an “allegory” for Antichrist (283) and that, according to Luther, is not necessarily warranted in context.

Luther is not the only sixteenth-century commentator to react against these “legendary accretions” about the birth of the Antichrist; Erasmus himself maintains a palpable flippancy regarding the details of Antichrist’s origins. In a 1526 letter to Dubois, Erasmus jokingly refers to other popular prophecies about the Antichrist’s birth while addressing rumors of Luther’s wife’s pregnancy: “There is no doubt about Luther’s marriage, but the rumour about his wife’s early confinement is false; she is said, however, to be pregnant now. If there is truth in the popular legend, that Antichrist will be born from a monk and a nun (which is the story these people keep putting about), how many thousands of Antichrists the world must have already!” (1667, 79). Here, Erasmus acknowledges one version of the popular legend regarding Antichrist’s bastardy.<sup>7</sup> Although Erasmus is making a joke here, the fact that he is willing to laugh about the particulars of the prophesy suggests that he, like Luther, is wary of giving too much credence to these legends of the Antichrist.

Whereas Erasmus laughs off these accounts as a way to exonerate Luther from popular speculation, Luther dismisses overreaching glosses of Genesis in order to

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<sup>7</sup> *Here Begynneth* refers alternatively to the incestuous relations of Antichrist’s father, Schaleus, and Schaleus’ daughter, Ulcas. *Der Antichrist und die Fünfzehn Zeichen* (ed. H. Th. Musper) similarly warns that this father and daughter will beget the Antichrist. Adso himself refers simply to Antichrist’s corrupt mother and father while denying still other accounts that Antichrist, in a crude parody of the Incarnation, will be born of a virgin impregnated by an incubus.

*expose* the papal Antichrist. Luther argues that the popular emphasis upon a Babylonian Antichrist obscures the possibility of a Roman one, and he characterizes the popular warnings as devilish strategies intended to protect the identity of the papal Antichrist. Luther's revision of the Genesis commentary is fueled by his anxiety that these misleading glosses are part of the Antichrist's elaborate, deceptive line of attack—one that shields him from suspicion while he takes advantage of an unwitting faithfulness: "I think the devil was the author of this fable and that he invented this gloss to lead our thoughts away from the true and present Antichrist" (283). For Luther, these glosses are more than just tall tales spun by over-zealous commentators and an imaginative public; he suggests that the proliferation of traditional lore is the papal Antichrist's own device: "For among all the papist schools and teachers there is no one who thinks that the pope is the Antichrist. They all think that he will come from Babylon. In the meantime, however, while they talk foolishly about him and wait for him, they are being oppressed and devoured by the true Antichrist, the Roman pontiff" (283).<sup>8</sup> The proliferation of these legendary accretions is just one example of the abuses of the papal office—one that not only controls its constituents' education but that also shapes their very conception of their enemy. Luther insists that returning to the "letter" of biblical prophecy provides the only reliable vita for the Antichrist—and one that makes room for a papal Antichrist who rises from within the

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<sup>8</sup> Luther's hypothesis is an early iteration of what Bishop John Jewel later characterizes as the deceptive tactics of Antichrist. In his *Exposition vpon the two epistles of the apostle Sainct Paule to the Thessalonians*, Jewel argues similarly that traditional legends are "tales [that] have been craftily devised to beguile our eyes, that whilst we think upon these guesses, and so occupy ourselves in beholding a shadow or probable conjecture of antichrist, he which is antichrist indeed may unawares deceive us" (fol. 8). For Jewel, conjectures about Antichrist are evidence of the papacy's elaborate rhetorical maneuvering: "craftily devised" by Antichrist himself, these carefully constructed plots distract and deceive the faithful.



Church. He emphasizes the warnings in 2 Thessalonians 2, which describe the spiritual corruption of an Antichrist who “sits in the holy place” (283).<sup>9</sup> For Luther, Rome is the “true Babylon” and the pope the capital Antichrist: “That Danite [the pope] has extinguished the Gospel by means of his laws and has been born from the true Babylon, namely, from Rome, just as Augustine calls that the second Babylon which began to be born when the former Babylon disappeared. And Dan, or the pope, is the viper on the path of Christ—the viper which, with its poison and violence, slaughters those who walk on this path” (284).

As Whitford has shown, Luther maps an even broader “*curriculum vitae* for the Antichrist” in his 1522 commentary on 2 Thessalonians (37). Luther not only sees the Apocalyptic Antichrist as a villain who will “betray the Church from within” (37), but he also expects him to “undermine the Roman empire, take God’s rightful place in the Church, and mislead through false doctrines and signs” (37). In his letter *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), Luther attacks the papacy on the first of Whitford’s counts, undermining the empire.<sup>10</sup> Luther describes an institution that abuses ecclesiastical office to subvert the authority of Christian princes. Luther specifically denounces payments for indulgences, as well as demands for “large sums of money”

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<sup>9</sup> Luther’s emphasis upon the Antichrist’s ecclesiastical character is his primary argument against a Turkish capital Antichrist. Luther explicitly denies that the Turk is the capital Antichrist; as he explains in his lectures on Genesis: “It is more in accordance with truth to say that the Turk is the beast, because he is outside the church and openly persecutes Christ. The Antichrist, however, sits in the temple of God. Therefore, strictly speaking and by logical definition, he who sits in the church is the Antichrist” (634-5).

<sup>10</sup> James Atkinson suggests that this letter is “one of the most significant documents produced by the Protestant Reformation,” having appeared “at a critical point in Luther’s career” (117). He explains, “The Leipzig debate with John Eck during the summer of 1519 had projected Luther into a position of prominence and attracted support from a wide variety of partisans and sympathizers in humanist circles, Episcopal courts, universities, and among the imperial knights” (117). *To the Christian Nobility* appeared as Luther was coming into prominence.

to “dissolve oaths, vows, and agreements” (193-4) and even to finance military campaigns “to fight the Turk” (144)—all practices that Luther insists are “done in the holy names of Christ and St. Peter” (144), but that actually serve to fuel Rome’s temporal ascendancy. The pope professes spiritual protection in return for compensation, but Luther insists that “this traffic is nothing but skullduggery” (193). The princes receive no return on their investment; instead, they are taken in by the pope’s trickery and false promises. “They [the pope and his legates] lie and deceive. They make laws and they make agreements with us, but they do not intend to keep a single letter of them” (193-4). For Luther, the most brazen example of the Antichrist’s deceit is the Church’s warmongering: Luther argues that “they pretend that they are about to fight the Turks, [and] they send out emissaries to raise money. They often issue an indulgence on the same pretext of fighting the Turks ... in spite of the fact that everybody knows that not a cent of the annates, or of the indulgence money, or of all the rest, is spent to fight the Turk. It all goes into their bottomless bag”(144). In short, the papacy restricts the autonomy of the German princes by stripping them of their financial assets, thereby gradually establishing temporal control. Yet Luther emphasizes that the pope’s ability to undermine temporal powers is intrinsically linked to his usurpation of divine authority: the pope strong-arms financial support under the pretext of pious obedience.

As Whitford notes, Luther also sees the papal office as usurping divine authority. In his commentary on John’s epistle, Luther characterizes obedience to the pope as a form of worship, highlighting the ways the papal office displaces God’s authority in the Church. “Obedience to the supreme pontiff is the highest form of

worship,” Luther writes, “Look at those who worship gods and at those who worship the one true God. Yet you will not see worship so great as the worship of the pope is” (288). Citing 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-4, which warns that the capital Antichrist “opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god” (288), Luther argues that the pope assumes God’s rightful authority.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Luther ties the pope’s rise to exalted authority directly to his successful enforcement of false doctrine and corrupt laws—laws to which the pope demands obedience before God’s own. “Today the laws of the pope are stressed more than are the laws of Christ. No one among the priests fears the laws of Christ as he fears the laws of the pope. No one has repented of adultery, envy, and murder as he repents of neglecting the canonical hours” (288). Here, Luther specifically pits Christ’s laws against the pope’s, establishing an antithesis that he uses to justify the pope’s identity as the Antichrist. As he stresses in his later commentary on Genesis, “The Antichrist [the pope] took his seat in the church, yet not to govern it with divine laws, promises, and grace—for this he could not have done—but to do so in the opposite way” (283). Luther offers an explicit comparison between the actions of Christ and those of the pope: “This means that where Christ, by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit, remits sins and frees consciences from sin, death, hell, and the power of the devil, there, on the other hand, the Roman pontiff filled the world with countless snares and lies ... with which he

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<sup>11</sup> This warning also features in traditional accounts of the Antichrist legend, albeit alongside additional details about the Antichrist’s birth. For example, *Here Begynneeth* specifically addresses the degree to which the capital Antichrist will exalt himself as a god: the tenth chapter “speketh how the malycyous Antechryst shall stande and preche shewyng himself beter than god by his grete pryde” (sig. Bi r), having earlier specified that many “shall gyue unto Antechryste lawde and prayse as yf he were god” (sig. A[vi] v). *Der Antichrist und die Fünfzehn Zeichen* similarly depicts the worship of the Antichrist. These two texts are examples of a much broader tradition reiterated in a variety of forms that makes the same (or very similar) claims about the Antichrist’s life and reign.

takes consciences captive” (283). Matters of conscience are one of the important ways, according to Luther, that Christ and the pope stand at odds.

This kind of antithesis had come to characterize Luther’s writings on the papal Antichrist, and it is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the 1522 *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, one of the first places that Luther argues for a papal Antichrist. The *Passional* pairs Luther’s prose antitheses with accompanying, contrasting illustrations from the life of Christ and the pope.<sup>12</sup> In this way, Luther again engages the medieval Antichrist tradition: he imitates earlier illustrated Antichrist narratives like the ones mentioned above that depict the Antichrist in terms of his opposition to Christ. Yet once again, Luther modifies these traditional accounts in important ways: not only does he figure the papacy in the role that earlier writings had reserved for an unnamed Antichrist yet to come, but he also minimizes the degree to which arguments about a papal Antichrist rely on extra-biblical prophecies about the Antichrist’s birth and origins.

Antichrist’s physical nativity is a scene consistently featured in earlier accounts of Antichrist’s life but Luther conspicuously omits it in the *Passional*. This omission is significant for two reasons. It serves as additional evidence of Luther’s rejection of extra-biblical lore described above, and it also highlights the degree to which Luther must reinterpret traditional prophecies in order to make the case for a

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<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive study of Luther’s *Passional* and reduced facsimiles of the thirteen pairs of images, see Gerald Fleming. Joseph Leo Koerner addresses the *Passional* in the context of Reformation print culture in *The Reformation of the Image*, pp. 114-23. Fleming and Koerner both address Lucas Cranach the Elder’s contributions to the work. As Jaroslav Pelikan notes in his chapter on the magisterial Reformers, “Just how much of the iconography in the book was actually the work of Lucas Cranach the Elder has continued to be a matter of debate and surmise among art historians” (“Some Uses,” 83). Yet, for the purposes of my analysis, I repeat Pelikan’s assertion that “the solution of that question does not affect the point at issue here” (83). David Whitford offers a new assessment of the *Passional* with regard to Luther’s engagement with Lorenzo Valla, pp. 37ff.

papal Antichrist. Luther's Antichrist is not a single man, but a single institution that consists of many successive popes. Practically speaking, the birth of an institution cannot be described in physical terms.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, earlier accounts anticipate the arrival of a future Antichrist; they provide details about his birth so the signs might be recognized when it finally occurs. Yet Luther argues that the papal Antichrist has already arrived—and has been overlooked for centuries. Thus, Luther's vision of a collective Antichrist complicates traditional depictions of Antichrist's nativity and even challenges the degree to which precise warnings about an imminent birth are relevant in the first place. Luther's rejection of extra-biblical lore, particularly his reinterpretation of Antichrist's nativity, marks a shift from medieval emphasis upon the carnal signs of a single capital Antichrist to what William Tyndale later terms the "spiritual" signs of an institutional one—signs that implicate the Antichrist through his rejection of Christ's law and teaching not necessarily his physical appearance or actions ("The Parable," 80). As Bernard McGinn notes with reference to Reformation scholar Hans Preuss, "the papacy proved itself to be Antichrist for Luther primarily due to its opposition to the word of God both in Scripture and in preaching" (*Antichrist*, 205).

In this way, Luther appears to take some of Erasmus' advice after all: Erasmus consistently urged Luther to focus his reform arguments on the Gospel message, emphasizing how the teachings of the clergy stood in opposition to Christ's own laws. Although Luther refuses to abandon his arguments about a papal

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<sup>13</sup> The case is complicated even in the case of individual popes. Would the traditional signs of Antichrist's birth apply to the birth of every pope? And, if the defining characteristic of any capital Antichrist is his papal office, would he be considered the Antichrist before his election, i.e. at his nativity?

Antichrist, his justifications for his arguments emerge as the one-to-one comparisons for which Erasmus pleads. Luther emphasizes the degree to which the papal law, more than any physical sign or circumstance, stands in opposition to Christ and exposes the pope as the Antichrist. This spiritual antithesis between Christ and the pope that Luther outlines in the *Passional* not only lays the foundation for early English understandings of Antichrist tradition and prophecy, but also places the Antichrist at the center of the Reformation debate.

### **LUTHER'S *PASSIONAL*: REIMAGINING ANTICHRIST'S NATIVITY**

Erasmus was not alone in noting that Antichrist's nativity was a popular component of traditional lore. Accounts warned about a Babylonian birth and often describe the nature of Antichrist's parents; they detail tell-tale signs of Antichrist's unnatural arrival; perhaps most intriguingly, they rely upon the details of Christ's own nativity to describe a birth that will be opposed to Christ's in every way. The physical birth of Antichrist became a significant component of these popular narratives, and Luther engages this aspect of the tradition in his own account on the Antichrist: the *Passional's* eighth antithesis opens with a familiar depiction of the infant Christ in the manger—the same scene frequently referenced in catalogues of Antichrist's birth. In Figure 2-1, the infant Christ lies in a feeding trough among animals; his parents, Mary and Joseph, kneel peacefully in prayer at his feet; and distant shepherds observe a gleaming angel, who seems to double as the bright star described in Gospel accounts of Christ's birth. This scene is a far cry from traditional accounts of Antichrist's nativity: whereas Christ was born at night, Antichrist will be born during the day;

whereas Christ's birth was witnessed only by the animals tucked away with him in the manger, Antichrist will be born in plain sight in a crowded street; and whereas a star marked the Christ's birth, a terrifying noise will announce Antichrist's arrival.<sup>14</sup> Other accounts enforce the antithesis even more precisely—so much so that Adso himself is skeptical of their fastidiousness. In his own account of Antichrist's birth, Adso rejects unduly specific predictions of an anti-Incarnation: "He will be born as the result of the sexual intercourse of his mother and father, like other men, and not, as some say, from a virgin alone" (102). Just as Luther worries about the consequences of misguidedly waiting for a Babylonian Antichrist, Adso seems to suggest that overly exacting descriptions of Antichrist can be dangerous—that is, while the population waits to observe a particular sign, the Antichrist might arrive unnoticed, having been born under less stringent conditions.

Yet despite Adso's skepticism, later accounts of Antichrist's birth continue to juxtapose Christ and Antichrist's nativities with detailed precision. For example, the early sixteenth-century English pamphlet *Here Begynneth* describes how "in that tyme [of the Antichrist's birth] shall be a myst or tenebrosyte lyke a grete smoke that one shall not se[e] another" (sig. Aiii v).<sup>15</sup> The anonymous author notes how these circumstances contrast with the environment of Christ's birth: "In contrary wyse as our lorde was borne in a darke cloudy nyght which was sodanylny chau[n]ged in to

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<sup>14</sup> These comparisons are drawn from my reading of *Here Begynneth the Birth and Lyfe of Antichrist*.

<sup>15</sup> The author provides additional detail regarding the spectacle of Antichrist's birth: the infant Antichrist will also "speke boldely and wisely divers languages as thoughe he had ben upon the erth longe and hys visage shall be chaungeable" (sig. Aiii v).

resplendidysshynge bryghtnesses” (sig. Aiii v).<sup>16</sup> Here, Antichrist brings a palpable darkness into the world, while Christ literally brings light. Accompanying illustrations bear out the visual metaphor and similarly portray Antichrist’s birth in grotesque opposition to familiar depictions of Christ’s nativity. *Here Begynneth*, for example, shows Antichrist rent from his mother’s womb by devils in waiting. In Figure 2-2, a devil stands in the place of Christ’s messenger angel: in a perverse reimagining of the animals in the manger scene above, an anthropomorphic bore attends Antichrist’s mother. The mother herself lies in distress with her arms flailing, a demeanor which is again starkly opposed to Mary’s serenity. The late-fifteenth-century German blockbook *Der Antichrist* offers a similar illustration. In Figure 2-3, a demon again stands ready to receive the Antichrist. The accompanying caption also indicates that the capital Antichrist (*endchrist*) will be born in Babylonia (*Babylonie*), highlighting the physical details of the Antichrist legend. In providing these images, I do not intend to suggest that Luther was familiar with either of them specifically; I offer them instead as examples of a well-established tradition that emphasizes the opposing natures of Antichrist’s and Christ’s births. This is a tradition with which Luther engages—but he does so in order alter it.

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<sup>16</sup> The author’s prediction about the mist raises a ‘chicken or egg’ problem: it is not clear whether the blinding mist is an independent prophecy or results from the author’s efforts to formulate a nativity that opposes Christ’s in every detail. It is possible that the author recounts the prophesy from an unnamed source and then further justifies the warning by pointing out how the mist will be contra to the bright light at Christ’s nativity. Alternatively, the author may be guided by an underlying assumption that Antichrist’s birth will be contra Christ’s in every way, and he thereby isolates details from Christ’s nativity and uses them as a basis for predicting opposite circumstances for Antichrist’s birth. The latter scenario speaks to Luther’s (and Adso’s) concerns about the unreliability of legendary accounts that introduce precise details about the life of Antichrist; these details may very well be individual speculations that, despite carrying the weight of tradition, have idiosyncratic and extra-biblical origins.



Luther's account of the Antichrist defies convention: rather than present corresponding images of Antichrist's grotesque birth, he pairs the image of Christ's nativity above with an image of the pope leading an army. (See Figure 2-1.) At first glance, it is difficult to see how the pope commanding an army parodies the infant Christ lying in the manger. Yet Luther is not dismissing the relevance of Christ's birth as means of understanding the Antichrist; he is simply reinterpreting it. Rather than emphasize the literal details of the nativity, Luther's unusual pairing emphasizes a spiritual juxtaposition. In the caption below the manger scene, he quotes Luke 9: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Fleming 366). He adds a reference to 2 Corinthians 8:9, as well: "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (366). In this way, Luther emphasizes Christ's modest birth as a way of introducing a new antithesis between Christ and Antichrist—one that juxtaposes Christ's temporal penury with the pope's temporal power. Luther's depiction of a battle-ready pontiff suggests that the pope holds "not only the spiritual sword but the temporal sword also" (366). As such, Luther reinterprets the function of Christ's nativity in Antichrist lore: he suggests that the circumstances of Christ's birth should not be read as literal indicators of Antichrist's physical origins, but instead as figurative indicators of Antichrist's worldly authority. Thus, at the same time that Luther argues for a radically literal interpretation of "Antichrist" as the Apocalyptic harbinger, he adopts a more figurative interpretation of the signs of this capital villain. Somewhat paradoxically, Luther makes the case for a literal villain by first extracting Antichrist from the tradition that renders him most literally. He argues for

signs of an Antichrist who is defined solely in terms of his *spiritual* opposition to Christ, and in this way, defines the nature of the literal, capital Antichrist in figurative terms.

Luther is, in a way, indifferent to physical signs of the Antichrist; for him, Antichrist cuts even more deeply, through the flesh to the spirit. As he explains in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), the violence that the Antichrist commits against the conscience is far worse than any other torment he might impose:

For if they [the papacy] did these things and we suffered their violence, both sides being well aware that it was godlessness and tyranny, then we might easily number it among those things that contribute to the mortifying of this life and the fulfilling of our baptism, and might with a good conscience glory in the inflicted injury. But now they seek to deprive us of this consciousness of our liberty, and would have us believe that what they do is well done, and must not be censured or complained of as wrongdoing. (71)

Enduring Antichrist's tyranny in the name of Christ fulfills one's baptism, but failing to *recognize* his tyranny—or worse, condoning it—jeopardizes one's spiritual well-being. Luther suggests that the Antichrist is dangerous not because he commits injustice against the faithful, but because he deprives the faithful of their very ability to recognize injustice, to distinguish right from wrong. By destroying the moral compass of the faithful—by turning “unrighteousness into righteousness”—the Antichrist “teach[es] us sin and lead[s] us into hell” (“To the Christian Nobility,” 193). Thus, Luther focuses on spiritual corruption as a sign of the Antichrist, and

identifies the ways the popes “force and twist the Scriptures to suit [their] fancy” (194).

## **THE INSTITUTIONAL ANTICHRIST IN ENGLAND**

Luther’s re-reading of traditional Antichrist lore resonates particularly in William Tyndale’s earliest reform writing. By 1528, Tyndale had also begun questioning the relevance of traditional accounts of the Antichrist, suggesting like Luther that legendary prophesies encourage the faithful to anticipate the wrong kind of Antichrist. In his *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon* (1528),<sup>17</sup> Tyndale likens the faithful’s inability to recognize a papal Antichrist to the Jewish people’s failure to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, suggesting that both groups have been guided by false expectations:

The Jews look for Christ, and he is come fifteenth hundred years ago, and they not aware: we also have looked for Antichrist, and he hath reigned as long, and we not aware; and that because either of us looked carnally for him, and not in the places where we ought to have sought. The Jews had found Christ verily if they had sought him in the law and the prophets, whither Christ sendeth them to seek. We also had spied out Antichrist long ago if we had looked in the doctrine of Christ and his apostles. (“The Parable,” 81)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> William A. Clebsch argues Tyndale’s *Parable* is an “elaboration and translation of Luther’s exposition of the parable of the unjust steward” (75).

<sup>18</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan notes that John Calvin makes the same argument in his commentary on Paul’s epistles: “Calvin went on to draw a historical analogy between the failure of Roman Catholicism to recognize the predicted Antichrist when he stood before them in the flesh and the failure of first-century Judaism to recognize the predicted Christ when he stood before them in the flesh” (“Some Uses” 86). Pelikan suggests that, in this, Calvin distinguishes himself from Luther; while Pelikan

Tyndale's commentary brings two things into focus regarding early Protestant attitudes toward the medieval Antichrist tradition: namely, the rejection of legendary accounts of Antichrist's physical biography and the subsequent emphasis on Antichrist's spiritual corruption and perversion of the Gospel message. Just as Luther later rejects the tendency to look for a specifically Babylonian Antichrist, Tyndale censures those who look "carnally" for the Antichrist. He shares Luther's mistrust of traditional lore and even prefaces his remarks above by rejecting outright legendary accounts that foreground physical signs of the Antichrist's arrival. "Mark this above all things," Tyndale warns, "Antichrist is not an outward thing, that is to say, a man that should suddenly appear with wonders, as our fathers talked of him. No verily; for Antichrist is a spiritual thing. And is as much to say as against Christ; that is, one that preachest false doctrine contrary to Christ" (80). Again like Luther, Tyndale calls into question whether the Antichrist will really fulfill the expectations of popular prophesy—in this case, whether the Antichrist will perform "wonders," another legendary accretion that proliferated in retellings of the Antichrist myth.<sup>19</sup> Tyndale rejects notions of a spectacular Antichrist and advocates a different foolproof indicator: namely, the degree to which the true Antichrist perverts the teachings of Christ through his words and actions.

In *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), Tyndale assigns very little weight to traditional interpretations of Antichrist prophecies that emphasize

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rightly notes that Calvin's assertions go beyond Luther's in this regard, it is worth noting that Tyndale actually anticipates Calvin.

<sup>19</sup> Commentators often read the magician Simon Magus as a type for Antichrist, contributing to the popular expectation that the Antichrist would perform many false signs and wonders. Many of these are described in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. See William Henry Hulme.

Antichrist's outward, carnal signs. For example, Tyndale recounts the prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2 that Antichrist will send forth his messengers with "lying signs and wonders" ("Obedience," 265). Tyndale insists that these "lying signs" are not the grand spectacles suggested by early legends; he reinterprets this prophecy, urging his readers to compare the pope's corrupt doctrine "to the signs of the Holy Ghost which Paul reckoneth, and thou shalt find it a false sign" (265). As above, Tyndale's point is that those looking for carnal indicators—whether they are spectacles, details about Antichrist's precise biography, or other similar signs— are likely to miss the pope's more subtle perversion of the gospel message through his words and teachings. Tyndale replaces expectations of physical spectacle with what he characterizes as the Antichrist's "fleshly" rhetoric: "The reason wherewith they prove their doctrine are but fleshly: and as Paul calleth them, Enticing words of man's wisdom; that is to wit, sophistry, and brawling arguments of men with corrupt minds and destitute of the truth" (325). It would seem that words, not physical signs, are the Antichrist's chief weapon in Tyndale's new Protestant eschatology.

Whereas Luther's *Passional* depicts a warmonger commanding an army, Tyndale alternatively suggests that the pope manages to maintain control over the faithful through language. In one example, Tyndale singles out the pope's opposition to a vernacular Bible. He first characterizes it as a sign of the Antichrist by contrasting it explicitly with Paul's use of the vernacular: "And yet Paul (2 Cor. Xiv) forbiddeth to speak in the church of congregation, save in the tongue that all understood. ...What saith the pope, 'What care I for Paul? I commandeth by the virtue of obedience, to read the gospel in Latin ...'" (266-7). Yet the pope's

opposition to Paul is only part of the problem for Tyndale: he goes further by suggesting how this particular behavior is not only contrary to the gospel, but it also has the specific effect of distancing the faithful from Christ and destroying their relationship with him: “It is verily as good to preach to swine as to men, if thou preach it in a tongue they understand not. How shall I prepare myself to God’s commandments? How shall I be thankful to Christ for his kindness? How shall I believe the truth and promises which God hath sworn, while thou tellest them unto me in a tongue which I understand not?” (267). Tyndale describes an Antichrist who denies Christ to the faithful, leading them to fall unwittingly out of communion with him. Significantly, Tyndale’s Antichrist does not necessarily ask his followers actively to deny Christ—that is, he does not perform wonders and then demand that they worship him in place of Christ as medieval accounts repeatedly suggests. Instead, Tyndale’s papal Antichrist withholds the Truth from his followers, impairing their ability to recognize him as villainous in the first place and, thus, making their downfall nearly a foregone conclusion.<sup>20</sup>

This dynamic fuels efforts by Tyndale and others to bombard their readers with vernacular accounts of Christ’s life. In the vein of Luther’s *Passional*, Tyndale

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<sup>20</sup> Barlowe and Roye’s fictive friars, Watkyn and Jeffraye, make a similar point in *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*. I have already considered the ways that the tract opens with a consideration of language. Yet for Watkyn and Jeffraye, the way the pope manipulates language—and particularly the word of God—trumps any rough words that the polemicists themselves might lob at their clerical opponents. As he makes the case for a papal Antichrist, Jeffraye insists that the clergy “despise Christ oure saveoure” and “Whosoever will he gospel rede, / To prove it shall nede no testes” (sig. h6v, ll.3165ff). Watkyn then makes a familiar argument in favor of a vernacular gospel, but he additionally points out the rationale behind the papacy’s suppression of gospel translations, “Peraventure they wolde have it hid, / Wherefore to rede it they forbid, / Lest men shulde knowe their wickedness” (sig. h6v, ll. 3170). Jeffraye elaborates on the Antichrist’s “subtle” strategy: “Had thou studied an whoale yere, / couldest not have gone no nere, / To hit their crafty suttelnes. / For yf the gosepell were soffered, / Of laye people freely to be red, / In their owne moders langage. / They shulde se at their fingers endes, / The adhominations of these fendes” (sig. h6v, ll. 3171ff).

uses antithesis as the way to demonstrate the discrepancy between Christ and Rome, so as to implicate a papal Antichrist. In *Obedience*, Tyndale provides a laundry list of papal practices, each of which he contrasts with a precise passage from the New Testament. These discrepancies suggest the pope's identity as the Antichrist. In one example, Peter insists that God's ministers should "not [be] given to filthy lucre, but abhorring covetousness" whereas the pope justifies his wealth by arguing that Peter "wast too long a fisher" and "wast never brought up at the arches, neither was master of the Rolls, nor yet Chancellor of England'" (268). Tyndale uses this antithesis to define the spiritual signs of the Antichrist against less reliable carnal indicators: he admits that the pope's outward appearance often suggests humility and thereby obscures his underlying avarice. "Abhorring of covetousnes is signified, as I suppose, by [the pope and his clergy's] shaving and sheering of the hair that they have no superfluity" (268). Yet despite this outward mortification, the pope and his clergy continue to acquire wealth and influence: "Is not this [shaving and sheering] also a false sign? Yea, verily, it is to them a remembrance to shear and shave to heap benefice upon benefice, promotion upon promotion, dignity upon dignity, bishoprick upon bishoprick ... " (268). Tyndale identifies the pope as Antichrist insofar as his governance—not necessarily his appearance—contradicts the gospel message, and he likens him to a wolf in sheep's clothing. "Christ warned us to beware of wolves in lamb's skins and bade us to look rather unto their fruits and deeds, than to wonder at their disguising" (285). Tyndale uses antithesis to present the pope's ambition in direct contrast to Peter's message.

Other contemporary English polemicists, including John Frith, similarly use antithesis to structure their critiques and identify the pope's opposition to Christ. Frith appends an extensive antithesis to his English translation of Luther's *Responsio* (1521) to Ambroisus Catharinus' *Apologia* (1520), which he re-titled *The Revelation of Antichrist* and published in 1529 together with his own *Antitheses*. Frith gives special prominence to the pope's accrual of temporal power: in the first diptych, he suggests that while Christ was poor, the pope and his adherents are rich. Frith goes on to make seventy-seven additional comparisons, contrasting Christ's willingness to serve with the Pope's desire to be served; Christ's forgiveness of sins with the Pope's vengeance; and Christ's deference to temporal authority and the Pope's demands for kingly allegiance. Yet Frith insists that even this list of antitheses is hardly exhaustive: "there are infinite other things," he attests, and the pope "contraryeth Christ in so much that if it be diligently examined I think there is no word that that Christ spake but that other he hath taught or made judgment" (sig. [N vi] r).<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Frith specifically implicates the pope's teachings—that is, his antitheses do not highlight the actions or behavior of a particular pontiff, but the doctrine of a succession of men.

Like Luther before them, both Tyndale and Frith attack the entire institution of the papacy and, in the process, begin to articulate a new definition of the term "Antichrist" that comes to shape its usage in the sixteenth-century. I have already argued that More's treatment of the term falls someplace in between those of Erasmus

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<sup>21</sup> McGinn also makes note of Heinrich von Kettenbach's *Antithesenbüchlein*, or *Little Book of Antithesis*, published in 1523 (*Antichrist*, 209). This is alternatively titled *Vergleichung des Allerheiligsten Herrn und Vaters, des Papsts, gegen den seltsam fremdem Gast in der Christenheit, genannt Jesus* (Augsburg, 1523).



and Luther: More vacillates between recognizing Luther's capital definition and later embracing Erasmus' general definition as the only viable use of the term. The definition of the term "Antichrist" becomes subtler still in the early sixteenth-century. Not only do polemicists argue over the possibility of an impending Apocalypse—that is, whether the term refers to many general Antichrists or a single capital one—but Luther's developing arguments about an institutional, papal Antichrist redefine the nature of this capital Antichrist by suggesting that many men together might comprise this single villain. Luther's notion of a corporate, capital Antichrist challenges the neat, pre-Reformation distinction between the "already" and the "not yet"—that is, the plurality of general, recurring Antichrists and the singular, future capital Antichrist. Luther newly suggests these distinctions do not characterize two separate kinds of Antichrists, but that, instead, they describe the same Antichrist—an Antichrist who is manifest in a series of individuals who collectively comprise the mystical body of the capital Antichrist. For Luther, the capital Antichrist—that is, the institution of the papacy— is *at once* many and one, already and not yet.

Arriving at this new position involved some difficult rhetorical maneuvering. Prodded by Erasmus's insistence upon a figurative understanding, Luther first embraced the Antichrist in literal rather than rhetorical terms; in order to implicate the papacy as the capital Antichrist, however, he then needed to extract the Antichrist from the traditional legend that rendered him most literally—and then to reconceive of Antichrist in spiritual rather than physical terms. This is not easy theology, and it was further complicated by the fact that centuries of lore had been built upon the premise that the Antichrist would be a particular corrupt individual, an actual physical

person who could be identified by any number of specific, personal characteristics. What's more, the traditional Antichrist legend was preserved, in large part, as a visual history—one that emphasized precise details about Antichrist's birth and anticipated a literal nativity that intricately parodied Christ's own. Reformers like Luther, Tyndale, and Frith had to reinterpret traditional prophecies in order to make the case for a papal Antichrist—one who has figurative birth, rather than a literal one.

