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# "Bite on Boldly": Staging Medieval and Early Modern Heretics

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# “Bite on Boldly”: Staging Medieval and Early Modern Heretics

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[early English drama, parody, Lollardy, Catholicism, Antichrist, *Mankind*, Croxton  
*Play of the Sacrament*, John Bale, Shakespeare, Marlowe]

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the parodic Biblical language employed by medieval and early modern staged heretics. The plays' coupling of parody and heresy forges ideological connections between the two, as when they disrupt authorized, orthodox models of the Word, as both the Scriptures and the Host. My Introduction addresses the theological controversies over the relationship between language and meaning that arise from Lollard, Catholic, and Protestant heresies. Chapter two analyzes how, in the Chester cycle, Antichrist's theological and verbal dissents are eerily similar to orthodox models. That framework forces the audience to depend on the *context* of the heretic's words and deeds, rather than the words and deeds themselves, to interpret meaning. Chapter three examines *Mankind's* construction of orthodox and parodic registers of language and its mapping of Mankind's fall and ascent through his transition from one register to the other. Chapter four addresses how the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* defends the doctrine of the Real Presence by aligning the transformative power of the consecratory words with the transformative power of believers' confessions at conversion, wherein both enact a transubstantiation. Chapter five argues that John Bale's *Three Laws* relies on the dichotomy of the letter and the spirit to characterize his parodic Catholic vices as legalistic adherents to the Word and his Protestant heroes as spiritually-enlightened believers. Chapter six analyzes how Falstaff's Puritan parody, in the *Henry IV* plays, locates meaning in the audience rather than the speaker, particularly through dramatic irony, equivocation,

and allusions. Lastly, chapter seven examines how, in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the spectrum of orthodox and parodic language use collapses into Faustus's idiom, and I contend that Faustus's heresy is ultimately his indecision. My conclusion ultimately finds that the univocity between language and meaning is a specious construction, and, collectively, these texts demonstrate that language may be a marker but not a maker of meaning.

## LOLLARDS, AND CATHOLICS, AND MAGICIANS – OH MY!

In the York “Fall of Man,” Satan encourages Eve to “bite boldly on” the forbidden fruit (80). A mere twenty-two lines later, after she does indeed bite boldly, Eve persuades Adam to “bite on boldly” of the same fruit (102). These brief exchanges demonstrate how contagious language can be, spreading, like sin itself, from one character to the next. However, Satan’s and Eve’s linguistic tag is also a symptom of their sin. Satan’s initial command to bite on boldly demonstrates his opposition to God’s command, while Eve’s later use of it not only confirms her own fall but also marks her transition into the Satan-like role of temptress.

The Satan and Eve characters in the York play provide a generic model of language and language transmission occurring often on the medieval stage. In fact, the disease of transgressive language plagues medieval drama, making manifest the Biblical adage “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45 DRV). Much attention has already been paid to the language of the period’s tyrant, vice, and villain figures, all of which have some linguistic markers that indicate their moral status. However, modes of transgressive language also mark contemporary stage heretics, a set of characters that has been largely overlooked by modern scholarship. Specifically, stage heretics parody Biblical language to denote their heterodox religious leanings, and their language can be both contagious and symptomatic. Their disruption of linguistic orthodoxy parallels their disruption of

religious orthodoxy, and, despite shifting definitions of orthodoxy in the medieval and early modern periods, stage heretics are consistently signified *through* such linguistic disruptions. Their models of parodic language plot the development of staged heretics, drawing on first the Lollards in the fifteenth century, then the Catholics in the mid-to-late-sixteenth century, and finally early modern religious others, such as witches, Jews, and Puritans.

England's first substantial bout with heresy came from the Lollards, whose doctrines were officially condemned in England in the Blackfriars Council of 1382. Their presence appears to have waxed and waned until the Protestant Reformation, which branded Catholicism heresy, began under Henry VIII in 1534 and flourished under Edward VI's reign from 1547 until 1553. The brief return to Catholicism under Mary later in 1553 turned the tables on religious doctrine once again, only to be squelched by Elizabeth's ascension in 1558. England's merry-go-round of religious metamorphoses suggests how heterogeneous the population's religious beliefs were.

What qualified as heresy, and hence heretics, vacillated throughout the medieval and early modern period, and the word itself accommodates such fluidity. The *OED* defines 'heresy' as "theological or religious opinion or doctrine maintained in opposition, or held to be contrary, to the 'catholic' or orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church" and hypothesizes its first use in 1225 in the *Ancrene Rule*. As the *OED*'s definition suggests, heresy is not simply disagreement with or criticism of orthodoxy, but rather a doctrine that is maintained despite its explicit opposition to

orthodoxy. Heresy, like orthodoxy, is officially defined; thus, heresy and orthodoxy are symbiotic because their respective definitions necessitate an opposite.

In England, the heart of medieval and early modern heresies was the Word, both in the written Scriptures and the sacramental Host. These two issues formed the backbone of religious conflict from the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth centuries. They also represent an underlying question that all doctrines—orthodox and heterodox alike—had to address: What is the relationship between words and meaning, or more particularly, between words and truth?<sup>1</sup>

John Wyclif, whose ideas later evolved into the religious sect termed Lollardy,<sup>2</sup> was England's first major heresiarch. He proposed several doctrines contrary to contemporary orthodoxy, spurring the Blackfriars Council of 1382 to convene to discuss them. The council ruled on twenty-four tenets, finding ten of them heretical and fourteen erroneous.<sup>3</sup> Significant among the heretical propositions were the denial of transubstantiation (articles 1 and 3), the notion that internal confession is as efficacious as external (article 5), and denial of the Pope's

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<sup>1</sup> Janette Dillon, in her book *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England* frames her opening chapter in these terms and then develops the dichotomy of the True Word and Babel (babble) to discuss competing discourses in medieval drama.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Cole's recent work in *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* on the development of the term 'Lollard' and the differences between 'Wycliffite' and 'Lollard.' He proposes that the term 'Lollard' was in flux through the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and that 'Lollard' did not necessarily mean Wycliffism. He also examines the term's construction and evolution in the contemporary writers Langland, Chaucer, Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Kempe.

<sup>3</sup> Heretical beliefs were those explicitly contrary to orthodox doctrines, such as confession and transubstantiation; erroneous ones were contrary to the Church's teaching but did not contradict a specific doctrine. The 1401 statute permitting the burning of heretics, the "De Haeretico Comburendo," cites both "heretical and erroneous Opinions" as indicative of a heretic (127).



power and authority (8 and 9). Among the erroneous propositions, the support for unauthorized preaching (article 15), the advocacy of withholding tithes from sinful clergy (article 18), the conviction that among Christians all prayers are equal (19), and the belief that friars should earn a living through labor (23) were held as particularly disruptive.<sup>4</sup> The Lollard heresy was officially born.

The religious battle soon turned political regarding issues of language, and, as Janette Dillon in *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England* observes, orthodoxy “demonised English as the language of potential heretics” while it maintained that Latin was the language of Biblical truth (11). As the sect’s more democratic stance would suggest, Lollardy supported disseminating texts in the vernacular, most significant of which was the Bible itself. Later legislation from Archbishop Thomas Arundel responded with further persecution, this time focusing on the dissemination of the heresy rather than the doctrines themselves. He issued his *Constitutions* in 1409, addressing unlicensed preachers, sermon content, permissible topics of instruction, and heretical books and doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Specifically regarding language, the *Constitutions* state:

It is a dangerous thing, as witnesseth blessed St. Jerome, to translate the text of the holy Scripture out of the tongue into another; for in the translation the same sense is not always easily kept, as the same St. Jerome confesseth, that although he were inspired, yet oftentimes in

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<sup>4</sup> A full list of the articles condemned as heretical and erroneous can be found in Joseph Dahmus’s *The Prosecution of John Wyclif* (93-5).

<sup>5</sup> A full list of Arundel’s articles can be found in Lynn Staley’s edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (187-196).

this he erred: we therefore decree and ordain, that no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue, by way of a book, libel, or treatise; and that no man read any such book, libel or treatise, now lately set forth in the time of John Wickliff, or since, or hereafter to be set forth, in part or in whole, privily or apertly, upon pain of greater excommunication, until the said translation be allowed the ordinary of the place, or, if the case so require, by the council provincial. He that shall do contrary to this, shall likewise be punished as a favourer or error and heresy. (Staley 192)

Interestingly, Lollardy came at a time of orthodox attempts for reform, dating back to the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> During that period, the English vernacular was on the rise, as was lay devotion. However, the threat of Lollardy halted this movement. Early in Lollardy's development, the politico-religious lines between Latin and the vernacular were murky (and transitory) at best, but as the heresy spread in the early fifteenth century, these lines became more rigid, "forced . . . to fork along the lines of orthodoxy and heresy" (Dillon *Language and Stage* 11). Latin became solely the language of authority and orthodoxy, while the use of English for Biblical material was coded as strongly heterodox. The case of Bishop Pecock demonstrates such hardening: he held orthodox beliefs and wished to combat the Lollard heresy,

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<sup>6</sup> In 1281, Archbishop Pecham "ruled that parish priests should instruct the laity in English in the basics of the faith at least four times a year" and these lessons in English informed Archbishop Thoresby's *Lay Folk's Catechism* (Dillon *Language and Stage* 10), which was later adapted by the Lollard movement to promote their doctrines and emphasize vernacular teaching. Moreover, the *Lay Folk's Prayer Book* developed around the end of the thirteenth century, and the *Lay Folk's Mass Book* followed in the late fourteenth century.

but he chose to disseminate his theological beliefs in English. His language choice, despite orthodox content, marked him as a heretic, and he was tried for heresy in 1457 (Dillon *Language and Stage* 18).

The Lollard disbelief in transubstantiation also fostered much debate and, aside from the heresy's endorsement of the vernacular, sparked the most attention in social, religious, and, significantly, artistic spheres. Leading the list of heretical tenets discussed at the Blackfriars Council were three articles on the Eucharist:

1. That the substance of the material bread and wine remains in the sacrament of the altar after consecration.
2. That the accidents do not remain without the subject in the same sacrament after consecration.
3. That Christ is not in the sacrament of the altar identically, truly, and really, in his proper corporal presence. (Dahmus 93-4)

These propositions directly opposed the orthodox line of the Real Presence. The denial that the Word became flesh in the Host was the signature of Lollards, and this belief inherently disrupted the traditional answers to the questions regarding words and truth. If "this is My body" did not mean that that was His body, the presumed link between signifier and signified was broken.

Along with their preference for English and denial of transubstantiation, other markers also became associated with Lollards. Anne Hudson, in *The Premature Reformation*, notes that in the early years of the Lollard movement, Lollards were identified with russet or coarse clothing, which in turn was connected to the plowman image often evoked by and against Lollards. This image appears in

the Lollard texts *Piers the Ploughman's Creed* and *The Complaint of the Ploughman*.<sup>7</sup> Andrew Cole, in *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer*, also documents some of the common tags given to the group, and the repetition of certain buzz words clearly demonstrates a coherent set of markers for Lollardy: for instance, when speaking of Lollard preachers “usurping the office,” both Archbishop Courtenay and John Buckingham, Bishop of London, compare the unauthorized preachers to Christ’s parable about wolves in sheep’s clothing (Cole 8, 15).<sup>8</sup>

Lollards’ heterodox beliefs on language and the Eucharist, plus their secondary markers found in contemporary literature, make their way onto the medieval stage through several staged heretics. In the Chester cycle, Antichrist employs parody to specifically disrupt Eucharistic doctrine and is characterized as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. In the morality play *Mankind*, the vice figures’ Biblical parody intentionally fragments the univocity between signifier and signified, while the primary vice Tityvillus tempts the rustic farmer Mankind into a distinctly Lollard fall into sin. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jews’ parody of the consecration of the Sacrament drives the play’s plot and its emphatic endorsement of the Real Presence. Moreover, Shakespeare characterizes Falstaff, his

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<sup>7</sup> The connection between the Lollard plowman image and Langland’s *Piers Plowman* is more speculative, and recent scholarship has yet to reach a consensus on the relationship between the emerging heresy and the extant manuscripts of the poem. For instance, C. David Benson interrogates what he terms “the Langland myth,” questioning the lines of authorship and chronology that have formed the basis of previous studies on *Piers Plowman*. Conversely, Cole relies on traditional assumptions of authorship and chronology to argue that Langland’s revisions in the C-text redirect the term ‘Lollards’ away from the suspected heretics and towards socially unproductive members of society, like friars. He finds the poem “a direct involvement in Wycliffite controversies” (26).

<sup>8</sup> Cole documents such evidence to advance his thesis on the contemporary fabrication of Wycliffite activity outside of Oxford in order to move the discussion of Lollardy into the ecclesiastical realm. But, regardless of the ends of the quoted documents, the use of key words and phrases to establish a Lollard presence—fabricated or not—demonstrates their currency at the time.

reincarnation of the famous Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle, as a parodic wolf in sheep's clothing.

When the religious tables turned after the Protestant Reformation, England was faced with a new yet familiar heretic—the Catholic. Henry VIII's tension and subsequent break with the Roman Catholic Church laid the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation in England.<sup>9</sup> He began seeking divorce from Katherine of Aragon in May of 1527, and threatened a schism with Rome a year later. As A. G. Dickens, in his copious *The English Reformation*, remarks, "over the next three years there followed a sequence of statutes which, though still carefully avoiding schism, involved the most serious curtailment of ecclesiastical privilege since the fourteenth century" (124). The King's official divorce in 1533 was only "one of the many dangerous reefs which English Catholicism had to circumnavigate, [and] English Catholicism, despite its gilded decorations, was an old, unseaworthy and ill-commanded galleon" (Dickens 129). In 1534, the Act of Supremacy declared the King head over the Church of England, politically and religiously ousting the Pope and effectively Catholicism from the isle. The Catholic-Protestant war of the sixteenth century began.