Luther's solution above is to replace iconography of Antichrist's birth with images of papal power; he crafts a new visual narrative for a new kind of Antichrist. As such, Luther actually *avoids* the complicated task of depicting the birth of an institution; he makes Christ's nativity a sign of something entirely different and renders the task of depicting an Antichristian "birth"—literal or figurative—entirely irrelevant. Luther's approach was foundational for the sixteenth-century polemicists who later took up his anti-papal arguments. For the early Protestant polemicists, the task of identifying the Antichrist was not one of pinpointing contemporary evidence about the birth and life of a particular reigning pontiff, but of chronicling a centuries-old history of the institution and its gradual accrual of temporal power—a task that English Reformation historiographers such as John Bale and John Foxe take-up in the mid-sixteenth-century in their respective treatments of Church history.<sup>22</sup> In these

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<sup>22</sup> As Hotson explains, "the 'discovery' of Antichrist in the papacy had direct implications for Protestants' understanding of their place in sacred history" (162)—particularly for a burgeoning Protestant millenarianism. Millenarianism was a belief that twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation is a prophecy that details the chronology of sacred history: the chapter describes a thousand-year period in which Satan is bound and the saints reign; millenarianism argued that this period "would be fulfilled literally, on earth, and in the future" (160). With the identification of the papal Antichrist, new interpretations of the millennium emerged. John Foxe, for example, locates the birth of the papal Antichrist at the rise of Pope Innocent III in 1215: he specifies in *Actes and Monuments* that the Roman Church began "to decline a pace from God" in the centuries before Innocent's rise but "remained hitherto in some reasonable order, till at length after the sayd Bishops began to shout vp in the world through the liberalitie of good Princes ... then riches begot ambition,

chronicles, the papal Antichrist is not a single man who has a literal, carnal body, but instead a many-membered villain comprised of multiple, successive popes—that is, the papal Antichrist does not have a corporeal body, but a corporate one.

But before either Bale or Foxe chronicled the papal Antichrist, the German polemicist Thomas Naogeorgus Kirchmeyer (b. 1511) had wrestled with the same question that Luther takes on in his *Passional*—namely, what does the birth of an institution look like and is it possible, in the tradition of the medieval picture books, to depict it visually?<sup>23</sup> This was a question of less import for Bale and Foxe’s prose narratives, but for Kirchmeyer, a dramatist, the stage presented the particular problem of rendering this new figurative understanding of the Antichrist in concrete, visual

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ambition destroyed religion, so that all came to ruin” (sig. \*iiii r). Foxe indicates that was “Pope Innocentius 3 ... by whome altogether was turned vpside downe, all order broken, discipline dissolved, true doctrine defaced. Christian faith extinguished. Instead whereof was set vp preaching of mens decrees, dreames, and idel traditions. And whereas before truth was free to be disputed amongst learned men now libertie was turned to law, argument into authoritie. Whatsoeuer the Byshoppe of Rome denounced that stode for an oracle, of all men to be receaved without opposition of contradiction: whatsoeuer was contrary, ipso facto, it was heresie, to be punished with fagot and flaming fire. Then began the sincere faith of this English Church, which help out so long, to quayle. Then was the clerre sunne of Gods word ouershadowed, wth mistes and darcknes, appearing like sackcloth to the people, which neither could vnderstand that they read, nor yet permitted to read that they could vnderstand. In these miserable dayes, as the true visible Church beganne now to shrinke and keep in for feare: so vpstart a new sort of players to furnish the stage, as schole Doctours, Canonites, and foure orders of Friers. Besides other Monasticall sects and fraternities of infinite variety” (sig. \*iiii v). When Foxe implicates Innocent III, he in turn divides the history of the Christian Church into three main periods—a millennium of peace, book-ended by two periods of persecution. As Hotson summarizes, “the first period of persecution under the pagan emperors lasts 294 years and comprises the ten great persecutions of the ancient church. The millennium of freedom from persecution, established by Constantine in the fourth century, ends with the loosing of Satan and the revival of persecution with Wycliff in the fourteenth. The ensuing second great period of oppression under the Antichrist is likewise destined to comprise ten persecutions and perhaps also to last 294 years, and will be followed immediately by the Second Coming and the Last Judgement” (164-5). Of course, as Hotson cautions, “not all Protestants who condemned the papacy as Antichrist were equally outspoken regarding the millennium, but those who were almost invariably regarded it as a thousand-year period in the past history of the Church” (164).

<sup>23</sup> As Paul Whitfield White recounts, Kirchmeyer was a best known for *The Boke of Spiritual Husbandry*, a Christian version of Virgil’s *Georgics*—hence earning his pseudonym “Naogeorgus” (“The Pammachius Affair” 263).

terms.<sup>24</sup> Like Luther, Kirchmeyer aimed to supplant traditional prophecies about a single Antichrist with a Protestant vision of an institutional one. And, again, like Luther, Kirchmeyer acknowledged that this institutional vision seemed incompatible with the enduring legendary accounts of a single, infant Antichrist's unholy nativity. Yet while Luther displaces the iconography of Antichrist's birth with new images of papal power, Kirchmeyer attempts to alter these traditional images rather than abandon them entirely. Kirchmeyer *does* depict the birth of Antichrist. His is a figurative portrayal—that is, he does not depict a literal birth, but instead a spiritual fall. In his Latin drama *Pammachius* (Wittenburg, 1538), Kirchmeyer's papal Antichrist is “born” at the very moment a troubled and fearful Pope Pammachius despairs and chooses to reject God. Then, this feeble and cowardly bishop is transformed into a newly indomitable Antichrist. In *Pammachius*, Kirchmeyer stages a new kind of (anti)incarnation for a new kind of Antichrist—one that is in keeping with the traditional tendency to depict Antichrist's birth but one that also incorporates Luther's depiction of a power-hungry papacy.

Kirchmeyer draws attention to a changing eschatological playing field. When Antichrist's literal nativity is replaced by a figurative one—that is, when his identity is defined not genetically, but spiritually—the criteria for identifying him become significantly relaxed. The stakes change in at least two important ways: it becomes easier to become part of the Antichrist's mystical body at the same time that it becomes possible to stop, or at least curb, the Antichrist's steady progress toward the Apocalypse. In the first regard: spiritual depravity—not physical identifiers—

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<sup>24</sup> Since the sixteenth-century lacked the contemporary legal fiction of a corporation as a quasi-human entity, early reformers like Kirchmeyer wrestled not only with a conceptual shift regarding the Antichrist but also a broader one regarding the very nature of an institution.

become primary means for identifying all the members of the Antichrist's corporate body. Since the Antichrist need no longer be born into his role, a new point of identification—namely, spiritual opposition to Christ—serves instead to signal the Antichrist's identity. Kirchmeyer stages spiritual corruption as a kind of epidemic that spreads from one individual to the next. There is a growing sense that the number of members who can join Antichrist's figurative body is limitless.

Since spiritual complicity with the Antichrist is a matter of the individual will, Kirchmeyer and others also explore the possibility that Antichrist's members can reform or be reformed. In other words, the faithful won't succumb without a fight, and the reform effort specifically seeks to curb the expansion of Antichrist's spiritual empire. Kirchmeyer sets the stage for English dramatists like John Bale who depict the battle against Antichrist as England's own manifest destiny. Bale dramatizes an institutional villain who is not only an enemy of the Church, but who is specifically the enemy of England. Hardly resigned to succumb to the Antichrist, England (led by its divinely appointed monarch) is called to resist and overcome him.

### **THOMAS KIRCHMEYER AND THE BIRTH OF AN INSTITUTION**

Thomas Kirchmeyer maintained reform positions so extreme that Luther once requested that he, as Charles H. Hereford candidly puts it, kindly "keep his heresy to himself" (120).<sup>25</sup> *Pammachius* was no less controversial. Written in Latin and set in Rome after the conversion of the Caesars, *Pammachius* is the first Protestant Antichrist play. Although published in Wittenberg, the play quickly made its way to

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<sup>25</sup> As Hereford recounts, Kirchmeyer battled with Luther particularly over the doctrine of election, with Kirchmeyer advocating the doctrine in its "most violent form" (120).

England, and is it is probably best known for its inflammatory performance at Christ's College, Cambridge in 1545. The play chronicles the rise of a fictional pope, Pammachius, who makes a Faustian pact with Satan, thereby becoming the Antichrist. *Pammachius* fears the Church's enemies; moreover, he fears that defending its teachings will send him headlong toward an imminent, violent demise. In the name of prudence, he surrenders himself to Satan, hoping to gain security and worldly glory to assuage his fears. Urged on by his obsequious aid Porphyrius, Pammachius hungers for power, and he demands greater authority from Julian Caesar; although Caesar initially resists, he yields when threatened with excommunication and the loss of his imperial authority. Christ remains an observer throughout, and eventually sends Truth to Germany to inspire the hearts of believers to detect the papal Antichrist. As Kirchmeyer warns in the Epilogue, however, Satan likewise musters the armies of Asia to fight against Germany, and the Turks rage against Truth. Kirchmeyer leaves the final act of the drama unwritten, explaining that only Christ will defeat the Antichrist "at his own time" (5.Epilogue).<sup>26</sup> In other words, Pammachius is merely the first in a line of Antichristic popes, and Kirchmeyer engages the burgeoning notion of an institutional Antichrist.

The Cambridge performance triggered a terse exchange between then Chancellor Stephen Gardiner and then Vice-Chancellor Matthew Parker. In a letter to Parker, Gardiner had objected that "contrary to the mynde of the Master and President," students had "played a tragedy called Pammachius, a part of which is so

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<sup>26</sup> I take English translations from *Pammachius* and its prefatory epistles from C.C. Love's 1992 edition for the Records of Early English Drama, which is based on the edition of Nicholas Brylenger (Basle, 1540). Quotations cite only act and scene because Love's electronic edition is not lineated.

pestiferous as were intolerable” (Nelson 144). Parker—decidedly more sympathetic to the play’s reform agenda— assured the Chancellor that all offensive passages had been struck before the performance and memorably insisted that “none of all the companye declared . . . that they were offended with any thinge that now they remember was then spoken” (144). Yet, as an exasperated Gardiner then noted, no amount of linguistic censure could expunge the play’s central portrayal of Pammachius as the papal Antichrist, or, moreover, the play’s implicit and recurring claim that the Roman Church had functioned as an agent of Satan since the fourth century. In the end, Parker managed to deflect Gardiner’s objections, not in the least because the play, which Kirchmeyer had dedicated to Thomas Cranmer, championed one of the Archbishop’s favorite themes: the portrayal of the pope as the Antichrist.<sup>27</sup>

Paul Whitfield White notes that discussion of this “*Pammachius* affair” dominates critical accounts of the play at the expense of more detailed treatments of Kirchmeyer’s dramatic choices. The controversy surrounding its performance “is routinely cited in theatre histories to illustrate the combustible nature of polemically-driven religious drama after the Reformation in England” while “the remarkable qualities of this interlude as an opulent, pageantry-rich piece of *theatre* have been rarely discussed” (“The *Pammachius* Affair,” 262). White argues that the theatrical qualities of *Pammachius*—not just the controversy surrounding it—deserve attention,

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<sup>27</sup> Gardiner never prevailed against Parker. As MacCullough recounts, Parker “courteously but firmly stood his ground under an increasingly angry barrage of letters from the Chancellor who eventually dragged the Privy Council into the affair to command a general peace in the University and protection for Gardiners’ informants. There was little end result for the Bishop, however, apart from a lasting animus against yet another Cambridge reformer” (324).

in large part because understanding the play in performance informs an understanding of its controversial aftermath.

Kirchmeyer's dramatic choices are inextricably tied to his reform message: Kirchmeyer uses the stage as the vehicle for his revised visual narrative of the Antichrist and even goes so far to suggest that his efforts to mingle theatre and contemporary politics are just as radical as the reforms he proposes.<sup>28</sup> He argues that presenting the heady content of Luther's theological tracts as drama will facilitate reform by "imbuing" the controversial message in young minds in an explicitly visual way: "Since I have judged that it is of the greatest importance that from childhood minds should be imbued publicly with a keen hatred of tyranny of the sort which the popes have practiced for more than 400 years, I have composed a tragic play, in which I have attempted to represent and depict in whatever way I could for that tender age some picture of that tyranny" (Preface to Cranmer).<sup>29</sup> Kirchmeyer explains that he presents an "imagine[m]"—an image or *picture*— of papal tyranny and thereby stresses the importance of visual representation in educating the impressionable. He also calls attention to his literary form when he admits that *Pammachius* is properly *fabulam*—a fable or fictional frame that he uses to make a point about a theological reality: "The story is fiction; yet it is of such a sort that truth

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<sup>28</sup> He suggests in his epistle to Luther that the ancient dramatists were more "prudent" than he in this regard: "Certainly the ancients, who wrote tragedies, dealt with arguments well over long before their time, and none of them dared to put on present events. By this it came about that they themselves lived in safety and were commended for their hard work by the voices of all. They acted prudently, but I, on the other hand, am quite stupid in that I do not follow their footsteps, but I call down upon myself the hatred of many by using today's problems in my work" (Preface to Luther).

<sup>29</sup>"Cum autem judicauerim plurimum referrectiam publice ut animi à pueris imbuantur acriodio tyrannidis cuiusmodi iam annos plus quàm 400. exercuerue Pontidices, composui Tragicam fabulam, in quarenere aetati eius aliquam imaginem exprimere ac depingere ut cunq; conatus sum" (sig. [A6 r]).



is present; fiction and truth give the pleasure and the profit” (Prologue).<sup>30</sup> This is a curious instance of fiction asserting a literal truth: while the particulars of Pammachius’ tale may be invention, its implied universals are not. As Kirchmeyer continues, “The situation is quite clear to one who looks at times past and times present, if he considers the sum of apostolic doctrine and then the perversions of doctrine which a foul papacy has produced for the sake of profit or ambition. In sum: we have *painted* the papacy in its true colors” (Prologue, *my emphasis*).<sup>31</sup> Kirchmeyer links the nature of this drama—replete with its spectacle and fictional plot—to its polemical function: he advocates the “remov[al] of the abuses which have threatened the Church for a long time” by crafting a portrait of that corruption, namely the image of Pammachius as papal Antichrist (Preface to Cranmer).<sup>32</sup>

But, what does Kirchmeyer’s portrait of Antichrist look like, and how does Kirchmeyer resolve the apparent visual disjoint between medieval prophesies about the Antichrist’s nativity and contemporary notions of a papal Antichrist? Kirchmeyer begins, as Luther does, by engaging the Antichrist legend and suggesting, at least momentarily, that his papal villain will appear exactly as centuries of exegetes had anticipated the Antichrist would. In the opening scene of the play, Kirchmeyer directly engages traditional lore that warned against a tyrant Antichrist who will be a dangerous counterfeit, a powerful, charismatic villain who is as terrifying as he is mesmerizing and who can only be defeated by Christ himself at his Second Coming.

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<sup>30</sup> “Res ficta est, itatamen, ut adsit ueritas / Que iucundum coniuncta dant & utile” (sig. B3 v).

<sup>31</sup> “Res est non obscura, intuenti tempora / Et praeterita & praesentia, si collegerit / Apostolicae doctrinae summan, & que dein / Doctrina monstra Papatus, turpis lucri / Aut ambitionis gratia produxerit / In summa. Papatum suis coloribus / Depinximus” (sig. B3 r).

<sup>32</sup> “... tollendis abusibus, qui iam longo tempore in Eccelsia invalverant ...” (sig. [A6 r]).

This Antichrist will usher in the Apocalypse—no small part for no small villain. In the very first line, the character Christ announces that the time of “reckoning for the aging world” has come and Satan will now “put forth his strength and in the highest degree prevail against the truth by his foul incredible lies” (I.i). Satan, having been bound and chained for one thousand years, has been loosed and will now “roar and take vengeance for the filthiness of his prison.” His whelp, Antichrist, will “bring about the total destruction of right and faith.” Christ describes a powerful villain who “is ambitious for pomp, for power, and worldly glory” and will treacherously overthrow the greatest, most powerful rulers of the world.

Christ’s description of the Antichrist also takes on the familiar form of antithesis that Luther uses and that was common in the traditional accounts of the Antichrist legend: “In everything he takes the opposite way from me,” Christ specifies, “I lived in poverty; he will be very rich. I showed the way of salvation to men; but he will take care that no one understands it ... Teaching the good news, I traveled through towns; but he as an armed warrior will surround them with his troops” (I.i). This kind of antithesis continues for more than twenty lines before Christ finally concludes that the Antichrist will be “diametrically opposed to me.” In short, the audience’s expectations are sufficiently whetted for the entrance of an all-too-familiar Antichrist—one whose description matches exactly the criteria of the traditional legends.

Yet like Luther, Kirchemeyer seems to incite these expectations only to alter them: upon first entrance, Pammachius appears as a feeble, cowardly man who is uncertain and afraid—a far cry from the powerful tyrant overlord that Christ has just

described. There are no stage directions, but Pammachius' friend Porphyrius describes his appearance when he confirms the bishop's deteriorating physical and mental stage: "You are not well, or some common evil has befallen you. For brave men do not look sad for nothing. Why are you sighing?" (I.iii). The audience is left to wonder if this sad, wheezing bishop is, indeed, the Antichrist about whom Christ warned just moments ago. In his opening soliloquy, Pammachius admits that he is afraid and lacking courage—he fears for his financial security; he fears hunger and war; he fears persecution on behalf of his beliefs; and he fears that even God cannot ensure his safety from his Turkish enemies. In these ways, Pammachius is perhaps more frightening in his resemblance to Everyman than he is frightening for any identifiable villainy. Pammachius fears are not unusual, and his desires seem reasonable, if not relatively mundane. He muses about what he remembers as "the old days," a time when "the people of God did not endure such evils not were subjected to so many deaths, but lived pleasantly, and were fed on peace and tranquility" (I.iii). Kirchmeyer places the audience in the unusual position of identifying with the Antichrist.

Since Christ pegs Pammachius as the villain from the beginning, the audience may wonder if Pammachius is bluffing here—that is, if his empathetic portrayal is his own meta-theatre and all part of his elaborate plan to deceive. After all, the traditional prophecies warn that the faithful won't recognize the Antichrist when they see him anyway. Yet, Pammachius' vulnerability does not appear to be an act, not in the least because Kirchmeyer makes a point of depicting Pammachius' opening fears as part of a crisis of conscience. Pammachius' first scene actually begins *in medias*

*res*, and his first line is a question: “To whom am I to entrust safely what I want to be done?” (I.iii) Pammachius, alone, has apparently been busy planning a course of action that could solve all of his problems and assuage his fears, and he seems to have settled on some kind of solution. Yet this possible solution—which he won’t yet bring himself to utter—seems, in turn, to be causing him even more anxiety. “But what am I doing?” he asks. “Where am I being carried?” (I.iii) Nearly two hundred lines later, Pammachius finally reveals what Kirchmeyer has only yet hinted at—namely, that Pammachius has concocted a devilish solution to his problems: after determining that defending the Church’s teachings will undoubtedly put his life in danger, he decides that he must surrender himself to Satan to achieve the security and protection he desires. Pammachius’ worldly troubles have caused the greatest despair. “It is a grave decision to reveal such an important matter,” Pammachius muses, “But I shall withdraw myself from these perpetual terrors of death; I shall certainly seek tranquility in my life. ... Let us leave Christ with his doctrine to other men; let us ourselves serve the prince of the world” (I.iii). Here, Pammachius rejects Christ outright, and it is at this moment—in the middle of the first act—that Kirchmeyer’s Antichrist is born.

After he makes this choice, Pammachius gradually begins to assume the characteristics of the Antichrist that Christ details in the opening scene. He immediately begins to recover his confidence, and by the end of the scene, he is urging Porphyrius to follow him to Hell where they can “pay their respects to Satan.” By the next scene, Pammachius is making demands of the Roman Caesar, Julian; and in the third act, Pammachius banishes Free Speech, sending her to join an already

exiled Truth, and seizes control of the Roman government. No longer feeble and cowardly, Pammachius has been transformed by sin into the power-hungry tyrant that centuries of Antichrist lore had expected. All of this occurs without a literal birth; instead, Pammachius experiences a *spiritual* birth (or, perhaps, spiritual death). Kirchmeyer gives us a radical new portrait of an Antichrist who is not literally born but who actually becomes— and his staging makes this “becoming” seem terrifyingly easy, actualizing Christ’s prediction in the opening scene that “human natures are so prone to evil that divine grace soon will leave for other regions” (I.i). The fact that mundane fears trigger the transformation of an otherwise well-meaning man into the greatest of villains is arguably just as grotesque as the perverse images of Antichrist’s more traditional nativity. What is more, Kirchmeyer’s staging suggests that as soon as the Antichrist “goes corporate,” there is no limit to the number of members who can join his figurative body.

In addition to staging Pammachius’ fall, Kirchmeyer also depicts a complicit Porphyrius, who actually becomes an essential part of Pammachius’s tyranny. Before Porphyrius’ entrance, Pammachius admits that he needs to “entrust” his plan “safely” with another. “I must go and find someone with whom I may share my plans,” he insists (I.iii). It is with the help of Porphyrius—and his promises of allegiance—that Pammachius is finally able to utter his rejection of Christ and can become the Antichrist. In this way, Kirchmeyer suggests that the Antichrist rises only through the cooperation of others. Indeed, the seeming helplessness of a solitary Pammachius suggests that responsibility for “the total destruction of right and faith”

is shared—even by otherwise good men who might never imagine themselves jumping to the same seemingly rash conclusions that Pammachius does.

This is a possibility that the action of the play bears out in the character of Julian Caesar. Caesar is skeptical of Pammachius from the beginning and sees through his ploys for power and influence; but when Pammachius finally rallies the Romans against their emperor in Act Three, Caesar has a crisis of conscience much like Pammachius' own: Caesar fears losing his authority, he fears being “robbed of all my honour and betrayed,” and he fears “languishing miserably in prison”—fears very similar to those that Pammachius expressed before he surrenders himself to Satan. Indeed, Caesar's nearly manic behavior in this scene closely parallels the frantic, disheveled portrait Kirchmeyer gives us of Pammachius at the beginning of the play. Weeping, Caesar admits defeat at the hands of his enemy and while Pammachius sold his soul to Satan, Caesar sells his to the Antichrist. In this, Kirchmeyer makes a powerful point about the corporate body of this new Antichrist: his figurative depiction of Antichrist's birth as a spiritual fall suggests that once the literal, physical signs of the Antichrist are left behind, anyone who suffers from the same fears and desires that plague Pammachius can become part of the spiritual body of this Apocalyptic harbinger—even if that individual's birth did not resemble the elaborate, spectacular rendering of earlier lore.

Paradoxically, Kirchmeyer depicts an Antichrist whose villainy is both dangerously contagious and imminently controllable. Kirchmeyer is hardly coy about his polemical intentions: he overtly links German reform to a burgeoning, like-minded movement in England—efforts that should presumably stop the Antichrist in

his tracks. Kirchmeyer includes two dedications—one to “the distinguished professor of Sacred Letter and Literature,” Martin Luther, whom he credits with being “the first to bring truth back, oppressed as she was by this Egyptian darkness, into this very clear light” (Preface to Luther).<sup>33</sup> The other is to Thomas Cranmer, “the most worthy Archbishop of Canterbury.” Kirchmeyer admits that he relies upon his ties to Luther to establish his credibility among other “adherents of truth,” yet he indicates that he not only aims to reinforce Luther’s polemic, but also to extend the reform agenda abroad. Kirchmeyer’s preface to Luther is the second (and shorter) of two dedicatory epistles, and in writing to Cranmer, Kirchmeyer urges him to champion reform at the English court.

Kirchmeyer praises King Henry’s resistance to Rome and the example the king sets; moreover, he insists that Cranmer too has already played an integral role in promulgating reform. “Nor indeed, most distinguished Archbishop, will your England owe little to you who, as we hear, do not cease from any study, deliberation and work to strengthen and help such holy and wholesome councils of the King” (Preface to Cranmer). The dedications suggest that Kirchmeyer is, from the outset, invested in championing Luther’s continental reforms for an English audience. “It seemed good to me,” Kirchmeyer explains to Cranmer, “to send my work to your Honour, so that you might understand that even among foreign nations your zeal in renewing the doctrine of the Church and removing the abuses which have threatened the Church for a long time, is very greatly approved, and at the same time you might be strengthened by these examples to carry through to the end with greater heart what

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<sup>33</sup> “Quid igitur tu nobis primus eam tenebris / Oppressam Aegyptiacis, in hanc clarissimam / Lucem” (sig. Bi v, Bii r).

you have started” (Preface to Cranmer). Kirchmeyer expresses the hope that Luther’s reforms will flourish among the English reformers.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, Kirchmeyer’s play bridges the medieval and Reformation conceptions of the Antichrist at the same time that it demonstrates the continental origins of English reform polemic. Kirchmeyer sets the stage for subsequent dramatic portrayals of the pope as Antichrist—particularly those in the plays of John Bale and John Foxe. Bale’s debt to Kirchmeyer is particularly pronounced in his *King Johan* (1538), which he writes shortly after completing a personal translation of Kirchmeyer’s *Pammachius* (Hereford 131).<sup>35</sup> Charles Hereford has argued that *King Johan* is a “deliberate imitation of the *Pammachius*” (136), explaining that Bale’s play “owes much of its peculiar construction” to Kirchmeyer:

Kirchmeyer had taken up the transformed Antichrist legend; Bale, without anxious fidelity, followed his lead; Kirchmeyer had typified the Empire, whose ruin accompanies the rise of the Antichrist, by the Emperor Julian; Bale, to whom England naturally took the place of the

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<sup>34</sup> Kirchmeyer also suggests that he has “composed a tragic play” with an audience of children in mind: “Moreover, since I have judged that it is of the greatest importance that from childhood minds should be imbued publicly with a keen hatred of tyranny of the sort which the popes have practiced for more than four hundred years, I have composed a tragic play, in which I have attempted to represent and depict in whatever way I could for that tender age some picture of that tyranny. For there is no danger of going too far against actions being continually carried out in an impious and criminal way” (Preface to Cranmer).

<sup>35</sup> Hereford argues that Bale imitated Kirchmeyer in staging a papal Antichrist in *King Johan* (cf. *Studies in the Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 132ff.); however, Peter Davidson suggests in his introduction to Kirchmeyer’s prose tract *The Popish Kingdom* (trans. B. Googe, 1570) that the influence of *Pammachius* upon Bale is slight if any. Davidson cites Blatt’s arguments in *The Plays of John Bale: A Study of Ideas, Technique, and Style* (Copenhagen, 1968), particularly the introduction to *The Epistle Exhortatory*. Yet he affirms that Kirchmeyer’s work was nevertheless well known in England, citing Fritz Weiner’s work on the play in his *Naogeorgus im England der Reformationszeit* (Berlin, 1907). Weiner quotes Bishop Gardiner’s now infamous epistolary exchange with Parker, addressed above, as well as John Crane and Nicholas Grenewall’s separate depositions regarding the play’s performance at Christ’s College.



Empire, found a parallel in the English king whom he had in his rough fashion canonized. ... Like Kirchmeyer's Julian, King Johan is assailed by a conspiracy in which the Pope takes a prominent part; like him he first resists and then succumbs. ... Finally, each drama closes with an attempt to represent the Reformation. (137)

Hereford notes the structural resonance between these two plots, but Bale also borrows the very machinations of Kirchmeyer's *Antichrist*. Bale's play, like that of Kirchmeyer, not only dramatizes the institutional Antichrist, but also foregrounds the degree to which the individual's concupiscence facilitates the growth of Antichrist's mystical body. At the same time, Bale presents the reformation of the individual will as the one effective means of keeping the Antichrist at bay; the same characters that facilitate the rise of the papal Antichrist in *King Johan* eventually thwart his ascendancy by rejecting the authority of the papacy. Bale's play dramatizes that which Kirchmeyer's unwritten fifth act only hints at: namely, the defeat of the Antichrist through organized reform.

Not only does Bale effectively write Kirchmeyer's fifth act, but he also gives it a decidedly English spin. Kirchmeyer's Dromo awakens at the end of act four to the news that "Truth has found its champion at Wittenberg," but Bale's Verity "appears announcing the Reformation, dispatched characteristically enough, not by Christ, but by the 'Imperial Majesty' of Henry VIII" (Hereford 136). Not only does Bale write King Henry and England herself into the winning side of Antichrist's teleology, but Bale also introduces a vision of an institutional Antichrist to an English audience. Kirchmeyer is technically the first dramatist to actualize the complex

theology of Luther's Antichrist, but the Cambridge performance of *Pammachius* is not until 1545—nearly a decade after Bale's *King Johan* was performed at Thomas Cromwell's home in December 1538. Thus, in *King Johan*, England gets its first look at what an institutional Antichrist might be—and also its first sense of exactly how the English crown, together with its citizens, might bring an end to an institution that had purportedly plagued the universal Church for centuries.

### CHAPTER 3:

#### STAGING ANTICHRIST IN JOHN BALE'S *KING JOHAN*

Known for his radical Protestantism and impassioned prose, John “Bilious” Bale is perhaps the last reformer whom early modern critics would dub “temperate.” In his infamous, alliterative critiques of Rome, Bale stakes political and theological positions that are among the most radical of the early English reformers.<sup>1</sup> Maligning the pope’s legates as “beastly blockheads” and “popish parasites,” Bale unapologetically attacks the “malygnaynt muster of ȳ execrable Antichryst of Rome” and characterizes a “creull and furious franticke kingdome” of “the deuels owne vicar.”<sup>2</sup> It is surprising, then, to consider the polemic in Bale’s *King Johan* (c. 1538); critics have called it cautious, restrained, and even, in certain regards, polite. Although in it Bale remains routinely caustic—hailing the pope as the “wyld bore of Rome” (1.71) and his ministers as “pygges” (1.119)—the drama primarily seems to reinforce the status quo rather than to stir support for the author’s own, more radical reform agenda. As Greg Walker has asserted, “Bale is doing no more than converting the polemical prose of the reformist writers and Crown propagandists into dramatic action” (*Plays*, 187). In advocating royal supremacy, arguably the play’s dominant political theme, Bale merely reaffirms what the 1534 Act of Supremacy had already asserted. Further, the play never broaches the debate regarding transubstantiation, nor

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Bale’s theology see Peter Happé’s biography, *John Bale*, especially pp. 10ff and pp. 26ff.

<sup>2</sup> These depictions of the Roman church occur over the span of just a few paragraphs in Bale’s preface to his *A brefe chronycle concernynge the examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Iohan Oldecastell the lorde Cobham* (1544). See sig. Aiii r and following.

does it critique private masses, communion in one kind only, or the Roman prohibition of clerical marriage—all tenets that ardent reformers, including Bale and his patron Thomas Cromwell, contested elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Paul Whitfield White has convincingly argued that *King Johan* would still have raised an eyebrow with its disparaging portrait of auricular confession, a practice that the Ten Articles of 1536 had declared “expedient and necessary.”<sup>4</sup> Yet Walker suggests that this critique is watered-down: Bale attacks only corrupt ministers of the sacrament, not the sacrament itself.<sup>5</sup>

Bale, in other words, holds his tongue to save his head.<sup>6</sup> Aware that Henry VIII was hardly inclined to embrace radical theological reform, he mitigates his polemic to satisfy the expectations of a tepidly Reformist monarch. His relatively orthodox theology keeps him out of prison and, possibly, off the chopping block.

This reasonable and compelling argument is bolstered by the play’s critical history,

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<sup>3</sup> See Walker’s discussion of the Confession of Augsburg, which saw identifies private masses, communion in one kind, and clerical celibacy as “the three great abuses in English religious practice” (*Plays*, 203).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Whitfield White goes so far to suggest that we might “say without hesitation that if not for Cromwell’s protection, *King Johan*’s debunking of Auricular Confession . . . would have resulted in Bale’s imprisonment, if not execution on grounds of heresy” (*Theatre*, 18).

<sup>5</sup> Walker notes, “In criticizing the institution of auricular confession, then, Bale was arguing from a position considerably more radical than that held by the King and promulgated by the official pronouncements of his Government. Hence the caution evident in the wording of his criticisms, which addressed the practice, not as doctrinally unsound, but as politically unacceptable” (*Plays*, 214).

<sup>6</sup> Walker specifies that in this play Bale seeks to persuade his audience of unprecedented reform: “In both his treatment of auricular confession and his ridicule of catholic ceremonies, then, Bale was arguing for reforms more radical than Henry VIII was currently prepared to embrace, and in so doing he was reflecting the views advanced more cautiously still elsewhere by Cromwell, Cranmer and their allies. Perhaps the most obvious example of this trend, however, is to be found in his call for the Bible in English” (*Plays*, 216). In this regard, Walker argues that *King Johan* warrants inclusion in his study of “persuasive” drama even while he admits that Bale is “checked by the dilemma experienced by all the reformers who had invested their expectations in the erastian Reformation which Henry has set in motion in England” (219). Bale and his fellow reformers were “forced to encourage and goad as best they could the dead weight of royal skepticism overland, ever aware that at any point it might turn about and crush them. The reforming language of Bale and the other reformers linked to Cromwell’s circle, however lurid it at times became, thus needed to be circumscribed by caution” (219).

one that reads *King Johan* as a deferential exaltation of Henry VIII's brand of Protestant kingship. Bale lauds John's defiance of Rome and commends Henry himself who, in his cameo as Imperial Majesty, appears to rescue England from the clutches of multiple clerical Antichrists. But could Bale—hot-headed, foul-mouthed, unabashed Bale—really bite his tongue?

I contend that Bale is as “bilious” as ever in *King Johan* and that we uncover his subversive politics by identifying and exploring the machinations of his Antichrists. Although Bale does advocate a relatively orthodox theology, his presumed restraint is undercut by a characteristically radical polemic that reinterprets the traditional Antichrist mythology at the same time that it critiques the crown. While others have successfully used the early Reformation political environment to understand Bale's literary choices, I use his engagement with a literary Antichrist tradition to illuminate the intricacies of his politics.

*King Johan* may be best known as England's first history play, but it is also England's first Protestant Antichrist play. Bale might not overtly contradict crown reform policy, but he does feature a new kind of apocalyptic villain. In so doing, he challenges the conventions of pre-Reformation Antichrist drama and advances a burgeoning series of Protestant Antichrist plays spearheaded on the continent by Thomas Kirchmeyer in *Pammachius* (Wittenburg, 1538). While earlier Antichrist drama features a single Antichrist, Bale features many, vilifying the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy in the characters of Usurped Power, Sedition, Dissimulation, and Private Wealth. Yet, Bale's Antichrists are even more remarkable for the new ways they infiltrate and corrupt than for their numerous clerical costumes. Where the

traditional Antichrist endeavors to seize crowns by corrupting kings, Bale's Antichrists steal the throne by targeting the commons and the ruling classes; and where pre-Reformation lore warns against the Antichrist's lies, bribes, and terrors, Bale demonstrates how the success of these extrinsic temptations depends upon victims' more potent intrinsic concupiscence. In pre-Reformation dramatic accounts of Antichrist's life—particularly the Chester Mystery Cycle's *The Coming of Antichrist* (c. 1400) and the early Latin drama *Ludus de Antichristo* (c. 1150)—the Antichrist seizes control of the world's governments by earning the trust of its kings; in top-down style, the Antichrist convinces monarchs to surrender their power so that he, in turn, might rule their subjects. Bale's Antichrists, however, are grassroots campaigners: they charm John's subjects and tie the king's hands by stripping him of his allies. These Antichrists still seek the crown, but they contend for it in unconventional ways, managing to secure royal scepters without actually corrupting kings' wills. Although John remains defiant, he is powerless without the support of those he rules; likewise, Imperial Majesty suppresses Rome only with the assistance of the ruling classes. The impotence of an isolated king suggests, at the very least, that a balance of power necessarily lies with the estates. Bale undercuts his seeming royal deference by slyly questioning whether the authority of John and presumably Henry himself is as weighty as their exalted dramatic portraits first seem to imply.

The play likewise emerges as more invested in the behavior of its non-royal characters than of its kings; in what is close to being a revisionary theology of the Antichrist, Bale holds Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order accountable for the Antichrist's rise to power, exposing how their concupiscence enables papal

corruption. The Antichrists in pre-Reformation drama generally advance by exploiting their victims' piety, yet Bale's advance by exploiting victims' iniquity. Centuries of lore paint the Antichrist as charismatic fraud who uses victims' faith against them: his performance as the Messiah targets the most devout, duping those eager to worship and obey God. In the bitterest of ironies, Antichrist's victims' are simply too faithful for their own good; they choose evil only because they mistake it for virtue. Earlier portrayals all but exonerate them for their misapprehension, suggesting further that the Antichrist himself is too expert a dissembler in the first place for anyone to differentiate between true virtue and his feigned piety.<sup>7</sup> Mesmerized by his irresistible theatrics, Antichrist's victims are the passive targets of the Antichrist's active dissembling. Bale, however, necessarily reverses these poles; an irresistible Antichrist would hardly fit his Reform agenda.

Bale alternatively portrays the Antichrist as the passive beneficiary of his victims' active pursuit of villainy. Bale's Antichrists are incompetent actors who can barely keep their wickedness under wraps, and they would be woefully inefficient villains if it were not for their victims' propensity to sin. In a much more incriminating portrayal, Bale's victims surrender to known evil in exchange for sustenance, power, and security. Man's appetites—both literal and figurative—prove more potent and more necessary to the Antichrist's success than any performance or disguise. In one bold stroke, Bale deflates the long-held belief that an imperceptible Antichrist will capture his victims unawares. Bale holds victims accountable for their

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<sup>7</sup> According to Adso's legend, which is based a reading of Revelation 11, only God's messengers Enoch and Elijah will be able to see through Antichrist's act. Although they will struggle to warn the faithful, many will still succumb.

capitulation, undercutting the Antichrist's presumed super-human stealth by stressing the force of victims' mundane concupiscence. The implication of Bale's depiction is again radical: Bale's Antichrists do not reign against our will, but *by* our will. They do not impose their tyranny; we choose it. Bale's play can be seen as showing how, after Kirchmeyer's originary moment in *Pammachius*, the institutional Antichrist perpetuates itself.

### ***KING JOHAN AS AN ANTICHRIST PLAY***

It has been conventional to read *King Johan* as a response to William Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528). In this tract, Tyndale laments that historiographers unfairly disparage England's twelfth-century monarch when they might otherwise praise his notorious defiance of papal authority.<sup>8</sup> Bale agrees and writes a Reformist's history of the king: where early chroniclers blast John's willful resistance to Rome, Bale lauds his proto-Protestant sympathies and depicts him as a martyr-saint who wages an early, lonely battle against papal tyranny.<sup>9</sup> Such a reading

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of King John's reputation in the early modern England, see Carole Levin. As Levin recounts, early modern history had not been kind to John (b. 1167?- d. 1216); chroniclers maligned him for everything from sloth, gluttony, and lechery to overall political ineptitude ("A Good Prince," 23). Particularly notorious were his strained relations with the Roman church. John infamously rejected Pope Innocent III nomination's of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury, sparking a dispute with Rome that lasted nearly a decade. Levin suggests that John's defiance may have struck a chord among historiographers, not in the least because many were themselves churchmen (23). This detail was not lost on Tyndale who, in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, asserts the chroniclers' bias and accuses them of deliberate defamation: "Considre the story of kyng Iohn where I dou[b]te not but they [the Roman church] have put the best and fayrest for themselves and the worst of ki[n]ge Iohn...." In his brief account of the monarch, Tyndale recasts John's papal conflict as the struggle between a just monarch and a usurping Roman hierarchy unwilling to grant him the "due obedience which they oughte to the kyng by the ordinaunce of God" (fol. 157 v). See also Peter Happé's discussion of Tyndale as Bale's chief inspiration in *Four Morality Plays*, p. 51, and in *John Bale*, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> As Creeth asserts, "The major chronicles available to Bale were those of Fabyan and Polydore Vergil—who, since he vilified John, gets special attention in the play" (xxiv). In an extended soliloquy late in the play, Veryte critiques Vergil and his *Anglica Historis* (printed 1534) for failing to assert the king's godly character: "I assure ye, fryndes, lete men wryte what they wyll, / Kyng Johan was a man



not only positions Bale as England's "first Reformation historiographer" (White, *Theatre*, 32) but also tends to focus critical attention on how the play models effective Protestant kingship and how, particularly, Bale's lessons on leadership might be intended for England's sitting monarch. Although Bale's John ultimately loses his battle against Rome's wily Seditio, he remains staunchly resistant to the end; moreover, his successor, Imperial Majesty, takes up John's fight and eventually subdues England's subversive foe. Critics argue that Imperial Majesty is a not-so-veiled proxy for King Henry VIII,<sup>10</sup> and the play itself functions as "a piece of political and religious special pleading" (Walker, *Plays*, 200) whereby Bale and his patron Thomas Cromwell unambiguously petition their king to persevere as Imperial Majesty by reaffirming royal supremacy, denouncing popish ceremony, and championing a vernacular Bible.<sup>11</sup>

Bale's appeal comes at a time when Henry's reformist fervor—heretofore seemingly fueled only by personal and political convenience—may have needed stoking.<sup>12</sup> As Greg Walker suggests, Cromwell suspected that Henry was listening

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both valeaunt and godlye. / What though Polydorus reporteth hym very yll / ... / Nothyng is allowed in hys lyfe of Polydorus / Whych discommendeth hys ponyshmentes for trayterye, / Advauncynge very sore high treason in the clergie. / Of hys godlynesse thus muche report wyll I ... ." (2.1075ff).

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Happé's discussion of Imperial Majesty in "Dramatic Images," pp. 247ff. Happé argues that, even without a recognizable costume or an actor's impersonation (both conceivable staging possibilities), "Bale's audience would hardly miss the link" between Imperial Majesty and Henry himself (248). See also Happé in *John Bale*, p. 99, and Greg Walker in *Plays*, p. 210. Clergy insists that Imperial Majesty "shall be the supreme head of the churche" (2.1271), just as Henry himself earned the same title under 1534 Act of Royal Supremacy.

<sup>11</sup> See Walker, *Plays*, p. 210ff; White, *Theatre*, p. 32; Happé, *John Bale*, p. 103ff.

<sup>12</sup> For Henry's less aggressive reformist stance, see Walker's discussion of the degree to which the Ten Articles of 1536 fell short of the expectations of reformers interested in more aggressive doctrinal revision, particularly because Henry made reforms that were "more or less conducive to stable government and the good of the commonweal ... . It was this fundamental contingency to Henry's interest in reform which posed the gravest threat to Cromwell and his allies. For it meant that at

too closely to his more traditional advisors.<sup>13</sup> Fearing imminent reversal of crown Reformation policy, Cromwell commissioned Bale to write a play that reinforced the merits of royal supremacy and other reforms that the king had already authorized. Such a reading explains Bale's deference to the theologically orthodox Ten Articles and his avoidance of religious critique that could embitter Henry.<sup>14</sup> In *King Johan*, Bale sticks to issues upon which everyone involved—that is, a cautious king and radical Protestant propagandists alike—appeared to agree.

This reading has been skillfully argued elsewhere, and I do not intend to challenge its plausibility or its usefulness in guiding consideration of Bale's drama. It is important to recognize, however, that the current focus upon Bale's dialogue with Tyndale's writings on John—and the subsequent critical emphasis on the play as propaganda aimed at Henry—obscures the extent to which Bale is in dialogue with an extensive tradition of literature about the Antichrist. *King Johan* is as much an Antichrist play as it is historical drama. Critics rarely, however, consider *King Johan* as Antichrist drama *per se*—nor do they consider Bale's engagement with the

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virtually any moment both they and their cause might be abandoned if the political situation suggested it" (Plays, 204).

<sup>13</sup> "The distinct possibility arose that Henry might desert the reformers and align himself more closely with his more conservative bishops who, with the Duke of Norfolk and other conservative noblemen, formed the makings of a reactionary administration in waiting. Chief among the opponents of reform whom Henry had never entirely removed from his confidence (perhaps with just such purposes as now suggested themselves in mind) were the bishops of Winchester, Durham, and London, Stephen Gardiner, Cuthbert Tunstal, and John Stokesley. These men, and the last named in particular, had already signaled their determination to resist changes in doctrine and practice in a number of ways" (Walker, Plays, 204-5).

<sup>14</sup> Bale could not, in this case, deny transubstantiation; the Ten Articles of 1536 upheld the real presence. As for the prohibition of clerical marriage, communion in one kind only, and private masses, in 1531 Henry had affirmed these practices in 1531 when he refused to commit England to the Augsburg Confession (Walker, Plays, 203). As for fears about policy reversal, Henry would return the Church of England to more traditional theological stance with the Six Article of 1539, which reaffirmed transubstantiation and auricular confession and explicitly upheld clerics' vows of celibacy.

Antichrist tradition as integral to the play's political function.<sup>15</sup> Yet, if Bale's drama is, as others have successfully argued, a viable form of Protestant political lobbying in early Reformation England (Walker, Plays 8), the Antichrist is clearly Bale's preeminent lobbying tool. Further, the ways Bale incorporates and adapts a literary Antichrist tradition are the foundation for his broader political arguments; we do not fully comprehend the force of his political commentary—particularly his commentary on kingship—until we understand how he makes these points using the figure of the Antichrist.

Bale's dramatic villains are morality vices with a significant twist: they are consistently identified as Antichrists. King John characterizes the Church's ministers as "the very antychrysts" (2.962) and vows to confront those "trayterouse pristes ... the pernycyouse Antichristes" (l. 2080f.) and "all the of[f]sprynge of Antichristes

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<sup>15</sup> German historian Klaus Aichele includes Bale's play in his seminal study of (largely continental) Antichrist drama of the early modern period, *Das Antichristdrama Des Mittelalters Der Reformation Und Gegenreformation*; however, Aichele's analysis of Bale is limited (see pp. 66ff.). To my knowledge, nineteenth-century critic Charles H. Hereford provides the only extensive consideration of *King Johan* as an Antichrist play, addressing the play primarily in terms of its participation in and contribution to the dramatic Antichrist tradition. He suggests that Bale's play is more of an Antichrist play than an estate drama, citing Bale's greater debt to Kirchmeyer than to Lyndsay's *Satire of the Three Estates*, a commonly cited source (135-6). Hereford acknowledges that the play alters the traditional Antichrist mythology, particularly the way Protestant writers had begun to interpret the Antichrist lore for polemical ends: "it would be too much," he admits, "to describe *Kynge Johan* as a consistent Protestant version of the story of Antichrist, in terms of English History" (137). However, Hereford does not investigate the specific ways Bale challenges the Antichrist legend and the extant Protestant adaptations of it, nor does he consider the theological and political consequences of Bale's changes. More recently, Greg Walker, Paul Whitfield White, and Peter Happé address Bale's political influence in their separate, seminal discussions of early Reformation drama as a form of political lobbying, yet *King Johan*'s status as an Antichrist play does not feature prominently in their analyses. They—and other critics who consider the play's political significance—are generally more interested in the play as a history, an estate morality (see Fichte), or as an historical morality (see Duncan), with Bale, in the latter two cases, having adapted these medieval dramatic forms for Protestant polemical ends. Happé—more than anyone else—does acknowledge the debt *King Johan* owes to the Antichrist dramatic tradition (including Kirchmeyer's Protestant *Pammachius*), yet his analysis leads to a discussion of the play as Bale's adaptation of the medieval saint-play, considering *King Johan* alongside Bale's own writings on Anne Askew; see "The Protestant Adaptation of the Saint Play" 214ff. Raymond-Jean Frontain considers the importance of the Penitential Davidian strains in *King Johan* while Jacqueline A. Vanhouttee considers how the play "adapts late medieval ways of imagining community" (49).

generacyon” (2.1560).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Bale’s use of the term “Antichrist” is too ubiquitous to be ignored. Time and again, his characters associate the Church hierarchy with the Antichrist: Sedition admits that Usurped Power, “the great pope of Rome,” is himself “Antycrist” (1.675); King John identifies the clergy as “an hepe of adders of Antecristes generacyon” (1.490); and Imperial Majesty suggests that the battle against Church corruption requires “the full suppressynge of Antichristes vanytees” (2.1525). Nobility, reflecting upon John’s martyrdom, laments “how Antichristes whelpes have noble princes used” (2.1533). In this way, Bale departs from the Lutheran model that identifies the Antichrist strictly with the pope. While Bale sometimes identifies the pope’s assistants as subject to the papal Antichrist (i.e., as “Antichristes whelpes” or the “of[f]sprynge of Antichristes generacyon), he simultaneously identifies them as the “very antychrysts” themselves. This identification of the pope’s myriad clerical accomplices as “antychrysts” demonstrates how quickly Luther’s notion of an institutional villain gives way to an Antichrist who is a “kingdom.” Bale’s drama implicates the entire Roman hierarchy as Antichrists, from the pope and the cardinals to the lowliest members of the clergy. *King Johan* is the first dramatic model for what becomes the English Protestant notion of an aggregate Antichrist—an Antichrist who is related to Luther’s institutional one, but who is both larger and has the potential for exponential growth.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This and all subsequent references to *King Johan* refer to Peter Happé’s 1985 edition.

<sup>17</sup> See too Paul Christianson, p. 21ff, for a discussion of Bale’s divergence from Hus and Wycliff and their notions of a many-membered Antichrist.

Bale does, however, do more than simply name-drop “Antichrist” in the way that so many Reformation propagandists do. He strategically incorporates aspects of traditional Antichrist lore as he reinterprets that tradition. Bale’s characters frequently evoke the pre-Reformation tradition without even uttering “Antichrist.” In one instance, Nobility decries the pope with five separate biblical images in the span of just ten lines; he cites the political tyrant, the crafty deceiver, the Leviathan of Job, the apocalyptic beast of Revelation, and a villain of fallen Babylon, all images that exegetes use to characterize the Antichrist in traditional lore.<sup>18</sup> Further, Bale’s *Private Wealth* proves to be the crafty tyrant of Nobility’s complaint, performing many of the specific signs detailed in early exegetical texts. Early accounts of the Antichrist legend suggest that the Antichrist employs a hierarchy of tactics to seize power. He becomes more aggressive as his victims become more resolute. Adso describes this escalation in his *Libellus de Antichristo*: “Those whom he cannot corrupt by gifts, he will conquer by fear. Those whom he cannot terrify, he will try to seduce by signs and miracles. Those whom he cannot convince by miracles, he will cruelly torture, and put to a pitiful death in the sight of all” (104-5).<sup>19</sup> In like fashion,

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<sup>18</sup> Nobility denounces the pope: “He is wurse than the Turke, / Whych none other wayes but by tyrannye doth worke. / Thys bloody bocher with hys pernycouse bayte / Oppresse Christen princes by frawde, crafte, and dissayte, / Tyll he compel them to kysse hys pestilent fete, / Like a leviathan syttyng in Moyses sete. / I think we can do unto God no sacrifice / That is more accept, nor more agreynge to justice, / Than to slea that beaste and slauterman of the devyll, / That Babylon boore, which hath done so muche evyll” (2.1285ff).

<sup>19</sup> In general, the Antichrist of traditional lore takes a “path of least resistance” approach. While initial gifts—often just the simple promise of his good favor—come at little cost to the Antichrist and require little of him, subsequent tactics demand an increasing amount of engagement: threatening talk gives way the demand for tangible signs and miracles; these benign behaviors give way to more severe ones. As John Wright notes, *The Play of Antichrist* stages a comparable escalation: the Antichrist rewards the King of the Franks’ allegiance with gifts; he seduces the King of the Greeks with threats of war. The stubborn King of the Teutons, undeterred by war, succumbs instead to the Antichrist’s miraculous healing of the sick and raising of the dead. Synagoga and the Jews, still unconvinced, are murdered (104-5). Bale’s villains’ aggression escalates in like manner. When speculating as to how to deal with

Private Wealth first attempts to lure King John with the gift of the pope's good favor, advising King John that he will "reforme the peace between Holy Chyrch and yow" (2.186) should the king agree to the Pope's demands. When John resists, Private Wealth then attempts to woo him through fear, threatening that "dyssobedyent" kings are apt to face "ponyshment" (2.221). When John remains undeterred, Private Wealth warns John more aggressively that the Church will "subdue ye manfully" (2.526) and that the King's continued disobedience will lead to war with Rome's allies (2.225ff.).<sup>20</sup>

We have this howr great navyes upon the see  
 In every quarter, with this loller here to fight  
 And to conqwarre hym for the Holy Chyrchis right.  
 We have [i]n the northe Alexander, the Kynge of Scottes,  
 With an armye of men that for their townnes cast lottes;  
 On the sowthe syde we have the French kyng with his powr,  
 Which wyll sle and burne tyll he cum to Londen towr;  
 In the west partes we have kyng Alphonse with the Spanyardes  
 With sheppes full of gonepowder now cummyng hether towards;

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a resolute King John, Sedition advises Usurped Power to "Suspend hym and curse hym, both with yowr word and wrytyng. / Yf that wyll not holpe, than interdyght his land / With extreme cruellnes, and yf that wyll not stand, / Cawse other princes to revenge the Churchys wronge" (1.975ff). He proposes to first use words against John; at the next stage, words become deeds; and at the last most "extreme" stage, these actions become even more severe, involving the broader participation of the Church's allies.

<sup>20</sup> Sedition reinforces the fact that the stakes have been raised by providing "sounds of war" from off-stage:

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Sedicyon <i>extra locum</i> . | Alarum! Alarum! Tro ro ro ro ro, tro, ro ro ro ro, tro ro ro ro ro! |
|                               | Thomp, Thomp, Thomp, downe, downe, downe, to go, to go, to go!      |
| King Johan.                   | What a noyse is thys that without the dore is made.                 |
| Private Wealth.               | Such enemyes are up as wyll your realme invade. (2.261ff)           |

And on the est side we have Esterlynges, Danes, and Norwayes

With soch powr landyng as can be resystyd nowayes. (2.512-22)

These military threats—coupled with Private Wealth’s admonition that the character Englande will be “lyke to smarte”— (2.506) recall Adso’s warning that the Antichrist will eventually use physical violence to coerce belief. John’s martyrdom completes the progression, suggesting, as Adso does, that murder is the Antichrist’s last resort against his most relentless enemies.

Bale even borrows the play’s central dramatic conflict from the pages of traditional Antichrist lore, including earlier dramatic accounts of the Antichrist legend. Indeed, chronicling a king’s struggle against the Antichrist is not unprecedented: Antichrist’s role was inherently a political one, and lore consistently warns that the Antichrist will seize control of governments by corrupting kings.<sup>21</sup> For example, the early sixteenth-century pamphlet *Here begynneth the byrthe and lyfe of the moost false and deceytfull Antechryst* (Wynkyn de Worde, c. 1525) confirms that the Antichrist will rise to power by overthrowing kings. Borrowing heavily from the *Libellus* narrative, the anonymous author explains: “Antechryst shall gete many kyngdomes and londes vnder his domynacyon & subgacvon” by “draw[ing] unto him a greate parte of the sterres that is for to knowe hyghe princes reigntyng on erthe”

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<sup>21</sup> The Antichrist’s desire for coronation was an important part of his traditional vita: Antichrist seeks the crown while Christ repeatedly rejects it (cf. John 6:13-15). Antichrist’s temporal power is often juxtaposed with Christ’s own crown of thorns. For example, the *Passional* emphasizes this disparity between Christ and Antichrist by depicting two coronations side by side: Christ’s crowning with thorns and the pope’s crowning with the triple tiara (Luther sig. Aii v-Aiii v). cf. Joseph Leo Koerner in *The Reformation of the Image*, p. 122 ff. Koerner glosses Cranach’s comparison, “The pope craves worldly rather than heavenly dominion, and that fact signals he is Antichrist . . . . What does the crowning of thorns itself say about power, though? While the tormentors’ words ‘Hail, King of the Jews’ were intended as mockery, the insult backfired. Resurrected and glorified, Christ revealed that he was king, his death was life, the instruments of his Passion were victory arms, and so on, through all the inversions by which the Good News was announced” (122).

(sig. A5v-A6r).<sup>22</sup> Significantly, prose tracts are not the only source for the legend: a series of early Antichrist plays similarly focus on the plight of monarchs who struggle to resist and subdue the Antichrist. In the early Latin drama *Ludus de Antichristo* (c. 1150), the Antichrist separately confronts the kings of the Greeks, of the Franks, of the Teutons, of Jerusalem, and of Babylonia and demands their obedience, and in the Chester Mystery Cycle's *The Coming of Antichrist* (c. 1400), Antichrist spends the play making similar demands of the "Four Kings." The fourteenth-century French play *Jour du Jugement* (c. 1450) is broader in scope than the others,<sup>23</sup> yet its dramatization of Antichrist's terrors still features an extended sequence where ten kings struggle to resist Antichrist's wiles. Even Kirchmeyer's *Pammachius* chronicles the struggle of Emperor Julian Caesar as he weighs the consequence of surrendering imperial authority to the papal Antichrist, the fictional Pope Pammachius.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The pamphlet also warns that those who refuse to submit will be killed: "he shall put vnto dethe many kynges and grete lordes that wyll not beleue in his cursed lawe" (sig. A5v). In this passage, the authors gloss Revelation 12:4 in way common among early Antichrist material, suggesting that the image of the red dragon knocking the stars for the night sky with his tail represents the usurpation of earthly kings and princes in the time of the Antichrist.

<sup>23</sup> While the other plays tend to focus on Antichrist's three and one-half year reign of terror, *Jour du Jugement* dramatizes all the events from Antichrist's birth until the Second Coming.

<sup>24</sup> These and subsequent references to the dramatic Antichrist tradition refer to the following editions: David Mills, ed. *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992; John Wright, ed. *The Play of Antichrist*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967; Richard K. Emmerson and David F. Hult, eds. and trans. *Antichrist and Judgement Day: The Middle French Jour du Jugement*. Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998; Thomas Naogeorg [Kirchmeyer]. *Pammachius*. Trans. C.C. Love. University of Toronto, 1992.



In this context, the trials of Bale's own royal protagonist make *King Johan* that much more of an Antichrist play. Granted, critics often consider Bale's account of John as evidence that he is writing historical drama, having lifted the king's notorious clash with the pope straight from the chronicles. John is the first English king to have a dramatic counterpart, and as a result, Bale is rightly hailed as the author of the first English history play. Yet, as we have seen, Bale's *King John* does not simply battle the pope, but the Antichrist; he does not simply clash with bishops and priests, but by his own account, with "the bloody Babulon, the gro[u]nd and mother of whordom" (l.370f). As much as Bale revolutionizes English historical drama with his characterization of the king, it is important to recognize how Bale, when he pits John specifically against Antichrists, borrows more precisely from the pre-Reformation Antichrist tradition, including what would seem to be dramatic conventions specific to this tradition.

Of course, one need not split hairs about the extent to which Bale borrows from Fabian's chronicles or Adso's *Libellus*. The crucial point is that Bale purposely evokes both simultaneously. Bale's arguments about a Roman Antichrist rely upon his ability to demonstrate the congruence of pre-Reformation prophecy and the activities of corrupt ecclesiastics. He splices together aspects of Antichrist prophecy and historical chronicle in order to suggest how they are equivalent. For example, prophecies warn that the Antichrist will usurp kings; likewise, the historical King John accused Rome of usurping the authority of European monarchs. By dressing his Antichrists as Pope Innocent III and Bishop Stevyn Langton, Bale suggests that the two usurpations are one and the same and that the pope and his ministers *are* the

prophesied Antichrist. In this way, *King Johan* demonstrates the complicated ways that the pre-Reformation Antichrist tradition remains latent in the emerging polemical one. Bale does not abandon or rewrite these early characterizations of the Antichrist as much as he reinterprets them in light of historical and contemporary events, arguing how a corrupt Church hierarchy fulfills earlier prophecies about the Antichrist's tyranny.

One of the more arresting ways Bale's drama aligns clergy with the traditional prophecy is by emphasizing the visual similarities between pre-Reformation Antichrist tableaux and contemporary ecclesiastical images. In the example I will discuss below, Bale fuses two distinct behaviors in a single scene: the traditional image of a king kneeling in surrender before the Antichrist and the image of a penitent kneeling before a confessor. This example is significant for a number of reasons. In the first place, Bale reproduces a standard Antichrist tableau—that of kings kneeling before Antichrist. This bolsters his already considerable investment in an Antichrist tradition and reinforces *King Johan's* classification as an Antichrist play. More significantly, Bale's fusing of these two images demonstrates how he argues for theological reform by inscribing the pre-Reformation Antichrist tradition with contemporary significance. In a subtle bit of visual rhetoric, Bale implies that receiving the sacrament of confession is equivalent to surrendering to the Antichrist. Walker suggests that Bale addresses confession in a limited way in *King Johan*, arguing that Bale avoids overt theological critique by focusing only on how corrupt ministers use the sacrament for political gain. When we recognize that Bale's depiction of confession directly engages traditional Antichrist lore, however, we

uncover a much more radical reform argument that specifically attacks the sacrament on theological grounds. This radical critique bolsters White's observation that "*King Johan's* debunking of Auricular Confession ... would have resulted in Bale's imprisonment, if not execution on grounds of heresy" (*Theatre*, 18). Bale's polemic is not entirely tame in *King Johan*, and this example ultimately suggests that we cannot fully understand the depth of Bale's polemic without considering how his arguments engage the Antichrist tradition.

*Here begynneth*, seen in Figure 3-1, features a detailed woodcut that depicts the crowned Antichrist seated on a throne, scepter in hand, flanked by nine kings. Seven kneel beside him paying him homage and two—presumably those who refused to acquiesce—lie beheaded at his feet, apparent victims of the ready executioner looming in the left corner. Prophecies warn that world rulers will flock to the Antichrist bearing the gift of their own surrender—a crude parody of the three kings' visit to the infant Christ.<sup>25</sup> The woodcut visually reinforces these prophecies, depicting a tableau also constructed in a substantial number of earlier Antichrist plays where royal struggles with the Antichrist always culminate in a similar scene of surrender. Although each play introduces its own distinctive flourishes, the defining elements are consistently preserved: the Antichrist, enthroned, accepts the surrender

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Debra Higgs Strickland who discusses Bosch's late-fifteenth century triptych, which depicts the three kings visiting the infant Christ, flanked by Antichrist himself. As Strickland notes, "the juxtaposition of Antichrist with the three Magi recalls the eschatological meanings attached to the liturgical celebrations of Advent. The beginning and end of the liturgical year had been devoted to eschatological subjects at least since the time of the same St. Gregory pictured on the triptych's exterior. In the Roman liturgy of the Epiphany, the gifts of the Magi prefigure Christ's sacrifice but are also symbols of the eschatological element of the Eucharistic rite, in that the hymns chanted during the offertory procession evoke the vision of the Second Coming. The continued popularity of this liturgical connection is manifest in the parallel drawn in the *Golden Legend* (c. 1265) between the First Advent—the Coming of Christ—and the Second Advent of the Last Judgment, to be preceded by the arrival of Antichrist" (15).

of a kneeling monarch (or monarchs) who promises allegiance. In *Ludus de Antichristo*, for example, each of the kings individually surrenders his authority in exactly the same way: the king approaches the throne of Antichrist, kneels, and hands over his crown. The stage directions for each king reads, “He goes to Antichrist and stands before him singing: ‘I acknowledge your imperial right; I ask to serve you as a royal knight.’ And he bends his knee and offers him his crown” (84). The kings in Chester assume a similarly reverential posture. Responding to Antichrist’s demands that the kings worship him, the third king declares, “Oh, gracious Lord, go sit down then, / and we shall, kneeling on our knen, / worship thee as they own men / and work after thy lore” (l. 177-80). The stage direction indicates that the kings, “shall go up to the throne” (s.d. 180). The fourth king describes how they together offer a lamb sacrifice to the Antichrist “kneeling thee before” (l. 184). The kings in *Jour du Jugement*, predictably, agree to pay the Antichrist “homage” (l. 1041), presumably kneeling as they “humble [them]selves totally before” him (l.1034). Even Kirchmeyer’s Caesar is unable to resist the Antichrist and agrees to obey Pammachius, who is “dressed in royal purple” (III.v) holding Caesar’s scepter, and wearing a crown (in this case, of course, it is the pope’s “triple diadem”). Completing the conventional tableau, Caesar even agrees to “prostrate [him]self prone on the ground here, so that the Father [the Pope] may know that [he is] clearly humbled” (III.v).

Dramatists repeatedly focus on the struggles of kings against the Antichrist and stage this climactic tableau. Bale’s royal chronicle is no different. Whether or not Bale (or his audience) was familiar with these specific plays is beside my point; I

introduce these examples in order to attest to the ubiquity of this particular tableau—one that depicts kings and emperors as Antichrist’s loyal subjects kneeling obsequiously at his feet. Regardless of whether Bale borrows consciously from this apparent dramatic tradition, his play nonetheless evokes a visual image that has distinctly medieval roots, transforming it in a new context. Bale’s *Sedition* introduces himself to King John in the opening scene and not-so-subtly announces his intentions: “The pope ableth me to subdewe bothe kyng and keyser” (1.99). King John vows to “execute the rod” upon *Sedition*, and his pledge establishes the central dramatic conflict: the king vs. the clerical Antichrists. *Sedition* then makes the conventional demand of John to surrender his authority—“Tush, gyve upp the crowne, and make no mor[e] ado” (2.551)—and John, albeit after a considerable amount of stalling, offers the conventional response, professing his allegiance to Rome: “Here I submit me to pope Innocent the Thred, / Dyssyering mercy of hys holy fatherhed / ... / To hym I resygne here the septer and the crowne / Of Englande and Yrelond, with the powr and reowne, / And put me wholly to his mercyfull ordynance” (2.608-9, 612-4). The historical King John had been excommunicated for exacting tribute from Rome, and he cannot fully submit himself to the pope until he is “assoyll[ed] ... of irregularyte” (2. 665). Thus, immediately after he gives up his crown, John asks *Sedition* (disguised as Bishop Stevyn Langton) to hear his confession.

Contemporary woodcuts like the one in Figure 3-2, the title page of *Thordinary of Crysten men* (Wynkyn de Worde, 1506), suggest that the standard image of confession depicted the confessee kneeling before his confessor.<sup>26</sup> Further,

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<sup>26</sup> The figures in this cut also appear later in *The Serche of Confessyon* (1529), printed by Robert Copeland. Copeland’s use is reproduced in Hodnett’s *English Woodcuts* (no. 2016, fig. 174). For

when Sedition administers the sacrament earlier in the play, he urges both Clergy and Civil Order: “sytt downe on yowre kneys, and ye shall have absolucyon” (l. 1213)

John, too, would undoubtedly kneel as Sedition utters the words of absolution, “Ego absolvo te” (l. 1797).<sup>27</sup>

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additional examples, see Thomas N. Tentler and his foundational study of confession in pre-Reformation Europe. See also Katherine C. Little. Tentler’s frontispiece similarly depicts a kneeling penitent and reproduces “The Heavenly Road” from Stephen Lankran, *Himmelstrass. im latin genant Scala celi* (Johann Otmar: Augsburg, 1510). Tentler attests that although the use of the confessional box, with a penitent kneeling behind a screen, was a mid-sixteenth-century innovation, earlier illustrations still consistently depict a kneeling penitent: “The confessional box with a partition between priest and penitent was not used until the second half of the sixteenth century, and the fifteenth and early sixteenth century illustrations generally show the priest seated, the penitent kneeling in front of him” (82). Tentler also cites contemporary confessional manuals noting that, despite a few notable instances, the general practice was to kneel: “The *Tractatus de instructionibus confessorum* [Erfurt, 1483?] says that the penitent should kneel at the beginning and then, to tell his sins, sit at the feet or side of the confessor according to the custom of the land. Most, however, direct the penitent to kneel, women with their heads covered and men with their hats off. Angelus de Clavasio in one place [in the *Summa de casibus conscientiae*, Lyon, 1500] says the penitent should kneel and in another argues that it is not absolutely necessary for him to kneel or to take off his hat, since it is internal more than external humility that is wanted here. But Godescalc Rosemond [Confessionale, Antwerp, 1518] expands on the more common opinion—that it is proper to have humility of posture as well as of mind—by addressing the penitent: ‘... throw yourself at the feet of the priest, the representative of Christ, no matter how great you are; not standing, or sitting, or lying out on the altar as has become the unworthy custom in many places.’ In short, there is much evidence to suppose that a variety of postures was permissible for the penitent, but the vast majority stipulated that he kneel before the priest” (83). See Tentler, p. 83, n. 2, for a comprehensive survey of examples of kneeling in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century European confession manuals.