However, reform did not come overnight under Henry VIII; in fact, his statutes were conservative given his rather public break with Rome, and he

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<sup>9</sup> Anne Hudson's *The Premature Reformation*, as the title suggests, explicitly connects the tenets and beliefs of Lollardy from the late fourteenth to the late fifteenth centuries with those of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. A. G. Dickens's *The English Reformation* confirms this model by including a section on "The Wycliffite Prelude," in which he argues that "the old heresy and the new began to merge together from about the time Tyndale's Testament came into English hands" (58).

hesitated to revise major doctrinal beliefs, like transubstantiation. It was not until the succession of his son Edward VI that Protestant reform gained momentum. This movement was briefly halted when Mary took the throne in 1553, but Elizabeth's reign, beginning in 1558, resumed England's march toward Protestantism.

Once again, language was central to the engagement. English translations of the Bible emerged, albeit contentiously, and by 1536, every church was to possess a Latin *and* English translation of the Scriptures.<sup>10</sup> The *Book of Common Prayer*, first issued in 1548, revised the Latin mass with devotional passages in English, and lay devotion was encouraged<sup>11</sup>. Although Henrician approaches to the vernacular and lay access varied (even from year to year), the agenda of promoting the seemingly plain vernacular over Catholicism's obscure Latin was clear. Among the primary issues of the Catholic heresy, the centrality of Latin in worship and preaching was under attack. Once again, the competing doxai addressed the relationship between words and meaning, this time opposing the obscurity of Latin against the unadorned vernacular as "the sign by which a truthful speaker was to be known" (Dillon *Language and Stage* 79). For Protestants, transparency in language meant transparency in truth. While Lollards were once accused of desecrating holiness with the vernacular, now Catholics were accused of veiling (and even withholding) holiness with pretentious Latin. Hugh Latimer, an ardent early reformer, condemns Catholicism's language choice: "This is the devilish plowing . . . the which worketh to have things in Latin and letteth [hinders] the fruitful edification" (qtd. in Dillon

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<sup>10</sup> See Dillon (*Language and Stage* 70-79).

<sup>11</sup> See Dillon (*Language and Stage* 73).

*Language and Stage* 79); moreover, Tyndale himself criticizes the faulty logic of keeping the Scriptures in Latin: “If I must first believe the doctor, then is the doctor first true, and the truth of the scripture dependeth of his truth; and so the truth of God springeth of the truth of man. Thus antichrist turneth the roots of the trees upward” (qtd. in Dillon *Language and Stage* 75).<sup>12</sup> The political overtones of the movement echoed the concerns of the Lollard heresy a century prior: the schism was not polarized over Latin and English per se as much as it was over “language open only to the exclusive few” and “language of the people” (Dillon *Language and Stage* 76). Despite the reversal in what was deemed heresy, language still remained central.

The Word incarnate also dominated England’s combat against Catholicism. The Council of Trent, assembled to delineate Catholic doctrine in response to Protestant movements, affirmed in 1551,

it has . . . always been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy council now declares it anew, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. (*Canons and Decrees* 75)

However, the once-orthodox doctrine became heresy in mid-sixteenth-century England, although the road to this doctrine was contentious, as Protestantism came

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<sup>12</sup> Antichrist in the Chester “Antichrist” actually enacts this image, uprooting trees and turning them upside down.

in many flavors. With the influence of the competing ideas of Luther, Zwingli, and later Calvin, Anglican doctrine evolved over time. Initially, Cranmer's Ten Articles, issued in 1536, upheld transubstantiation, as did the subsequent revisions and elaborations of the tenets found in *The Bishop's Book* of 1537 and its descendant *The King's Book* in 1543.<sup>13</sup> It was not until the Forty-Two Articles, passed under Edward in 1552, that the Real Presence was officially denied. Elizabeth's Thirty-Nine Articles maintained the same doctrine:

[T]ransubstantiaion (or the change of the substance of bread, and wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proued by holy writ, but is repugnant to the plaine words of Scripture: ouerthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The body of Christ is giuen, taken, and eaten in the Supper, onely after an heauenly, and spirituall manner: and the meane whereby the body of Christ is received, and eaten in the Supper, is faith. (Rogers 171)

Despite this relatively late pronouncement of transubstantiation as heretical, various sects of Protestantism denied the doctrine long before it was officially renounced, and questions surrounding the Eucharist permeated Catholic and Protestant discourses in the sixteenth century.

Contemporary Protestant propaganda recast Catholicism's transubstantiation as various defamations, from cannibalism to black magic, and

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<sup>13</sup> Article 4 of the Ten Articles declares: "under the form and figure of bread and wine, which we there do presently see and perceive by outward senses, is verily, substantially, and really contained and comprehended the selfsame body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . and, that under the same form and figure of bread and wine, the very selfsame body and blood of Christ is corporally, really, and in the very substance exhibited, distributed, and received unto [you] and of all them which received the said sacrament" (qtd. in Fuller 152).



these form the secondary markers of Catholic heretics in the sixteenth century. As Keith Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, writes, to the medieval and early modern Catholic, the consecration was a “magical notion that the mere pronunciation of words in a ritual manner could effect a change in the character of material objects” (33). The propaganda against these heretics was much more abundant and vitriolic than that against their Lollard predecessors, providing a larger, thornier network of heretical signals. Connections to Babylon and the Antichrist also dominate such characterizations.<sup>14</sup> Dillon situates transgressive language as babble/Babel, and connects the former to Reformation identifications of Rome as Babylon:

It should come as no surprise that sixteenth-century writers assumed an identity between Babylon and Babel. This allowed Reformers to link their attack on Latin as the obfuscation of Babel with their figuring of the Pope as the Whore of Babylon, and to construct contemporary Catholicism in terms of fallen language as well as the revelation of the Antichrist. (*Language and Stage* 80)

As Bernard McGinn observes, “Protestant Christianity from the start made identifying the institution of the papacy with Antichrist a fundamental tenet of belief” (201). The texts and images linking the two figures pervade Protestant works, including those of Luther and Calvin on the Continent and Tyndale and Cranmer in England. During the mid-sixteenth century, a bishop remarked that

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<sup>14</sup> Wyclif and later Lollards first characterized the Pope as Antichrist, and this association gained significant force during the Reformation. For a brief summary of such characterizations, see Emerson (“Contextualizing Performance” 100).

“[t]here is none, neither old nor young, neither learned nor unlearned, but he hath heard of Antichrist” (qtd. in McGinn 218).

Linked to the Catholic heresy were religious Others, who intersected or paralleled Catholicism at a variety of points. Principal among them was the connection between Catholics and magicians. As Tyndale himself characterizes, a Catholic priest appears “as a conjuror doth in his circles, characters, and superstitious words of his conjuration” (qtd. in Thomas 61) and by the time Elizabeth takes the throne, “‘conjuror’ came to be a synonym for a recusant priest” (Thomas 68). This elision speaks to issues of the Word, as witchcraft, like orthodox Catholicism, emphasized the power of words to transform material objects, such as the Host, outside of the morality or intent of the speaker.<sup>15</sup> As Tyndale’s description suggests, witches were easily recognizable on stage by their garbled Latin and Hebrew incantations, conjuring instruments, and magical circles drawn on the floor.

Jews represented another religious Other, in both medieval and early modern England. Although Jews were officially expelled from England in 1290, Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition later settled in England during the sixteenth century and, while conforming outwardly to Christianity, continued to practice Judaism in secret (Shapiro 13-20); moreover, England inherited other (often stereotypical) views of Jews from Continental texts, and, in general, anti-

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<sup>15</sup> Catholicism held that an ordained priest’s consecration of the Host always transformed its substance, outside of his personal morality or intent. However, unordained and lay persons’ words held no such power. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* illustrates this doctrine well—the ordained priest’s words have the power to consecrate the Host while the Jews’ parodic replication of such words do not.

Semitism ran rampant in the literature of the period, often demonizing Jews religiously and socially.<sup>16</sup> As Robin R. Mundill, in the *King's Jews*, observes of medieval attitudes, "To any Christian, the Jew was first and foremost the Christ Killer. The Jews had also refused to accept Christ as the Messiah; the Jew had missed and even rejected redemption" (67). To medieval Christians, their opportunity for salvation and subsequent rejection of that salvation labeled Jews as heretics; moreover, their denial of core Christian doctrines, like the incarnation and the Eucharist or later Communion, solidified their heterodoxy. In the early modern period, Elizabethans also categorized Jews as heretics, along with "apostates, renegados [Christians converted to Islam], and fugitives" (qtd. in Shapiro 20). Judaism, as heresy, was also linked with Catholicism in the sixteenth century, as a gloss in Luther's commentary on Galatians suggests: "Papists are our Jews which molest us no less than the Jews did Paul" (qtd. in Shapiro 21).

Puritans, the ugly stepsister of the Protestant Reformation, were also marginalized. As Kristen Poole's *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton* elucidates, the term 'Puritan' in early modern usage was a catch-all reproach for non-conformists: "Contemporaries most often employed the term 'Puritan' as a derisive synonym for 'schismatic,'" and "'Puritan' described all those who were divided from the central church body" (3). She emphasizes that the term's modern usage attempts to categorize while its original intent was to indicate fracture (4). Therefore, while modern scholars label one type of schismatic 'Puritan,' the term

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<sup>16</sup> See Anthony Bale's *The Jew in the Medieval Book*, Sheila Delany's collection *Chaucer and the Jews*, and James Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews*.

original's usage suggests a larger body of non-conformists in early modern England. While both types of Puritans—proper and generic—appeared on the early modern stage, their far-reaching range of heretical beliefs and their complex conglomeration of social markers situate them in a larger context, beyond the more specific markers of previous heretics. However, their mere stage presence, as non-conformists, provides a basis for more specific stage heretics.

In the Chester cycle, the seedlings of non-conformist witchcraft can be found in Antichrist's faux miracles, including his own resurrection. Even in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jews' disbelief in the "magic" of the Real Presence is combated with the play's various miracles of the Host. Both Antichrist and the Jews in the Croxton *Play* also draw on characterizations of Jews as heretics. The heretical beliefs of Catholics and witches also grace the early modern stage in the vices of John Bale's *Three Laws*, each of whom represents a contemporary Catholic figure and one of whom is an actual witch. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* also famously blends Catholicism with witchcraft, inciting references to Babylon and Antichrist, while Falstaff's Lollard-based parody echoes many Puritan sentiments.

Like 'heresy,' 'parody' can elude definition. The *OED* defines it as "A literary composition modeled on and imitating another work, *esp.* a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect." It gives the first usage as a noun in 1607 and as a verb in 1733.

However, though the word may be anachronistic for medieval and some early modern texts, the concept is not.

Evil or transgressive language exists in nearly all extant medieval plays, and modern scholarship has often lumped all transgressive language, including parody, together in its analyses. However, not all transgressive language is parodic, and in each text discussed in this study, the text's parody is clearer when compared to the transgressive but not parodic language of other plays similar in time and genre. For instance, *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Wisdom* both employ transgressive language for their vice characters; however, their language differs dramatically from the parody found in *Mankind*. Similarly, the genre of Biblical plays abounds with transgressive language, but their use of parody is quite limited. Although Herod and Pharaoh transgress and signify their evilness, they do not parody Biblical orthodoxy. This feature is reserved particularly for Antichrist in the Chester cycle. Likewise, the parody evident in Bale's *Three Laws* (and its less parodic companion *King Johan*) stands in stark opposition to the scatological language of contemporary characters, like Mery Report in John Heywood's *Play of the Wether*. These opposing models of language also bleed into early modern drama. Falstaff's parody counterposes his rebellious company's transgressive but never parodic language, just as Faustus's parody pervades the play while Lucifer and the Bad Angel merely tempt the scholar with dumb shows and thoughts of despair.

Like heresy, parody also interrogates the relationship between words and meaning—parodic language takes signifiers out of their original contexts, causing them to change significations. Thus, parody inherently disrupts the univocity of

words and meaning by demonstrating that all words and all meaning are subject to the contexts within which they are placed.

Based on the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and C. L. Barber, some modern scholarship has teased out parody to investigate its relationship to and descendance from the carnival and festival traditions respectively. Bakhtin addresses the relationship of the word to its signification specifically in "Discourse in the Novel" with his discussion of heteroglossia, noting that "the word lives . . . on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context" (284); in the case of parody, the alien context is always the licensed original context, without which the parody would not be possible. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin categorizes parody as one of the three aspects of folk culture that demonstrates the "expression of the popular carnival spirit" (13). He catalogues instances of medieval parody, particularly within the *parodia sacra* or "sacred folly" and "feast of fools" traditions. Barber, in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, investigates instances of parody within the native English festival traditions, such as the Lord of Misrule celebrations during the Christmas season, which sometimes included a parody of religious offices like a funeral sermon or a Mass (46-50).

While staged heretics certainly possess some of the features associated with both modes, they also differ from these characterizations as necessitated by their religious context. The carnival and festive atmospheres and participants described by Bakhtin and Barber are class-based, and most importantly, they do not segregate based on religious difference; in fact, they necessitate inclusiveness. However, in each of the texts examined below, the parodic figures are clearly religious heretics,

and in each case, their clear parody of orthodox Biblical language and doctrine places them outside the accepted social sphere. The source of the plays' parody certainly may originate from these traditions, but the plays' use of parody to characterize specific heretics moves beyond the more general, class-based evocations of the festival and carnival modes. Moreover, there is no reason to polarize these approaches—forcing the texts' parodies to be one or the other—but the characters can signify on multiple levels. Idolatry can easily be a Catholic priest *and* a grotesque; Falstaff can be a historical Lollard *and* a Lord of Misrule.