<sup>27</sup> Bale’s confession scene also appropriates the conduct of the sacrament, as it is presented in contemporary manuals. As Tentler notes: “There was an etiquette for confession ... there were apparently slight variations according to the customs of different lands and ages, but on the whole there was uniformity... . He [the penitent] is to make the sign of the cross, either at the very beginning after he greets the priest, or else before he starts to tell his sins. Usually he is directed to begin with a general admission of sinfulness in the form of a prayer that begins, ‘I confess to almighty God,’ in which the penitent names the Virgin, the saints, and the priest as those to whom he acknowledges that he has sinned; and after saying ‘mea culpa,’ he interrupts this prayer to begin the recitation of sins ... . After the penitent has told all he can remember, he completes the prayer of general confession, if he has begun with it, by beseeching God, Mary, the saints, and the priest for their mercy. He may add some formula indicating sorrow for forgotten sins as well as confessed sins. The confessor may then ask any questions he feels necessary to the correct understanding of the sins he has just heard ... . Then most of the manuals direct the confessor to impose a penance—prayers, fasting, alms, and so on—and then absolve the penitent; but a few reverse the order and place the absolution before the imposition of the penance” (82, 85). Bale’s scene follows this familiar rubric; his notable exceptions are integral to the critique. King John begins with “I confess,” but instead of confessing to God and the saints, he instead asks for the pardon of the pope and other ecclesiastics: “Confiteor Domino Pape et omnibus cardinalibus eius et vobis” (I confess to the Lord Pope, and to all his cardinals, and to you”). John then details his sins as Tentler specifies and requests mercy, but he again appeals to the ecclesiastics instead of God, Mary, or the saints.

Bale is careful to preserve the specific elements of the conventional Antichrist tableau, but he reproduces them in a new context. The audience would see John complete his surrender in the standard, iconic fashion when he kneels before the Antichrist, but Bale sets the scene in a provocative, new situation: the moment of sacramental confession.<sup>28</sup> Bale reproduces the traditional image of royal surrender and demonstrates the extent to which his play remains steeped in the pre-Reformation lore. Yet, at the same time, he emphasizes the way that these Antichrist prophecies are properly fulfilled in the Roman rite (at least according to him and his fellow Protestant reformers). The spectacle of John kneeling combines the familiar image of a humble penitent with the traditional image of an obsequious king. In turn, Seditio appears simultaneously as a priestly confessor and a usurping Antichrist.<sup>29</sup> This shared visual register implies a shared theological one: Bale asks his audience to consider whether confessing ones sins to a priest could be just as misguided as humbling oneself before the Antichrist.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bale's scene is closely indebted to Thomas Kirchmeyer's *Pammachius*, where Julian Caesar's kneeling surrender to the Antichrist is also presented as a confession. Porphyrius insists that surrender to Pammachius is the only way to gain pardon for Caesar's sins: "He [Pammachius] gives pardon to your sins and calls you back from hell, if you persuade your mind to obey the terms which you shall hear" (III.v). What follows is both a crude parody of the renewing of Caesar's baptismal promises (in which he pledges his belief in the pope's supreme authority not less than twelve times consecutively) and the bestowing of absolution on Caesar, to whom Pammachius "will give ... pardon" after Julian promises to sin no more, i.e., "swears an oath that [he] confirms [his] faith in them so that the Father may never repent of giving his grace" (III.v). Bale arguably draws on the confession rite with greater specificity (King John explicitly seeks pardon, and Usurped Power delivers a parodic absolution, mimicking the language of the confession rite); Kirchmeyer's reference is comparatively oblique.

<sup>29</sup> One even wonders if an elaborate altar chair like the one pictured in the confession above would have doubled as the Antichrist's throne.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Greenblatt, "Shakespeare and the Exorcists" in *Shakespearean Negotiations*. In this moment, Bale "empties out" confession for his audience in the same way Greenblatt suggests Shakespeare marks out demonic possession in *Lear* as "theatrical fraud": "... the evacuation of the divine presence from religious mystery, leaving only vivid but empty ceremonies; the transformation of faith into bad faith ... . *King Lear* is haunted by a sense of rituals and beliefs that are no longer efficacious, that have been emptied out" (113, 19).

We need not be familiar with the traditional tableau to discern Bale's ubiquitous mistrust of the sacrament: Bale's Antichrist uses confession throughout the play, systematically securing allegiance among king and subject alike. Sedition praises confession shortly after introducing himself to King John; this scene's early prominence suggests that confession will be an integral component of the Antichrist's plots and, likewise, Bale's polemic. Sedition explains that the pope exploits confession as his own, failsafe version of Big Brother: "Whan all other fayle he is so sure as stele. / Offend Holy Church and I warrant ye shall yt fele, / For by confession the holy father knoweth / Throwwt all Christendom what to his holynes growth" (l. 270ff). Bale depicts confession as allowing the pope full access to the faithful's consciences and vulnerabilities.<sup>31</sup> Confession also allows the pope's ministers to strong-arm support for the Church. Sure enough, it is during confession that Bale depicts Sedition securing Nobility's allegiance. Before administering absolution, Sedition threatens Nobility with damnation should he refuse to recognize the authority of the pope and his ministers: "Godes holy vycare gave me his whole autoryte. / Loo, yt is here, man, beleve yt, I beseche thee, / Or elles thow wylte faulle

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<sup>31</sup> Bale follows the example of early polemicists like Tyndale, who in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) insists: "Shrift in the ear is verily a work of Satan, and that the falsest that ever was wrought, and that most hath devoured the faith" ("Obedience," 296). In the same tract, Tyndale notes, "They [the corrupt clerics] have feigned confession for the same purpose to stablish their kingdom withal. All secrets know they thereby. The bishop knoweth the confession of whom he lustest throughout all his diocese. Yea, and his chancellor commandeth the ghostly father to deliver it written. The pope, his cardinals and bishops, know the confession of the emperor, kings, and of all lords: and by confession they know all their captives. If any believe in Christ, by confession they know him. Shrive thyself where thou wilt, whether at Sion, Charterhouse, or at the observant's thy confession is known well enough. And thou, if thou believe in Christ, art waited upon. Wonderful are the things that thereby are wrought. The wife is feared, and compelled to utter not her own only, but also the secrets of her husband, and the servant the secrets of his master. Besides that through confession they quench the faith of all the promises of God, and take away the effect and virtue of all the sacraments of Christ" (372).



in danger of damnacyon” (2. 60). With his soul’s forgiveness hanging in the balance, Nobility quickly complies, submitting himself to the authority of the pope rather than to King John. Clergy and Civil Order do exactly the same only thirty lines later; they promise to obey “the popes holy majeste” (2.91) over King John himself, and Sediton again urges them to formalize their promise through confession: “Sytt down on yowr kneys, and ye shall have absolucion” (2.92).

It is this kind of straightforward commentary that Greg Walker cites when he argues that Bale constructs a political, not a theological critique of the sacrament. According to Walker, Bale portrays confession “not as doctrinally unsound, but as politically unacceptable” (Plays, 214). He emphasizes how Bale, aware that King Henry upheld the efficacy of confession, depicts corrupt ministers as abusing sacramental privilege purely for political gain. In the case of Nobility, Sediton uses confession as a way to undermine royal supremacy by pitting the authority of the king against the authority of the pope. In this way, Walker suggests Bale implicates the corrupt minister of the sacrament, not the sacrament itself. In this particular context, it does seem that Bale implies that confession is still efficacious when administered in good faith. Sediton, after all, does not administer the sacrament exactly as the rubrics dictate. For instance, he absolves both John and Nobility by the authority of the Pope, rather than God the Father: “Dominus papa noster te absoluat, et ego absolve te” [Our lord pope absolves you, and I absolve you] and “Auctoritate Romani pontyficis ego absolve te [By the authority of the Roman Pontiff I absolve you]” (2.65). Sediton’s concluding blessing is also consistently incorrect: he blesses all of his penitents “*in nominee pape,*” not “*in nominee patris, et filius, et spiritu sancti.*”

Changes like this suggest that what Seditio administers is not the sacrament, but only a very close approximation of it.<sup>32</sup> Thus, even when the confessor is explicitly the Antichrist, Bale still tiptoes around theological critique by implicating Seditio's garbled version of the sacrament, not the appropriately administered one.

Significantly, Seditio does not invent the sacrament itself for his own destructive purposes; he merely hides "underneath *benedicite*" (l. 264), hoping his version of sacrament will pass for the real thing. The Antichrist, in other words, exploits sacramental privilege to secure his authority just as he exploits other existing religious practices and political structures. The distinction is slight, but likely enough to get Bale off the hook, should the king question his intentions.

The import of Bale's polemic necessarily shifts, however, when we consider that John's confession explicitly doubles as his surrender to the Antichrist. From this perspective, Bale does not tiptoe around anything: he clearly *does* question the sacrament on theological grounds by suggesting that confession itself is just as morally corrupt as submitting to the Antichrist. In Walker's analysis, the confessor alone is guilty, having exploited the sacrament for political gain; in this new context, however, Bale implicates the confessing party, too. Surrender to the Antichrist—even if it is accidental or secured through trickery or coercion—always has grave moral consequences for the individual doing the surrendering. When Antichrist demands the allegiance of the kings in *Ludus de Antichristo*, he seeks not only

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<sup>32</sup> Seditio also uses a variety of saints' relics during Clergy and Civil Order's joint absolution. In this case, Seditio fails to administer separate, private confession for each and also departs from the rubrics by employing the relics—which are purposely grotesque ("a scabbe of seynt Job, a nayle of Adams, too") and part of Bale's broader critique of ceremony and superstition.

“princely power” but also “to be recognized as God” (83).<sup>33</sup> The Antichrist has usurped divine authority as much as he has usurped earthly authority, and surrendering to him jeopardizes the state of a person’s soul as much as it jeopardizes the world political scene. Surrendering to the Antichrist requires that a person recognize a false Christ as Christ himself. When Bale links confessing and surrendering, he suggests that sacrament itself involves the same kind of surrender to a false Christ: penitents are morally culpable for granting a priest authority that belongs to God alone. Bale’s critique anticipates Thomas Becon’s objection to confession in his *The Acts of Christ and of Antichrist* (1577). Becon insists that one need only confess in prayer to God himself, and he denies the necessity of priestly intervention through auricular confession: “Christ declareth in his doctrine, that when we haue offended our heauenly Father, and gone astraye from the patches of his holy commaundementes: we shoulde conuert and tourney unto hym, and make our hu[m]ble confession unto hym and craue forgiuennesse of our synnes at his hande, for his sonne Christ Jesus sake” (sig. F ii r). Becon objects to confession precisely because the priest presumes the role reserved for God himself: “Antichrist sendeth us unto his Priestes commaunding us to publish and confesse our synnes unto hym, and take penance and absolution at his hande, with this faithe, that so doying we are forgiuen and deliuered from all synne” (sig. F ii r). From Becon’s perspective, a

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<sup>33</sup> Admittedly, Bale’s Antichrists do not explicitly make this second demand of John, and they remain explicitly preoccupied with canceling Rome’s required tribute to England. However, it is impossible to divorce the Antichrist from his identity as a false god. That is, if a person solely concerned with accumulating political power would be considered a tyrant. The fact that Bale explicitly maligns Sedition and his cohorts as “Antichrists” suggests that they use this tyranny precisely for a broader, theological end—namely, to facilitate mass conversion and the destruction of souls. The Antichrist only seizes secular authority as a means to an end: as Satan’s apocalyptic soul-catcher, the Antichrist must seduce as many of the faithful as possible before it is too late—that is, before the Final Judgment—and the power and influence afforded by political control simply makes this job easier.

confessor is, *de facto*, an Antichrist, because he acts *in personae Christi*. Bale suggests the same when he merges John's confession with his surrender.

In short, Bale's polemic is transformed when we consider it in the context of the Antichrist tradition. Although oft considered tame, Bale's critique of confession emerges as predictably "bilious" when we realize how he uses a familiar Antichrist tableau to question the theological grounding of the sacrament. His critique may be skillfully couched for the political reasons that Walker and others have previously articulated—so skillfully, perhaps, that it is easy for us to overlook how John's kneeling corresponds to standard images of royal surrender. However, if Bale is carefully avoiding royal backlash, the subtlety of his most radical arguments is his best defense. His discreet theological points are, in other words, no less purposeful than his overt political ones. Further, Bale can afford to make John's surrender a moment for radical theological critique because he has already boldly divested kingship of its political worth earlier in the play.

Critics often suggest that Bale reveres kingship in *King Johan*—if only because Bale is so openly determined to redeem John from the "ill reports" of Polydorus's chronicles.<sup>34</sup> However, Bale's polemic again proves more subversive than critics have asserted. Just as Bale uses the Antichrist tradition to construct his bold arguments against confession so too does he tacitly undermine the authority of English kings by making calculated alterations to traditional depictions of the Antichrist.

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<sup>34</sup> See especially 2.1077.

## THE IMPOTENCE OF AN ISOLATED KING

It is not surprising that traditional Antichrist lore consistently emphasizes this moment of royal surrender discussed above. After all, a king's acquiescence is traditionally the lynchpin in the Antichrist's plot to convert the larger body of the faithful. As Adso warns, the Antichrist usurps monarchs so that he might, in turn, rule their subjects: "He will first convert kings and princes to his side and then, through them, the rest of the people" (104). *Here Begynnth* specifies further that after the King of Lybia converts, "than shall all his people be marked with the token of Antechryste on theyr forhe[a]des & upon theyr right handes and with this marke Antechryst shall subdue the worlde to hym and his miserable credence" (sig. A6v). The surrender of monarchs opens the floodgates, as it were: by converting kings and princes, the Antichrist gains royal license to seduce the masses. The moment the king kneels before the Antichrist is the moment that the Antichrist has, at least for the time being, won.

What turns out to be surprising about Bale's portrayal is that the king's crown is a trophy for an already victorious Antichrist. John's surrender is more of a formality than a necessity: it occurs very late in the play, after the Antichrist has *already* wooed the king's subjects. John submits precisely because, lacking allies, his back is against the wall. He laments that "my Nobilyte, / My Lawers and Clergye hath cowardly forsake me, / And now last of all, to my most anguish of mynd, / My Commynalte here I fynd both poore and blynde" (l. 460ff). Without the support of the estates and the commons, England cannot withstand the military attacks that Private Wealth threatens. As John explains to an exasperated England, he cannot

single-handedly defeat the pope's armies, and he must give up his crown else "thy people wyll ... be slayne here without number" (l. 600ff). Nevertheless, John's stalls for a good part of the play: just before his surrender, he still insists that the "crowne of a realme is a matter of great wayght" and he needs more time to consider "gyvyng it upp" (2.553ff).<sup>35</sup> John's tenacity sets him apart from other dramatic kings in the Antichrist tradition.

King John consistently sees through Sediton's deceit, refuses his bribes, and withstands his threats, and even after he surrenders, he is by no means convinced that the pope and his ministers are benevolent. Lamenting his overthrow, John tells Englande that the pope and his ministers are even worse than England's eastern foes: "Alas, I had rather be underneath the Turke" (2.652). His mistrust of Rome is so potent that his explicit surrender fails to convince Sediton that he will remain obedient. As Sediton explains to Private Wealth: "I hope in a while we wyll make hym so to rave, / That he shall become unto us a common slave / And shall do nothyng but as we byd hym do / ... / But yet it is hard to trust what he wyll be, / He is so crabbed: by the Holy Trinyte, / To save all thynges up I holde best we make hym more sure, / And gyve hym a sawce that he no longer endure" (2.871ff). Sediton thinks the only way to ensure John's compliance is to kill him.

Earlier dramatic kings never require such drastic action: Antichrist plays consistently implicate weak-willed kings in the rise of the Antichrist; these monarchs predictably surrender their kingdoms and consequently facilitate Antichrist's quick

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<sup>35</sup> A legitimately impatient Sediton knows that John need "make no more ado." Whether the king keeps his crown or not makes little difference at this point. John has already become a figurehead ruler because his subjects have promised to yield to the pope rather than their king. John's stalling only delays the inevitable.

accumulation of power. Further, these kings surrender precisely because they are convinced that the Antichrist is God himself. The Four Kings in Chester's "The Coming of Antichrist" are easily wooed by Antichrist's false miracles; when they surrender, the first king affirms, "That thou art God now lieve ye" (l.167). The kings in *Ludus de Antichristo* are each undone by a different tactic, including bribery, threats, and violence; but they each eventually recognize Antichrist's "godhead." Notably, the King of the Teutons is initially able to resist the temptations that ensnare the other royals, but even he succumbs to the Antichrist's healing of the sick and raising of the dead—both signs, he suspects, of Antichrist's divinity.<sup>36</sup> This early drama suggests, in other words, that an unyielding ruler is his country's best defense against the Antichrist. A resolute king can presumably protect his people, whereas a weak one will allow his country to be easily overrun.

Bale's King John is exactly the kind of king who, in these early plays, might have successfully thwarted the Antichrist with his strong-minded resistance; perhaps an audience familiar with earlier lore might have expected him to do as much in *King Johan*. Yet Bale's Antichrists flourish in the face of his king's unprecedented resolve. John's unwavering claim that Sedition's "curssys . . . are of the devyll and not of God" (l.269-70) is not the failsafe defense that early drama implies it will be: his subjects still back him into a corner and force him to surrender. Thus, Bale puts his audience

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<sup>36</sup> In *Ludus de Antichristo*, the King of the Teutons refuses to surrender his authority to the Antichrist. The king mistrusts Antichrist's professions of godliness, and rejects the money and gifts Antichrist sends as a bribes. When the Antichrist changes tactics and threatens war, the King still refuses to give in; he fights the battle against Antichrist's army and wins, undeterred by threats of bloodshed. However, the resolute king's faith wavers in the face of Antichrist's false miracles. The stage directions indicate: "Then the Hypocrites bring a lame man to Antichrist. When Antichrist heals him, the King of the Teutons wavers in his faith. Then they bring a leper; when he is made clean, the King doubts even more. Finally they carry in a coffin, in which a man lies pretending to have been killed in a battle . . . . [When the Antichrist raises him from the dead,] the King of the Teutons, seeing the miracle, is seduced" (ll. 270ff).

in a curious, new position when he shows them how subjects like themselves facilitate the Antichrist's rise to power.

Bale refuses to scapegoat the king; instead, he implicates the king's subjects. In this, Bale departs significantly from contemporary polemicists who are often eager to blame the rise of the papal Antichrist upon the complicity of princes. William Tyndale, for example, laments the solidarity between the pope and kings in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528):

The emperor and kings are nothing now a days but even hangmen unto the pope and bishops, to kill whosoever they condemn without any more ado, as Pilate was unto the Scribes and Pharisees and the high bishops to hang Christ. For as those prelates answered Pilate, (when he asked what he had done) if he were not an evil doer, we would not have brought him unto thee. As who should say, we are too holy to do any thing amiss, thou mayest believe us well enough: yea, and his blood on our heads said they, kill him hardly, we will bear the charge, our souls for thine: We have also a law by which he ought to die, for he calleth himself God's son. Even so say our prelates, he ought to die by our laws, he speaketh against the church. And your grace is sworn to defend the liberties and ordinances of the church and to maintain our most holy father's authority; our souls for yours, ye shall do a meritorious deed therein. Nevertheless as Pilate escaped not the judgement of God, even so it is to be feared lest our temporal powers shall not. ("Obedience," 275)

Tyndale offers this comparison as exigence for princes and kings to reform their ruling practices by rejecting the influence of the papacy. Yet Bale himself is less



inclined to hold temporal authorities responsible for Antichrist's proliferation. As Paul Christianson notes,

The call for a godly prince echoed faintly through the pages of [Bale's] *The Image of Bothe Churches*. Compared to other protestant contemporaries Bale placed very little reliance in the apocalyptic leadership of established social or political forces. Repeatedly, he noted that princes possessed insufficient strength to overcome the hordes of antichrist: 'For unto kings hath not God given it to subdue these beasts. Only is it reserved to the victory of the living word.' Unlike Tyndale who supposedly asked the Lord to 'open the eyes of the King of England' when bound to the stake, Bale escaped from reliance on a reformation from above. Magistrates, princes, bishops, established power in general, proved weaker reeds than preachers, the persecuted, and the oppressed in the troubles of the last days. A godly prince might still help to open the light of the Lord in England, but Bale—despite his belief that God sent Prince Edward 'for the singular comfort of England'—believed that the reformation would come through other channels if necessary. (19)

Indeed, by absolving John of responsibility for the Antichrist's victory, Bale underscores the complicity of nearly every other character in the play. What once seemed the singular struggle of kings in earlier drama is of universal concern in *King Johan*, and non-royal characters' reactions to the Antichrist have a direct impact on his advancement in England. As an Antichrist play, *King Johan* proves surprisingly less invested in the behavior of kings and more critical of the behavior of the king's subjects. Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order all waffle between loyalty to King John

and allegiance to Pope Innocent III. Each wage a personal battle with the Antichrist and weighs the benefits of royal allegiance against the Antichrist's tempting promises of worldly reward. Time and again, the estates leave John in the lurch, abandoning his reform campaign and rejecting royal supremacy. So too does Commonality struggle to resist the Antichrist; although fully cognizant of Sedition's villainy, he rationalizes complicity in exchange for security and sustenance. As Bale stages it, even a clear-sighted king willing to advance reform will fail against the Antichrist if he lacks the support of those he rules—particularly his confidants and advisors. The play's villains succeed despite King John's nearly unflinching resistance because, as Sedition reveals, their success depends more upon their ability to corrupt Nobility, Clergy, Civil Order, and Commonality than the king himself.

Bale challenges the traditional Antichrist lore by suggesting that kings cannot single-handedly thwart the Antichrist. A king must have the cooperation of the ruling classes in order to defeat the Antichrist, and Bale makes his point by juxtaposing two royal attempts to arrest Sedition. The king's first attempt occurs in the opening scene of the play: John confronts Sedition, who has just insisted that he will "hold upp the pope" in England so "that no prince can have his peoples obedience" (1.119). The king insists that Sedition's efforts will fail, no matter how relentlessly he pursues them. In particular, John argues that his royal authority, which has been divinely granted, is sufficient to withstand the challenges of a few rogue priests: "Gett thee hence, thow knave, and moste presumtuows wreche, / Or as I am trew kyng thow shalt an halter streche. / We wyll thow know yt, owr power ys of God, / And therefore we wyll so execute the rod / That no lewde pryst shall be able to

maynetwyne thee” (1.221ff). John spends a good bit of this opening scene asserting his governance in England and explaining his clear-sighted plans for Church reform, but all of this lofty talk only leaves Sediton overcome with laughter: “By the holy Masse, I must lawgh to here yowr grace. / Ye suppose and thynke that ye coud me subdewe. / Ye shall never fynd yowr supposycyon trewe, / Though ye wer as strong as Hector and Diomedes, / Or as valiant as ever was Achylles” (1.230ff). The once elevated scene quickly devolves into a raucously funny cat-and-mouse chase in which John proves that he is, indeed, no Hector. Although John tries to restrain him, slippery Sediton easily and repeatedly wrestles himself out of the exasperated king’s clutches. As the hilarity continues, Sediton tumbles across stage, shamelessly asserting that he has “a great mynd to be a lecherous man!” (1.304). Sediton and John also share a series of jaunty rhyming couplets during the most intense moments of the pursuit; it’s an undeniably silly exchange that further detracts from the imposing tone that John had asserted only moments before.<sup>37</sup>

In this slap-stick interlude, John certainly proves less capable at nabbing corrupt clergy than he first claims. Not twenty-five lines into the play, John promises that, “by the wyll of God, and his high ordynaunce,” he will “reforme the lawes and sett men in good order, / That trew Justyce may be had in every border” (1.20f). Yet, just two-hundred lines later, Sediton is slipping through his fingers as Bale juxtaposes John’s bold claims of divinely-mandated reform with the king’s ineptness.

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<sup>37</sup> John. Tush, dally not with me, I saye thou shalt abyde!  
[Tries to hold Sediton.]  
 Sediton. Wene yow to hold me that I shall not slyppe asyde?  
 John. Make no more prattyng, for I saye thou shalt abyde!  
 Sediton. Stoppe not my passage, I must over see at the next tyde!  
 John. I wyll ordeyne so, I trowe, thou shalt not over.  
 Sediton. Tush, tush, I am sewer of redy passage at Dover. (1.305ff)

John's authority is neither intimidating nor effective. The implication is curious: why would a staunch supporter of royal supremacy like Bale want to suggest that his Reformer king is all bark and no bite? In one regard, Bale may simply wish to avoid underestimating John's opposition: as *Sedition* reminds the king, the Church has strongholds in nearly every corner of Europe and certainly every abbey in England: "Nay, that ye can not [subdewe me], thowgh ye had Argus eyes, / In abbeys they have so many suttyl spyes, / For ones in the yere they have secret vysytacyons, / And yf ony prynce reforme there ungodly facyons, / Than two of the monkes must for the to Rome by and by / With secret letters to avenge ther injury" (1.244ff). *Sedition* describes a papal network that is so extensive that it will certainly take more than one person to disassemble and quell it. This may be precisely Bale's point when he depicts John as unable to wrangle *Sedition*.

Acting alone, the king cannot subdue his seemingly ever-present villain; he needs allies to help him successfully implement an ambitious reform agenda. As Bale's lively staging suggests, single-handedly vanquishing *Sedition* is like playing an impossible game of Whac-a-Mole: even as the king lays hands on his nemesis in one corner of the stage, *Sedition* manages to wriggle away and pop-up again elsewhere, taunting the king with his maddening dexterity. The chase makes it clear that John simply cannot win against *Sedition* until he has more hands on deck. John's problem is that even his closest advisors are reluctant to help him.

At their first entrance, the estate classes prove dangerously uninterested in John's reform agenda. Nobility enters just as *Sedition* scrambles off-stage, but rather than help John in what must obviously be the tail-end of a vigorous pursuit, he

nonchalantly urges the king to “troble not ... with no soch dysolate persone” (1.314). Still reeling, John blasts Nobility for his treasonous allegiance to Sedition: “No man levynge is in more famlyerite / With that wycked wrech, yf it be trew that he told me” (1.321). Nobility, of course, downplays any association with “the unthirfytte knave” (1.313), but his thrice repeated denial seems peculiarly akin to Peter’s own spurious denial of Christ.<sup>38</sup> John also lacks the support of Clergy and Civil Order: Clergy boldly warns the king, “If you do us wrong we shall seke remedy” (1.347) and repeatedly takes Rome’s part against John’s accusations of papal corruption and usurpation. Although Civil Order promises to “submytte [him]selfe unto yowr graces correccyon” (1.390), it still “pyttyth [him] much” that John derides the Church hierarchy (1.493). In short, John’s advisors run hot and cold when it comes to supporting their king’s reform agenda; they offer obligatory pledges of support, but when push comes to shove, they each finally render allegiance to the pope rather than to their king.<sup>39</sup> Significantly, their surrender—and not the king’s—proves to be the real lynchpin the Antichrist’s success.

Bale suggests that Sedition escapes because John lacks the support—both physically and ideologically—of his estates, and Imperial Majesty’s late-play victory reinforces this point. When Imperial Majesty finally subdues Sedition, the only difference between this confrontation and John’s earlier one is that Imperial Majesty

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<sup>38</sup> Sedition’s denials follow on the heels of one another. In three separate responses, Nobility claims that he has never met Sedition: “I know hym not I, by the waye that my sowll to shall” (1.326); “Beleve me yff ye wyll, I know hym not, I assure yow” (1.328); and “Syns I was a child both hym and his condycyon / I ever hated for his iniquite” (1.330f).

<sup>39</sup> As we have seen above, Nobility surrenders to Sedition in confession and is thereby “assoyle[d] ... from the kynges obedience” (2.63). Clergy seems already well-committed to the interests of the Church in the opening scenes of the play, but his official pledge of obedience occurs in the beginning of Act 2 when both he and Civil Order promise to support Sedition’s cause against the King.

is flanked by a newly reformed and an aggressively supportive group of advisors. Imperial Majesty is no more of a reformer than John himself—that is, he is no more resolute in his Protestantism and no more aggressive in his efforts to quell Church corruption. Yet, unlike John, Imperial Majesty has the unwavering support of Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order, and with their support he wages a wholly more effective campaign. In this mirror scene, Imperial Majesty's confrontation with Sediton begins in exactly the same way as King John's: the king first demands to know Sediton's name. When John had asked earlier, Sediton unreservedly disclosed his true identity, presumably made bold by the nonexistence of John's allies. When Imperial Majesty poses the same question, however, Sediton is noticeably more intimidated; he frenetically pleads for "a sayntwary!" (2.1356) before he unconvincingly introduces himself as "Holy Perfectyon" (2.1361). Things only get worse for Sediton as the scene progresses. The estates, together with Imperial Majesty, render the once quick-witted vice speechless with a tag-team onslaught of accusations and insults. Overcome, Sediton finally kneels before Imperial Majesty, and in a startling reversal of the traditional tableau, Bale depicts the Antichrist humbling himself before England's king. In a similar situation, John might have immediately laid hands on Sediton, grateful that the villain was finally staying still; however, Bale again introduces a crucial difference between Imperial Majesty's arrest of Sediton and John's earlier, failed attempt. Whereas John had personally chased Sediton around the stage, Imperial Majesty simply turns to his waiting advisors and asks Civil Order to bring the confrontation to an end: "Have hym fourth, Civyle Order, and hang hym tyll he be dead, / And on London bridge loke ye bestowe hys

head” (2.1465f). Imperial Majesty relies on the extra muscle that John lacked, and this time, Sedition does not struggle or manage to wrestle free. Just as John is powerless without the support of those he rules, Imperial Majesty suppresses Rome only with the assistance of the ruling classes.

The impotence of an isolated king suggests, at the very least, that a balance of power lies with the estates; although many critics cite Imperial Majesty’s decisive victory as evidence of Bale’s royal deference, the king’s triumph ultimately (and perhaps surprisingly) proves faint praise at best. Certainly, Sedition’s defeat at the hands of Imperial Majesty introduces a new circumstance to Antichrist lore: traditionally only the Archangel Michael or God himself could kill the Antichrist, making Imperial Majesty’s victory, by comparison, no small feat. Further, if the king is, as it seems, a not-so-subtle substitute for Henry VIII himself, the victory duly reveres Henry and his Reformation triumphs, extolling the king for succeeding where others have failed. The compliment is even grander if the king succeeds in singular-style—as a *deus ex machina* who converts the estates and suppresses Sedition simply by virtue of his supreme authority as “mynyster immediate undre God” (2.1238).<sup>40</sup> Yet, it is important to recognize that it is not the king’s hand alone that saves: Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order prove instrumental in Imperial Majesty’s success. Bale undercuts his seeming royal deference by suggesting that a king is only as powerful as his subjects help him to be.

Once again, a consideration of Bale’s engagement with the Antichrist tradition complicates our understanding of his polemic. We have seen that pre-reformation Antichrist lore operates under the assumption that the Antichrist will

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<sup>40</sup> This is the title Veryte grants to Imperial Majesty upon the king’s first entrance.

convert the masses only after he secures the allegiance of kings. We have seen, too, how Bale's Antichrist play challenges this convention: Bale's king is not the Antichrist's primary target, and Sedition unconventionally seizes control of John's government by corrupting his subjects, not the king himself. Bale's new Roman Antichrists rely on the support of many to overthrow the governance of one, and defending the country against these grassroots tactics becomes, likewise, a newly collective effort. Significantly, Bale invests the king's subjects—particularly the estates—with unprecedented responsibility in the defense of the realm: the king succeeds when Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order support him, and he fails when they do not. When Bale elevates the influence of the king's subjects he simultaneously detracts from the authority of the king himself. He tacitly suggests that the king shares divinely-appointed authority with the estates, and Imperial Majesty's impressive victory against the Antichrist becomes a kind of back-handed compliment. For all of the play's commanding assertions of royal power, Bale never depicts a king who subdues the Antichrist by his imperial authority alone. Bale does not, of course, go so far as to suggest that the estates could quell the Antichrist without the leadership of a righteous monarch. In this regard Bale, avoids entirely divesting his kings of their authority and influence. Nevertheless, *King Johan* suggests that power is not the king's alone, and for that reason, it is not simply the monarch who is responsible should the Antichrist successfully infiltrate and corrupt the realm.