Clearly, the use of Biblical parody in medieval and early modern drama is linked with staged heretics and forms one marker of the characters' heterodoxy. However, each staged heretic also draws on some secondary heretical markers, beyond his transgressive language and beliefs. These markers include heavy alliteration, a connection with Jews or Judaism, references to Antichrist and Babylon, and lastly, an association with witchcraft. The alliterative boasts of the Biblical plays' villains become a signature of some staged heretics, like Antichrist, Mischief in *Mankind*, and Infidelity in *Three Laws*, as they combine their parodic, heterodox language with the easily recognizable language of villainy. Moreover, the Biblical plays' more general casting of Jews as villains spills over into specific links between staged heretics and Jews or Judaism, such as Antichrist as a king of the Jews, the Jewish protagonists of the Croxton *Play*, the Jewish-Catholic elision in *Three Laws*, and the cabalistic overtones of *Faustus*. This intersection is not particularly surprising, since Judaism represented a consistent (if absent) heresy in England, despite the shifts in Christian beliefs. Staged heretics' association with

Antichrist and Babylon are obviously more frequent after the Reformation; however, as scholars like Richard K. Emmerson, Bernard McGinn, and John Parker have demonstrated, the Antichrist and Babylon traditions extend well back into the medieval period, and medieval staged heretics either are or are characterized as Antichrists well before the religious shifts of the sixteenth century. Lastly, the evocation of heresy as witchcraft ties together several of these strands, such as Judaism and the Antichrist traditions, both of which are heavily linked with the practice of magic. Again, though Catholicism would eventually be viewed as witchcraft after the Reformation, the connection between heresy and witchcraft existed in medieval texts as well, such as Antichrist's fake miracles and the Jews' dismissal of the consecration as magic in the Croxton *Play*. This association blossoms in early modern stage heretics, particularly in Bale's vices and, most famously, in Marlowe's *Faustus*. All of these secondary markers reinforce the primary marker of a heretic—parodic Biblical language. Many of the heretics use alliteration in their parodies, and contemporary anti-Semitic texts depicted Jews as perverters of the Word, like parody itself; likewise, the Antichrist, Babylon, and witchcraft traditions all stemmed from the misinterpretation and misapplication of the Biblical Word, a distortion Biblical parody also necessitates.

Without orthodoxy, there is no heresy, and without the earnest, there is no parody—"the license depends utterly on what it mocks" (Barber 214). Paul confirms this antibiosis between the two when he casts heresy as the antiexample by which the orthodox are known: "For there must be also heresies: that they also, who are



approved, may be made manifest among you” (1 Corinthians 11.19 DRV). Thus, both heresy and parody become forbidden fruits, dependent on the knowledge of good to gain the knowledge of evil. They inherently rely on their orthodox counterparts for their own existence, and the nexus for both heresy and Biblical parody is the Word itself. The Word as incarnate Host breeds doctrinal transgression while the Word as word breeds linguistic transgression. Given that both heresy and parody necessitate symbiotic relationships with their orthodox others, it is not surprising that they intersect consistently in the heavily religious drama of medieval and early modern England. These intersections across the medieval-early modern and Catholic-Protestant divide demonstrate a consistent tethering of parodic language with heretical belief and point to a clear dramatic history of staged heretics.

A handful of recent scholars have devoted ink to the various intersections between religion and language on the medieval-early modern stage. Dillon analyzes the uses of foreign languages, primarily Latin, on stage through their historical contexts, beginning with the rise of Lollardy and spanning until well after the Protestant Reformation. She examines the role of Latin in the medieval compilations of the Towneley plays, N-Town plays, and *Mankind*, and then traces its development in the early modern period, concurrent with the Reformation, in the works of Bale, Kyd, and Shakespeare. However, Dillon focuses on all uses of foreign languages in the plays she examines, devoting only some attention to parody in her chapter on *Mankind*. Lynn Forest-Hill’s work *Transgressive Language in Medieval English Drama* also addresses language on the medieval and early modern stage; however, her study almost completely ignores parody and focuses rather on slander, insults,

oaths, and bawdiness. She catalogues and examines the use of transgressive language in the mystery plays, the Macro plays, and three early modern moralities *Magnyfycence*, *The Play of the Wether*, and *King Johan*. Her research asserts that transgressive language is put to a variety of uses, from a signal of a character's morality to an unstable sign provoking attention to motivation, yet her analyses represent local rather than global trends in the drama. She fails to integrate particular plays' transgressive uses of language into a larger narrative about transgressive language on the medieval and early modern stage, a larger narrative within which parody is central.

Aside from direct studies of language on the medieval and early modern stage, some scholars have traced tangential elements, like the Eucharist, devils, and the Antichrist. These examinations inform my treatment of staged heretics because all are connected to language, as either users or abusers. Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher's essay "The Wound in the Wall" explores medieval tensions between orthodox doctrine on the Real Presence and artistic representations of the Host, which inherently interrogate the relationship between what was truly present and what was seen. Greenblatt and Gallagher focus their analysis on depictions that not only involve the Host but also Host miracles and Jews, an iconic history of which the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is part.

John D. Cox's *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama 1350-1642* establishes a model of traditional dramatic functions persisting across the medieval-early modern and even Catholic-Protestant divide and argues that stage devils, both medieval and early modern, disrupt sacral communities; however, he casts these

disruptions in terms of social class rather than religious affiliation, with medieval devils seen as upper class and early modern devils as lower. This reading disregards the religious context of staged devils, namely a context fraught with (r)evolving heresies. John Parker's more recent *The Aesthetics of Antichrist* follows Cox's model, positing that early modern secular drama, particularly the heroes of Marlowe's drama, stems from the Christian concepts surrounding the Antichrist as both a religious and dramatic figure. According to Parker, as the presence of God-figures on stage waned in the early modern period, the aesthetics of the Antichrist image filled that void. His discussion of Antichrist elements in *Mankind*, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, and *Doctor Faustus* provides supplemental material for the broader set of staged heretics on the medieval and early modern stage.

This project will examine the intersections of parodic language and staged heretics in six dramatic texts, extending from the medieval Biblical and morality genres to Shakespeare's and Marlowe's Elizabethan stage. Chapter two will examine the Biblical play "Antichrist" from the Chester Cycle; chapters three and four will explore the plays *Mankind* and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* respectively; chapter five will analyze Bale's *Three Laws*; chapter six will discuss Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, while chapter seven will address Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*. Each text individually characterizes and addresses its heretics and the language they employ; however, each also contributes and develops the larger tradition of staged heretics.

My second chapter analyzes the religious and linguistic heterodoxies found in the titular character of the Chester cycle “Antichrist” play. The play begins by depicting Antichrist’s theological and verbal dissents as eerily similar to orthodox models offered by Enoch, Elijah, and Christ, a framework that forces the audience to depend on the *context* of the heretic’s words and deeds, rather than the words and deeds themselves, to interpret meaning. I argue that within the play, this orthodox context of interpretation hinges on the miraculous power of the Host, the primary point that contemporary Lollards denied. Within the play, the Host signifies the religious belief in the Real Presence as well as appropriately contextualized interpretation of the Word. Ultimately, the play demonstrates that belief in the power of the Host provides the necessary interpretative scheme to convert one’s doctrine as well as one’s language.

My third chapter examines the complex depictions of authoritative and dissenting language use in the morality play *Mankind* within its religiously-charged East Anglian context. Through Kathleen Ashley’s lens of active and idle language, I analyze the play’s construction of these orthodox and heterodox registers of language and trace how the moral fall and ascent of its protagonist Mankind correlates with his transition from one verbal register to the other. I also argue that through the deconstructive parody of its heretical vices, *Mankind* challenges the traditional coding of Latin as the language of authority and truth, and this disruption of language morality ultimately establishes the speaker’s intent as the litmus test for vice and virtue.

In my fourth chapter, I address the intersection of heresy and parody in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. The play's highly theatrical depiction of Host miracles appears to both enforce and undermine its emphatic endorsement of the Real Presence. I argue that the play ameliorates this tension through the privileging of words over deeds by aligning the transformative power of the consecratory words with the transformative power of believers' confessions at conversion, wherein both enact a transubstantiation and make manifest the Real Presence of Christ. Thus, language serves as the vehicle for the heretics' dissent (and descent) but also for their reconciliation. Furthermore, in the fraught religious landscape of fifteenth-century England, both transubstantiation and conversion were contingent upon one another—one must believe in transubstantiation to be a convert while only those converted believe in (and then partake in) transubstantiation. I contend that the Croxton *Play* establishes this symbiotic relationship as essential to bringing heretics back into the fold.

My fifth chapter investigates John Bale's early modern morality play *Three Laws*, which relies on the prior, medieval association of heretics as employers of verbal parody but reshapes this tradition as Protestant, not Catholic, drama. Through the dichotomy of the letter and the spirit, Bale characterizes his Catholic vices as legalistic adherents to the Word and his Protestant heroes as spiritually-enlightened believers. I assert that the former's parody of Biblical passages, like their heretical antecedents, disrupts the assumed univocity between language and meaning by demonstrating that both are context-dependent. I then argue that Bale uses this tenet to characterize the Catholic-Protestant debate as a whole—both rely

on the same Word, but each interprets it within different contexts and thus produces different meanings of the Word. The virtues and vices within *Three Laws* illustrate the Reformation as a reformation of those contexts.

Chapter six of the project examines intersections of heresy and parody in Shakespeare's Falstaff. Using Alice Lyle Scoufos's reading of Falstaff as, in part, a satire of the Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle, I argue that Falstaff appropriates the parodic registers of previous stage heretics into a destabilizing religious and social force that is ultimately to be rejected. In *2 Henry IV*, the Chief Justice accuses Falstaff of "wrenching the true cause the false way" (2.1.113), and this notion moralizes Falstaff's theological and verbal heterodoxies. The play suggests that both the "true cause" and the true "way" are necessary for religious and social order. Moreover, as Falstaff's plurality and ambivalent reception suggests, meaning ultimately resides not in the speaker but in the hearer, not in the character but in the audience.

My seventh and final chapter explores Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. The text is obsessed with variations of *solvo*, Latin for 'to loosen, untie, or release'; however, one form of the word is conspicuously absent: In *Faustus*, there is no 'absolution.' Neither are there absolutes. I argue that Faustus's heresy is ultimately his indecision, his faith *and* his disbelief. This contradictory state complicates any categorizations of Faustus as a 'believer' or 'heretic' and instead removes him from the orthodoxy-versus-heresy system entirely. I also contend that Faustus's language use reflects this spiritual state, as he employs both the orthodox language of the Church and the parodic language of previous stage heretics. The spectrum of language use depicted in the preceding plays collapses into Faustus's idiolect.

My analysis of these six primary texts ultimately finds that the univocity between language and meaning is a specious construction that medieval and early modern dramatic texts often questioned. As these texts demonstrate, medieval and early modern stage heretics disrupted the orthodox Word in both word and deed. Thus, their forbidden fruit of parodic language invite their temptees to bite on boldly on heresy. The plays' protagonists are not immune to such linguistic and doctrinal infection, and the aforementioned plays document such encounters as heresy runs viral on the medieval and early modern stage.

## CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION: CHESTER'S "ANTICHRIST"

The figure of Antichrist looms large in late medieval texts, making an appearance in all of the art forms of the period, including drama. His conspicuous shape-shifting and his pervasive presence make him a repository for a variety of deviances, and this flexible signification accommodates the didactic needs of each art form. Within the period, Antichrist is depicted as part-devil, part-beast, part-serpent, a tyrant, pope, false prophet, Jew, and Babylonian; not surprisingly, in his only extant appearance in medieval English drama, he is also a heretic.

As his name suggests, Antichrist's words and deeds are often counterposed with Christ's to delineate heterodox and orthodox faith. The Chester "Antichrist" play seamlessly blends both religious and linguistic heterodoxies in its titular antihero and opposes them to orthodox, clerical figures. Antichrist's heresy is developed through his parodic employment of Biblical language, the same register on which Christ draws. The play begins by depicting Antichrist's theological and verbal dissents as eerily similar to these orthodox models, forcing the audience to depend on the *context* of his words and deeds, rather than the words and deeds themselves, to interpret meaning. Within the play, this orthodox framework of interpretation largely hinges on the miraculous power of the Host, which signifies the religious orthodoxy of the Real Presence as well as appropriately-contextualized interpretation of the Word. Ultimately, the play demonstrates that belief in the



power of the Host provides the necessary interpretative scheme to convert one's faith as well as one's language. Moreover, the play speaks to the currency of coupling heresy and parody within other contemporary plays, such as the morality play *Mankind* and the miracle play, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, while dramatic descendants of Antichrist stretch through Bale's *Three Laws*, Shakespeare's Falstaff, and Marlowe's Faustus.

The scholarship on the Biblical plays has long discussed characterization through language; however, this research has overwhelmingly been focused on villain and tyrant figures and their use of bombastic alliterative lines. For example, in the Towneley "Conspiracy and Capture," Pilate opens the play with,

Peas, carles, I commaunde!  
Vnconand I call you;  
I say stynt and stande,  
Or foull myght befall you.  
Fro this burnyshyd brande,  
.....  
I am kyd, as men knawes,  
Leyf leder of lawes;  
Seniours, seke to my sawes,  
For bryssyng of youre bonys. (1-5, 10-13)

His heavy alliteration coupled with his violent threats immediately signal his antagonistic role, and his speeches are similar throughout the other plays in which he appears. Likewise, Herod has a similar speech coding in York:

King! In the devil's way, dogs, fie!  
Now I see well ye rage and rave.  
By any shimmering in the sky  
When should ye know or king or knave?  
Nay, I am king, and none but I;  
That shall ye ken, if that ye crave.  
And I am judge of all Jewry,  
To speak or spoil, to say or save. ("The Goldsmiths" 48-55)

Shakespeare, of course, made Herod's vociferousness infamous.<sup>17</sup> Articles by Lawrence Clopper, Garret Epp, and Jonathan Gil Harris address these generic, villainous characterizations, and the characters' signature alliterative boasts do resonate in contemporary and later literature.