In *King Johan*, Bale lobbies for the vigilance of the estates. Greg Walker has alternatively suggested that Bale's polemic primarily targets the king, arguing that the play ultimately highlights the merits of Henry's crown reform policy and encourages



Henry to protect the crown against papal usurpation.<sup>41</sup> However, as Bale's engagement with the Antichrist tradition makes clear, *King Johan* does not simply function to reinforce the status quo. The play more aggressively targets the ruling classes, whose support proves essential for the maintenance of the crown. In this way, Bale writes polemic for palpable change: he argues that the ruling classes must embrace the king's reforms in order for the Antichrist to be subdued in England. It is useful, in this context, to recall Paul Whitfield White's observation that "while the doctrine of papal supremacy had been legally dead since 1534, the religious and cultural fabric on which it rested was not" (*Theatre*, 27). Bale and his patron Thomas Cromwell surely fretted about the fickle will of their king, yet the Ten Articles meant that, at least for the time being, they had secured Henry's backing for limited reform. By 1538, however, recent crown-mandated reform still lacked widespread popular support, leading Bale and Cromwell to suggest that England still had many more roving Antichrists to overcome. As Walker reminds us, "the reform of the abuses which brought about John's destruction, the play suggests, has yet to be fully accomplished. The threat still remains that all that has been achieved hitherto may be reversed by those still in positions of power" (177). Waning popular support could smother reform efforts in the early sixteenth-century just as Bale suggests it did for John in the twelfth. Increased support, particularly among the estates, would alternatively ensure reform's advancement.

In short, there is more than one way to seize power, and Bale's Antichrists know it. Perhaps as lazy as they are corrupt, they consistently take a "path of least

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<sup>41</sup> c.f. Walker, *Plays*, pp. 210. In his introduction to the play, Peter Happé does acknowledge *King Johan*'s engagement in the estate play tradition.

resistance” approach to tyranny: far easier than battling a staunchly reformist king is corrupting a willing ruling class. Bale holds Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order accountable for the Antichrist’s rise to power, exposing how their concupiscence enables papal corruption. Traditional lore warns against an Antichrist whose uses flawless theatrics to ensnare many, but Bale subverts this convention, too. Bale’s Antichrists are incompetent actors who can barely keep their wickedness under wraps, and they would be woefully inefficient villains if it were not for their victims’ propensity to sin. In other words, Bale portrays his Antichrists as deceivers only to undermine their reputations as such. In *King Johan*, the Antichrist’s performances are red herrings that distract from his real weapon of choice: exploiting his victims’ desires, particularly ambitions for power and influence. Bale’s play suggests that the Antichrist’s best disguise is actually the oft-repeated warning that he will be wearing one. While victims struggle to discern the Antichrist’s disguise, he has already managed to seduce them with overt promises of worldly reward.

## **RETHINKING DECEPTION:**

### **CONCUPISCENCE AND THE RISE OF THE ANTICHRIST**

When Bale was busy reading *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), he would have discovered plenty of passages about the Antichrist before he came across Tyndale’s discussion of King John in the final pages of the tract; in fact, Tyndale mentions the Antichrist more than forty times before he addresses John’s historiography. Moreover, Tyndale argues that the king’s damning biography is just one example of how the Antichrist maintains control through deceit. In the passage

containing his discussion of John, Tyndale suggests that the Church's "fyghte agenst the Turkes" (Obedience, fol. clvii r), and its additional demands for the allegiance of John and other European kings only appear to protect the interests of the faithful. Like the prophesied Antichrist and his "false prophetes" (fol. clvii v), the pope and his legates are duplicitous: "In all their doinges though they prete[n]de outwardly y<sup>e</sup> honoure of God or a come[n] wealth their entente and secret councell is only to brynge all vnder their power a[n]d to take out of the way whosoever letteth them" (fol. clvi v). Tyndale warns that the Church's disguised imperialism will soon bring the world "vnder Antichrist and Antichristes possession" (fol. clviii r) and circulating a biased history of their enemies is one way Church leaders conceal their tyrannical intentions and maintain their elaborate masquerade. "I suppose," Tyndale writes, "they make the cronycles them selves" and "have put the best and fayrest for the[m]selves and the worst of ki[n]ge Iohn" that they might disguise "a greate parte of their wekednisse" (fol. clvii r). In short, the Antichrist has been keeping England's annals and has masked his own villainy by demonizing John's righteousness.

This broader reading of Tyndale is significant for a number of reasons. Most immediately, it highlights the further similarity between Tyndale and Bale's accounts of the king, both of which not only critique previous chroniclers, but also explicitly portray John as a victim of the Antichrist. Yet the passage also highlights the extent to which the Antichrist's success is intrinsically tied to his ability to deceive. Tyndale contrasts the Antichrist's "entente and secret councell" with the façade that he "prete[n]de[s] outwardly" and, by emphasizing the discrepancy between the two, foregrounds the Antichrist's theatricality (fol. clvi v). This is a theme upon which

Tyndale elaborates elsewhere, particularly in *The Parable of the Wycked Mammon*, also published in the 1528. Here, Tyndale argues that the Antichrist's nature "is (whan he is vttered and ouercome with the word of God) to go out of the playe for a season and to disgyse hym selfe and then to come in agayn with a new name and new rayme[n]t" (Parable, sig. Aiv r). Here, the Antichrist behaves not unlike a stage Vice: Tyndale warns against a chameleon Antichrist—one who is adept a playing many roles and who, when unmasked in one part, mounts the stage again disguised in a new role and a new costume.<sup>42</sup> Tyndale's immediate point, as discussed in the previous chapter, is that the Antichrist is a recurring threat. Tyndale considers the Antichrist to be a variety of evils that plague, have plagued, and will plague the community of the faithful throughout history "tyl the worldes ende." In this way, he ultimately justifies how an institution like the papacy, with its succession of individual popes, might be identified collectively as the Antichrist (sig. Aiv r).<sup>43</sup> Yet, in a more precise way, this depiction also engages the common conception of the Antichrist as a skilled performer—one who is able to deceive precisely because it is never clear that he wears costume.

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<sup>42</sup> Tyndale explains in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) that the clergy's attire is the costume of the Antichrist: "Is not that shepherd's hook, the bishop's cross, a false sign? Is not that white rochet that the bishops and canons wear, so like a nun, and so effeminately, a false sign? What other things are their sandals, gloves, mitres, and all the whole pomp of their disguising, than false signs in which Paul prophesied that they should come? And as Christ warned us to beware of wolves in lamb's skins, and bade us look rather unto their fruits and deeds, than to wonder at their disguising" ("Obedience," 285).

<sup>43</sup> Tyndale explains: "Antichriste was in the olde Testament and foughte with the prophtes, he was also in y<sup>e</sup> tyme of Christ and of the Apostles as thou readest in the epistels of Ihon and of Paul to the Corinthians and Galathians, and other Epistles. Antichriste is nowe and shall (I dout not) endure tyl the worldes ende. (Parable, sig. Aiii v- Aiv r).

A host of medieval texts suggest that discerning the Antichrist from the Christ-like role he portrays will be nearly impossible; few will be able to distinguish between his feigned orthodoxy and the real thing. The Antichrist's nigh flawless dramatic prowess causes problems not only for the faithful striving to recognize him, but also for exegetes attempting to anticipate and warn against his presumably undetectable theatrics. How might one prepare to resist a villain who is, by definition, irresistible? How might one describe a wickedness that, by definition, always appears to be godliness? And, perhaps most vexing of all, why struggle to expose an Antichrist who is already prophesied to deceive you? These contradictions are distressing precisely because they mandate certain helplessness in the face of the Antichrist's evil. It is not, in other words, difficult to understand why Tyndale, even after exposing the Antichrist in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* above, still anticipates the steady progress of papal imperialism. The Antichrist has not only infiltrated England in an innumerable number of ways, but he is also destined to fulfill the warnings of the prophets. Tyndale writes, "And verily I se[e] no other lykelyhode but that the lond shalbe shortly conquered. The starres of the scripture promyse vs none other fortune" (Obedience, fol. clviii). Antichrist may not fool Tyndale in the chronicles, but he is presumably fooling someone— somehow—still. At the same time, it is also not surprising why writers might still wrestle with Antichrist's contradictions and try to find ways to expose him. The faithful could not, after all, despair; furthermore, the prophesies account for a number of believers who will, by the grace of God, see through the Antichrist's disguise and resist him.

Perhaps as optimistic as Tyndale is grim, the dramatic Antichrist tradition offers its playgoers the chance to be a part of this select group of faithful.

Pre-Reformation drama allows audience members to discern clearly the villainy of an Antichrist who otherwise dupes the play world into thinking him holy. Chester's Antichrist, for example, mesmerizes the Four Kings, who are at last able to recognize Antichrist's wickedness when it is revealed, as prophesied, by God's messengers, Enoch and Elijah. However, although Antichrist can trick the Kings, he hardly fools the audience. Playgoers not only recognize him as the clearly designated antagonist—one whom the prophets of Antichrist announce before his entrance— but the Antichrist's over-the-top characterization also leaves the audience in little doubt about his duplicity.<sup>44</sup> Further, Chester's audience also sees the Antichrist, quite literally, as an actor playing a part, demonstrating the unique way in which the play's form underscores its content: having an actor portray another actor makes Antichrist's penchant for performance doubly resonant. In short, Chester's audience has little

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<sup>44</sup> Although Chester's Antichrist never reveals his true identity directly to the audience (as morality vices, with a sly wink or a divulging soliloquy, are apt to do), his duplicity is readily evident to the audience. Chester's Antichrist is a collection of contradictions, making him a woefully unconvincing Messiah. Chester's dramatic structure makes use of visual juxtaposition: in one moment, Antichrist performs miracles, raises the dead, and otherwise intimates a Christ; however, these signs nearly immediately work against him: Antichrist's "walking dead" demonstrate a clear aversion to the Eucharist, and when his authenticity is challenged, Antichrist lashes-out at the righteous prophets, Enoch and Elijah. He inadvertently reveals a malicious character that undermines the Christian role he seeks to portray. In short, Chester's Antichrist isn't fooling anyone. He is, in fact, a terrible actor: hardly threatening, his behavior is downright slapstick. Antichrist's parodic mimicking of God the Father's Latin pronouncements—typical elsewhere in the cycle—are borderline ridiculous, "a clatter with contrived rhymes" (Martin 167). Antichrist also performs a checklist of promised signs in the span of about 50 lines, and his whirlwind of "marvels" make him seem conspicuously too eager to please. Like an over-zealous used car salesman anxious to make a deal, Antichrist wants Chester's Four Kings to proclaim him "'Messy,' / 'Forbuyer of Isreal'" (23.19-20) before they have time for second thoughts. Antichrist's ensuing histrionics further undermine any attempts at verisimilitude: he announces his own death, "I die, I die! Now am I dead!" and he follows this pronouncement with a nigh comic "I rise!" several lines later. After being captured by the Archangel Michael, his exaggerated "Help! Help! Help! Help!," coupled with his steadfast refusal to admit to his disguise, marks the exit of a "bad actor" unwilling to relinquish a role beyond the limits of his ability.

opportunity to be duped in the same way Antichrist's dramatic victims are. Although drama could not save its audience from the actual Antichrist, it could, at the very least, give playgoers a temporary feeling of power over him: they can see what the characters in the play world cannot, making playgoing a particularly helpful medium for revealing the Antichrist.

The audience's knowledge of Antichrist's duplicity was especially potent because Antichrist legend consistently suggests that his lies are his most powerful stratagem. Traditional lore suggests that the Antichrist will use a variety of tactics to seduce the faithful; in addition to his powerful charisma, he'll practice deceit and false miracles, issue bribes, and threaten to terrorize and torture. Although each of Antichrist's strategies might each seem equally viable, however, the pre-Reformation Antichrist drama consistently implies that duplicity is the most effective means to convert the faithful. Clear-sightedness is, after all, what finally separates Enoch and Elijah and those others who are able to resist the Antichrist's snares from his victims. Pre-Reformation drama foregrounds the Antichrist's failsafe theatricality: Antichrist's lies ensnare even when bribery and other threats founder. The staunchest believers easily resist Antichrist's temptations and are willing to undergo physical and emotional suffering rather than submit to him; however, they are inevitably undone by Antichrist's false miracles, consistently citing them as the basis for their conversion. In the pre-Reformation plays, the Antichrist's seamless resemblance to Christ is his *coup de grace*.

Fusing Tyndale's polemic with this dramatic precedent, Bale adapts the pre-Reformation Antichrist tradition in service of his Protestant polemical aims. He again

foregrounds the Antichrist's dangerous duplicity, yet Bale takes the Antichrist exposé one step further: not only are Bale's Antichrists skilled performers, but Bale also assigns them specific, contemporary roles in the hierarchy of the Roman Church. Just as Tyndale finds Antichrists hiding behind the "rayments" of "a pope, a Cardinal, a Bishoppe, and so forth" (*Parable*, sig. Aiv r), Bale's Antichrists infiltrate the community of believers by posing as its ministers. Sedition, for example, pledges that he too will instigate subversion "unto the daye of doom" (1.184-5),<sup>45</sup> and he giddily delivers a laundry list of his favorite ecclesiastical disguises, itemizing all the possible parts he might perform within the Roman hierarchy, from the lowliest monk to the most powerful cardinal or pope. He gloats: "In every estate of the clargye I playe a part. / Sumtyme I can be a monke in a long syd cowle, / Sumtyme I can be a none and loke lyke an owle, / Sumtyme a chanon in a syrples fayer and whyght, / A chapter howse monke sumtyme I apere in sight ..." (1.194ff)<sup>46</sup> Bale's polemic compounds the significance of early Antichrist tradition's playmaking metaphor. Like his dramatic forbearers, Sedition once again thrusts Antichrist's duplicity into the limelight, and theater again affords Bale an opportunity unavailable to Tyndale or even More in their early theological exchanges: as Greg Walker puts it, Bale "need

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<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note the similarity between Sedition's pledge here and Tyndale's observation above that the Antichrist will deceive "tyl the worldes ende."

<sup>46</sup> The full speech reads: "In every estate of the clargye I playe a part. / Sumtyme I can be a monke in a long syd cowle, / Sumtyme I can be a none and loke lyke an owle, / Sumtyme a chanon in a syrples fayer and whyght, / A chapter howse monke sumtyme I apere in sight. / I am ower syre John sumtyme with a new shaven crowne, / Sumtyme the person and swepe the streets with a syd gowne, / Sumtyme the bysshoppe with a myter and a cope, / A graye fryer sumtyme with cutt shoes and a rope. / Sumtyme I can playe the whyght monke, sumtyme the fryer, / The purgatory pri[e]st and every mans wyffe desyer. / This company hath provided for me morttmayne, / For that I might ever among ther sort remayne. / Yea, to go farder, sumtyme I am a cardynall; / Yea, sumtyme a pope and than am I lord over all, / Bothe in hevyn and erthe and also in purgatory, / And do weare three crownes when I am in my glorie." (1.194ff) See White, *Theatre*, p. 37, for his discussion of this scene.



not simply assert that the clergy are duplicitous sinners, he can produce clergymen who will admit as such” (Plays, 190). Not only does Bale associate Antichrist with actor, but he also blurs the line between cleric and player, altar and stage. By having an actor stand-in for a priest and a stage substitute for a worship space, Bale underscores his Reformist notion that the Roman religion was little more than an elaborate pageant of corrupting performances and empty ceremonies.

Bale’s characterization of the Antichrist’s deceit is, however, different from the pre-Reformation legend and boldly undercuts earlier models. In *King Johan*, Bale’s audience can straightforwardly recognize the Antichrist’s deceit, but so too, surprisingly, can Antichrist’s dramatic victims. In other words, the audience members do not enjoy a privileged position as omniscient witnesses to Antichrist’s duplicity; they only see the hypocrisy that Bale’s characters see themselves.

Although Bale’s Antichrists imagine themselves to be skilled actors, their shoddy performances rarely dupe any of the characters in the play world. Surprisingly, they still manage to corrupt the faithful just as efficiently as their stealthier predecessors. Their ineffective disguises, in fact, prove to be elaborate distractions that, while unconvincing, nevertheless facilitate their rise to power—a strategy anticipated in the mid-sixteenth century by Bishop John Jewel. Jewel argues that speculations and predictions about Antichrist’s identity are “tales [that] have been craftily devised to beguile our eyes, that whilst we think upon these guesses, and so occupy ourselves in beholding a shadow or probable conjecture of antichrist, he which is antichrist indeed may unawares deceive us” (Exposition, fol. 8). For Jewel, conjectures about Antichrist are “craftily devised” by Antichrist himself: in an elaborate bit of rhetorical

maneuvering, the papacy carefully points fingers in one direction in order to distract and deceive the faithful from their own escalating villainy.

Sedition, in particular, depends upon the fact that King John will be so distracted by his own efforts to “execute the rod” upon his wily nemesis that he will entirely ignore Sedition’s wooing of Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order until it is too late. Indeed, Sedition boldly announces his identity to John in the opening scene and subsequently details a laundry list of his best costumes, implying he uses deception to infiltrate the church, corrupt its members, and gain power for the pope. “In every estate of the clargye I playe a part / ... / For that I might ever among ther sort remayne ... I hold upp the pope, as in other places many, / For his ambassador I am contynwally” (l.194, 206, 213). He even suggests to John that he plans to dupe Nobility with one of his well-practiced disguises: having not donned a costume during his encounter with the king, Sedition struggles to make a quick exit when he learns that Nobility approaches. “First of all I must change myn apparel / Unto a bysshoppe, to maynetayene with my quarrel, / To a monke or pryst, or to sum holy fryer ... I wold not be sene as I am for fortye pence” (l.296ff., 301). In this way, Sedition primes John to think deception is the Antichrist’s choice method of advancement, and Sedition’s anxiety when Nobility nearly catches him out-of-costume reinforces this claim.

Sedition’s desire to keep his hypocrisy under wraps suggests that he has, in fact, shared privileged information with John. As such, John supposes he can use Sedition’s secrets against him and warns Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order to be wary of villains in “shepes aparell” (l.549): “God graunt ye be not deceyvdy by

hypocresye. / I say no more, I. In shepes apparel sum walke, / And seme relygeyose that deceivably can calke. / Beware of soche hypocrites as the kingdom of hevyn fro man / Do hyde for awantage, for they deceive now and than” (1.548-552). Armed with a resolute vigor and, presumably, a knowledge of all Sediton’s favorite tricks, John works to “have a churche not of dysgysed shavelynge, / But of faithful hartes and charytable doynge” (1.429-30). But does John underestimate Sediton? Does Sediton deliberately divulge his secrets to John with the expectation that king will then, in turn, consider Sediton a manageable threat? After all, if Sediton operates chiefly by way of lying, his loose-lipped habits would certainly seem to thwart his efforts before long. Over-confident, John plays right into his enemies’ hands. With the king expecting a deceiver, Sediton throws deception out the window; with John expecting the king to be the Antichrist’s first victim, Sediton goes after everyone else. And, John, distracted by his own presuppositions and spurred on by Sediton’s own performance in the opening scene, lets him.

Despite recognizing the Antichrist, the estate characters are still complicit in his treachery. Indeed, those who profess allegiance to the Antichrist in *King Johan* do so willingly and are fully cognizant of the evil to which they surrender. While earlier drama suggests that victims only submit to the Antichrist when convinced of his godliness, Bale argues less optimistically that the Antichrist attracts followers even when his wickedness is laid bare. Ultimately, the victims’ own desires for power, security, and even basic sustenance trump their willingness to resist known evil. Bale’s innovation not only foregrounds individual believers’ agency in the rise

of the Antichrist, but it also demonstrates, in an unprecedented way, their potential role in his downfall.

In the case of Commonalyte, compliance is a result of his own suffering and an intense desire to alleviate this suffering. In the first lines of the drama, England admits that she can see right through the clerics' disguises, explaining to King Johan that she knows "such lubbers as hath dysgyssed heades in their hoodes" (1.35) who "in side cotys wandryng, [appear] lyke most dysgyssed players" (1.66). However, she, like Commanalyte cannot help but be complicit with the Antichrist's tyranny, as Commonalyte explains, his own "poverté, which cleve so hard to my sydes" (2.446) provides ample reason to remain loyal to the Church, which can presumably alleviate his suffering.

Nobility acquiesces under similar circumstances. Nobility also recognizes Antichrist's duplicity: he initially balks at Sedition's assertions that King John is "a very wicked man" (2.48) and is incredulous that Sedition's intentions are wholesome. When Sedition asks Nobility to yield to the pope in order to subdue John's "cruell tyranny" (2.51), Nobility resists, explaining that "Yt is clene agenst the nature of Nobilyte / To subdew his kyng without Godes autoryte" (2. 55f). Nobility recognizes Sedition's request contradicts the express commandment of God: "For his [King John's] princely estate and power ys of God ... I fere his ryghtfull rode" (2.57f). However, like Commonalyte, Nobility still submits in a pinch when Sedition threatens his basic needs, particularly his desire for salvation. Nobility surrenders under the threat of damnation:

Sed. Godes holy vycare gave me his whole autoryte.

Loo, yt is here, man, beleve yt, I beseche thee,

Or elles thow wylte faulle in danger of damnacyon.

Nob. Than I submit me to the Chuyrches reformacyon. (2.59ff).

In these examples, Bale's critique stems from the reasons why both Commonalyte and Nobility acquiesce. Since Commonalyte's poverty "ponych ... so sore that [his] power ys lytyll of non" (2.446), his complicity is understandable if not justified; it is, at least in Commonalyte's case, the dubious means to relief. Nobility, like Commonalyte, also seeks what emerges as a greater good—namely, salvation. Although Commonalyte and Nobility are, in the end, responsible for their individual choices, Bale resists making them singularly culpable. In this regard, the question becomes why, according to Bale, the Antichrist has become so powerful that Commonalyte's welfare seems to be contingent on him alone. Why is Nobility overcome by the threat of damnation despite his initial, clear-sighted skepticism? If not Nobility and Commonalyte, who is to blame for these circumstances that seemingly necessitate their surrender?

Both England and Commonalyte explicitly blame corrupt clergy, particularly those who withhold the gospel message precisely in order to preserve their own interests. Indeed, Commonalyte insists that his poverty is not the primary reason why he succumbs to the Antichrist: "The first is blyndnes, wherby I might take with the pope / Soner than with yow [King John], for alas I can but grope, / And ye know full well ther are many nowghty gydes" (2.443ff). England explains how these "nowghty gydes"—namely, the "monkes, chanons, and pristes, and mynysters of the clergy" (2.473)—foster a "blyndes in sowle for lacke of informacyon / In the word of God"

(2.466). She suggests that Commonalty continues to support the papacy because he simply does not know any better, and she blames those responsible for his spiritual education, accusing the clergy of purposefully withholding the gospel so that ignorance might facilitate submission and that this submission might, in turn, cultivate their own self-interests. “Yf yowr Grace wold cawse Godes word to be tawght sincerely,” she pleads to the King, “And subdew those pristes that wyll not preche yt [the Word] trewly, / The peple shuld know to ther prynce ther lawfull dewty. / But yf ye permytt continuance of ypocresye ... Yowr realme shall never be withowt moch traytery” (2.469ff.). Indeed, Clergy confirms England’s accusations: Clergy admits in the opening lines of the play that he is willing to accept the authority of the pope over the authority of the king precisely because his own interests are at stake. He suggests that the king, having lost land in his wars with France, plans to seize Church property as recompense. Clergy promises his allegiance to the pope lest “and abbeye turneth to a graunge” (1.580) and “Holy Churche ... so be browght to thralldom” (1.602). Clergy later promises that in all his “preachynges” he will “saye through his [King John’s] occacyon / All we are under the danger of dampnacyon” (2.121ff). In this way, Bale’s characterization of Clergy manifests England’s worst fears—namely, that the clergy themselves pervert the gospel message in order to preserve their own self-interests. In this case, Clergy preaches against the king in order to preserve “the tenth part of owr lyvyng” (1.593).

It is interesting that the estates—and not Sedition himself—make the most use of deception. Just as Nobility casts the Gospel in such a way as to promote his personal agenda, Civil Order pledges that he will “for the clargyes sake” (2.136)

uphold “cautyllys,” or deceptions, “of the lawe” (2.138) in order to give the papacy sway. Civil Order, like Nobility, is also first skeptical of Sedition, but ultimately pledges loyalty in order to maintain his wealth and elevated status: “For yf the Church thryve than do we lawers thryve, / And yf they decay ower welth ys not alyve. / Therefore we must helpe yowr state masters to uphold, / Or elles owr profyttes wyll cache a wynter colde” (2. 141ff.). In Civil Order, Bale emphasizes the role of concupiscence in the rise of the Antichrist. Civil Order’s acquiesces for the sake of financial advancement, admitting outright that “we may not leve Holy Chyrchys quarell, / But ever helpe yt, for ther fall ys owr parell” (2.148).

Bale’s emphasis upon victims’ willingness to comply with known evil demonstrates his specific debt to Kirchmeyer’s *Pammachius*. Kirchmeyer’s play foregrounds concupiscence—not deception—as not only the Antichrist’s means of achieving power, but also as the very means that Pammachius, the chief papal villain, himself becomes the Antichrist in the first place.<sup>47</sup> Pammachius chooses to become the Antichrist for exactly the same reasons that Clergy and Civil Order reject royal supremacy: namely, in order to prevent a debilitating loss of power and wealth.

For Kirchmeyer, Julian Caesar’s surrender to Pammachius is the lynchpin the Antichrist’s rise to power. Significantly, Caesar gives in for precisely the same reasons that Pammachius initially makes his Faustian pact with the devil: confiding in

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<sup>47</sup> Regarding, Pammachius “becoming” the Antichrist: Kirchmeyer’s play supplants traditional prophecies about a single Antichrist with a Protestant vision of an institutional one. In turn, Kirchmeyer reinterprets traditional lore about the Antichrist’s birth and origins in order to account for this new reading. Kirchmeyer depicts Pammachius as one of many popes whose collective reign as Antichrist spans centuries, yet this institutional vision is incompatible with legendary accounts of the single, infant Antichrist’s unholy nativity. Kirchmeyer stages a new kind of (anti)Incarnation instead: when the cowardly, feeble Pammachius makes a Faustian pact with Satan, the bargain transforms him into a newly indomitable Antichrist.

his aide, Nestor, Caesar admits that the loss of power and the affection of his Roman populace is too difficult to bear. Like Bale's estate characters, Caesar openly chastises Pammachius' obvious corruption, yet he too is willing to acquiesce in order to preserve his worldly authority. Kirchmeyer suggests that Antichrist relies upon Caesar's concupiscence in order to secure his own authority; indeed, Caesar's choice not only yields a bleak conclusion to the drama, but Kirchmeyer's final lines suggest that man's unavoidable selfishness will allow the Antichrist to flourish until the Second Coming. Worldly comforts are, according to Kirchmeyer, too much of a temptation and lead otherwise upright individuals to choose evil knowingly and willingly.

Bale certainly acknowledges the strength of these temptations, yet he picks up where Kirchmeyer leaves off and writes a more hopeful final scene in which the estate classes recognize their faults and overcome them. Although they are too late to save King John, their conversion strengthens the authority of Imperial Majesty who, with their help, is finally able to wrangle the papal Antichrist. Just as England's monarch depends upon the support of the estates for the maintenance of power, Bale's play suggests that Antichrist's activities are similarly contingent upon the cooperation of the estates. Likewise, the defeat of the papal Antichrist depends upon their recuperation—and not the Antichrist's seemingly indomitable charisma.

In Bale's account, the papal Antichrist is something like Homer's shape-shifter Proteus, the mythic sea god whom King Menelaus and his knights cooperatively subdue in *The Odyssey*. In George Chapman's *Homer's Odysseys* (1614?), the goddess Idothea counsels Menelaus about her father's deceptive slights:



when confronted, Proteus will try to escape by “turn[ing] himselfe to every one / Of all things that in earth creepe and respire, / In water swim, or shine in heavenly fire” (4.559-61). Proteus is, in this regard, not unlike Bale’s wily Sedition who himself “shape-shifts” in myriad ecclesiastical costumes—or Tyndale’s Antichrist who, when unmasked in one “parte,” seeks a new disguising “raiment.” Menelaus resembles Bale’s King Johan who (aware of Antichrist’s metamorphic capacity) sees through disguises otherwise intended to distract and deceive. Yet Menelaus need not subdue Proteus alone: more like Bale’s Imperial Majesty, he enlists the help of “three of them, on whom [he] most relied / For firme at every force” (4.575-76). Encountering the sleeping Proteus, Menelaus and these three trusted knights “cast all [their] hands about him manfully,” restraining him through multiple, successive transformations until he finally surrenders (4.608ff.). Once ensnared, Proteus must give “true solution of all secrets” (4.518), revealing to Menelaus and his company the way back to Sparta. Imperial Majesty and his three new allies, Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order, similarly demand that Sedition finally “tell the trewthe” (2.1377), revealing Usurped Power’s various plots for the seduction of the faithful. The connection between Antichrist and Proteus is bolstered by Bale’s earlier characterization of an Egyptian pope as Antichrist—that “proude Pharao” who opposes King John’s “faithful Moyses” (1.1107ff)—for in addition to being a shape-shifter, Proteus was a mythic King of the Egyptians.

While Bale does not refer explicitly to Proteus, the multiple ways his characterization of Antichrist resonates with Protean mythology suggests how the sixteenth-century imagination might have associated its new vision of Antichrist with

this slippery sea god. Certainly, by the mid-sixteenth century references to Proteus, like those to Antichrist, peppered Protestant theological tracts. Stephen Orgel argues that “to the Elizabethans, Proteus was a ubiquitous figure ... the mythological representative of two central themes of the literature of the age: the dangers of inconstancy and the deceptiveness of appearances” (9). The concluding chapter of this study uses the figure of Proteus to frame its discussion of the Elizabethan Antichrist—an Antichrist whose ever-expanding aggregate body resembles Proteus in its malleability and its exoticism. Proteus provides a mythological pattern into which the sixteenth-century Antichrist can fit.

## CHAPTER 4:

### PROTEUS, IDENTITY, AND ELIZABETHAN ANTICHRIST

Homer's Proteus evades his Spartan visitors by transforming himself: he changes from an old man into "a Lion, with a mightie mane; / Then next a Dragon; a pide panther then; / A vast Boar next; / and sodainly did strain into all water. Last he was a Tree, / Curled all at top, and shot up to the skie" (4.610ff). As A. Bartlett Giamatti has shown, early modern writers tend to interpret these metamorphoses in two distinct ways: some use Proteus's mutability to emphasize "the One behind the Many" (441) whereas others use the figure "to find the Many in the One" (441).<sup>131</sup> In the first case, writers depict Proteus as having one natural body that he conceals though successive transformations. These transformations are the "sleights" of an "old Forger" (4.609) and eventually yield to his true shape, the aged seafarer "like to a shepherd" (4.555). This Proteus is no more a lion than he is a tree; he merely disguises himself as such. In the second case, writers imagine Proteus as a composite figure—one whose transformations define his identity rather than mask it. This Proteus is *as much* a lion as he is a tree or an old man—that is, he does not have one natural body. Instead, Proteus is all of these shapes, and his many forms together comprise an aggregate body that cannot be rendered literally. In *The Golden Booke of Leaden Gods* (1577), Stephen Batman explains that he cannot provide an accompanying illustration for

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<sup>131</sup> For Proteus in the Renaissance, see Giamatti, "Proteus Unbound," pp. 437-75; Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, pp. 1-18, 40-2; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*, pp. 191-217; and William E. Burns's recent study of Proteus and natural knowledge, pp. 969-80.

Proteus because the sea god “hath no shape or likeness” (fol. 20r).<sup>132</sup> Since Proteus “could turne himselfe into any shape, whether it were of flaming Fyer, or of a Furious Lion, a grunting Hogge, a running streame, or any thinge ells” (fol. 20r), he lacks essential corporality. No illustration could represent these limitless forms; Proteus has a figurative body, not a material one.

These Renaissance conceptions of Proteus resonate strikingly with the contemporary Antichrist, whom writers imagined as both a single man who appears in a variety of disguises and as an aggregate body comprised of innumerable members. Thus far, I have argued that the latter definition supplants the former among sixteenth-century Protestants. By mid-century, dismissing “old wiues fables and winter tales” about a single Antichrist had become polemical commonplace (A short description, fol. 7r). The anonymous author of *A short description of Antichrist vnto the nobilitie of Englande* (1555) insists, for example, that Antichrist “must not be understood and taken... for one naturall man, that by nature is as all other be...but this Antichrist is the name of a misterie and office perteing to a misticall bodi” (fol. 7r).<sup>133</sup> Similarly, in *The Figure of Antichrist* (1586), Thomas Tymme rejects “the foolish opinion... that Antichrist shuld be borne in Babylon, and should raigne certeine yeeres,” arguing that prophecies “doth not speake... of one man, but of a

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<sup>132</sup> A bibliographic note in the Huntington Library copy of Stephen Batman’s *The Golden Booke of Leaden Gods* indicates that the book “may be considered as the first attempt towards a Pantheon, or description of the Heathen Gods.”

<sup>133</sup> This tract is sometimes erroneously attributed to John Old and Rudolph Walther. The STC entry notes that “the ascription may arise from confusion with John Old’s translation of Rudolf Gwalther’s ‘Antichrist’ which is wrongly described in Dict[ionary of] Nat[ional] Biog[raphy] as another edition of this work—Halkett & Laing.”

king[d]ome which Sathan shall inioy and possess” (sig. E4 r).<sup>134</sup> Tymme also demonstrates the degree to which Antichrist’s aggregate body continues to grow as the sixteenth-century progresses. While Luther and Bale describe an institutional Antichrist comprised of many successive popes, Tymme refers to an entire “kingdom” and “Empire lifted up against Jesus Christ” (sig. [E6] r). This Antichristian kingdom is more inclusive than the institutional model; it incorporates not only the pope but also an ever-growing body of believers who acknowledge papal authority—not “one man alone but a multitude of men” (sig. [E5] r). In this way, Tymme envisions Antichrist as a kind of “pestilent contagion that doth inuade and raigne in the Church of God” (sig. [E6] r). As Antichrist moves beyond the institution of the papacy, he becomes amorphous—and, in turn, more difficult to define and contain.