However, they also form one of the stage markers for heretics specifically, and while these other, less generic antagonists also take the stage, little ink has been spilled on them or their language. Warren Edminster's *Preaching Fox: Festive Subversion in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* briefly connects some moments of subversion to Lollardy, but these are primarily thematic and ideological. Moreover, he only addresses parody tangentially, when appropriate to his reading of carnival and festive elements within the Towneley plays. Ruth Nisse, in *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England*, examines similar traits in the York cycle, positing that it "draw[s] on heterodox ideas about translation,

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<sup>17</sup> During Hamlet's advice to the players, he instructs them to not overact their lines because it "out-Herods Herod" (3.2.15).

interpretation, and secular authority over Scripture” from Lollardy (24). However, her study assumes Lollard sympathy and also ignores parody. Only Lauren Lepow’s *Enacting the Sacrament: Counter-Lollardy in the Towneley Cycle* closely analyzes the heretical religious context of the plays, but her analysis focuses entirely on the Towneley Cycle.

Surprisingly, a close reading of the religious context within which the Chester “Antichrist” play was originally performed and the Biblical parody employed by Antichrist himself is sorely lacking. Yet, his heresy and his parody dominate the stage, and he conspicuously fuses various secondary markers of stage heretics—alliterative language, a connection to Judaism, and magic—to demonstrate that words alone do not guarantee a univocity of meaning. Antichrist’s very presence forces the audience to interpret meaning contextually, a practice that the play encourages them to repeat outside the theatrical space as well, particularly in contentious theological matters, such as the Real Presence of the Host.

To say that the Chester cycle has complicated dating and manuscript traditions is an understatement. A whopping eight manuscripts survive that contain some or all of what modern scholars call the “Chester cycle,” which is itself a constructed myth of preferred texts and editorial choices. The manuscript tradition offers five complete versions of the cycle, with four fairly similar manuscripts (called the Group) and a fifth quite distinct, with some scenes varying widely from the Group, others being absent entirely, and a conflation of two Passion plays into a

single one.<sup>18</sup> Three other manuscripts contain individual or partial plays, including, most significantly, the Peniarth, which documents the earliest version of “Antichrist.” Moreover, a host of secondary documentation survives, further complicating the record by often suggesting significant differences from the extant manuscript tradition, such as the number, order, and content of the plays performed. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills astutely propose that the extant primary and secondary texts represent both evidence of an evolving cycle and residue of the exemplar system, in which plays were variously copied out, revised, moved, and even provided with alternative readings. Thus, what scholars call the “Chester cycle” is not a fixed corpus of plays but rather a “cycle of cycles” (Lumiansky and Mills 86).

Mills notes that the Chester plays, in whatever form, were originally performed as part of Corpus Christi Day, when the Church celebrated the Real Presence and “affirmed the authority of the Church rooted in the priestly power to effect transubstantiation” (xii). However, evidence from the sixteenth century demonstrates that, at some point, the plays were moved and performed during Whitsun week (Mills xiv).

The first documented historical reference to a Corpus Christi play in Chester dates to 1422; however, the reference does not delineate what pageants were played (Mills xiii). The “Antichrist” play survives in the Peniarth manuscript, usually dated to the end of the fifteenth century, and in the five more complete extant manuscripts that date to the late sixteenth century (*Chester Mystery Cycle* 1.ix-xxvii).

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<sup>18</sup> See *The Chester Mystery Cycle* (1.xxviii).

Lumiansky and Mills document the earliest reference to the “Antichrist” play and its guild in 1467 – 68 (175).<sup>19</sup>

As Richard Emmerson demonstrates in his article “Contextualizing Performance,” Chester’s “Antichrist”’s “reception was heavily implicated by political and religious developments” (97). Any interpretation of the play must rely on its historical context to provide a framework for discussions of its reception and meaning, particularly when the long performance history of the Chester cycle spanned the various religious sea changes in England, making any unified examination of either problematic. In his article “Contextualizing Performance: The Reception of the Chester *Antichrist*,” Emmerson provides three possible audience receptions to Chester’s “Antichrist” based on three distinct historical periods over which the play was performed: the early sixteenth century, pre-Reformation; the Henrician period of Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century; and the early Elizabethan settlement of the late sixteenth century. However, he ignores the earliest records of the play, dating to the late fifteenth century, concurrent with the spread of Lollardy in the north. This original context provides the foundation upon which the Chester cycle stages its heretical and parodic Antichrist.

The Chester cycle is unique among the English cycles in its inclusion of an Antichrist play. Technically, the cycle contains two: first, the prefatory play “Antichrist’s Prophets,” which is simply a catalogue of Biblical characters

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<sup>19</sup> The six extant versions of the play demonstrate, as Emmerson notes, that “the play’s text was basically fixed, at least through the time when the Exemplar was copied” (“Contextualizing Performance” 97). Moreover, as adamant Reformer Christopher Goodman’s objections to the 1572 performance indicate, even the Reformation production preserved the earlier, Catholic elements (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 148).

expounding prophecies regarding Antichrist; and second, the “Antichrist” play itself, which enacts his actual deceptions until he is defeated by the archangel Michael. The two plays are situated between “Pentecost” and “The Judgement,” indicating their protagonist’s position in chronological limbo; Antichrist, like Judgment itself, can come anytime. These flexible bearings are particularly conducive to contemporary allusions and contextually-based readings. As the archangel Michael emphasizes to Antichrist, “nowe ys common this daye” (625).<sup>20</sup> In fact, the word ‘nowe’ is used fifty-one times within the text.

Much of the scholarship on the Chester “Antichrist” play focuses on its place within the Antichrist tradition, and the medieval and early modern Antichrist traditions have been well-documented by numerous scholars, foremost among them Emmerson and McGinn. More specifically, Parker traces the role of Antichrist in the corresponding dramatic tradition. In each of these studies, the Chester “Antichrist” play is briefly addressed; however, no author has undertaken an extended examination of Antichrist’s connection to the Lollard heresy nor his invocation of Biblical parody. The play’s connection to Lollardy is largely ignored and its more comical elements are written off as “the senseless giddiness of farce” (Travis 233). Yet, the farcical elements are in fact crucial to any characterization of Antichrist and are particularly important to Chester’s because of his connection to heresy and the parody that he employs.

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<sup>20</sup> All quotations taken from “Antichrist.” *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. 2 vols. Eds. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills. EETS. London: Oxford UP, 1974. Print.

The medieval Antichrist tradition connected the false prophet with Judaism and witchcraft, two threads that also characterize many stage heretics. As early as Hippolytus's writings, Antichrist was sometimes seen as the Messiah of the Jews, counterposing Christ, the real Messiah for Christians (Parker 2).<sup>21</sup> This tradition also held that Antichrist would be born Jewish and would be a leader of Jews (McGinn 199; Emerson *Antichrist* 79). However, as McGinn notes, the Great Schism led to a reappropriation of Antichrist mythology, shifting the focus to false Christians (and popes), and Wyclif uses these associations in his own attacks on papal power.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, by the fifteenth century, Antichrist had accumulated associations with both Judaism and the papacy. Moreover, Antichrist lore also held that he was trained in magic and sorcery, thus enabling him to perform the false miracles, including his own resurrection, necessary for his rise to power (McGinn 195). The Chester "Antichrist" play draws on these multiple threads in strategic ways—Chester's Antichrist is clearly characterized as Jewish, rather than Catholic, and it turns Wyclif's accusation of Antichristianity back onto the heresy itself, casting Antichrist as a Lollard figure. Then, the text explicitly connects this heresy with witchcraft.

Chester's "Antichrist" also straddles typical generic conventions, drawing on both the historical Biblical depictions of the Biblical plays and on the morality play structure, with two opposing powers alongside representative figures of humanity who progress from evil to good. While it follows other Biblical plays by using

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<sup>21</sup> Hippolytus was a Bishop of Rome in the third century.

<sup>22</sup> See Curtis V. Bostick for Lollard Antichrist and Apocalyptic imagery.

historical rather than abstract figures, like Enoch, Elijah, the kings, and the resurrected men, the play also follows the emblematic morality play structure: the kings and once-dead men are led astray by evil but brought to redemption through the virtuous figures. Ultimately, they are saved while the vicious Antichrist is carried “bodye and soule both in feare / and all goeth to the devyll” in Hell (651-652). This generic versatility, found within the already versatile Biblical plays genre, not only speaks to Antichrist’s multifaceted nature as both a historical and emblematic figure, but it also demonstrates the adaptability of stage heretics, as they also appear in contemporary morality and miracle plays and later early modern comedy and tragedy.

Despite the play’s dependence on religious theology, and its place within the doctrinally-saturated Corpus Christi tradition, only two scholars posit connections between the play and historical heretics. Emmerson suggests that the play’s allusions to “heresy” and “heretikes” are references to Henry VIII and Henrician reforms in the 1540s (“Contextualizing Performance 105-106), and Karen Sawyer Marsalek, in “Marvels and Counterfeits: False Resurrections in the Chester *Antichrist* and *Henry IV, Part 1*,” follows suit by suggesting that Antichrist’s accusation against Enoch and Elijah as Lollards is an earnest concession to a Reformation audience, while, at the same time, she admits that “such an incorporation of reformist ideas would unfortunately be undercut by Elias’ use of a miraculous host to destroy Antichrist’s illusions” (230). Both scholars entirely overlook the potential heretical referents from the play’s earliest records in the mid-fifteenth century—Lollards themselves.



However, the play itself makes its religious context—heretical and orthodox—quite clear. The bulk of the play encompasses a lengthy and rather tedious flyting match between Antichrist and Enoch and Elijah, who each in turn hurl insults, rebukes, and curses at one another for 220 lines. The core of their debate centers on the authenticity of their own claims about divinity—Antichrist’s insistence that he is Christ, and Enoch and Elijah’s denial of this claim. At the point in the play when this debate takes place, however, both sides are nearly equally matched in terms of evidence of their claims.<sup>23</sup> Antichrist has raised two dead men plus himself: three points to Antichrist. However, on the other side, only Enoch and Elijah have been “resurrected” thus far: a mere two points to the duo. Marsalek notes a verbal parallel between Christ’s raising of Lazarus in “The Blind Man and Lazarus” and Antichrist’s boast: Mary refers to Lazarus’s resurrection as evidence of Christ’s divinity, “By verey signe nowe men maye see / that thou arte Godes Sonne” (476-477), but Antichrist also uses this logic for his own resurrections,

That I am Christ and Christ wilbe  
by verey signe soone shall you see,  
for dead me through my postee  
shall ryse from death to liffe (77-80).

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<sup>23</sup> Theoretically, the audience could at first mistake Antichrist for Christ, who does return in the play immediately after “Antichrist,” in “The Judgement.” God even opens this play with a Latin quotation, much like Antichrist’s. The last line in “Antichrist’s Prophets”—“Hee comes! Soone you shall see!” (340)—contains an ambiguous pronoun, the antecedent of which could be either God or Antichrist, further developing the possibility of an audience’s misreading of the latter as the former. Within the “Antichrist” play itself, Antichrist’s heretical nature is not confirmed immediately.

If the audience is to “believe for the very works’ sake” (John 14.11 DRV), to believe the “verey signe,” then their sympathies are not firmly placed at the play’s midpoint, as the evidence weighs in favor of Antichrist, not Enoch and Elijah.

The text’s use of the word ‘heresy’ demonstrates this initial instability in audience response. The first two times the term is used, Antichrist employs it ironically. He first says, “I put you owt of heresy / to leeve me upon” (87-88), and later reiterates, “But I shall teach you curtesye, / your savyoure to knowe anonne in hye, / false theeves with your heresy” (377-379). The doctor, a counselor to Antichrist, echoes this characterization by referring to Enoch and Elijah as “yonder heretikes” (439). This initial coding casts Antichrist as orthodox and Enoch and Elijah as heterodox. The text also specifically addresses the Lollard heresy:

Antichrist remarks of Enoch and Elijah:

These lowlers, the would fayne me greeve  
and nothing one me the will leeve,  
but ever be readye me to repreeve  
and all the people of my lawe<sup>24</sup> (428-431)

Lumiansky and Mills gloss “lowlers” as ‘lollards’ and note that it “picks up the emphasis on heresy seen elsewhere in the play” (*Chester Mystery Cycle* 2.n.343 l.428). The term ‘heresy’ turns, however, at the precise point of the kings’ conversions. When the third king believes in the Host and repents, he exclaims, “A, nowe we knowe appertlye / wee have binne brought in heresy” (589-590), and the

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<sup>24</sup> The Peniarth manuscript, dating from the late fifteenth century, also has “lowlers.” See *The Chester Mystery Cycle* “Peniarth ‘Antichrist’” (428).

first king confirms that Antichrist “hast us lead in heresy” (599). The coding thus reverses, confirming Antichrist as the heretic indeed.

It is, of course, no surprise that Antichrist is a heretic. As McGinn notes, “Antichrist was often seen as a heretic, and a leader of heretics” (199). But the theological tie-breaker between the two camps turns on two specific points of orthodox doctrine: the Trinity and the Host. Both of these heresies support Antichrist’s characterization as a “lowler” heretic.

Notably, Antichrist’s theological dissent, not his name, identifies his heretical nature, for his heterodox views emerge mid-way through the play, but he remains unnamed until Michael calls him “Antichriste” in line 625.<sup>25</sup> The first chink in Antichrist’s theological armor comes in his denial of the Trinity. When Enoch refers to the Trinity in one of his insults, Antichrist inquires, “What ys the Trinitye for to saye?” (491). Elijah proffers an expectedly orthodox answer—

Three persons, as thou leeve may,  
in on godhead in feere—  
Father and Sonne, that ys noe naye,  
and the Holy Ghoost styrringe aye.  
That ys one God verey. (492-6)

Antichrist becomes outraged at the notion that even God has to share godhood with two other entities, exclaiming,

Owt on you, theeves! What sayen yee?

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<sup>25</sup> “Antichrist” contains a total of 722 lines, meaning that Antichrist remains verbally unnamed through roughly 90% of the play.

Wyll you have on God and three?  
Howe darre you so saye?  
Madmen, madmen! Therefore leeve on mee  
That am on god—so ys not hee! (498-502)

According to Hudson, discussions of the Trinity are “rare” and “obscure” in extant Lollard texts, but she does provide three examples of suspected Lollards who denied the orthodox Trinity. One finds the Son more important than the Father; another believed the Trinity was the Father, the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit; and a third denied the Son and Holy Spirit altogether (Hudson 384-5). However, she notes that “there is nothing in any of the surviving texts that could have given rise to any of these views, though it is possible to see how the first could have been deduced from medieval preaching, orthodox as much as heretical” (385).

More persuasive is Antichrist’s interaction with the Host. Within the play, the power imbued in the Host singlehandedly overcomes the kings’ and the dead men’s theological errors by serving as the impetus for their conversions. In an Antichrist play, one might expect Christ himself to defeat Antichrist, for symmetry if nothing else. Yet, the play does not stage a head-on battle between the two. Instead, Antichrist encounters Christ in the Host, an encounter obviously appropriate for the cycle’s Corpus Christi origins and specifically accessible to its audience, who themselves can defeat Antichrist (and Lollardy) through believing in the Real Presence. Emerson notes that the raising of the Host does not appear in other Antichrist narratives, remarking that “the scene, probably added to underscore the cycle’s celebration of Corpus Christi, reinforces orthodox nature of Chester’s

*Antichrist*” (“Contextualizing Performance” 99). Not only does it underscore the orthodoxy of the play’s righteous figures, but it also highlights the heretical, and in this case Lollard, nature of Antichrist.

The play offers clear indications of Antichrist’s heresy—a denial of the Real Presence, charges of heresy, and, most importantly, an implicit accusation as a “lowler” (428), and the consecration scene demarcates these orthodox-heterodox lines quite clearly. Elijah desires to test the authenticity of the resurrections of the dead men by having them partake of the Mass:

Yf thou bee so micle of might  
to make them eate and drynke,  
for verey God we will thee know  
such a signe yf thou wylt shewe” (547-550)

As Marsalek points out, this test relies on the belief that a “ghooste to eate hath no powere” (“Emmaus” 198). The Host becomes the litmus test for orthodoxy.

During one of Antichrist’s insults to Enoch and Elijah, he berates their attire, remarking, “Eychen man may see you be so / all by your araye, / muffled in mantelles. Non such I knowe” (388-390). Antichrist’s description of the two “muffled in mantelles” indicates that both men are likely dressed as priests. Elijah emphasizes this role, particularly his consecratory abilities, against those of Antichrist, who has no power to transform the bread into the Host:

Have here breadd both too.  
But I must blesse yt or yt goe,  
that the fyend, mankyndes foe,

on hit have no power. (565-568)

Elijah's role as priest is solidified when he then consecrates the Sacrament:

This bread I blesse with my hand

in Jesus name, I understand,

.....

In nomine Patris—that all hath wrought—

et Filii virginis—that deare us bought—

et Spiritus Sancti—ys all my thought—

on God and persons three. (569-570, 573-576)

The bread is clearly the Host, as it has a “prynt . . . uppon hit” (579), and the text implies that Elijah raises it, as the two dead men both exclaim that “to looke on hit I am not light” (578, 581).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, this moment of consecration is one of Reformer Christopher Goodman's objections to the Catholic elements within the cycle; he specifically disapproves of the “Antichrist” play's “Elias blessing bread with the sign of the Cross” (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 148). But, at the mere sight of the Host, the two dead men whom Antichrist has just raised and the four kings are converted. The two dead men express their fear of the Host, echoing each other that the bread “puttes me to great feere” and “great deare” (580, 584). The kings also demonstrate that they have been “converte[d] to him” (587) when they each in turn renounce Antichrist as a heretic (590, 599) and vow to live “for Jesus sake” (611). Elijah's conspicuous raising of the Host, the third and ultimate “resurrection” for their party, wins over the formerly dead men, the kings, and presumably the

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<sup>26</sup> For the consecration liturgy, see the *Sarum Missal*.

audience, to righteousness. The Real Presence of the Host trumps Antichrist's faux resurrections. Game and match.

Chester's "Antichrist" dramatically confirms the Real Presence and its power by making the Eucharist the vehicle of salvation for the recently resurrected men. The Host's power is *real*, unlike Antichrist's illusionary magic show. This real, saving power defines orthodoxy, whereas the false appearances of Antichrist become elided with the false appearances of Lollardy—things are not as they seem. A resurrection is not always a resurrection, and more importantly, bread is not always bread.

To differentiate between these appearances and reality, the Chester "Antichrist" play requires its audience to interpret based on context, such as counterposing Antichrist's interaction with the Host with Enoch and Elijah's. The text also necessitates such reading regarding Antichrist's Biblical parody.

Unsurprisingly, Antichrist's heresy is coupled with, and developed by, his parody. Since his character is an inversion of Christ, his words are naturally inverted as well, as he is heterodox in both word and deed. Tellingly, Antichrist quotes Biblical passages to support his own claims to divinity, a practice Christ uses often in the New Testament. Thus, the Biblical text in and of itself is not exempt from abuse, and in an inappropriate context—like in support of Antichrist's claims to divinity—they can signify evil rather than good. This misappropriation is the nature of Antichrist's parody.

Scripture addresses this possibility of abuse in Satan's temptation of Christ in the desert. In the narrative, Satan models a similar use of Biblical language—he

invokes Biblical passages to encourage Christ to break his fast, test the angels' protection of him, and rule over earthly kingdoms. In each temptation, Christ replies with other Biblical passages, appropriately contextualized, defeating Satan's blasphemous application of the Word with a more faithful reading.<sup>27</sup>

Inherent in the discussion of Antichrist's parody is language choice. Antichrist's quotations of Latin Scripture passages simultaneously rely on and invert Latin's assumed authority, forcing meaning to be derived not simply from the use of Latin itself but from the context in which the quotations are spoken. This subversion is most evident in his opening Latin lines, which are uncontextualized by Antichrist's actions (he has yet to perform any) and more suggestive of God or Christ given their previous Latin introductions in preceding plays. Moreover, "Antichrist's Prophets," the play immediately prior, concludes with the ambiguous line "Hee comes! Soone you shall see!" (340), with the pronoun referring to either God or Antichrist as its antecedent. Thus, without corroborating evidence of the speaker's morality, Antichrist's Latin passages initially signify the virtue and authority attached to language. Emerson finds this "dramatic control of the spiritual and authoritative language genuinely frightening" ("Englysch Laten" 326). One might even say Satanic: Antichrist parallels Satan's words in desert, which appear in Latin in the Vulgate, just like Christ's and their Old Testament antecedents. Only the context of the quotations demarcates Satan as evil, and only later in the play is Antichrist's heretical nature confirmed.

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<sup>27</sup> See Matthew 4.1-11.



Antichrist opens the play by announcing his presence in Latin, which forges an immediate parallel between him and the other previous characters who begin a play with a Latin self-identification: God introduces “Lucifer,” “Adam and Cain,” and “The Judgement” with “Ego sum alpha et omega,” while Jesus begins with, “Ego sum lux mundi. Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris sed habebit lumen vitae” in “The Blind Man and Lazarus” and “Pax vobis; ego sum; nolite timere” in “Ascension.” The prophet Ezechiel also opens a play with Latin: “Facta est super me manus domini et eduxit me spiritus domini, et demisit me in medio campi qui erat plenus ossibus, et [circumduxit] me per ea in giro” (“Antichrist’s Prophets”). However, the longest Latin introduction in the entire cycle (three times the length of God’s in fact<sup>28</sup>) belongs to Antichrist:

De celso throno poli, pollens clarior sole,  
age vos monstrare [descendi], vos judicare,  
Reges et principes sunt subditi sub me viventes.  
Sitis sapientes vos, semper in me credentes  
et faciam flentes gaudere atque dolentes.  
Sic omnes gentes gaudebunt in me sperantes.  
Descendi praesens rex pius et perlustrator,  
Princeps aeternus vocor, Christus, vester salvator. (1-8)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Martin William Walsh notes this proportion (17).

<sup>29</sup> “From the high throne of the heavens, shining brighter than the sun, I have come down to make you see, to judge you. Living kings and rulers are put down beneath me. Be wise, believing in me always, and I shall make those who weep and grieve rejoice. Thus all nations placing hope in me shall rejoice. I have come down in your sight as a benevolent king and for your scrutiny; I am called ‘Eternal Prince, Christ, your Savior.’ Translation Mills’s (*Chester* 390).

To further the parallels between himself and the cycle's divine figures, Antichrist then invokes four Biblical passages as evidence to support his claims to divinity, precisely as Christ does in the Gospels and as numerous virtuous figures do in the cycle.<sup>30</sup> He boldly announces that "I shall fulfill Whollye Wrytte" (113), just as Christ claims he came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5.17). First, he exclaims, "De me dicitur Ezechielis tricesimo sexto: 'Tollam vos de gentibus et congregabo vos de universis terris, et reducam vos in terram vestram'" (24+).<sup>31</sup> Antichrist parodies the traditional, Biblical referents of 'people' and 'land': he *will* take people from "among the heathen" into their own land, but given Antichrist's heretical nature, those people are the damned and their land is Hell. Antichrist perverts the context of the quotation to redirect its meaning.

Antichrist's justifications continue, two stanzas later, with "De me enim dicitur in psalmo: 'Adorabo ad templum sanctum tuum in timore tuo'" (40+).<sup>32</sup> The context of this passage within the whole Psalm highlights its irony, as the verses surrounding Antichrist's quotation contrast the faithful with the liar:

Neither shall the wicked dwell near thee: nor shall the unjust abide  
before thy eyes. Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity: Thou wilt  
destroy all that speak a lie. The bloody and the deceitful man the Lord

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<sup>30</sup> See for instance Jesus in "The Blind Man and Lazarus" (35+, 356+) and the "Harrowing of Hell" (152+), and all the prophets in "Antichrist's Prophets."

<sup>31</sup> "Of me it is said in the thirty-sixth chapter of Ezechie: 'For I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.'" Translation Mills's (390). See Ezechie 36.24.

<sup>32</sup> "About me it is said in a psalm: 'In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.'" Translation Mills's (391). See Psalm 5.8.

will abhor. But as for me in the multitude of thy mercy, I will come into thy house; I will worship towards thy holy temple, in thy fear. Conduct me, O Lord, in thy justice: because of my enemies, direct my way in thy sight. For there is no truth in their mouth; their heart is vain. (Psalm 5.6-10 DRV)

This passage also foreshadows Antichrist's inverted ascension to the throne later in the play (624+), attempting to misdirect the faithful's worship at God's temple to his own.

Antichrist continues his parodic campaign as Christ with two other Biblical supports: "Dabit eis potestatem, et multis terram dividet gratuito.' Danielis decimo tertio" (56+)<sup>33</sup> and "Expecta me in die resurrectionis meae in futurum quia iudicium ut congregem gentes et colligam regna.' Sophoni 3"(120+).<sup>34</sup> The passage from Daniel alludes to an idolatrous king, and the verse in context underscores Antichrist's ironic use:

And the king shall do according to his will, and he shall be lifted up, and shall magnify himself against every god: and he shall speak great things against the God of gods, and shall prosper, till the wrath be accomplished. For the determination is made. And he shall make no account of the God of his fathers: and he shall follow the lust of women, and he shall not regard any gods: for he shall rise up against

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<sup>33</sup> "He shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain,' the thirteenth chapter of Daniel." Translation Mills's (392). See Daniel 11.39.

<sup>34</sup> "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms,' Zephaniah 3." Translation Mills's (394). See Zephaniah 3.8.

all things. But he shall worship the god Maozim in his place: and a god whom his fathers knew not, he shall worship with gold, and silver, and precious stones, and things of great price. And he shall do this to fortify Maozim with a strange god, whom he hath acknowledged, and he shall increase glory and shall give them power over many, and shall divide the land gratis. (Daniel 13.36-39 DRV)

The partial quotation from Zephaniah functions similarly, given the context of the verse:

I have destroyed the nations, and their towers are beaten down: I have made their ways desert, so that there is none that passeth by: their cities are desolate, there is not a man remaining, nor any inhabitant. I said: Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive correction: and her dwelling shall not perish, for all things wherein I have visited her: but they rose early and corrupted all their thoughts. Wherefore expect me, saith the Lord, in the day of my resurrection that is to come, for my judgment is to assemble the Gentiles, and to gather the kingdoms: and to pour upon them my indignation, all my fierce anger: for with the fire of my jealousy shall all the earth be devoured. (Zephaniah 3.6-8 DRV)

Lastly, Antichrist alludes to references of himself “in prophecye / of Moyses, Davyd, and Esaye. / I am hee the call messye, / forbyar of Israell” (17-20). Mills suggests specific passages from Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah that mention the Messiah, but he also observes that “all. . . also contain warnings against false prophets,

lending irony to the allusions” (*Chester* n.390 ll.17-18). Finally, Antichrist bequeaths his spirit to the kings, pronouncing in Latin, “Dabo vobis cor novum et spiritum novum in medio vestri” (196+).<sup>35</sup> Again, the parody is clear: the new heart and new spirit are ones of damnation, not salvation.

Like Christ in the desert, the righteous figures of the play fight back with properly contextualized Latin. “Antichrist” does provide two instances of orthodox uses of Latin, although both are liturgical rather than Biblical passages, reinforcing the ecclesiastical uses of Latin within the Church. When Elijah consecrates the Host, he speaks a blessing over it, “In nomine Patris. . . et Filii virginis . . . et Spiritus Sancti” (573, 574, 575). Notably, this first use of authorized Latin comes immediately after Antichrist’s last use of Latin parody. After the consecration of the Host and subsequent conversion of Antichrist’s former followers, Antichrist ceases his parodic employment of the language, leaving its use to the orthodox figures instead. At the play’s conclusion, when the Angel leads the resurrected Enoch, Elijah, and Michael off-stage, the stage directions indicate that he sings “Gaudete justi in Domino” (722+ SD),<sup>36</sup> providing the play’s second and last use of liturgical Latin. Mills notes that “of the possible liturgical sources, the Communion of the Mass of Two or More Martyrs has been strongly proposed” (*Chester* n. 413 l. 728+SD). These Latin uses by righteous characters highlight how language coupled with appropriate context produces virtuous meaning. The Latin consecration of the Host leads to the Real Presence and the salvation of the two dead men and four kings who are

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<sup>35</sup> “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” Translation Mills’s (396). See Ezechiel 36.26.