As I have argued above, the traditional tell-tale signs of a physical Antichrist were nugatory in the battle against a figurative one, and sixteenth-century authors scrambled to compile a new list of identifiers with which to pin down their Protean villain. Tymme himself expresses frustration with an irrelevant catalogue of traditional signs and tokens, namely predictions of “one onely man which should come in the tribe of Dan, and should be borne in Babylon, and shoulde raigne certeine yeeres, to the great detrement and hurt of the faithful” (sig. E4r), or similar predictions that Antichrist would be a “certaine wicked persone, that shuld be

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<sup>134</sup> Thomas Tymme (d. 1620) was a translator and devotional writer. He “seems to have studied at Cambridge under Edmund Grindal, later archbishop of Canterbury... [and] secured powerful patronage from, among others, the earls of Sussex, Devonshire, and Warwick (to all of whom he dedicated books), as well as Archbishop Grindal” (DNB). *The Figure of Antichrist* is an explication of 2 Thessalonians that Tymme compiles from the commentaries of the “best and most approved divines,” including Augustine and Tertullian (sig. [A1] r-v).

begotten betwixt a freere and a Nonne, or betwixt a Monk and a Nonne” (A short description, fol. 7 r). As Luther argues, the Protestant theology of Antichrist did not accommodate a villain who would be born at a specific time in a specific place to particular parents. Yet Elizabethan Protestants were nonetheless invested in profiling the likely signs and behaviors of the many members who comprise Antichrist in his aggregate form. That is, while I have argued for a shift from a literal conception of a single villain to a figurative conception of a mystical Antichristian body, there are still ways that this new Protestant conception of an aggregate Antichrist seeks to incorporate, rather than displace, the older mythology. Antichrist had become a contagion, and just like the authors of earlier lore, Elizabethan writers would systematically identify the symptoms. Tymme teaches his readers to identify the “qualities of the Antichrist” (sig. [E6] v): Antichrist’s members are, generally speaking, “euill, wicked, sinfull, prophane, & far from all goodness” (sig. [E6] r); but Tymme is also quick to fine-tune Antichrist’s new biography so that his “subtill deceits” might be “made frustrate” (sig. [L6] v). For Tymme, Antichrist exhibits “three vices especially, namely: To be an adversarie unto God, and his diuine doctrine; not to be co[n]tente with the true worship of God; and to be proud & to rule ouer faith, as if he were some God” (sig. [E6] v). These are all characteristics that Luther highlights in his own rewritings of Antichrist’s biography, but other sixteenth-century writers introduce new criteria as they specify the nature of Antichrist’s wickedness.

Just as the Antichrist becomes a kind of trope—a figurative, aggregate villain—in the later sixteenth century, so too did Elizabethan writers increasingly rely

on new metaphors to characterize him. This first part of this chapter explains how Elizabethan writers used the figure of Proteus as a metaphor for the aggregate Antichrist. The image of Proteus as “many in one” modeled the nature of a composite villain—one whose many forms together establish Antichrist’s mystical body. At the same time, the characteristics of Proteus the man—the “one behind the many”—helped to define the specific nature of Antichrist’s various members. As the “old Forger,” Proteus was a master of disguise and a reluctant truth-teller; so too were the members of Antichrist. These Antichrists hid behind their own masks, including clerical vestments and religious offices, and could continually transform themselves, adopting new roles and new disguises depending on their audience and situation. Perhaps chief among their “Protean sleights” was linguistic mutability: Antichrist’s members were skilled rhetoricians who masked the truth with their words.

Elizabethan writers consistently characterize Antichrist’s sophistry as Protean: his language is as slippery as Proteus’s successive transformations. While Menelaus subdues Proteus with sheer physical strength, Protestant writers like Archbishop Matthew Parker and homilist William Fulke seek to overcome Antichrist with their rhetorical prowess. In a war of words, they attack Catholic arguments in scrupulous detail, attempting to pin down Antichrist by exposing his fallacious arguments.

Yet the Elizabethan Antichrist was not merely a rhetorical threat; he was also a foreign military opponent. Just as Elizabethan writers use Proteus’s transformations as a metaphor for Antichrist’s linguistic mutability, they deploy Protean metaphor to depict Antichrist’s bellicose foreign nationalism. The chapter next argues that Francis Davison’s *Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* (1599) is an allegory

for the Spanish Antichrist and its imposing Armada. As a sea god, Proteus is an apt metaphor for the Spanish navy, and his identity as the mythic king of the Egyptians coincides with Elizabethan notions of a foreign Antichrist. Davison alludes to representations of the Spanish Antichrist in late-century anti-Armada polemic, and in this way, he casts a Proteus as a threat to Protestant English nationalism.

Davison's Protean Antichrist brings into focus shifting Elizabethan conceptions of Antichrist's whereabouts: as the Antichrist expands from a single man to an institution to an ever-expanding kingdom, Elizabethan writers increasingly characterize him as an exterior enemy rather than an interior one. That is, while early Reformation writers like John Bale attacked the Antichrists lurking within England—especially those roving the court and ensnaring the ruling classes—Elizabethan writers like Protestant Bishop John Jewel locate Antichrist outside of England. While Davidson allegorizes a Spanish Antichrist, Jewel depicts an Eastern threat—one who is sometimes Persian, sometimes Turkish, but invariably Other. Jewel evokes Antichrist's exoticism in a debate about English nationalism, and the chapter argues that Jewel uses the figure of the foreign Antichrist to define a Protestant national identity for England. Jewel outlines in his religious polemic what Spenser then takes up in imaginative literature, particularly Book I of *The Faerie Queene* (1590).

Not only does Spenser use Antichrist to articulate his own version of English Protestant nationalism, but his Antichrist is also distinctly Protean in all the ways modeled by earlier polemic: his Antichrist is an amorphous villain comprising a variety of shape-shifting deceivers who challenge Red Crosse in both rhetorical and physical combat. Spenser's Antichrist is also an exterior threat akin to depictions in



Davidson and Jewel: his exoticism is at odds with Red Crosse's own English identity. Granted, the entire landscape that Red Crosse travels is equally as inward as it is outward; that is, the Antichrists that Red Crosse battles—Archimago, Duessa, and the Sans-brother—are allegories for qualities that are as much inside of him as outside of him. Nonetheless, Canto 10 distinctly excludes Red Crosse's enemies from his espoused national identity, and in this way, Spenser recapitulates Antichrist's shift from an interior to exterior threat. That is, if Antichrist begins the sixteenth-century within known worlds, he becomes by the end of the century an exotic Other excluded from the possibility of English national identity. The chapter makes this argument by first establishing the use of Protean imagery in Elizabethan Antichrist polemic; it then argues how Davidson uses Proteus as an allegory for Spanish Antichrist. These depictions of a foreign Antichrist frame subsequent claims about the function of Antichrist in mid-century debates about English identity; and these debates underlie Spenser's depiction of a Protean Antichrist who emerges, in turn, as a distinct threat to Protestant nationalism.

### **ESTABLISHING A PROTEAN ANTICHRIST**

Giamatti begins his seminal study of the Renaissance Proteus with a portrait of a Protean Erasmus: he recalls a letter written by humanist and physician Ambrose Leo likening Erasmus's rhetorical mutability to Homer's shape-shifting sea god who "in varias formas mutasse sese" (qtd. Giamatti 437). Just as Proteus changes himself into various forms, Erasmus changes "from poet to theologian, from theologian to cynic philosopher, and from cynic philosopher to orator: 'quae mirae metamorphoses Protei

illius solius videbantur” (438). Leo presumably pays Erasmus a compliment, praising his impressive versatility and intellectual breadth; yet it would seem Erasmus would rather not be likened to this slippery self-fashioner. With characteristic wit and candor, Erasmus replies that “he has never been other than he is” and “pointedly compares himself to Ulysses instead” (438). Giamatti speculates as to why Erasmus might resist Leo’s metaphor: “Perhaps [he] remembered, as his correspondent had not, that in his *Enchiridion* (1503) Proteus had figured the evil passions of man” (438). That is, while it may have been to some degree flattering “to signify man’s potential for learning and virtue and, importantly, his artistic or literary capacities under the figure of Proteus ... of all the interpretations of the shape-changer, some were by no means benign” (438).

Renaissance depictions of Proteus are, indeed, outright contradictory. Proteus is at once a benevolent truth-teller and a master of deceit. In Homer’s account, Proteus is a reclusive “old Sea-tell-truth” who lives peacefully among Neptune’s seal pups and minds his own business (4.538). Homer’s Proteus (like the truths he tells) might be literally hard to handle, but this sea god is no trickster. Instead, it is Menelaus who tricks Proteus, luring him out of hiding and seizing him in his sleep. Proteus transforms himself to elude this Spartan ambush, but once subdued, he is cooperative: he dutifully tells Menaleus and his men the safe way home. Yet other accounts of Proteus tend to emphasize his efforts to conceal the truth rather than share it. His shape-shifting is not the defensive tactic of a surprised old man but the offensive strategy of an oracle who hates his job. In his *Bibliotheca Eliotae* (1559), Sir Thomas Elyot reports that Proteus was “a prophete, notwithstanding he would not

geue aunswer but being costrained by Ulysses” (sig. Mmm ij r). Here, Elyot confuses Ulysses with Menaleus, and this misattribution overtly signals Elyot’s more subtle changes to the Protean narrative. While Elyot recognizes Proteus as a “prophet,” he does not explicitly identify him as a truth-teller, nor does he specify the veracity of Proteus’s “aunswer” to Ulysses. In fact, in the first edition of Elyot’s *Dictionary* (1538), an abbreviated entry describes Proteus simply as a “jugglar,” thus identifying him as a trickster and also implicitly calling into question the accuracy of his oracles (sig. [T iv] r). Elyot also emphasizes that while Proteus is a prophet, he is reluctant to “giue aunswer,” only doing so when forced by the strongest of men. Similarly, Stephen Batman describes a Proteus who “neuer gaue foorth anye true Oracles, but when hee was forced or constrained thereunto” (sig. E2 v). Both Elyot and Batman present Proteus’s truth-telling as the rare exception to the rule: he is truthful only when coerced.

The sixteenth century is similarly ambivalent about Proteus’s shape-shifting “sleights” (4.550): while some, like Ambrose Leo above, admire the dextrous self-transformation, others deplore the deceptive potential of artful mutability. The fact the Proteus’s “orbit of action is not fixed, like that of angels or animals, gives him the power to transform himself into whatever he chooses and become a mirror of the universe” (Wind 191). Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the fifteenth-century Italian philosopher, expresses direct admiration for this kind of mutability in his oration *On the Dignity of Man*: “Who would not admire this chameleon?” (qtd. Wind 191). Repeated self-transformation yields a range of knowledge and experience that allows for a kind of transcendence. As Giamatti notes, “man’s Protean ability to adapt and

to act many roles is the source of the power that enables him to assume the burdens of civilization, to create cities on earth and win citizenship among the immortals” (439). Stephen Greenblatt has also influentially elaborated the role of self-fashioning in allowing man to shape his identity and, in turn, his sense of self in Renaissance society (Renaissance, 2).<sup>135</sup> Greenblatt argues that self-fashioning is always (though not exclusively) achieved through language (9), and it would seem that Ambrose Leo imagines Erasmus as just this kind of self-fashioner—a “Protean writer who knows many things and can assume various forms through and of expression” (Giamatti 447). That Protean mutability is an attractive metaphor for identity formation, yet it can also be deceptive and misleading.

While Proteus can be an image of the “limitless man,” he is also an “evil seer and deceitful actor” (Giamatti 444). Elyot brands Proteus a “juglar” precisely because he “coulede shewe hym selfe in sondry fourmes” (Dictionary, sig. [T iv r]). Raphael Holinshed similarly associates Proteus’s transformations with illusion. Preempting critics of his Scottish chronicles, he disparages those who may “like Proteus at their owne pleasure make black seeme white [and], alter euerie matter into euerie shape” (fol. 405). Holinshed understands Proteus’s mythic transformations as inherently deceptive: he expects Protean critics to misrepresent his work. Likewise, sixteenth-century authors frequently associate Proteus’s changeability with vice and even with the devil himself. Batman notes how Proteus “straungely doth transforme”

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<sup>135</sup> Giamatti notes the degree to which one’s ability to shape identity is necessary for civic function: “Man is not Protean because he is civilized; he is civilized because he is Protean, and the role of civic Proteus is central to the Renaissance’s view of man in society” (439).

and that “some thincke that by Proteus the dyvers affections, of manns mynde are signified,” explicitly linking Proteus’s mutability with man’s propensity to sin:

...for somewhat wee take pleasure, for the chiefeste felicitie, when in verye deede it is but a hoggish affection: otherwhyle Anger haleth vs, and maketh vs more lyke Tygres, than men: sometimes Pryde assaulteth us, and maketh us more hautie then Lyons: sometime swynish affections, and then we become more Dronken then hogs: as for good cogitations, they haue smalle or no dwellings in our harts ... Wherefore, if wee wyll reape anye profite by Proteus that is, by these our dyuers affections, we must bridle theym. (sig. E2 r-v)

For Batman, Proteus’s metamorphoses signify the worst of human behavior—including at least four of the seven deadly sins: wrath, pride, gluttony, and sloth. Along these lines, theologians frequently demonize Proteus, likening Satan’s innumerable names and forms to Proteus’s own myriad transformations. In his commentary on Revelation, the sixteenth-century Protestant homilist William Fulke explains that St. John represents Satan “with sundrie titles... and also reciteth hi[s] diuers names that wee mighte vnderstand, that... he be an artificer of a thousand subtilties, and like Proteus, could transforme him selfe in a hundred shapes” (Praelections, fol. 131 r).<sup>136</sup> Fulke suggests that suppressing Satan is akin to subduing

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<sup>136</sup> Fulke (1536/7–1589) was a popular homilist and Calvinist theologian who became “the acknowledged successor to John Jewel in the theological defence of the Church of England against Rome” in the 1570s and 80s (DNB).

a struggling Proteus and finds it no surprise that Satan must “be taken and cast into boundes” (fol. 131 r).<sup>137</sup>

Sixteenth-century writers evoke this more nefarious side of Proteus when they link him specifically to the Antichrist. In a 1570 sermon, William Fulke again employs a Protean metaphor, but this time he uses the figure to explain the nature of a shape-shifting Antichrist—an aggregate villain whose many members “chaunge themselues like Proteus into neuer so vnlikely shapes” (sig. F I r). In one sense, Antichrist’s many members are like Proteus’ own myriad transformations; like an ever-changing Proteus, Antichrist manifests himself in as many forms as his innumerable members. Yet, as Fulke specifies, the figure of Proteus also models each member’s specific behavior: each one of Antichrist’s members can itself change shape, adopting new roles and new disguises as circumstances demand. Protestant polemicists Jerome Barlowe and William Roye are perhaps the first to describe Antichrist’s members as distinctly Protean. In *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* (1525), discussed in Chapter One above, they identify Bishop Henry Standish as an advisor to Cardinal Wolsey who is himself “Antichristis chefe member” (l. 3533, sig. i5r).<sup>138</sup> By associating with Wolsey, Standish too becomes part of Antichrist’s body, and his Protean characteristics become signs of this membership. Standish is “a grett deale more mutable / Then Proteus of forme so variable” (ll. 3502f., sig. i4v). As shape-shifter, Standish assumes a variety of roles: “thou mayest se of theym in one manne, / Herod, Pilat, Cayphas, and Ann[as], / With their properties severall. / And in another

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<sup>137</sup> See Revelation 20 where Satan is cast into the bottomless pit and bound for one thousand years.

<sup>138</sup> Henry Standish (d. 1535), Franciscan friar and Bishop of St. Asaph, was “a zealous upholder of the church and persecutor of heretics” (DNB).

manifestly, Judas full of conspiracy” (ll. 3495ff., sig. i4v). In order to demonstrate Standish’s mutability, Barlowe and Roye record a fictive conversation between Standish and Wolsey; they note when, over the course of the dialogue, Standish speaks as each of these biblical traitors. Sometimes he speaks “the words of Pilat” (l. 3574, sig. i6r), other times he answers “as the bishop Cayphas” (l. 3579), and still others “he did no persones represent/ Th[a]n Judas the trayour malevolent” (ll. 3492f., sig. i4v). Standish transforms himself successively into judge, jury, and conspirator, and he is also Protean in terms of his rhetorical style. Standish’s “sophisticall” arguments against reform demonstrate a linguistic prowess akin to Proteus’s own physical metamorphoses (l. 3525, sig. i5r). Barlowe and Roye allege that Standish abuses biblical sources in the process of convincing Wolsey to prohibit the vernacular bible: he uses words to “represent apes, and beares / Lyons, and asses with longe eares” (ll. 3503-5, sig. i5r). Like Holinshed’s imagined critics who make “black seeme white,” Standish manipulates language to support his own interests and skillfully makes words seem to mean that which they may not. Like Proteus’s own physical transformations, language is the Antichrist’s smokescreen. Yet just as Proteus is eventually unmasked, so too do the Antichrist’s inconsistent and contradictory arguments eventually collapse. Barlowe and Roye are undeterred by the Antichrist’s Protean rhetoric just as Menelaus is undaunted by Proteus’s transformations: they demand “to heare... these wordes right interpreted” (l. 3527, sig. i5r).

The figure of Proteus comes to characterize the members of Antichrist’s mystical body in the sixteenth-century writing. Barlowe and Roye christen this

metaphor early, and by the middle of the century, the figure of the Protean Antichrist appears to have taken hold in Protestant reform polemic. Archbishop Matthew Parker is among the first Elizabethan Protestant to associate the two figures. In his post-Tridentine assessment of Catholic doctrine, *A godly and necessarye admonition of the decrees and canons of the Counsel of Trent* (1564), he characterizes the papal rules for receiving communion as both Antichristian and Protean.<sup>139</sup> Trent reaffirmed the Church's position that laymen did not need to receive the Eucharist under both species, bread and wine, but Parker objects to the practice of reserving the cup for the priest alone. "Thou seest Christian Reader, the steppes of Antichrist, who extolleth himselfe aboute God" (fol. 76). Parker insists that the faithful should "receave both kinds" and cites the "expresse and manyfest commaundement of Christ, *DRINKE YE, & he addeth AL*, namely they whiche eate the same also must drinke" (fol. 77). This is a commandment, Parker insists, that "the perspicuity of the cou[n]sell can by no meanes make darke, howsoeuer they turne themselues into all manner of formes like Proteus" (fol. 77). Like Barlowe and Roye, Parker characterizes Antichrist's members as being as rhetorically dexterous as Proteus is mutable. In a similar way, John Barthlet's *The pedegrewe of heretiques* (1566) accuses the late Bishop Stephen Gardiner of being "that Proteus" for advancing the doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>140</sup> Barthlet argues that Gardiner manipulated the "speech, *breade is the bodye of Christ*"

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<sup>139</sup> The STC attributes the tract to Parker while the title page only identifies *Mattias Flacius Illyricus*, as author and translator.

<sup>140</sup> John Barthlet, "a Church of England clergyman and author, was perhaps one of the many evangelical laymen who entered the ministry late in life after the accession of Elizabeth I" (DNB). *The pedegrewe of heretiques* was "a reply to Richard Shacklock's translation of Cardinal Hosius's *De origine haeresium nostri temporis*, published in 1565 as *The Hatchet of Heresies*. Bartlett attempted to show that all Roman Catholic doctrine was tainted by heresies traceable to either Judas Iscariot or Simon Magus. The table of heretics he appended was of awesome length, including such peculiar sects as 'Visiblers' and 'Mice-feeders'" (DNB).



to mean “*is made the body of Christ &c*” (fol. 56 v). For Barthlet, this Protean rhetoric is a sign that Catholics are not only heretics but also members of “the church of *Antichrist* ... the societie of the mysticall body of sinne and perdition” (fol. 86). Protestant writer John Bridges likewise characterizes these maneuverings as “the shiftes of Proteus” (fol. 433), noting that Antichrist’s members use language to conceal the truth. In *The supremacie of Christian princes ouer all persons throughout the[i]r dominions* (1573), Bridges responds to the separate tracts of Thomas Stapleton and Nicholas Sander— Catholics who, along with many other recusant writers, published extensive defenses of the Council of Trent. Bridges argues that these recusant “volumes” expose the Protean rhetoric of Antichrist’s members, “who... chaunging their shapes like *Proteus*, haue so often altred their religion” (fol. 151):

The experience whereof [of reading these tracts] is dayly to be séene in the Papists, defending their errors and impugning the truth, in their subtile practises, in their tyrannicall inquisitions, and cruel torments, yea euen in this yours and your fellowes volumes, striuing to obscure and deface the truth: but all these steps notwithstanding, the truth is and shal be more and more set forth, the Popish errors [le]sse and lesse begutle vs, and the kingdome of Antichrist detected and forsaken. (fol. 40)

Like the Protean Antichrist described above, Bridges’ Antichrist obscures the truth with language; and like Barlowe and Roye, Bridges himself is confident that the members of Antichrist’s kingdom will be discovered and overcome. That being said,

while Bridges exposes the Antichrist's illusions, he does not necessarily imply that the ensuing battle against this Protean villain will be easy. Neither did Elizabethan writers imagine Proteus himself as an easy opponent. Francis Davison's *The Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* (1594) is case-in-point.

Davison composed *The Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* in honor of Henry Holmes, the self-declared "Prince of Purpoole" and Lord of Misrule at Gray's Inn during the season of 1594-5. The masque was performed at Elizabeth's court for Shrovetide.<sup>141</sup> Davison's Proteus is the familiar shape-shifter who tries to evade capture by manipulating his appearance, but his transformations are unusual, seemingly tailored to his individual victim. In Davison, Proteus's transformations arguably become an allegory for the Protestant view of Antichrist, and Davison's masque might even hold a place in the tradition of Antichrist literature. Observing the "gallant shape and budding Youth" of his latest opponent, the Prince of Purpoole, Davison's Proteus first transforms into a "goodly lady, passing fair," with hopes that that her "matchless Beauty" will tempt the Prince to release him (fol. 61). When the Prince is undeterred, Proteus responds by transforming again, this time into a serpent who "might affright" even "th' undaunted Master of dread Cerberus" (fol. 61). Still ensnared, Proteus then bribes the Prince, appearing as "many Diadems and Rubies of inestimateable worth" (fol. 62). His last resort is to assume several forms at once:

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<sup>141</sup> As Orgel explains, "For the season 1594-5, the gentlemen of Gray's Inn had revived the custom of appointing a Lord of Misrule to supervise the revels lasting from Christmas to Shrovetide. He was, a subsequent report tells us, 'one Mr. Henry Holmes [Helmes], a Norfolk gentleman, who was thought to be accomplished with all good parts, for fit so great a dignity; and was also a very proper man of personage, and very active in dancing and reveling.' Helmes styled himself 'Prince of Purpoole,' and Gray's Inn became a miniature court during what appear to have been a depressingly sophomoric two months. Part of the Prince's time was taken up with an imaginary voyage to visit 'the great and mighty emperor of all Russia,' on 'Theodore Evanwhich.' It was to represent the triumphant return from this journey that a colleague, Francis Davison, composed *The Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock*, which also served to conclude Helmes's reign" (8).

Proteus becomes a “sad Spectacle” and transforms himself into a grisly scene of a war-ravaged battlefield, featuring the “mangl’d” bodies of the Prince’s friends and fellow soldiers (fol. 62). Strikingly, Davison’s Proteus is as resourceful and unrelenting as Antichrist himself, even if he is not immediately or explicitly associated with Antichrist at this point in the performance. Adso’s Antichrist similarly uses successive tactics to overcome the faithful—including temptations, fear, bribes, and eventually violent coercion. Indeed, Proteus’s final spectacle in Davison’s masque is not unlike the strategy of Bale’s Seditio who, when gifts and fear prove ineffectual, threatens King John with violent images of war—the presumed consequence of his continued opposition to Rome.

Archbishop John Jewel continues to apply Adso’s criteria under Elizabeth; in his posthumous *An Exposition vpon the two epistles of S. Paul to the Thessalonians* (1583), he too suggests that Antichrist manifests in various, increasingly threatening forms—from a singular, simple creature to climactic, catastrophic tableau:

Such a thorne, suche a beare, suche a serpent is Antichriste. At the firste he shal seeme softe and gentle, and pretie and innocent. After he shal growe fierce, and arme himself with sting and poison. ... Euen so Antichrist, thou hee seeme gentle milde....He growth by degrees, he wil be like his fire, his pawes wil bee dreadful, hys mouth wil be deadly. Who so euer know [the] nature and working of an earthquake, how it growth and how it worketh, know that at the first it is some little winde... [then] out it breaketh, and teareth the earth, & renteth rockes, ouerthroweth mountains, shaketh downe townes & Cities...

Such is the working of an earthquake: so greate and mightye at the  
end, so little and simple at the first. (sig. V ii r -V ii v)

Like Proteus, Jewel's Antichrist transforms himself to deceive; Jewel reminds readers of the discrepancy between Antichrist's appearance and his underlying identity so that they might not be fooled by Antichrist's pleasant appearance: "a thorne, though it be softe, is a thorne; a beare though he be little is a beare; a serpent though he be pretie is a serpent" (sig. Vii r). In Davison, the Prince of Purpoole must similarly remind himself that Proteus's appearance as a beautiful woman, fiery serpent, or rich diadems is merely a pleasant "delusion." Purpoole, like Jewel's readers, must continue "still to keep his fastened hold" (fol. 61). This resonance between Proteus's calculated metamorphoses in Davison and Antichrist's own transformative tactics could be more than accidental—especially given the body of earlier Elizabethan texts that explicitly link Proteus and Antichrist.

There are two significant ways in which Davison's Proteus appears to allude to Antichrist tradition, both of which arise through his more immediate targets, Spanish imperialism and Romish Catholicism. Davison's seafaring shape-shifter alludes most directly to Spain and its grand Armada. This Spanish theme reconnects Proteus to Elizabethan Antichrist literature because numerous late-century propagandists frequently and explicitly identify potential Spanish invaders as agents of the Antichrist. Spain threatens a Catholic resurgence in England, and the imagery of Davison's masque also draws upon allegorical images of papal authority. This more bellicose Proteus, bearing the flag of Spain and the keys of Peter, has the potential to change more than himself—he can transform others, too. In this way,

Proteus, Spain, and Antichrist become interchangeable signifiers for a particular threat to England's Protestant national identity—namely, forced submission to the papacy. Stephen Orgel admits that Francis Davison's *The Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* is “by no means the best of the Tudor entertainments, but it is notable because it is the first one that at all resembles the standard Jacobean masque” (8). This masque also looks forward to later Jacobean formulations of English identity by advancing a nationalistic rhetoric of its own.

### **FRANCIS DAVISON'S *THE MASK OF PROTEUS***

*The Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* begins with Purpoole's Esquire recounting the Prince's fictive dealings with Proteus, whom he had encountered on one of his “many strange Exploits” abroad (fol. 60). Purpoole's encounter with Proteus had been much like Menelaus's. Seeing “porpoises in a great unusual Flock” (fol. 61), Purpoole had detected the cave of their master, Proteus, who lay sleeping among his pups. He “seized suddainly upon this Demy-God,” and Proteus “thus surpris'd, resorted presently / To his familiar Arts, and turning Tricks” (fol. 61). A struggle ensued, but Purpoole eventually subdued Proteus, who finally “fix'd himself in his own wonted Shape” and begged for his liberty in exchange for a series of rewards—fortune, honor, fame, and great victories (fol. 62). The prince refused them all, arguing that he could never take these gifts without “sweat or pain, / Labour or danger” (fol. 62). Intrigued by the challenge, Proteus agreed to a game: he offered his Adamantine Rock, “the Sea's true Star,” which controls “the wild Empire of the Ocean” and gives whomever possesses it dominion over the seas (fol. 61). He would

place the Rock wherever Purpoole appointed, provided that the Prince “should bring him to a Power, / Which in attractive Vertue should surpass” the Rock’s “wond’rous force” (fol 63). Eager to compete for a prize so great, Purpoole agreed, even volunteering that he and seven of his knights enter into the Rock as hostages, to be released “when this great Covenant should be perform’d” (fol. 63).

Purpoole’s Esquire recounts these arrangements at the outset of the masque, and Davison devotes the remaining action entirely to the resolution of the game. Proteus first proudly “blazon[s].. forth” the power of his Adamantine Rock:

What needeth Words, when great Effects proclaim

Th’ attractive Vertue of th’ Adamantine Rocks

Which forceth Iron, which all things else commands? (fol. 63).

Proteus’s Rock is apparently magnetic and attracts even the strongest of metals, Iron; nevertheless, the Esquire is undaunted by the Rock’s powerful magnetism and chides Proteus for his presumption. The Esquire assures Proteus that Purpoole has the means to defeat him: “But calm awhile your over-weening Vaunts; / Prepare belief, and do not use your Eyes (fol. 64). The Esquire then gestures to Elizabeth, seated in the court audience, and presents Purpoole’s own “true adamant of hearts,” extolling her exceeding virtue (fol. 64). Without as much as a rebuttal, the defeated Proteus surrenders his Rock to Elizabeth, and the masque concludes with the triumphant release of Purpoole and his knights. According to the account of the revels in the *Gesta Grayorum* (1688), Elizabeth was pleased with the admiring tribute and “graced every one; particularly she thanked His Highness [the Prince of Purpoole, Henry

Helmes] for the good performance of all that was done; and wished that their sports had continued longer” (fol. 67).<sup>142</sup>

Richard McCoy has argued that the action of the masque refers to contemporary naval practices with Spain under Essex. The prospect of winning control of “the wide Empire of the Ocean” (fol. 61) may reflect the “ambition of the earl of Essex who began promoting a more aggressive naval policy against Spain at this time and would subsequently lead a huge expedition against Caliz in 1596 and the Azores in 1597” (218). Since such an endeavor required the queen’s support, Essex may have enlisted Davison to compose an “appeal in conventional romantic compliment” (218). Yet while McCoy postulates Davison’s engagement with Essex’s contemporary exploits, the masque also resonates with a range of earlier Armada propaganda published in 1588-89. The masque, and particularly Elizabeth’s bloodless victory over Proteus, parodies the failure of the Spanish Armada, which had similarly yielded naval dominance to England without a fight.

Notably, Elizabeth’s virtue alone—not “Force and the instruments of Wars” (fol. 61)—instigates Proteus’s surrender. So too do the Armada tracts credit Elizabeth’s virtue with the destruction of the Spanish navy. The anonymous “Sonnet of triumph to England” (1588) celebrates Spain’s defeat at Elizabeth’s hand:

England reioyce, the foes of thy welfare,  
The foes, that made the former monarkes bowe,  
Wrath, warre, discorde, and envy fettered are,

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<sup>142</sup> The *Gesta Greyorum* (1688) prints the text of *The Mask of Proteus* and an account of its performance at court; it was apparently prepared from a 1590s manuscript and additionally contains an extended fictive account of Purpoole’s adventures abroad. Significantly, the narrative also makes explicit reference to Shakespeare’s company and a Christmas 1594 court performance of *The Comedy of Errors* (see fol. 22).

Elizabeth, euen with a lawrell bow  
Hath vanquished them, that foyles Caesars band  
Vpon thy portes, to feat thy forraine foe,  
Destruction standes, with blouddy sword in hand,  
Within thy Coast, in townes and Country goe,  
Plenty and peace, armed with a hasell wand,  
Thy subiects true, on mylke and hony feed,  
Thy abiects false, consume like flames of reed.

Here, Elizabeth “with laurell bow” single-handedly foils Spanish naval aggression in the same way that the queen’s “garlands of Vertues, Beauties, and Perfections” overcome Proteus in Davison’s masque. Purpoole praises Elizabeth’s “adamant of Hearts” which defends “Britain *Land*” against its foreign enemies, and he notes that “upon the force of this inviolate Rock / The Giant-like Attempts of Power unjust / Have suffer’d Wreck” (fol. 65). Here, the Esquire likely refers to the literal destruction of the Spanish navy (fol. 65), especially in light of the other ways that the masque resonates with Armada propaganda.

Theodore Beza’s 1588 broadside, *Ad Serenissimam Elizabethan Angliae Reginam*, similarly extols England’s virtuous queen “for whom both windes and waues are prest to fight,” but Beza also emphasizes the great pride of the Spanish king who, with “swelling heart,” instigated the attack:

Now if you aske what set this king on fire,  
To practice warre when he of peace did treat,  
It was his *Pride*, and neuer quenched desire



To spoile that Islands wealth, by Peace made great  
His Pride which far aboue the heavens did swell,  
And his desire as vnsufficed as hell.

Davison's Proteus is similarly known for his swelling pride: the Esquire memorably warns Proteus that "the Seas have taught your speech to swell" (fol. 64) and mockingly recalls Proteus's foolhardy assumption that his challenge to Purpoole "would no way be perform'd" (fol. 63). The Esquire also accuses Proteus of underestimating the "hearts of Men" when he proudly asserts the strength of the Rock: "What can your Iron do without Arms of Men? / And Arms of Men from Hearts of Men do move..." (fol. 64). The author of *A True Discourse of the Armie which the king of Spain caused to bee assembled in the Hauen of Lisbon, in the Kingdom of Portugal, in the yeare 1588 against England* (1589), also accuses Spain of "not onely neglecting the almightie to trust in their owne might: but relying on themselues and theyr own power to glory and boast thereof vnto the world" (Archdeacon, trans., sig. [A3] v). Proteus boasts specifically of the power of his Adamantine Rock, which "by [its] attractive Force, was drawn to light, / From depth of Ignorance, that new found World, / Whose Golden Mines Iron found out and conquer'd" (fol. 64). Here, Proteus explicitly links the power of his Rock to new world conquest, and his apparent investment in transatlantic exploration strengthens the associative connection between Proteus and Spanish conquest.