<sup>36</sup> “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.” Translation Mill’s (413). See Psalm 32.1.

converted by its power, while the liturgical song at the play's conclusion accompanies Enoch, Elijah, and Michael's ascensions back into heaven, sharply contrasted with Antichrist's prior descent into Hell.

The play's use of Latin raises questions concerning audience. As Janette Dillon cautions, "It is perhaps more helpful to think of plays as having access to a plurality of languages and then to explore how particular plays manipulate the boundary between different languages within what we know of their potential audiences" (31). For the laity, who were not fluent in Latin, Antichrist's opening lines and expository use of Latin passages evoked contradictory interpretations—at first, the assumed authority of such quotations but then the recognized inversion of that authority by Antichrist himself. If Antichrist's morality is unclear at his initial entrance, then the disruption to Latin's authority is all the more powerful when his falseness is finally revealed. The audience, like the kings and resurrected men within the play, would have been fooled by Antichrist, taken in by his parody, but then ultimately saved by the Host—the characters by Elijah's consecration and the audience by the procession of the Host that accompanied the plays' performances for Corpus Christi.

Those fluent in Latin among the audience would have been more attuned to Antichrist's subtle mishandling of the Biblical passages and the quotations' consistent, though elided, warnings against false prophets and liars. Thus, they also might have caught on earlier to Antichrist's speciousness than the largely illiterate laity, affording not one but two possible moments of revelation within the text. Antichrist explicitly acknowledges this division within the audience. He prefaces one

of his Latin quotations with “I shall rehearse here readelye / that clarkes shall understand” (119-120). What was visceral for the laity was intellectual for the clergy.

Antichrist is necessarily an inverted Christ figure, with his Biblical parody as his most obvious inversion. Biographically, Antichrist presents what Emerson calls a “sham *imitatio Christi*” (“Nowe Ys Common” 90): he promises that he will die (121), be laid in a tomb (125-126, 136-137), be raised again (123, 129), and then send his spirit out to his people (131). Moreover, he was begotten in “cleane whooredome” (668). However, his parody of Scriptural passages develops this inversion of orthodoxy more fully, and the Chester play characterizes this disruption as an inverted tree. As Antichrist proclaims in his opening speech,

Nowe wyl I turne, all through my might,  
Trees downe, the rootes upright—  
That ys marveyle to your sight—  
And fruyt groinge upon. (81-84)

This image of uprooting a tree so that the roots grow the fruit provides a metaphor for the parodic type of Biblical interpretation Antichrist engages in—he turns the passages upside down and then forces them to bear fruit.<sup>37</sup> The serpent himself did this with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—he uprooted the commandment to not eat thereof by changing its context from a command for the

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<sup>37</sup> During the Reformation, Tyndale uses this image to criticize the faulty logic of keeping the Scriptures in Latin: “If I must first believe the doctor, then is the doctor first true, and the truth of the scripture dependeth of his truth; and so the truth of God springeth of the truth of man. Thus antichrist turneth the roots of the trees upward” (qtd. in Dillon *Language and Stage* 75).

preservation of life to a prohibition against it. Satan did likewise in the desert to tempt Christ. Thus, the word of God and the word of the tempter (serpent, Satan, or Antichrist) are one and the same; only the context, inverted or upright, determines meaning.

This contextual dependency also manifests in Antichrist's secondary heretical markers. As Leslie Howard Martin, in "Comic Eschatology in the Coming of Antichrist," observes, the play demonstrates "an assured sensitivity to contrast in language" (171), with Antichrist relying on "liberal alliteration" (171) during his most vociferous speeches. Martin admits that the prophets occasionally use alliteration, but he marks a clear distinction between Antichrist's "rant[s]" and the "controlled, elevated speeches" of the righteous characters (172), both of which are coded in part by context. For example, Antichrist digresses into heavy alliteration when most frustrated by Elijah and Enoch's pestering:

O you ypocrytes that so cryne!  
Loselles, lardans! Lowdlye you lyne!  
To spill my lawes you aspine.  
That speeche ys good to spare.  
You that my true fayth defyne  
and needeles [my folke] devyne,  
from hence hastelye; but you hence hyne,  
to you comes sorrowe and care. (357-364)



The alliteration is thick in this passage, with every line alliterating, and two lines doubling the alliteration, with four words rather than two. In contrast, the alliteration is more subtle in Enoch's opening lines:

Almightie God in majestie,  
that made the heaven and yearth to bee,  
fyre, water, stonne, and tree,  
and man through thy might—  
the poyntes of thy privitie  
any yearthlye man to see  
ys impossible, as thinkes mee,  
for anye worldelye wight. (253-260)

Only three of the eight lines alliterate, and they never contain more than two alliterative words per line. Antichrist's heavy alliteration connects to the broader tradition of alliterative villains within the Biblical plays, but it also forms a thread between that general antagonism and the particular role of the staged heretic.

This dependency on context also relates to Antichrist's association with Judaism, which, like Lollardy, was also viewed as believing some of the word of God but interpreting it in heterodox contexts. Emerson observes that among Antichrist drama in the Middle Ages, "the crucial role of Jews as his supporters" figures almost universally in the texts (*Antichrist* 164). In the Chester play, Antichrist situates himself as a ruler over the Jewish nation, referring to "my people of Jewes" (33, 229) and only (parodically) quoting passages from the Old Testament. The kings to whom he speaks allude to their continued observance of the Law—"Moyses lawe that

lasteth yett” (175) and “Wee readen in bookes of our lawe” (305)—and they also sacrifice a lamb to him (172+ SD). This characterization could be a function of the assumed chronological positioning of the play—Antichrist appears after Pentecost and before the Last Judgment, a huge swath of time which could accommodate the predominance of either a Jewish or Christian population, the former closer to Pentecost and the latter presumably closer to Judgement. However, given the historical context of the play’s medieval and early modern productions, and Antichrist’s presumed lack of historical appearance by that time, a Jewish kingdom is anachronistic, and the passage more likely speaks to Antichrist’s characterization as a heretic, ruling over a heretical people. Antichrist’s central heresies—disbelief in the Trinity and the Real Presence—were not only markers of Lollards (the latter much more so than the former) but also of Jews.<sup>38</sup>

In tandem with Antichrist’s Jewish link, the play also correlates the heretic with magic. The text casts his magic as a parodic manifestation of God’s real power, and the distinction between the two can be subtle. If God performs something supernatural, it is a miracle; if an evil agent performs something supernatural, it is magic.<sup>39</sup> It is, in fact, a matter of semantics. Elijah reiterates this point to Antichrist, “The were no myracles but mervelles thinges / that thou shewed unto these kinges / through the fyendes crafte” (410-412). Antichrist, in turn, demonstrates his acute awareness of the connotations of both terms in his disputation with the prophet. Elijah implies that Antichrist raised the dead men through “the devylles fantasye”

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<sup>38</sup> See chapter 4 “Hocus Pocus: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*.”

<sup>39</sup> Marsalek discusses the Patristic roots and modern interpretations of this distinction (223-224).

(526), to which he quickly retorts, “Ah fooles! I read you leeve mee upon / that myracles have shewed to manye on” (529-530). He deliberately changes the term from “fantasye” to “myracles” to give his own signs more legitimacy. However, Antichrist’s powers are consistently linked with magic, “wytchcrafte and sorcerye” (479), and the play explicitly connects this magic with heresy: as the first king remarks, “Thou fayture feard with fantasye, / with sorcerye, witchcraft, and nygromancye, / thou hast us lead in heresy” (597-599). His magic, and thus his heresy, are ultimately ineffective, as his “miracles” are all overturned by the miraculous Host.

Chester’s “Antichrist” provides a clear model of the staged link between heresy and parody. Antichrist embodies parodic inversion, in both word and deed, and his heterodoxies call for contextual rather than uniform readings to arrive at meaning. Ultimately, the signifying power of the Host, whose Real Presence serves as the antithesis to Antichrist’s, defeats his theological and verbal heterodoxies. This disruption of Biblical interpretation, again in both word and deed, quite literally sets the stage for other heretics and their parodic language. Antichrist finds analogues in *Mankind’s* vices and their parodic Biblical quotations, while his connections to Judaism, magic, and a mocking of the liturgy also appear in Croxton’s *Play of the Sacrament*. Moreover, Antichrist’s conspicuousness foreshadows the showmanship of *Three Laws’s* Infidelity, the parodic resurrection of Falstaff, and the hollow magic of Faustus.

## LANGUAGE GOETH BEFORE A FALL: *MANKIND*

What is in a name? Long before the fair Juliet posed this question, the morality play *Mankind* grappled with the relationship between language and meaning; and, like Juliet, the play finds that the prescribed univocity between the two is a false construct. Through the parody of its heretical vices, *Mankind* challenges the traditional coding of Latin as the language of authority and truth. This disruption of language morality ultimately establishes the speaker's intent, not language, as the litmus test for vice and virtue.

Most scholars date *Mankind* to 1465 to 1470 based on the references to coins in circulation during the collection scene. The latest fifteenth-century coin the Worldlings (New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought) refer to is the royal, which was minted between 1464-1465, thus providing a *terminus post quem*. The play's *terminus ante quem* is also marked by the coin references, as the one coin the Worldlings do not refer to is the angel, issued between 1468-1470.<sup>40</sup> Mark Eccles, in his edition of the play, notes but then dismisses W. K. Smart's dating of the play to February 1471 based on Mischief's claim that they were under "Edwardi nullateni"

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<sup>40</sup> See Baker, Eccles, and Ashley and NeCastro . Baker's information is repeated by Eccles (xxxviii) and later by Ashley and NeCastro (11).

(690);<sup>41</sup> Eccles responds that in February of 1471, one of the men mentioned in the Worldlings' litany of East Anglian names was in exile, making that late date unlikely (xxxviii).

Internal references in the play also point to its geographical context, placing its origin in East Anglia. The play is written in the East Midland dialect, used in East Anglia, and the Worldlings refer to several local places and names: in lines 505-515, they mention "Master Huntyngton of Sauston," Wyllyam Thurlay of Hauston," "Pycharde of Trumpyngton," "Wyllyham Baker of Waltom," "Rycherde Bollman of Gayton," "Master Woode of Fullburn," "Wyllyam Patryke of Massyngham," "Master Alyngton of Botysam," and "Hamonde of Soffeham." All of these names and places are found in East Anglia, particularly around the Cambridge area.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the play contains a direct reference to the East Anglian monastery Bury St. Edmunds—"I haue be sethen wyth þe comyn tapster of Bury" (274). Gail McMurray Gibson, in *The Theatre of Devotion*, notes Bury St. Edmunds's importance in the development of East Anglian drama, as it housed the prolific John Lydgate and was home to the Macro manuscript, containing the morality plays *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Wisdom*, and *Mankind* itself. Victor Scherb remarks of area in general, "East Anglia was the West End or Broadway of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England" (21).

While this region was particularly rich in drama, it was also rich in heretics. David Bevington, in his seminal *From Mankind to Marlowe*, speculates that the play

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<sup>41</sup> "Of Edward the Nothing"; according to Smart, this refers to the period in late 1470 to early 1471 when Edward IV was in exile (301-2). All quotations from *Mankind* are taken from Eccles's edition. *Mankind. The Macro Plays*. Ed. Mark Eccles. EETS. London: Oxford UP, 1969. 153-184.

<sup>42</sup> See Eccles (n. 222 l.505-515) and Ashley and NeCastro (54) for a fuller explication of the references.

was performed by a traveling troupe around East Anglia (17), and subsequent scholars support a localized playing region based on the play's dialect and local references.<sup>43</sup> Aside from the catalogue of regional place-names, the play also alludes to a specific Lollard trial in East Anglia, the Sparke trial of 1457. But the Sparkes were by no means the only Lollards in the neighborhood. As Gibson notes, in the fifteenth century, Lollardy “was rampant in East Anglia” (30). Heresy trials in Norwich in the 1430s prosecuted fifty-five supposed heretics, “the largest number of accusations in a single campaign recorded in the fifteenth century” (Gibson 30). Moreover, as John A. F. Thomson observes, East Anglian Lollards were particularly radical in some of their beliefs and persecution of them persisted throughout the fifteenth century.

These Lollards did not go without rejoinder. Directly combative to the heresy was Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409, which prohibited English translations of Latin texts: “we therefore decree and ordain, that no man, hereafter, by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English or any other tongue, by way of a book, libel, or treatise” (Staley 192).<sup>44</sup> The article also explicitly connects English translation and recitation to Wyclif and the Lollard heresy, as the item concludes, “He that shall do contrary to this, shall likewise be punished as a favourer or error and heresy” (Staley 192). After these regulations, meaning and content became inextricably tied to form—even orthodox content in English equaled heresy.

*Mankind* interrogates this relationship intensely.

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<sup>43</sup> See also Gibson (111).

<sup>44</sup> See “Lollards and Catholics and Magicians—Oh My!”

*Mankind* has direct connections with the Lollard heresy because, unlike its counterpart moralities in the Macro manuscript, it contains a historically-based, Lollard descent into sin. Aside from its provenance in the Lollard-rich East Anglia, a number of internal elements in the play also develop this association.

The bulk of the scholarship on *Mankind* focuses on the play's linguistic elements, which form the backbone of the play's discussion of heresy. Paula Neuss, in her article "Active and Idle Language," is the first to give extended attention to them. She focuses on the play's dramatic images of activeness and idleness, explicating the Biblical allusions to a dunghill, corn and chaff, and sowing and reaping; she also notes the associations of Tityvillus with sloth and verbal idleness. But it is Kathleen Ashley's seminal article "Tittyvillus and the Battle of Words" that establishes the linguistic framework for most of later scholarship. Ashley argues that the moral battle in *Mankind* is a battle of words—words of salvation against words of damnation. In her reading, Mercy's opening homiletic discourse establishes the positive model of language, against which the parody and scatological diction of the Worldlings is deemed idle and damning. She identifies Tityvillus's lies and whispering as a third model of language, more subtle than the Worldlings but equally evil. She is the first to track *Mankind*'s shifts between one discourse and the other as evidence of his moral state. Ashley also develops the corn and chaff metaphor and the Biblical allusion of sowing seed, arguing that "in *Mankind* idleness is portrayed as a *verbal sin*" (136).

As Neuss and Ashley discuss, the play's central religious conflict is over idleness and activeness, or idle, damning words and active, saving words. The

dichotomy of idle and active, though widespread in religious literature of the time, was particularly associated with the Lollard movement. The very name “Lollard” comes from this affiliation. The *OED* gives a Middle Dutch etymology from ‘lollaerd’ and ‘lollen,’ meaning ‘mumbler’ and ‘to mumble’ respectively, words befitting the idle language of the vices. Andrew Cole also cites fifteenth-century Lollard texts that pun on “loll,” meaning to ‘to lean idly’ (*OED*), demonstrating an early association between the two (34). As Dillon notes, Lollards “are identified by their contemporaries as ‘jangers’, abusers of words and the Word” (*Language and Stage* 14). The idle vice speakers of *Mankind* can be read as “lollards,” both generic and proper, counterposed to the active speakers, the religiously orthodox.

The play’s investigation of active and idle language can also be applied to the contemporary practice of preaching in Latin. Dillon suggests that *Mankind*’s criticism of Latin and Latinate English reflects ecclesiastical concerns over ineffective preaching, first critiqued by the Lollards, and that the play’s orthodox ending allows for the discussion of vernacular preaching without the suspicion of heresy (“*Mankind*”). Forest-Hill’s article directly expands Dillon’s work by connecting the play’s approaches to language to the fifteenth-century controversy over preaching in Latin or in the vernacular. Her article is the most contextualized in terms of Lollardy, and she views the play as directly addressing East Anglian Lollards, calling them to repentance by demonstrating sympathy for ineffective, Latin preaching. Thus, she submits that, in the play, language choice alone does not guarantee virtue but rather is dependent on “effect, intention, context, and responsibility” (36).



Secondly, Mankind's profession as a farmer evokes another Lollard connection, as Kathy Cawsey posits his vocation as a "satirical shot at the Lollard-influenced *Piers Plowman* tradition" (450) and Forest-Hill suggests that Mankind may be "lay person turned Lollard" (25). Although the plowman image had numerous resonances for fifteenth-century England, one was its association with Lollardy. In Lollard texts such as *The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman*<sup>45</sup> and *Piers Plowman's Crede*, the plowman acts as the mouthpiece for Lollard doctrine. Thus, though Mankind begins and ends the play in states of grace, his employment perhaps indicates his susceptibility to Lollard ideas and foreshadows his eventual fall.

The most blatant Lollard signal, however, is Mankind's actual fall. After Mankind fends off the Worldlings with his spade (a symbol of his work), Tityvillus enters and places a board under the earth to stop Mankind's seed from growing. Mankind begins the scene with a blessing on his work: "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti now I wyll begyn" (544) and trusts that after he sows, God will bring about the harvest; however, he soon realizes that his grain is lost and the ground has turned hard: "Here I gyff wpepe my spade for now and for euer" (549), dropping the very weapon that defended him earlier. He becomes idle, *lolling* about. This newfound idleness fosters another kind of lolling—not attending church. Mankind says immediately after his early retirement,

I wyll here my ewynsonge here or I dysseuer.

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<sup>45</sup> Though it was first printed in Antwerp in 1530, its origins appear much earlier. Hudson speculates, "Any date between about 1384 and about 1530 is arguable, any date between about 1401 and about 1450 equally likely" (11).

Thys place I assyng as for my kyrke.

Here in my kerke I knell on my kneys.

Pater noster qui es in celis. (551-4)

This assumption—that a prayer in a field is the same as a prayer in a church—was a Lollard doctrine, as Eccles notes: “The Lollards believed, according to the trial of William and Richard Sparke for heresy in 1457, that ‘a prayer made in a field or other unconsecrated place is just as efficacious as if it were make in a church’” (n.223 l.552). The Lollard text *The Lanterne of Ligt* confirms this association, discussing a physical church building as follows: “man bi vertu of Goddis word halowip þis place, but þis place mai not halowe man but if man be firste in cause” (qtd. in Hudson 319) and the Leicester Lollards declared in 1413, “tam bonum sepeliri extra sanctuarium quam infra sanctuarium”<sup>46</sup> (qtd. in Hudson 293). According to Lollardy, there is nothing inherently sacred about a church unless hallowed men be in it; likewise, hallowed men can consecrate a field just as well.

The vehicle for Mankind’s descent from a state of grace into sin is specifically a Lollard doctrine, and, moreover, a doctrine highly familiar to the East Anglian audience through the Sparke trial. However, this historical reference has been relegated to a footnote by Eccles, which is then simply quoted in another footnote by Ashley and NeCastro, and only a handful of other scholars mention it in passing. Only Forest-Hill views the play within this heretical framework, noting that “this brief reference, coming at the moment of Mankind’s fall, suggests that the

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<sup>46</sup> “It is as good to be buried outside the churchyard than beneath the churchyard.”  
Translation mine.

character's fall is toward heresy" (22). Indeed, not only does Mankind's passage epitomize the play's theme of idleness and activeness in language, it also provides a specific historical lens through which the characters' actions can be viewed—in particular, the lens of heresy.

Mankind's sin escalates from there, sliding down the slippery slope of churches in fields to no churches at all. He leaves his "bedys" (564) and vows he will no longer attend church (583). Tityvillus narrates that "He ys conveyde, be Cryst, from hys dyvyn seruyce" (566), and the tempter draws him from even his heretical prayers. Mankind ruminates:

Ewynsong hath be in þe saynge, I trow, a fayer wyll.

I am yrke of yt; yt ys to longe be on myle.

Do wey! I wyll no more so oft ouer þe chyrche-style.

Be as be may, I xall do anoþer.

Of labure and preyer, I am here yrke of both;

I wyll no more of yt, thow Mercy be wroth. (581-6)

A complete lack of church attendance was also a symptom of Lollard belief, as some skipped feast and fast days while others abstained from Sunday services altogether. Hudson recounts the story of John Pry, a Lollard, who in 1429 felt that one could be occupied as virtuously doing everyday tasks on Sunday as going to church (149).

Mercy also warns Mankind about the vices' dismal attendance record: "þei harde not a masse þis twelmonyth, I dare well say. / Gyff them non audyence; þei wyll tell yow many a lye. / Do truly yowr labure and kepe yowr halyday" (298-300). This characterization is later confirmed when the Worldlings make Mankind swear, "On

Sundays on þe morow erly betyme / 3e xall wyth ws to þe all-house erly to go dyn /  
And forbere masse and matens, owres and prime” (710-2). The author makes the  
moral clear—believing in the Lollard doctrine is a form of heretical idleness, and it  
ultimately leads to more idleness, a lack of physical and spiritual labor. Mankind  
becomes “yrke of both.”

The vices’ scathing criticism of orthodox doctrines further develops the  
play’s explicitly Lollard fall into sin. Their disparagements echo Lollard criticisms of  
the same hue. First, Nought mocks the institution of penance by remarking,

Lo, master, lo, here ys a pardon bely-mett.

Yt ys grawntyde of Pope Pokett,

Yf 3e wyll putt yowr nose in hys wyffys sokett,

3e xall haue forty days of pardon. (143-6)

This mocking of the Pope’s pardon was familiar terrain for Lollards, who  
vehemently criticized the Pope’s dispensation of “grace.” Lollards claimed that if the  
Pope really had the power he claims, he is actually cruel for not releasing more  
people from purgatory; that his pardons function on the false premise that he knows  
when the day of judgment is; and that grace can be bought, and, thus, the poor are  
not able to attain it (Hudson 300-301).

The vices also mock saints and relics, both of which Lollards criticized as  
image-making and idolatry. When New Guise appears in scene 3 with a broken  
noose around his neck (after he narrowly escapes being hanged), he remarks, “We  
were nere Sent Patrykes wey, by hym þat me bought” (614). Saint Patrick’s Way  
refers to a space where prospective converts could see Purgatory, and once they did,

were usually converted (Ashley and NeCastro 56); however, New Guise appears unfazed by his experience. Mankind then asks, “What was þat abowte yowr neke, so Gode yow amende?” (627), to which he replies, “In feyth, Sent Audrys holy bende” (628). This quip alludes to the medieval practice of pilgrims purchasing silk neckbands at the shrine of Saint Audrey in Ely. In New Guise’s case, the holy relic is a broken noose, suggesting that saints’ tokens are more malign than orthodoxy would claim. As Hudson records, Wyclif’s early distaste for saints and their accoutrements grew into full-blown loathing by later Lollards. Thomas Garenter, a Lollard in 1428, said that though he believed in the Bible’s authority, “for the legendes and lyves of saintes, I helde hem nought and the miracles wryten of hem I held untrewre” (Hudson 303). His skepticism can be seen in New Guise’s disregard for the traditions of Saint Patrick and Saint Audrey.

However, the text’s discussion of heresy is developed most thoroughly through the parodic language of its villains and the orthodox language of its virtues. The centrality of language in *Mankind* reflects one of the principal debates between Lollardy and orthodoxy: the inherent value of language was central to orthodoxy’s stance against Lollardy, and the subjectivity of any tenet—of language or sacrament—to the morality of its employer was central to Lollardy’s attack on traditional Christianity. Thus, orthodoxy revered Latin, and the absolute univocity of the Word—in both the Scriptures and the Eucharist, both of which were intertwined, as words transformed the Eucharist and the Eucharist was the Word. Dillon characterizes this as “the naturalised link between Latinity and the truth”

(*Language and Stage* 61). Conversely, Lollards endorsed the vernacular as worthy of transmitting meaning, and found meaning itself contingent upon the morality of the speaker, exposing the above link as “ideologically constructed” (Dillon *Language and Stage* 61). Dillon notes that “from the beginning...Lollards identified themselves by their focus on the word...in English” (*Language and Stage* 15).

*Mankind* pointedly depicts its heretical vices as ones who question the morality of language. As in Chester’s “Antichrist,” the play’s cast is divided between the morally upright—Mercy—and the vice figures—Mischief, New Guise, Nowadays, Nought, and Tityvillus. The author depicts two distinct registers in *Mankind* and correlates them with the righteous and corrupt figures respectively. The orthodox and heterodox registers are established in the opening scenes of the play and then used as one indicator of characters’ morality thereafter. Notably, *Mankind*’s shift from righteousness to corruption follows his shift from a Latinate register to a more colloquial one. As Ashley argues, “The battle between vice and virtue takes the form of idle words and lies attacking Truth with weapons of parody” (135).

The first register introduced is Mercy’s Latinate, homiletic sermon. Like Enoch and Elijah in “Antichrist,” Mercy is depicted as a priest, whom *Mankind* calls “goode fader” (86), and his sermon stretches through Scenes 1 and 3. Mercy often code-switches between English and Latin, using English for moral instruction and Latin for Scriptural quotations. For instance, he instructs *Mankind*, “The temptacyon of þe flesch ze must resist lyke a man, / For þer ys euer a battell betwyx þe soull and

pe body: / ‘Vita hominus est milicia super terram’<sup>47</sup> (226-8), and continues, “Folow the steppys of hym, my own swete son, / Ande sey as he seyde in yowr trobyll and aduersyte: / ‘Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit; sicut sibi placuit, ita factum est; nomen Domini benedictum!’<sup>48</sup> (290-2). Moreover, Mercy’s English is peppered with Latinate words: his lines, “Mercy ys my name by demonynacyon. / I conseyue ze haue but a lytyll fauour in my communycacyon” (122-3), earn him a reproach from New Guise for his “Englysch Laten” (124), and his Latinate diction abounds in the text: “creacyon” (1), “magnifyede” (2), “dysobedyenc” and “indygnacyon” (3), “crucifyede” (4), “obsequyouse” (5), “aplyede” (5), and “revyuyde” (7) appear in his opening stanza alone. This familiar, clerical register signals Mercy as morally upright.

However, Mercy does demonstrate some dents in his verbal armor, and his orthodoxy is qualified. When Mischief barges in on his opening sermon, Mercy takes offense that his “talkyng delectable” (65) has been interrupted. Although “talkyng” may signify both words and content, the play’s emphasis on the materiality of words and its system of linguistic registers points to Mercy’s auralty, not content, being interrupted. Likewise, in Mankind’s first passage to Mercy, he says, “O, yowr louely wordys to my soull are swetere þen hony” (225). However, Mercy has spoken only four lines to Mankind since he arrived on stage—

Cryst sende yow goode comforte! ze be welcum, my frende.

Stonde wppe on yowr fete, I prey yow aryse.

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<sup>47</sup> “The life of man upon the earth is a battle.” Translation mine. See Job 7.1

<sup>48</sup> “The Lord gave, the Lord took away; as it pleased, so it was done; blessed be the name of the Lord!” Translation mine. See Job 1.21.

My name ys Mercy; ze be to me full hende.

To eschew vyce I wyll yow avyse. (217-20)

Although Mercy's kind welcome might merit some praise from Mankind, spiritual content that might please the soul is sorely lacking. Rather, his description of the "louely wordys" parallel's Mercy's earlier description of his "talkyng delectable." It is the register, the aurality of the language, that entices both Mercy and Mankind, not necessarily the content. This dualism establishes the dichotomy necessary for Ashley's and the subsequent readings of the play. Both words *and* content must be considered to determine morality.