Davison's masque deeply resonates with Armada polemic; although Spain is never mentioned directly, Proteus (and his failed bid against Purpoole) nonetheless allegorizes the failure of the Spanish navy. What's more: the same Armada tracts that

cast Elizabeth as virtuous weapon against a proud Spain also ubiquitously cast Spain as a proud, deceptive Antichrist. In the final lines of his *A meruailous combat of contrarieties* (1588), William Averell earnestly prays for England's safety in the face of the impending Spanish invasion, urging his readers to "feare not, neither bee afraide for the force of Spaniards, nor for al the multitude that is with them" (sig. [E4v]). He prays specifically for the "confusion of Antechrist," likening the Spanish threat to Antichrist himself (sig. Fv). So too does the anonymous *Prayer for Assistance against the Armada* (1588) pray for strength against "the sleights of Antichrist"—phrasing that resonates with the figure of Proteus who is similarly known for his deceptive "sleights" (Chapman, 4.550). In his *A farewell Entituled to the famous and fortunate generalls of our English forces: Sir Iohn Norris & Syr Frauncis Drake* (1589), George Peele prays that the forces of England's counter-Armada might "deface the pryde of Antechrist / And pull his Paper walles and popery downe" (fol. 6).<sup>143</sup> These authors associate Spain and Antichrist in passing and almost off-handedly—as if the connection between the Spanish empire and the Antichrist needs no explanation. Yet other pamphleteers make a specific case for the Spanish Antichrist.

In *The Spanish Masquerado* (1589), Robert Greene finds the Spanish Antichrist in a series of cunning disguises. Green first identifies twelve "mottos," each pledging Spanish allegiance to a specific political or theological authority, including the king, his nobility, his cardinals and clergy, and the papacy itself. Greene proceeds to expose each figurehead as the clever guise of a shape-shifting

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<sup>143</sup> Drake and Norris led a fleet to the Iberian coast in 1589; Elizabeth hoped to take advantage of Spain's 1588 failure, but the expedition was ultimately unsuccessful and the English navy took heavy losses.

Antichrist. Just as successive popes masquerade as “Feeders of the flocke” only to “haue prooued rauening Wolues” (sig. Br), so too are Spain’s nobility and clergy “a presumptuous brood of Antechrist” who “in their Carnouale...go in Maskes” to conceal their sinfulness (sig. Cv). Averell similarly depicts the Spanish Antichrist as a masquerader, blasting Spain’s “papistically Iesuites” for donning Lion’s skins in order to deceive the faithful:

You cannot knowe them by their Priestly garmentes, for sometimes they iet in Lions skins, but you may discry them by their asses eares, péeeping out from vnder their hoodes. They will faine vnto you outward holinesse, when inwardly they are verie hypocrites, they will perswade you they séeke the saluation of your soules, when they meane to bewitch you with that inchantment. (sig. Cr)

Davison’s Proteus evokes these depictions of Antichrist as a deceiver, even including the specific image of Proteus as a “shepherd in Lions Skins” in the final lines of the masque. The concluding song depicts Proteus as a false lion who is unmasked in the presence of Elizabeth, the true “Royal Lion” of England:

Shepherds sometimes in Lions Skins were cloath’d  
But when the Royal Lion doth appear,  
...  
The Lion’s Skin, that grac’d our Vanity,  
Falls down in presence of Her Majesty. (fol. 67)

Presumably, shepherds disguised themselves in animal skins for the protection of their flock, and the image of Proteus hiding behind lion’s skins recalls how he too

uses “wily shifts” to protect himself and evade the likes of Menelaus and the Prince of Purpoole. Proteus’s gallant posturing also becomes a kind of leonine disguise; Proteus boasts of dominion over the sea, but his boasts are empty next to Elizabeth, who possesses true dominion over her subjects’ hearts. Davison’s Esquire argues how Elizabeth inspires the “purest Zeal and Reverence” among Englishmen—a zeal that “straight put[s] off all temper that is false / All hollow Fear... /.../ And stand[s] direct upon the Loyal line” (fol. 64). Averell similarly assures his readers of the strength of England’s true lion in the face of Catholic deception: “the princely lion, is the armes of your famous Countrie, retaine then his nature, and kéepe his courage, faint not nor flie from your enemies, but most valiantly beard them to their faces, that they may knowe the Lion will not shrinke in daungers, nor English hartes faint in troubles” (sig. Cv). Averall emphasizes how Elizabeth, the Princely lion, inspires English hearts to remain steadfast against her most powerful enemies.

These images of leonine royalty — a fierce Queen who can roar against the terrors of both Proteus and Spain—place Elizabeth in square opposition to papal authority. Once Davison implicitly aligns Proteus with the Spanish Antichrist, the image of the lion roaring against the rock can be read emblematically as an image of the Sovereign’s opposition to the pope, the Petrine Rock. When the Esquire recounts the merits of Proteus’s lodestone, which grants the possessor control of the seas, one wonders whether this “Empire large” is not literal oceans, but the papal See; and when the Esquire further insists that Proteus’s gift of the seas “is void” because the seas are “already here” (fol. 65), one wonders whether this is because Elizabeth, as Supreme Head of the Church in England, already possesses this self-same religious

authority. Proteus himself depicts iron as the “Prince” of metals trembling before the iron-drawing power of his rock: “Iron, of Metals Prince by ancient Right; / ... / Continually, with trembling Aspect, / True Subject-like, eyes his dread Sovereign” (fol. 63). The image of a prince’s deference to a rock might further suggest the behavior of Catholic princes who revered the pope as their own “dread Sovereign” (fol. 63). In Armada propaganda, the subjugation of Elizabeth (and, in turn, her subjects) is precisely what is at stake in the battle against the Spanish Antichrist. At the conclusion of his *Spanish Masquerado*, Greene admits that Spain’s shape-shifting Antichrist is a threat to England because “the malicious enemy seekes (puffed vp by ambition and couetousnesse) to subuert our religion, and make a Conquest of our Island” (sig. C3r). Just as Proteus transforms himself, the Spanish Antichrist sought to transform England, restoring the Old Religion and stripping Elizabeth of her religious authority. The Spanish Antichrist is, in this way, a distinct threat to the nation’s Protestant identity. Greene and others respond to the threat with a nationalist rhetoric of princely allegiance—one that casts Elizabeth as God’s righteous leader and the Catholic Antichrist as an usurping Other who is distinctly non-English.<sup>144</sup> Davison similarly concludes *The Mask of Proteus* by reiterating Elizabeth’s “true majesty” and her triumph over Proteus’s exotic “Inchantments” and “false principality” (fol. 66).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Greene, for example, ends his tract by assuring readers that God protects the English nation by protecting Elizabeth: “Yet hée that seated our most royall Princesse in her Kingdome, as his Minister to set foorth his trueth, and plant his Gospell, still shrowds her vnder his wing, and protectes her from the violent attempt of all her foes, and breaketh off the w Héeles of their Chariotes, that [strive?] with *Pharao*, to persecute his people” (sig. C3r). Green fashions Elizabeth as the biblical Moses who protects God’s chosen nation from the tyrannical Pharaoh.

<sup>145</sup> Davison perhaps alludes to Proteus’s mythic role as prince of Egypt. Elyot recalls, “in verie deede he [Proteus] was kynge of Aegypte in the time of Priamus kynge of Troy” (sig. Mmm ij r).

Davison never invokes the name of Antichrist, but a courtier versed in Antichristic, anti-Spanish, or anti-papal polemic would be able to read Proteus's performance as a code for Antichrist. A body of Elizabethan polemic associates Antichrist and Proteus; another body of texts associates Antichrist and Spain. It would seem that by using Proteus as a metaphor for Spain, Davison's masque doubly resonates as an Antichrist text. Through classical allusion, Davison avoids the scandal of declaring England's Spanish enemies as diabolic agents of Lucifer and presents a delightful court entertainment instead. Masking the Antichrist in the guise of Proteus enabled the trope to adapt and reproduce in the English imagination so that polemicists could continue the work of fortifying an English national identity rooted in Protestantism.

Employing this kind of associative web was not uncommon among earlier mid-century rhetoricians—especially those who had grown exhausted from excessive projection of Antichrist onto ideological opponents. Indeed, before his death in 1571, John Jewel had admitted that English readers were weary of Antichrist: “I knowe many men are offended to heare the Pope pointed out for Antichrist, and thinke it an vncharitable kinde of doctrine: therefore I refraine to vse any such names, and only wyl reporte to you of other, by what tokens Antichrist, when he commeth, may bee knowne” (Certaine Sermons, sig. E6 v- E7 r).<sup>146</sup> Rather than name-drop Antichrist, Jewel fashions a chain of associations that implicitly link Catholics to Antichrist without using the “offending” moniker. He pledges to focus on the signs and behaviors of the Catholic Antichrist and, as such, attacks Catholic ceremonies

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<sup>146</sup>As we will see shortly, Jewel does not frequently abide by this pledge.

and practices, comparing them to those “as in times paste, the Persians did fier, and the Egyptians...” (sig. D4 r). Persia and Egypt were contemporary surrogates for the scriptural Babylon, the legendary birthplace of the Antichrist. Thus, even without a specific appearance, Antichrist still looms in Jewel’s anti-papal polemic, and Jewel manages to expand Antichrist’s new biography at the same time.

Jewel evokes Antichrist’s old vita in order to add to the new one: he implicates specific Catholic practices as “tokens” of Antichrist and casts this Catholic villain as a foreign outsider. Significantly, Jewel’s reference to Persia and Egypt highlights a burgeoning discourse of Protestant English identity that associates Antichrist, the Roman Church, and Eastern nations and sets these three against the Christ, the Protestant Church, and England herself. For Jewel and other Protestant pamphleteers, Catholic practice was not only “antichristian” (sig. Ciii v) but was also decidedly not English. As Greenblatt has argued, “self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed” (*Renaissance*, 9). The same is true for Elizabethan polemicists who use the Antichrist to define their English identity. Their use of Antichrist is akin to the logic of self-fashioning: their sense of Englishness is achieved in relation to their sense of Antichrist’s foreignness.

### **JOHN JEWEL, THOMAS HARDING, AND THE ANTICHRIST**

In his recent work on Catholic and anti-Catholic discourses in late Tudor England, Arthur Marotti argues for a connection between emergent notions of English national

identity and contemporary religious discourse; he is specifically interested in how anti-Catholic polemic shaped a distinctly Protestant nationalism in post-Tridentine England.<sup>147</sup> Marotti suggests that beginning about the time of Elizabeth's excommunication in 1570, polemical responses to several "religiously-coded" events fueled early notions of Protestant English nationhood. He argues, for example, that the failures of the Northern Uprising of 1569, the Spanish Armada of 1588, and the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 generated a "providential narrative of deliverance in which God periodically saved an elect Protestant nation from the assaults of the forces of the Antichrist" (10).<sup>148</sup> Here, Marotti's reference to "Antichrist" is rhetorical shorthand for a wide "vocabulary of anti-Catholicism" that demonized English Catholics and excluded them not only from the Reformed Church, but also from the emerging Protestant nation-state (9). As such, Marotti does not argue for a more specific connection between the figure of Antichrist and early English nationalism. Yet, the late-sixteenth century Antichrist narrative (and related lexicon) to which Marotti alludes grows out of an earlier, hostile dialogue with Catholic polemicists who not

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<sup>147</sup> In the opening lines of *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England*, Marotti argues, "English Nationalism rests on a foundation of Anti-Catholicism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries English identity was defined as Protestant, so Roman Catholicism, especially in its post-Tridentine, Jesuit manifestations, was cast as the hated and dangerous antagonist, most fearfully embodied in a papacy that claims the right to depose monarchs. Politically intrusive popes' vision of international order directly conflicted with the kind of political autonomy implicit in the ideology of the newly emerging nation-state. From the time of Queen Elizabeth's accession in 1558 to that of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Catholicism was for the majority of nationalistic English both an enemy within and an enemy without. A vocabulary of anti-Catholicism or anti-Popery was developed and deployed for a wide variety of national and international political circumstances, becoming immersed finally in the post-1688 era in a Whig narrative of English history" (9-10).

<sup>148</sup> Pope Pius V's issued his Bull of Excommunication, *Regnans in Excelsis*, in February 1570. While the 1569 Northern Uprising actually pre-dates the bull by several months, Marotti suggests that polemicists "retrospectively connected" Elizabeth's excommunication to the uprising. The bull also "absolved her Catholic subjects of allegiance to her and this led to the strong link between Catholicism and treason emphasized in the later proclamations and statutes directed against priests, especially missionary priests, and the recusant Catholic laity who assisted them" (10).



only sought to define an English national identity of their own, but also specifically deployed the figure of the Antichrist against their Protestant opposition. Marotti makes passing reference to a figure that has otherwise become a scholarly euphemism for Elizabethan anti-Catholicism; however, the term is actually a complex nexus for both Catholic and Protestant debates about the nature of the universal Church and, in turn, English identity.

In the years immediately following Elizabeth's accession, the figure of Antichrist was not strictly an anti-papal commonplace, nor was a specifically *Protestant* English nationalism a forgone conclusion. The controversial writings of Protestant Bishop John Jewel and Catholic recusant Thomas Harding suggest that even after the 1559 Elizabethan Settlement of Religion, both Protestants and Catholics were still vying for control of England's religious identity, as well as a powerful Antichrist rhetoric to use against their opposition. In two separate controversies, Jewel, Harding, and their constituents employ images of the Antichrist to define competing images of the English church and its adversaries.<sup>149</sup> Jewel and

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<sup>149</sup> Jewel and Harding were the protagonists in two major controversies in the 1560s. See Peter Milward's excellent summary in *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age*, pp. 1-24; see also his article "The Jewel-Harding Controversy," pp. 320-341. Jewel's "Challenge Sermon" (preached at Paul's Cross on 26 November 1559, and again at Court on 17 March 1560 and Paul's Cross on 31 March 31) sparked the first controversy. In it, Jewel primarily addresses abuses in the Mass, but also broadly challenges "Catholics to justify a number of specific points of their belief and practice from the Scriptures or the Fathers or the General Councils of the first six centuries" (Milward, "Jewel-Harding," 324). The deposed Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. Henry Cole, offered the first response in private correspondence, and Jewel published their exchange, bound with a copy of his sermon in 1560. Thomas Harding published the first major Catholic response in 1565, *An Answer to Maister Iuelles Challenge*. Jewel followed with his *Replie unto M. Hardinges Answere* in the same year; Harding countered with *A Reioindre to M. Jewels Replie* in 1566; and Edward Dering responded on Jewel's behalf with *A Sparing Restraint* in 1568. At the same time, Jewel's challenge was taken up by Catholics John Rastell, Thomas Dorman, Thomas Stapleton, Nicholas Sanders, and William Allen. On the Protestant side, Alexander Nowell replied to Dorman; John Bridges confuted Stapleton and Sanders. Additionally, William Fulke launched an exhaustive Protestant counterblast in the late 1570s, taking it upon himself to leave "no Catholic work of controversy unanswered" (Milward, *Religious*, 7). See Milward for additional discussion of this complicated web of assertions and replies. Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England*, published in Latin in 1562 and in two English translations, one in 1562 and

Harding's Antichrist was not only God's enemy; he was also specifically England's; thus, their definitions of England's religious identity coincided with their burgeoning senses of its *national* identity. Both Jewel and Harding identify themselves as adherents to Christ's "true Church" at the same time that they identify themselves as *English* and loyal subjects of their Queen. In the same vein, they consistently characterize Antichrist as specifically non-English: their Antichrist is outsider—one whom they sometimes describe as Persian, sometimes Turkish, but invariably "Other"—whose foreign nationalism is distinctly at odds with "Englishness." Jewel and Harding's debate suggests at the very least that the foundations of English national discourse were not exclusively Protestant and that polemicists on both sides of the Reformation debate were conceptualizing English nationhood nearly a decade before the national and international conflicts that Marotti emphasizes above. What's more: the Jewel-Harding controversies reveal that the Antichrist was a key player in the formulation of these mid-sixteenth-century notions of what it meant to be English.

Peter Milward notes that Jewel and Harding's elaborate polemical war only receives cursory attention in contemporary scholarship; nonetheless, these two giants—and their massive theological tomes—were considered the Tyndale and More of their age. One sixteenth-century historian recalls that "Harding, and Iewell, were our Aeschines, and Demonsthe[nes]: and scarsely any language in the Christian world, hath afforded a payre of adversaries equivalent to Harding, and Iewell: two thundering and lightning Oratours in divinity" (qtd. Milward, "Jewel-Harding," 320).

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1564, sparked a second, concurrent controversy. Harding published his massive *Confutation of a Booke Intituled An Apologie of the Church of England* in 1565; Jewel published an even lengthier *Defense* in 1567; Harding countered with *A Detection of sundrie foule errorrs* in 1568; and Jewel offered a final salvo in 1570, publishing a second edition of his *Defense* with additions. Jewel died in 1571, and Harding the following year.

Although they are adversaries, Jewel and Harding are remarkably similar in terms of their rhetorical approach: both employ the same strategies as they struggle to define their religious and national identity. Both identify their opposition as the Antichrist, and both define their religious identity in opposition to this Antichrist, aligning themselves with the Christ's one "true Church." Both then cite the protection of Queen Elizabeth, God's appointed sovereign, in the battle against this Antichrist; and finally, both describe Elizabeth's enemy not only as an exile from the "true religion" but also as a foreign outsider whose Eastern allegiances pose a distinct national threat.

Significantly, at the beginning of their great debate, neither Jewel nor Harding imagines that it is possible to be English without being a member of the "true Church"—that is, to be English was to be opposed to the Antichrist and to be allied with the leonine Queen who roared against him. In this regard, Harding is fascinating, if not tragic, for his indomitable but ultimately irreconcilable loyalties to both Queen Elizabeth and the Pope. In his early debates with Jewel, he struggled to balance his political and religious identities—a struggle familiar to many early modern Catholics who loved their nation just beneath their God. Yet, for Jewel, counting Elizabeth among the Catholics' allies only further demonstrates Harding's allegiance with Antichrist. Jewel accuses Harding of willfully misreading the evidence: Elizabeth had commissioned Jewel to outline the doctrine of the English church and, as such, had effectively severed ties with the Rome. By continuing to fashion Elizabeth as a champion of English Catholics, Harding advanced a Protean rhetoric that made black seem white; he transformed Elizabeth's allegiances in the same way he and other Catholics purportedly transformed Scripture to satisfy their

theological arguments. Harding “altret[h], and shifteth himself into sundrie formes: in like sorte, as the Olde Poetes imagin, that one Proteus, a suttle fellowe, in like case was woonte to doo” (*Answer*, fol. 451). For Jewel, Harding’s slippery rhetoric is a token of the Antichrist; thus, Proteus remains a viable touchstone for Antichrist—even as polemicists introduce new exotic metaphors for conceptualizing the nature of this villain. Broadly speaking, Antichrist emerges as more Protean than ever in these mid-century debates: his allegiance vacillates between Catholic and Protestant as polemicists battle over the religious identity of a nation in flux.

One of the opening salvos in the Jewel-Harding controversy was the *Ad Ecclesiae Regimen* (1560)—the papal bull that announced the third and final session of the Council of Trent (1561-1563). Significantly, the bull limited participation in the Council to those who accepted papal authority and, in effect, excluded the English Church from the proceedings. In response, Elizabeth commissioned Archbishop John Jewel to compile an official summary of the doctrine of the Church of England that refuted the accusations of heresy made by the Council and outlined English theological positions with regard to the doctrine of Rome. If the “Bysshop of Rome [could procure] certaine parsons of eloquence yenough, and not vnlearned neyther” (*Apologie*, sig. [Avi] r) to compile a complete testament of unified belief, so too could Elizabeth’s Church produce a document crystallizing the doctrine of the Church of England.<sup>150</sup> Jewel’s *An Apologie, or Aunswer in Defence of the Church of England*

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<sup>150</sup> Jewel’s Preface explains: “we haue thought it good to render a reason of oure faithe by writinge, & vnto suche things as are openly obiected againste vs, truly & openly to answer, to the [i]n te[n]t the whole worlde may see the partes and the foundation of that doctrine, whiche so many godly men haue preferred before their owne liffes...” (sig. Biii r). All references to the *Apologie* refer to the 1564 English edition, translated by Lady Ann Bacon, which is considered to be superior to the 1562 English edition.

(1562) creates a single theological identity for English Protestants and pits the English national church against the “yoke & tyrannye of the Popes kingdome” (sig. Q r), which he explicitly identifies as the Antichrist.<sup>151</sup>

Jewel begins the *Apology* by acknowledging the distinct separation between the English and the Roman Churches. “It is trew we haue departed from them,” he writes, “and for so doing we both giue thankes to almightie God, & greatlye reioyce on our owne behalfe. But yet for all of this, from the primatiue Church, from the Apostles, and from Christ wee haue not departed, true it is” (sig. Lvi v- Lvii r). While acknowledging that “it is doubtless an odious ma[t]ter for one to leaue the fellowship whereunto he hath be accustomed” (sig. [Gviii] v), Jewel nonetheless insists that the English Church remains tied to Christ’s true church. He argues that English doctrine “truly and justly... agreeth with Christian Religion,” thereby rebuking Trent’s charges of heresy: “For wher they call us heretikes, it is a crime so haynous” (sig. Biii v - Biiii r). Jewel not only tries to distinguish between his opponents (the self-proclaimed “Catholics”) and his own community of believers (those accused “heretikes”), but he also seeks to reverse the names associated with each: he holds up the English church as true and universal and charges the Roman church with heresy.

Yet Jewel does more than call his opponents outright “Heretickes” (sig. J vii r): he experiments with a variety of names for adherents to the Roman church. Having asked at the outset, “what man[n]er of men be they? How meete it is to call them?” (sig. [Bvi] v), Jewel proposes “deceiuers” (sig. Jii v), “begylers” (sig. Jii v),

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<sup>151</sup> By 1609, Jewel’s *Apology* had been placed in every Anglican parish in the kingdom (Booty xlii).

“Pylates” (sig. Jii v), “theues” (sig. Hi r), and even “pirates” (sig. Hi r). His trump card seems to be “Antichrist”—the name he uses most often. Jewel accuses the pope of taking an “Antichristian name,” explaining that “we beleue... that he hathe forsaken the faith, and is the forerunner of Antichrist” (sig. Ciii r-v); he quotes a host of early theologians who argue that the “Bysshope of Rome himselfe (by your leaue) is verye Antichriste” (sig. Ji r); and he also links Catholics themselves to the Antichrist who “after he hath once entred into the Temple of God, should afterward saye, This house is myne own, & Christ hath nothinge to do withal” (sig. Hi v). While each of the other names embodyies a different, specific kind of corruption or sinful behavior, “Antichrist” is a term that embodies all these behaviors, suggesting broadly every way that the Catholics oppose Christ. For Jewel, “Antichrist” is a kind of Protean catch-all—the one name for the myriad ways Jewel’s opposition transform themselves against Christ’s “true Church.”<sup>152</sup>

The concluding pages of Jewel’s *Apology* outline the organization of the Church in England, detailing its hierarchy and even its relation to the English universities. In detailing “the manner how the Churche of Englande is administred and gouerned” however, Jewel does not mention the English monarch although, presumably, it is the divinely-appointed monarch who has the sole authority to appoint the archbishops and bishops of the realm. (Queen Elizabeth herself had appointed Jewel Archbishop of Salisbury shortly before he composed the *Apology*.) Just as Jewel never argues by whose authority he and the other bishops are appointed,

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<sup>152</sup> Elsewhere, Jewel defines “Antichrist” broadly as meaning “contrarie to Christ”: “You mvste vnderstande as I vnderstand: you myst heare with mine eares, and see with mine eyes: I wil gouerne, and direct you. He is contrarie to Christ. This is Antichriste” (sig. [T vii] v).

neither does he argue by whose authority he publishes an account of the faith of the Church of England. Not surprisingly in his *Confutation of a Booke Intituled An Apologie of the Church of England* (1565), Thomas Harding questions Jewel's omission. He asks at the outset why Jewel has not evoked a specific authority, particularly Queen Elizabeth herself:

Ye yeld vp an accompt of your faith in writing ye saye. But to whom do ye yelde it vp? and by whom is it yelded? From vvhom commeth the same? Do ye acknowledge no lafull iudge, no lafull Consistorie in the vvhole world? Committee ye your whole matter to the temeritie of the people? Why haue ye not set your namees to the booke, that conteinteth the profession of your faith and of your whole conscience? ...Why toke ye not example of the booke conteining the institution of a christen man set forth in king Henry theightes tyme? Though the doctrine of it be not in certaine pointes sounde and catholike, yet the maner of the publication of it resembleth auctoritie and due order.... (sig. F2 r)

Harding refers to the *The Institution of the Christian Man*, which was later revised as *The Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for Any Christian Man* (1543) and known as the *King's Book*. The text was attributed to Henry VIII and defined the theological positions of the Church of England under the king's explicit authority. Harding points out that the *Apology* does not similarly carry Elizabeth's explicit endorsement. For Harding, this suggests that the Queen was not only remaining neutral in the debate between the reformers and the Catholics, but that she might actually align herself with her "louing and faithfull" Catholic subjects (sig. \* 3 r).

Harding paints a wholly different picture both of the nature of the “true church” and Elizabeth’s allegiances. Yet, despite being ideologically divergent, Harding’s rhetoric is remarkably similar to his Protestant opponents’, and he too defines the “true church” in specific opposition to an aggregate Antichrist. In one example, he responds to Jewel’s argument that the persecution of the Reformers (particularly under Queen Mary) is a testament to their righteousness: Jewel had argued that since the “true church” is always persecuted, and the reformers are being persecuted, then the reformed church must be the “true” one. Harding disagrees:

Your first common place which ye treate, is, that truth is always persecuted...  
And this is the chiefe argument ye make in all that huge dongehill of your stinking martyrs, which ye haue intituled Actes and monuments. But we tell you. It is not death that iustifieth the cause of dying. But it is the cause of dying that iustifieth the death. He that dieth for maintenance of a good cause, is blessed. He that dieth for an euil dede, suffereth his deserued punishment. He that dieth in defence of your or any other heresies, beginneth his hell here, and from the smoke of temporall fyre leapeth into the flame of euerlasting fyre. (sig. D v-D2 r)

Harding doesn’t mince words, and his response seems no less vitriolic than if it had composed by John Bale himself—yet unlike Bale, Harding has little sympathy for persecuted reformers.<sup>153</sup> According to Harding, Jewel’s categorical syllogism is

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<sup>153</sup> Harding specifically demonstrates his ideological divergence from Bale and also Foxe with his critique of the Protestant narrative of King John: “Touching king Iohn of England, they that write that he was poisoned in a drinking cuppe by monkes, them selues make no better then a fable of it: and who so euer write it referre them selues to hearsaie, and to the popular fame. The author of your actes and monuments reporteth, that many opinions are among the chronicle writers of his death. For some write that he died for sorowe and heauines of hart, as Polydorus: some of surfeiting in the night, as



flawed: persecution does not *only* befall the righteous. Harding insists that Jewel and his adherents “hold not of Christ (what so euer they saye) but of Antichrist” (sig. [MM4] v), and he repeatedly refers to their church as the “synagog of Antichrist” (sig. F3 v, sig. L3 r). Elsewhere he maligns the reformers as the “ministers of Antichrist” (sig. YY2 v) and the “practized ministers of Antichrist” (sig. CCC3 v); he suggests that Jewel’s arguments “serueth marvelous wel for Antichrist” (sig. D2 v); and still elsewhere, he insists that the reformers are “not of this flocke of Christ, but of the herd of Antichrist” (sig. [M4] r). Just as Jewel defines his church in opposition to Antichrist so too does Harding define his. For Harding, the pope (as the rightful successor of Peter) leads the “true church” while the Protestant Antichrists follow Satan himself. “Barke vntill your bellies breake,” he chides, “ye that be the hellhowndes of Luthers and Zuinglius littor or rather of Sathans, you and their chiefe maister, shall not preuaile against the apostilike see of Peter” (sig. YY2 v).

Thus while Jewel argues that the primitive, catholic church is the one restored by the reformers—those who reject papal authority and extra-biblical traditions—Harding argues the opposite. Furthermore, he suggests that Elizabeth is a champion of the Catholic cause. Harding dedicates his Confutation to “To the Right Mighty and Excellent Prinicesse Elizabeth by the Grace of God Quene of England, France, and Irland, Defender of the Faith” (sig. \* 2 r). He presents evidence for Elizabeth’s Catholic sympathies: her alleged preservation of the crucifix in her personal chapel, her preference for moderate preachers, her presumed defense of

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Radulphus Niger: some of a bloody flixie, as Roger Houeden: some of a burning ague, some of a colde sweat, some of eating apples, some of eating pears, some of plummes, some of peaches, some by drinking of new sydar. Tell vs for truth how he dyed, before ye burthen the church with that fable” (sig. [ZZ4] r).

transubstantiation, and significantly, her hesitance to use violence against Catholics (despite the entreaties of the most ardent reformers). All of these suggest to Harding Elizabeth's "good inclination towards the auncient and catholike religio[n], which the authors of that Apologie with an odious terme do call papistrie" (sig. \* 2 v).<sup>154</sup> Additionally, Harding's dedicatory makes plain that neither he nor his constituents imagine themselves rejecting the queen's authority; he very much counts himself as a citizen of the realm and "your maiesties most faithfull subiect" (sig. [\*8] v). As such, he appeals for the protection of his monarch who has a responsibility to all of her citizens.

In this way, Harding does not see his religious identity at odds with his national one. In fact, he presents his allegiance to the papacy as further evidence of his loyalty to his queen who, as *Fidei Defensor*, "would subscribe to the late councill of Trent" (sig. I r).<sup>155</sup> Harding perhaps inherits this rhetoric from Marian Catholics

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<sup>154</sup> The full quote reads: "Of which your good inclination, (that I seme not to flatter) these both to me and to others appeare most euident arguments: Your constant bearing and vpholding of the banner and enseigne of our redemption (the Image I meane of Christ crucified) against the enemies of his crosse: Your princely word co[m]maunding a preacher, that opened his levvd mouth in your priuate chappell, to retire from that vngodly digression vnto his text of holy scripture: Your vvwel vnderstanded lyjking of the sobrest preachers, both alvways heretofore, and specially on good fryday last openly by vvord of thankes declared, vvhen one of a more temperate nature then the rest, in his sermon before your Maiestie confessed the real presence: Your gracious permission vnto your vvhole people to see, to heare, to haue, / and to read the defenses, and proues of the Catholike faith against the vnequall petitions of the contrary part: Your earnest zeale and trauail to bring (if it might be) those disordered ministers vnto some order of decent apparel, vvwhich yet they vvant the reason tapply them selues vnto. To conclude, your aduised stave from hasty and sharp persecution, your quiet bearing of your svvord vvithin the scabbard, being so lovvdy cryed vpon of hote preachers to dravve it forth, the keeping of your princely handes pure and vnspotted, hauing ben so often and so earnestly solicited vvith blood to haue embrued the same" (sig. \* 2 v / \* 3r).

<sup>155</sup> Harding refuses to accept that Elizabeth aligned herself with the reformers. He counters Jewel's claim that "a great number of kinges are become professours of your gospel," explaining that Spain, France, Portugal, Hungary, Poland have not rejected the authority of Rome. Apart from Germany, he counts only Denmark and Sweden as the two kingdoms that "be departed from the obedience of the Romaine church." Notably, Harding sidesteps the allegiance of Elizabeth with an unrelenting literalism: "The realms of England and Scotland, because by Gods prouidence the gouernement of them is deuolued to women, forasmuch as they be no kinges, of whom only ye make your vaunt,

who had argued a decade earlier that “Englishe hartes... obey so noble a Quene, so godly a Mary” (Proctor, sig. [C 8] r). For Harding, a Catholic religious identity defines one’s English national identity, and those reformers who reject Catholic beliefs are not English, but “Turkes and Saracenes” (sig. LLL r).<sup>156</sup> Jewel, on the other hand, ostracizes English Catholics as enemies of the realm, alternatively suggesting that those who reject the reformed doctrine of the Church of England are *themselves* infidels, and perhaps even *worse* than the Persians.

In his *Defence of the Apology* (1567), Jewel responds to Harding’s *Confutation* and casts Harding’s hope in the Queen’s popish sympathies as vain and presumptuous. He indicates that the Queen not only approved the *Apology*, but that she herself also commissioned the subsequent English translations. He also reminds Harding that the *Apology* was not intended to persuade the Queen of the reforms but to justify the tenets of a faith already adopted. The *Apology* is an official self-definition, not a proposed one, and Jewel stresses the *Apology*’s royal authority. Indeed, in her 1569 ‘Prayer of the Queen to God,’ Elizabeth definitively associates the Antichrist with Catholicism. She prays “to gain release from the enemies of religion as well as those who hate me—Antichrists, Pope lovers, atheists, and all persons who fail to obey Thee and me” (Marcus 163). Harding’s pleas for Elizabeth’s Catholic sympathies fall on the Queen’s deaf ears, and Jewel fortifies this

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though they haue the full right of kinges, of them I speake not” (sig. E v). Semantics aside, Harding is unwilling to admit that the Queen has, in fact, sided with Jewel. As his introduction implies, Harding leaves the door open for a Catholic England and a Queen who openly rejects the reform agenda of Jewel and others. He later aligns Elizabeth with the Frank king who, as he has specified above, had not rejected the authority of Rome.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas More’s *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (1533) explicitly glosses Revelation’s prophecies in terms of the Turkish threat, and his discussion of Eastern antichrists is a thinly veiled metaphor for the growing threat of Protestant reform.

Protestant English national identity by associating English Catholics with Eastern nations.

Jewel effectively suggests that there is no such thing as an English Catholic. To be Catholic is to adopt a wholly different national identity—one that is exotic and barbarous. These Antichrists are “barbarous Persian-like” (sig. Ji r) and associate with the likes of “Tamerlanes the kinge of Scithia a wilde and barabous creature or els of Sapor kinge of [the] Persians” (sig. Gv r-v).<sup>157</sup> Jewel also likens them to the “Mahomytes” who similarly “bragged that they alone were Catholiques” (Hiii r), and he further suggests that Catholic Antichrists are even more presumptuous (and dangerous) than these foreign “Others” themselves. Jewel recalls an anecdote about Cobdon, a Lacedemonian who refused to deliver a state message to the Persians on account of their playing dice. Just as Cobdon thought it imprudent to make a league with “Dicers,” so too does Jewel insist that it is even more dangerous to make a league with the pope and the Catholics—men who are “far more ungracious and wicked than dicers” (sig. [Pviii] r).<sup>158</sup>

Just as Harding’s rhetoric resonates with Catholic polemicists under Mary so too does Jewel reiterate the Eastern metaphors of Marian exiles. In his Antichrist drama, *Christus Triumphans* (1555), John Foxe similarly depicts the papacy as worse

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<sup>157</sup> See John Parker on Marlowe’s *Tamberlaine* and the figure of Antichrist, pp. 219-28.

<sup>158</sup> The full anecdote reads: “Men / saye that one Cobdon a Lacedemonian, when he was sent Embassadour to the kyng of the Persians to treat of a legue, and founde by chaunce them of the court playng at dyce, he returned straight waye home againe, leauing his message undone. And whe[n] he was asked why he did slacke to doe the thinges whiche he had receiued by publique commission to do, he made aunswere, he thought it should be a great reproche to his comon welth, to make a legue with Dicers. But yf we should content our selues to retorne to the Pope and his popyshe errors, and to make a couenaunte not only with dicers, but also with men farre more ungracious and wicked then any dycers be: Besides that this should be a great blot to our good name, it shoulde also be a very dangerous matter both to kindle Goddes wrath against us, and to clogge and condemne our owne soules foreuer” (sig. [Pviii] r).

than Eastern enemies. Europa, dismayed because his sister Asia “is so wretchedly enslaved under the Turk,” exclaims to his mother: “The rumor among the people is that the Antichrist is about to arise, but I think he’s the Asian Mohammed, who’s so troubling our family” (319). His mother, Ecclesia, (representing the Protestant church) replies, “He is, but he isn’t *the* one. There are many Antichrists as there are enemies of Christ” (319). Ecclesia acknowledges the threat of the “Asian Mohammed” and confirms that he is an Antichrist, yet she insists that the Turk does not act alone; and he is not, presumably, the most dangerous enemy of Christ. For Foxe, enslavement at the hands of the Turk pales in comparison to the threat posed by the greater Antichrist—one whom Foxe identifies as Pseudamnus, his allegorical figure for the papacy. This is a charge that Pseudamnus flatly denies; in his rebuttal, he tries to renew focus upon an Eastern threat:

Pseudamnus: Me the Antichrist, was that?

Anabasius: The very one that the Apocalyptic beast symbolizes.

Pseudamnus: It’s astonishing how the world is going mad in its old age.

That beast symbolizes the Mohammedan Turk. (353)

Pseudamnus diverts attention from his own hypocrisy by implicating a Turkish Antichrist. Jewel himself suggests similarly that “fonde tales” attesting “Mohamet is Antichriste” are among the disguises that Antichrist uses to deceive (Exposition, fol. 8). Both Foxe and Jewel depict the Turk as Antichrist’s pawn—a kind of weapon deployed by the Catholic Antichrist to distract the faithful.

Jewel was certainly not the first Tudor polemicist to associate the Catholic Antichrist with Eastern nations, and he would not be the last. Writers from Luther to

Spenser frequently describe their Catholic opponents as Persian or Turkish. Yet Jewel is among the first to evoke Antichrist's exoticism in a debate about English nationalism: he uses the trope of an Eastern Antichrist to reassign the national identity of recusant Catholics, thereby further defining Englishness as explicitly (and exclusively) Protestant. Jewel's Antichrist is distinctly Other, and in this way differs from the iterations of earlier writers. Bale had otherwise urged his audience (and his King) to be wary of Antichrists within England—specifically those lurking among the nobility, clergy, and even the commonality whose complicity with the pope could endanger themselves, not to mention their monarch and their nation. In Bale, the fight against Antichrist is an introspective one, and Bale urges his English audience to weigh whether their own lingering papal allegiances have made them part of Antichrist's aggregate body. Yet Jewel locates the Antichrist not within England, but outside of it. His Antichrists are not subjects but foreign invaders.

Jewel's polemic outlines what Spenser takes up in imaginative literature, particularly in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* (1590). Spenser also uses the Antichrist to articulate a Protestant national identity for England. Antichrist provides the narrative structure for the legend of the Red Crosse knight, who must slay a "Dragon horrible and stearne" (I.I.3) not unlike the beast of Revelation—one that exegetes had long associated with the Antichrist. While Spenser's allegorical use of Revelation in Book I has been much-studied, the nature of his Antichrist has received less attention.<sup>159</sup> Spenser's dragon is not the only Antichrist in Book I; instead, Red Crosse fights against a Protean Antichrist—one who not only manifests as the dragon,

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<sup>159</sup> For an overview of *The Faerie Queene's* use of Revelation see Florence Sandler, "The Faerie Queene: an Elizabethan Apocalypse."

but also appears as Archimago, Duessa, and the Saracen brothers, Sansfoy, Sansjoy, and Sansloy. It is often the case in Book I that Red Crosse mirrors the emotions, thoughts, and actions of his opponents, as if his struggles were as much against an internal force as an external one. That being said, in the arguments that follow, I would like to emphasize the latter interpretation by considering Spenser's Antichrists as outsiders. In this way, Spenser can be aligned with Jewel and the later Armada texts: his Antichrists exist outside "Faerie lond" and pose an external threat to the safety of Red Crosse, Una, and Gloriana's court.

### **SPENSER AND ANTICHRIST**

Book I of Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* brings together all of the concerns of this chapter: Spenser rewrites the medieval epic from the Protestant perspective just as Elizabethan authors reimagine the "sundrie fonde tales of the person Antichriste" to fit the new Protestant conception of an aggregate Antichrist (Jewel, Certain Sermons, sig. Tv r). Spenser's Antichrist is an amorphous villain comprised of a variety of deceiving shape-shifters—enemies whom Spenser portrays as foreign and often Eastern. Furthermore, Red Crosse's quest is both religious and nationalistic: he battles the dragon both in defense of Una, Spenser's allegory for Christian Truth, and on behalf of his "greatest Glorious Queene" (I.I.3). Red Crosse's victory over the Antichrist is as much a victory for "holinesse" as it is for Faerieland itself, and Spenser's allegory defines Red Crosse's nationalism in terms of his religious identity, particularly his ability to keep roving Catholic Antichrists at bay. Furthermore, the marriage of Red Crosse and Una—"with sacred rites and vowes for euer to abyde"

(I.XII.36)— links Spenser’s “true Saint George” (I.II.12) with Protestantism, fortifying a Protestant English identity that is distinctly at odds with Catholic outsiders like Archimago who attempt to thwart their union.

Spenser describes Archimago himself as explicitly Protean and sets in motion a metaphor that not only characterizes Red Crosse’s enemies, but also Spenser’s own depiction of the Antichrist. Archimago is like Proteus because

... by his mightie science he could take  
As many formes and shapes in seeming wise,  
As euer Proteus to himselfe could make:  
Sometime a fowle, sometime a fish in lake,  
Now like a foxe, now like a dragon fell,  
That of himself he oft for feare would quake,  
And oft would flie away. O who can tell

The hidden powers of herbes, and might of Magicke spell? (I.II.10)<sup>160</sup>

Like Proteus, Archimago begins as an “aged Sire” but quickly transforms himself into a variety of shapes—including a penitent hermit (I.I.30), a “false Pilgrim” (I.VI.48), a “craftie messenger” (I.XII.36), and even a gallant knight resembling Red Crosse himself (I.III.24). Despite his abilities to shift and change, Archimago is eventually unmasked and resumes “the hoarie head of Archimago old” (I.III.38) before he is finally “bound...hand and foote with yron chains” (I.XII.36), constrained in order to be subdued. This image of Archimago bound and “layd full low in dungeon deepe” alludes to the binding of Satan in Revelation—a scene, as we have seen above, that William Fulke references when he describes Satan as Proteus. Yet while Spenser

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<sup>160</sup> Proteus himself also appears as a distinct character in Book III.



undoubtedly depicts Archimago as a figure of Satan in this scene, Archimago's use of "deuilish artes" (I.II.9) nonetheless contributes to his characterization as a figure of the Antichrist. It is not Archimago's Protean abilities alone that make him like Antichrist. The Protean trope, while frequently associated with Antichrist, is applied widely to describe deception and trickery broadly construed. It is the *way* Archimago uses his Protean abilities that resonates with Antichrist exegesis. For instance, when Archimago transforms himself into Red Crosse, "that good knight, his late begiled guest" (I.II.11) and poses as Una's "long lacked Lord" (I.III.27), he plays the false bridegroom to Una's Truth. In Revelation, Christ the Lamb is the bridegroom to the one true Church in the New Jerusalem, and Red Crosse's eventual marriage to Una is an allegorical rendering of this apocalyptic scene. By posing as the false bridegroom—duping Una into welcoming him as her "light, and shining lampe of blis" (I.III.27)—Archimago becomes a figure of the usurping Antichrist; he deceptively assumes the role properly reserved for Christ alone.

Spenser's depiction of the Antichrist is not fixed; Archimago demonstrates aspects of the Antichrist, but he also functions as a figure of Satan, as well as a corrupt sorcerer more generally. The Antichrist darts and flickers throughout Book I; just as he manifests in one character, he transforms again, appearing in another. That is, Spenser does not posit one discreet Antichrist figure, and Archimago is not Spenser's only Antichrist. Duessa, another Protean shape-shifter, functions similarly as an Antichrist figure. Like Archimago, Duessa adopts a specific and well-studied role in Revelation: dressed in "royal robes, and purple pall / And ornaments that richly were displayed" (I.VIII.46), Duessa is the Whore of Babylon, sitting "high

mounted on her manyheaded beast” (I.VIII.6). Yet while Duessa undoubtedly resonates with this specific apocalyptic role, she is also a foil to Una and is, in this way, a figure of the Antichrist. In John 14:6, Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life”; thus, as an allegory for Truth, Una is a Christic figure. Duessa, posing as Fidessa, can “seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faine, / And fitting gestures to her purpose frame” (I.VII.1). By beguiling Red Crosse, Duessa attempts to replace Una, thus usurping Christ’s place in Red Crosse’s quest and serving, like Archimago, as a figure of the Antichrist. What’s more, Duessa first appears in Eastern garb with “like a Persian mitre on her hed” (I. II. 13). Spenser engages the rhetoric of a Eastern Antichrist when he depicts Duessa as an exotic queen. Furthermore, the Saracen brothers Sansfoy, Sansjoy, and Sansloy manifest in their own way as Antichrist figures.

The brothers are distractions for Red Crosse in the same way that Jewel and Foxe describe the Turk as a calculated distraction imposed by a papal Antichrist. Duessa depicts “the proud Sansfoy” as a barbarous lord slain deservedly by Red Crosse: Sansfoy had allegedly seized Fidessa, the daughter of a Roman emperor who “high hath set his throne, where the Tiberis doth pas” (I.II.22). He captures Fidessa in the same way the papacy feared the Turks would lay siege to Rome. Early in the century Martin Luther had complained of the papacy’s indefatigable requests for war money to keep Turkish threats at bay. Yet Luther suggests that the Turkish wars are an elaborate guise—a greedy excuse to fill church coffers and a distraction from the true enemy, the papacy itself:

When they pretend that they are about to fight the Turks, they send out emissaries to raise money. They often issue an indulgence on the same pretext of fighting the Turks. They think that those half-witted Germans will always be gullible, stupid fools, and will just keep handing over money to them to satisfy their unspeakable greed. And they think this in spite of the fact that everybody knows that not a cent of the annates, or of the indulgence money, or of all the rest, is spent to fight the Turk. It all goes into their bottomless bag. They lie and deceive. (“To the Christian Nobility,” 144)

So too does Duessa lie and deceive about her relationship with Sansfoy: her tale of fateful capture is a ruse that preys upon Red Crosse’s sense of chivalric duty. Duessa and the Saracen brothers are not enemies but allies, and Spenser’s Turks serve familiarly as pawns of a Catholic Antichrist. This is not to say that Spenser’s Saracen brothers do not pose their own legitimate threat to Truth; Sansloy’s “lawless luste” (I.VI) undoubtedly threatens Una after she is abandoned by Red Crosse and subsequently separated from her leonine protector. Yet as members of the Antichrist, Spenser’s Turks adopt the specific role modeled in Foxe and Jewel above—namely, they act as a dangerous distraction that diverts attention from the papal Antichrist and his constituents. Agreeing to protect Fidessa, Red Crosse follows her to the House of Pride, where his subsequent battle against Sansfoy’s youngest brother Sansjoy delays (and nearly derails) his primary quest to slay the Antichristic dragon threatening Una’s realm. The fight against a Turkish Antichrist distracts Red Crosse from the Catholic one.

Thus, Antichrist is splintered across Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser presents a parade of Antichrists not unlike the parade of sins at the House of Pride. Whereas Antichrist began the sixteenth-century as a singular threat, neatly contained by the elaborate lore surrounding his birth, life, and death, he ends the century as amorphous and reiterative. Antichrist is amorphous in the sense that he, like Proteus, assumes multiple forms; but he is also shapeless in the sense that Spenser does not explicitly or consistently identify any one character as Antichrist. As in Davison's *Mask of Proteus*, Spenser never uses the word 'Antichrist;' nonetheless, Antichrist's tell-tale behaviors are still recognizable. Just as the Protean metaphor had become a part of Antichrist's new vita, so too had the figure of Antichrist himself become a kind of trope that Spenser could apply subtly and frequently.<sup>161</sup> Spenser recycles this trope throughout Book I: Antichrist's membership continues to grow, and Red Crosse encounters copious Antichrists, with each encounter serving as a prelude to a new, subsequent battle against another of Antichrist's members. Battling this mystical villain has Sisyphus-ian quality to it, and Spenser's nearly identical Saracen brothers epitomize an overall sense that new Antichrists will perpetually replace the old ones. Having defeated *Sansfoy*, Red Crosse must then face *Sansjoy*; yet even with *Sansjoy* defeated, *Sansloy* still lurks waiting to avenge his brothers. Duessa also still poses a threat, having been released by Una to "wander wayes vnknowne" (I.VIII.49), and even Archimago, having been chained in a dungeon, predictably manages to escape (II.I.1). The battle against this arsenal of Antichrists is seemingly never over. Even

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<sup>161</sup> Florence Sander has used sixteenth-century annotations to argue that Spenser's references to Revelation would have been "simple and obvious" to the Elizabethan reader (149). I argue that Spenser's Antichrists would have been similarly recognizable.

after defeating the dragon, Red Crosse will “serue againe his soueraigne Elfin Queene” (II.I.2), engaging new threats to holiness.

Yet Spenser does posit a powerful weapon in the war against this Protean villain: England herself becomes an integral part of Antichrist’s teleology. During Red Crosse’s rehabilitation at the House of Holiness, Contemplation reveals “the new Hierusalem”—the holy city depicted in Revelation “that God has built / For those to dwell in, that are chosen his” (I.X.57). Red Crosse admits that, until now, he had thought Cleopolis, the city “in which that fairest Faerie Queene doth dwell,” to be “the fairest Citie... that might be seene” (I.X.58). Contemplation assures him Cleopolis is chief among earthly cities, and those who hope for a place in the heavenly city of the new Hierusalem, should abide the Faerie’s Queene’s example:

And well beseemes all knights of noble name,  
That covet in th’immortal booke of fame  
To be eternalized, that same to haunt,  
And doen their seruice to that soueraigne Dame,  
That glorie does to them for guerdon graunt:  
For she is heavenly borne, and heauen may iustly vaunt.

(I.X.59)

The example of the Faerie Queen promises to keep Red Crosse on “this path... to yonder same Heirusalem” (I.X.61). Red Crosse’s moral purity is thus intricately linked to his loyalty to his “soueraigne Dame.” Indeed, even after a recuperated Red Crosse successfully slays the dragon, his quest is not complete: he admits that he had “nought forgot, how he whilomme had sworne, / In case he could that monstrous

beast destroy, / Vnto his Faerie Queene backe to return” (I. XII.41). In keeping his promise to return to the Faerie Queen, Red Crosse demonstrates loyalty to both his God and his Queen. Elizabeth expected a similar allegiance from her subjects—those who, like Red Crosse, were “sprong out from English race” (I.X.60). Just as the Faerie Queen herself commissioned both the destruction of the dragon and Red Crosse’s loyalty, so too did Elizabeth petition her subjects to demonstrate their royal allegiance by rejecting Catholicism. Indeed, Thomas Farrington, a common worker in Kent, was convicted and punished for calling Queen Elizabeth herself “Antichrist” in 1599 (Cressy 83). By the end of the sixteenth-century, to be English was to be a Protestant enemy of a Catholic Antichrist.

## CONCLUSION

The introduction to this study recounts Bishop John Jewel's observation that everyone—young, old, learned, and unlearned—had heard of the Antichrist by the middle of the sixteenth-century. Society was transfixed by expectations for his arrival, as well as speculations that he may have already arrived. But as much as Jewel depicts Antichrist as a fixture in the popular imagination, he goes on to explain that Antichrist was no benign curiosity. The Antichrist was so prominent—indeed, infamous—precisely because he was dangerous. He was the object of both intense hatred and paralyzing fear:

They hate his name, and detest him, before they knowe him. But here you may marke the wonderful sleight and sutteltie of Sathan. The worlds shal looke after the coming of Antichrist. He shal not fayle but come. Al men shal carie hatred against him, and reckon hym abhominable, and yet their eyes shal bee blinded, and their hartes deceiued, so that they shal not knowe him. They shal hate his name, & embrace his doctrine: he shal couer himselfe with a cloke of holynesse. They shal thinke they do good seruice vnto Christ, but shal therin do seruice vnto Antichrist. (Certaine Sermons, sig. Tv r)

Men reviled this Antichrist in advance for his total opposition to Christ, yet their practiced hatred would not sufficiently arm them against Antichrist's dangerous sleights. Antichrist's monstrosity was not necessarily his association with huge and devouring beasts, but instead his capacity for impenetrable deception. Antichrist's *modus operandi* would be deceit: by disguising his villainy with holiness, he would conceal the very qualities that make him otherwise detestable and ensnare those

individuals who would otherwise “recker hym abhominable.” The stakes could not be any higher: Antichrist threatened the eternal salvation of his “blinded” victims. Not only was his arrival inevitable, but so too was his remarkable effectiveness.

In this way, Antichrist was a kind of primal nightmare from which no one could wake: although his atrocity was anticipated, there seemed to be little, if anything, that could be done about it. Antichrist’s success was prophesied, mandating certain helplessness in the face of his villainy. Adso had suggested that only two witnesses would be able to discern Antichrist’s hypocrisy—and even they would not be able to destroy the Antichrist themselves. Only supernatural intervention could defeat Antichrist in traditional accounts, usually at the hands the Archangel, Michael, or perhaps Christ himself. Furthermore, Antichrist’s steady expansion in the sixteenth-century made him even more powerful and, in turn, increasingly terrifying. Like Stephen Batman’s aggregate Proteus who “could turne himselfe into any shape” (fol. 20r), the Antichrist could appear anywhere. He was not contained in the body of single man; nor was he confined to a single institution like the papacy. Instead, the Antichrist was a mystical body that included anyone opposed to Christ and his Church—not one man, but many men. Yet, in a way, Antichrist had become even more diffuse than these many members. Was Antichrist the aggregate of his innumerable constituents? Or, had Antichrist become an ideology—one that was manifest in the words and actions of his members, but that was ultimately intangible and, thus, impossible to control or destroy? Menelaus could finally pin down Proteus’s physical body and force him to submit just as England could enforce laws that controlled and punished Antichristian behavior. Yet an



ideology—a point of view that manifests in a variety of forms but that completely lacks essential substance—could never be manacled or completely eradicated. In this way, Antichrist remained an unnerving aporia in the sixteenth-century imagination; he had the potential to morph perpetually out of grasp and to reappear continually in a new form or new context.

Yet Tyndale argues that the faithful could not simply surrender to this Antichrist, no matter how paralyzing and seemingly ungraspable his villainy seemed to be. As Tyndale writes in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, “The nature of God’s word is to fight against hypocrites. It began at Abel, and hath ever since continued, and shall, I doubt not, until the last day” (“Obedience,” 166). Thus, sixteenth-century writers still sought to expose Antichrist’s hypocrisy: Jewel himself admits that he rails against the Antichrist so as to *un-blind* the eyes of his constituents, and the polemicists in the preceding chapters all attempt to “pin down” the Antichrist in the actions of his members, exposing the dangerous ideology they espoused. Luther himself admits that these polemical efforts might be ultimately ineffectual; nonetheless, he is still determined to try: “If it [my book] helps, it helps; if it does not, then may our dear Lord Jesus Christ help, and come down from heaven with the Last Judgment” (“On the War against the Turk,” 205). While Christ would deliver the final, irrevocable blow to the Antichrist, Luther’s polemical exposé might inflict a substantial wound, impeding Antichrist’s progress and thereby postponing Judgment and Doomsday. Thus, sixteenth-century writers tried to force Antichrist into a temporary hiatus: Tyndale, for example, anticipates that Antichrist would “go out of the play for a season” if he were “overcome with the word of God” (“Parable,” 80).

So too might a righteous English monarch thwart the Antichrist's advances. Perhaps the sheer power of polemical writing could also convert hearts and thereby slow the steady expansion of Antichrist's mystical realm. In short, the threat of an imminent Doomsday that was at times so palpable, particularly at beginning of the century, seems to have subsided by the end. This study demonstrates that transition—a Doomsday averted.

Yet one needs to look no further than Jewel's debate with Thomas Harding to see how fragile this sense of postponement really was. Jewel and Harding both display a remarkable degree of self-assurance in their respective efforts to frustrate Antichrist's advances, yet neither had any reason to feel particularly confident that his side would prevail. Elizabeth's tepid Protestantism, her inscrutable religious sympathies, and even the lingering question of whether she would even survive at all made any ideological victory tenuous and potentially short-lived. Indeed, with Elizabeth's death and James's accession came new fears that the Antichrist had again infiltrated England's shores. In *Englands Sicknes* (1615), Thomas Adams warns that while "the Trophees of Victory ouer all *Antichristian enemies* may still bee seene amongst vs" (fol. 51 r), England was still susceptible and had perhaps already succumbed to the Antichrist again: "Sicke is the daughter of Sion; and the complexion of England giues her not to be sound. If shee feele her own pulse, and examin the *Symptomes* of her ilnes... shee must confesse that her health is empaired" (fol. 1 r). Adams imagines the Antichrist as a disease that targets the "spirituall...health" of the realm (fol. 89 r), and he urges England to fortify herself, strengthening her immunity. Yet after a century of battling "resolute Papistes" (fol.

39 r), England's exhaustion was palpable, and fears developed about where Antichrist still lurked in the emergent seventeenth-century political and religious landscape. Thus, even as late sixteenth-century writers championed England's fresh victories over foreign, Catholic enemies, the indefatigable Antichrist endured.

## FIGURES

FIGURE 2-1

Luther, Martin, and Lucas Cranach the Elder. *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (The Passion of Christ and Antichrist). Wittenburg, 1521. The Royal Library at Copenhagen. 22 Mar. 2010. <<http://www2.kb.dk/luther/passion/index.htm>>. (sig. [B4] v)

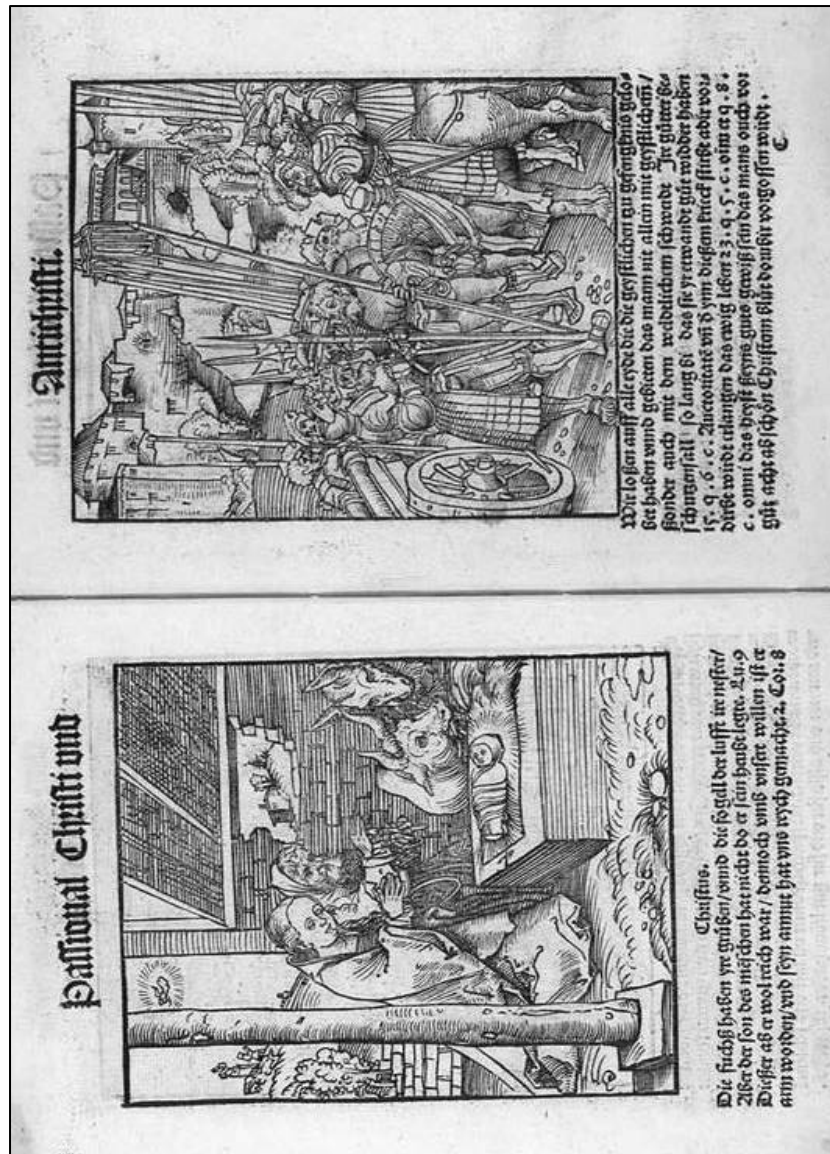


FIGURE 2-2

[Here Begynneth the Byrthe and Lyfe of the Moost False and Deceyfull Antechryst].  
 London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1525?. (sig. Aiii v)



**W**hen þe tyme is come that this chylde  
 shall come in too this worlde his moder shal  
 cas in gonge by the stretes in the towne of  
 Babylon shall fall vnto the erthe w a grete  
 noyse and crye. And than shall Antechryste  
 breke oute at her bely vnatutally before all þe people/  
 and he shall speke incontynent boldly and wyfely bys  
 uers languages as though he had ben vpon the erth  
 longe & his bysage shall be chaungeable. And in that  
 tyme shall be a myst or tenebryltye lyke a grete smoke  
 that one shall not se an other. In contrary wyse as our  
 lord was borne in a derke cloudy nyght whiche was  
 todaynly chaunged in to resplendysshynge byghynesse  
 And than shall there be herde a grete noyse or cryenge  
 as yf it were the grunting of a lowe or swyne. Therof  
 spekech Tabernus saynge that it shall be done in þe dys  
 troyte or angre of alle good Jewes. Alas there ben but  
 fewe now in these present dayes lyuyge. And in those

FIGURE 2-3  
 Der Antichrist Und Die Fünfzehn Zeichen (The Antichrist and the Fifteen Signs).  
 Nuremberg, c. 1467. ([fol. 2] v)



FIGURE 3-1

[Here Begynneth the Byrthe and Lyfe of the Moost False and Deceytfull Antechryst].  
 London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1525?. (sig. [A6] r)

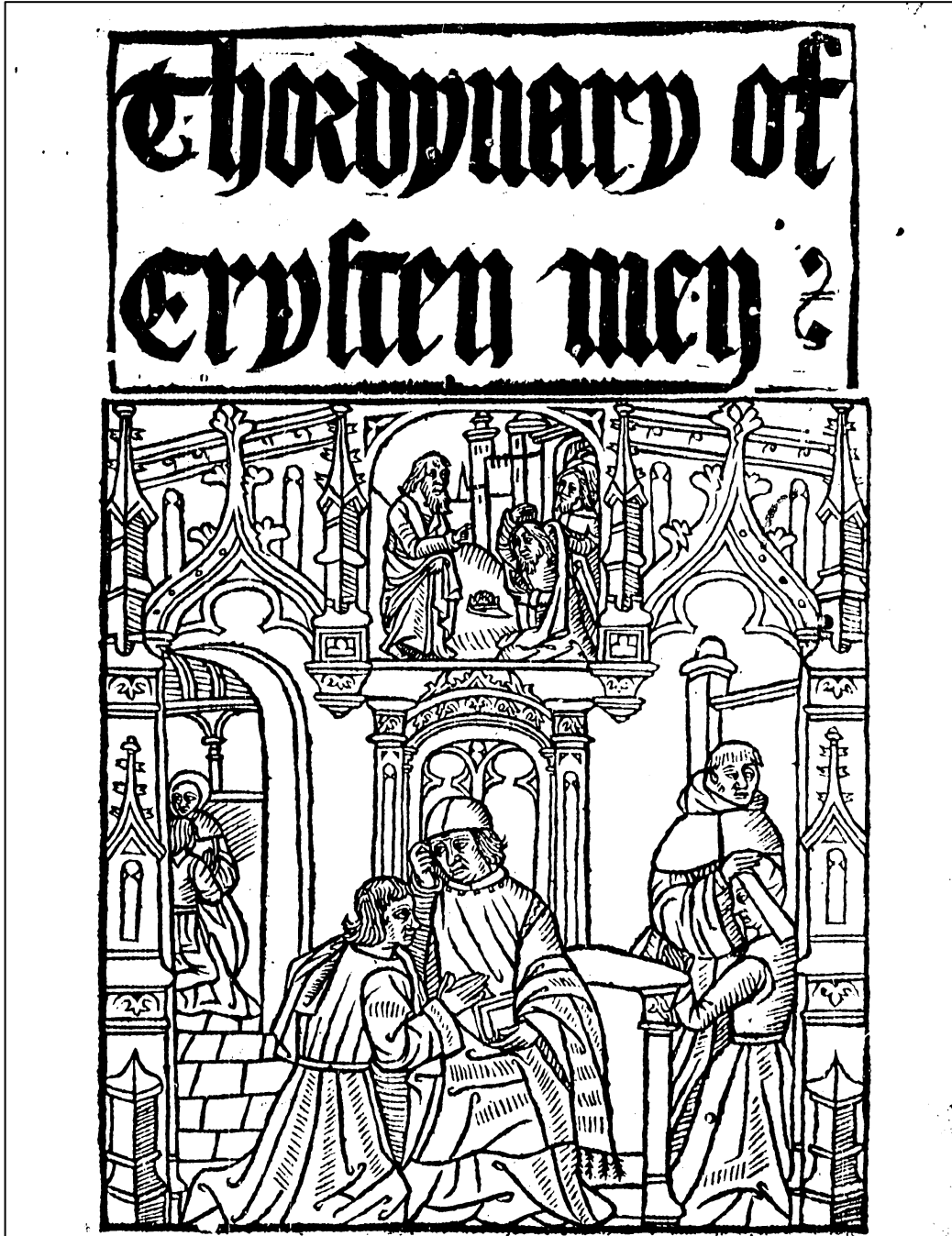


**A**S it is wryt-  
 ten in the Appo-  
 calyps. Adtra-  
 het ad se magna  
 partem stellaru.  
 Antechryst shall  
 drawe vnto him  
 a greate parte of  
 the sterres / that  
 is for to knowe  
 hyghe prynces  
 reignyng on er-  
 the. For some he  
 shal gete to him  
 warde by force /

and some by dowayres and gyftes. In lyke wyse it is  
 wryten in the Appocalyps in the thyrde chapytre. Vnto  
 hym is gyuen myghte in all the generacyon or kyn-  
 red of people. But after the prophetyng of Danuell  
 and of saynt Johan in the Appocalyps in his. xiii. cha-  
 pytre and Johanes camestor in scolastica historia. An-  
 techryst shall caste thre kynges out of the oriente. That  
 is to wete the kynge of Alstyrke / the kynge of Egypt / &  
 the kynge of Ethyope / the whyche he shall put to dethe  
 And. vii. other kynges shall become subiect to hym. And  
 other kynges of the erthe he shall subdewe by stronge  
 hande. But the kynge of Lybye shall not come to the be-  
 leue of the false Antechryst vnto y tyme that he shall re-  
 uyue his fader the olde kynge of Lybye and his moder.  
 And than shall Antechryst with arte magycke or with  
 the deuilles crafte make to aryse the forsayd kynge and  
 quene fro dethe to lyfe. And than shall they gyue vnto

FIGURE 3-2

Chertsey, Andrew. Thordinary of Crysten men. London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1506.  
(Title Page)





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