Throughout Mercy's sermon both to the audience and later to Mankind, he does not provide translations or even English paraphrases of the Latin Biblical verses quoted above, and their meaning is not readily apparent given the context of his instruction. Mercy's obscurity becomes more evident later when Mankind accurately quotes a verse from Job, using "louely wordys," but completely misses the verse's content. Mankind explains that he has written out "[t]he gloryuse remembrance of my nobyll condycyon" (318), and he recites the Biblical verse, "Memento, homo, quod cinis es et in cinerem reuerteris"<sup>49</sup> (321). Although Mankind has referred to Job as Mercy instructed, the *memento mori* is inappropriate and even ironic for Mankind's current situation, considering that it neither glorifies nor ennobles humankind and that he then proceeds to till the ground. Mankind's

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<sup>49</sup> "Remember, man, from dust you came and to dust you will return." Translation mine. See Job 10.9.



quotation here indicates that he has either memorized or simply recognizes the verse from Job but does not know what it means.

Moreover, Mankind's second Latin quotation also hints that language is fallible. When the Worldlings initially tempt Mankind, he fends them off with his spade, castrating New Guise, smacking Nowadays's head, and scaring off Nought before he too is harmed. Mankind responds to this victory with,

Now I thanke Gode, knelynge on my kne.

Blyssyde be Hys name! He ys of hys degre.

By þe subsyde of hys grace þat he hath sente me

Thre of myn enmys I haue putt to flyght.

3yt þis instrument, souerens, ys not made to defende.

Dauid seyth, 'Nec in hasta nec in gladio saluat Dominus.' (392-397)<sup>50</sup>

The quoted passage comes from David's battle against Goliath—despite using a slingshot to wound the giant and a sword to cut off his head, David attributes the victory to God's working. Superficially, Mankind's evocation of this passage seems sound: he has encountered an enemy, he has used his spade to defeat him, and now he credits the victory to God. Yet these similarities only serve to highlight the differences between the two encounters that render the passage ironic. First, David soundly defeated and beheaded Goliath, whereas the Worldlings receive comic injuries (like castration). Goliath did not return to wreak more havoc, but the Worldlings reenter a mere twenty-eight lines later to achieve eventual victory,

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<sup>50</sup> The Lord saves neither in sword nor in spear." Translation mine. See 1 Kings 17.47.

despite Mankind's assumption, "I promytt yow þes felouse wyll no more cum here" (401). Mankind fancies himself as David, but the comparison does not hold. Even Mankind's spade, though symbolically pertinent to the play's theme of work, is ironic compared to David's sword. Moreover, Mankind's humility slightly wanes in his subsequent soliloquy, when he says, "I xall convycte þem, I hope, euey chon. / 3et I say amysse, I do yt not alon" (405-406) and "Wyth my spade I wyll departe, my worschyppull souerence, / And lyue euer wyth labure to corecte my insolence" (409-410). Although he is able to defend himself briefly against the Worldlings' initial attack, he soon falls to Tityvillus's trap. His "bagge" proves futile as does his spade, and Mercy's "talkyng delectable" ultimately fails to aid Mankind's "defence" (258).

The play's vice register sharply counterposes Mercy's. Like the alliterative villains of the Biblical plays, the vices' diction sometimes evokes alliteration at crucial moments. For instance, Mischief's first lines, a rehashing of Mercy's sermon, alliterate:

I beseche yow hertyly, leue yowr calcacyon.

Leue yowr chaffe, leue yowr corn, leue yowr dalyacyon.

Yowr wytt ys lytyll, yowr hede ys mekyll, 3e are full of predycacyon.

But, ser, I prey þis questyon to claryfye:

Mysse-masche, dryff-draff,

Sume was corn and sume was chaffe (45-50)

Similarly, Tityvillus descends into alliteration when he reveals his scheme to corrupt Mankind to the audience:

I xall munge hys corne wyth drawke and wyth durnell;

Yt xall not be lyke to sow nor to sell.

Yondyr he commyth; I prey of cownsell.

He xall wene grace were wane. (537-540)

However, the play distinguishes the speeches of the vice and virtue figures beyond a mere alliterative marker of evil. It is the vices' parody that indicates their particular heretical status.

Mischief, the first vice character to come on stage, acts as a foil to the righteous Mercy, as demonstrated not only by their alliterate names but also by their juxtaposition in the first scene, in which Mischief interrupts Mercy's sermon and begins the linguistic bantering over Latin and English that punctuates the play. His opposition to Mercy and his authority over New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought indicate that he may be a corrupt priest. As Mankind calls Mercy "fader" (86), so New Guise calls Mischief "fadyr" (150), and Mercy refers to him as "broþer" twice in his initial address (53, 64). Moreover, New Guise reports that Mischief was convicted for stealing a horse but escaped hanging because "he coude hys neke-verse" (619).<sup>51</sup> His priestly status hints at one type of Lollard figure—the unlicensed preacher. As many of the early documents on Lollardy show, these preachers were the focus of the attack on the heresy because they roamed unauthorized and preached false doctrines in English.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> One could escape hanging if he could read Psalm 50:3—"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy"—in Latin, indicating clerical training and permitting the criminal to be tried in ecclesiastical courts, which did not permit the death penalty.

<sup>52</sup> Five of Arundel's thirteen Constitutions of 1415 deal with unlicensed or rogue preachers.

Mischief's parodic (and even nonsensical) employment of Latin and his English translations of his false verses highlight his possible connections to these rogue preachers. In the opening scene, Mischief disrupts Mercy's sermon on the corn and the chaff, providing his own mock sermon on it instead:

Ande ze sayde þe corn xulde be sauýde and þe chaff xulde be feryde,

Ande he prouyth nay, as yt schewth be þis werse:

'Corn seruit bredibus, chaffe horsibus, straw fyrybusque.'

Thys ys as moche to say, to yowr leude wndyrstondyng,

As þe corn xall serue to brede at þe nexte bakynge.

'Chaff horsybus et reliqua,'

The chaff to horse xall be goode provente,

When a man ys forcolde þe straw may be brent. (54-62)

His phony "werse" directly counterposes Mercy's true one. Moreover, Mischief's reference to "leude wndyrstondyng" is misplaced if it refers to Mercy, who has clear, if not annoying, knowledge of Latin. However, if Mischief's reference to lewdness is directed to the audience rather than Mercy, then his explication of his "werse" directly mirrors Mercy's earlier sermon in attempting to instruct the audience. But more importantly, his pseudo-Latin disrupts the supposedly inherent morality of the language, demonstrating, as does Chester's Antichrist, that though it can be employed for virtuous instruction, it can also be applied to heterodox devices.

Mischief recapitulates his earlier disruption in scene 3, when Mercy reenters. Mercy delivers a speech bemoaning Mankind's fallen state, concluding the passage with, "My predylecte son, where be ye? Mankynde, vbi es?" (771), echoing God's

inquiring after Adam in the garden.<sup>53</sup> Mischief quickly retorts, “ze are all to-gloryede in yowr termys; ze make many a lesse. / Wyll ze here? He cryeth euer ‘Mankynde, vbi es?’” (773-4), again honing in on Mercy’s “to-gloryede” employment of the Latin “ubi es” as opposed to the English “where be ye.” New Guise further deconstructs the dynamic when he answers, “Hic hyc, hic hic, hic hic, hic hic!” (775), both the Latin word ‘here’ and a drunk hiccup.<sup>54</sup> This exchange clearly demonstrates that words alone, like ‘hic,’ are intrinsically dependent upon context to convey meaning. As Dillon notes, Mischief attacks “the manner rather than the matter” (*Language and Stage* 55), and his parodic lines demarcate the play’s moral spectrum of language.

Mischief’s sidekicks, the Worldlings, aid in keeping Mankind in sin. The three characters also engage in the play’s linguistic discourse, parodying Latin—in Emerson’s words, they “out-cleric the cleric” (“Englysch Laten” 325). Though they seem to work in tandem, as their N-names suggest, they each represent different vices. New Guise’s and Nowadays’s names point toward contemporary trends or customs, which given the play’s theological connections to heresy, can easily be read as Lollardy. In *Confessio Amantis* (1390), John Gower calls Lollardy “this newe secte” (1.14.349), and Protestantism was often referred to as the “new learning” in the sixteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Nought, with his own synonymous name, is on par with the other two—the new guises of nowadays are really of nought. In particular, some of his verbal parody empties the signifier of the signified, such as

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<sup>53</sup> God inquires of Adam, “Ubi es?” See Genesis 3:9.

<sup>54</sup> See Emerson (“Englysch Laten” 324).

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, John Bale’s *Three Laws* (1429).

his recording of “blottybus in blottis, / Blottorum blottibus istis” (680-1), demonstrating that language is in fact made of nought.

Each vice engages in the parody of orthodoxy. New Guise first disrupts the univocity of language and meaning when, after Mankind quotes the verse “Memento, homo, quod cinis es et in cinerem reuerteris” (321), he pipes up with his own Biblical quotation:

The wether ys colde, Gode sende ws goode ferys!

‘Cum sancto sanctus eris et cum peruerso peruerteris.’

‘Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum,’ quod þe Deull to the frerys,

‘Habitare fratres in vnum.’ (323-6)<sup>56</sup>

Similar to Mischief and his fake corn-and-chaff verse earlier, New Guise uses the Biblical verse to tell a joke about friars in Hell. The quotation itself is correct but its immoral context disrupts the supposed sanctity of Latin, proving that even Biblical verses can be put to blasphemous uses. The vice also later recounts his near-death by hanging: “A grace was, þe halter brast asonder: ecce signum!” (616). As Ashley and NeCastro note, this Latin snippet parodies Christ’s words regarding his wounds after his resurrection (56), and the line also corrupts the liturgical call “ecce lignum crucis” on Good Friday (Kastan *King Henry IV* n.216 l.162).<sup>57</sup> New Guise aligns himself with Christ in that he too faced his own death and has been “resurrected.”

Nowadays, the most vulgar of the entourage, also uses Latin in a corrupt manner. In the initial assault on Mercy, Nowadays asks,

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<sup>56</sup> “You will be holy with the holy and you will be perverse with the perverse” and “See how good and how pleasant for brother to live in unity.” See Psalm 17.26-7 and Psalm 132.1 respectively.

<sup>57</sup> Falstaff in *I Henry IV* (2.4.166-7) and Robin in *Faustus* (3.2.2) make the same exclamation.

To haue this Englysch mad in Laten:  
'I haue etun a dyschfull of curdys,  
And I haue schetun yowr mowth full of turdys.'  
Now opyn yowr sachell with Laten wordys  
Ande sey me þis in clerycall manere! (130-4)

Nowadays perverts the “clerycall manere” to demonstrate the potential of any language, including Latin, to produce vulgarity. He highlights the materiality of words by attributing a “sachell with Laten wordys” to Mercy, a direct parallel to Tityvillus’s net that collects idle chatter; however, Nowadays reverses the moral associations in the image by aligning the Latin words in the sack with the idle chatter in Tityvillus’s.

Nought also spars in the verbal fight over Mankind’s soul. During Mankind’s first temptation, he wields the Scripture verse “Nec in hasta nec in gladio saluat Dominus,” and Nought replies, “No, mary, I beschrew yow, yt ys in spadibus” (397-8). This quip demonstrates Nought’s knowledge of Latin, as he not only comprehends the verse but also responds with a fake but grammatically correct Latin word. Nought also relies on Latin in the mock court scene where Mankind pledges himself to the vices. Mankind must swear allegiance to the Worldlings and vow to murder, steal, rob, and miss mass. Mischief reads Nought’s transcription:

Here ys blottybus in blottis,  
Blottorum blottibus istis.

.....

Take hede, sers, yt stoude you on hande.

Carici tenta generalis

In a place þer goode ale ys

Anno regni regitalis

Edwardi nullateni. (680-1, 686-90)

Here Nought parodies the Latin of the court system, literally turning it into nonsense.

*Mankind* appears anomalous in the morality tradition in that it contains two primary tempters—initially Mischief and later Tityvillus. Although Tityvillus “syngfyth the Fend of helle” (886), he is not the typical Satan figure. He appears in numerous medieval sermons, exempla, and plays, and he has direct links to Lollardy. Margaret Jennings’s thorough examination of the history of Tityvillus catalogues the demon’s background and medieval appearances across genres. One tradition depicts the demon as a word-collector, gathering the misspoken parts of the liturgy into his net. A coexisting tradition illustrates Tityvillus copying down the gossip of women in church. *Mankind* draws on the former for its characterization. Cawsey contends that the Tityvillus traditions provide mechanisms for audience control and maintaining religious order, as a warning against both lazy recitations and female gossiping. She also explicitly connects Tityvillus’s cautionary tales with Lollardy: “All of these dangers are paralleled in Wycliffite tenets, since Lollards advocated vernacular Bibles, promoted private confession, and allowed women to preach” (446). She also links Tityvillus’s associations with linguistic error (misspoken liturgy and gossiping)



to the etymological root of “Lollard” as ‘mumbler’ (446) and views the figure as “a warning against heresy and heterodoxy” (451).<sup>58</sup>

Tityvillus totes his word-gathering net in *Mankind*, which physically portrays the materiality of words and implies their dependence on context for meaning. Like the misspoken parts of the liturgy he is presumed to collect, Tityvillus’s very job demonstrates that language can be infused with a variety of meanings in a variety of contexts. His other prop, a board to block Mankind’s seed, also develops this theme, as it invokes the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, in which the Word of God is likened to the seed, scattered over the soil. He equates his wooden disturbance to weeds in the ground, blocking the corn from growing. Tityvillus’s net catches Mankind’s misspoken words—“Memento, homo, quod cinis es et in cinerem reuerteris” (321)—and stops his seed, the metaphoric Word, from reproducing, stressing that words and the Word can be collected or scattered. The play develops this theme elsewhere, such as Nowadays’s comment about Mercy’s “sachell with Laten wordys” (133) or Tityvillus’s comment that Mankind has gone to “schyte lesynges” (568). The materiality of words and language itself develops the play’s invocation of parody and the distance it portrays between the signifier and the signified.

Like other heretical figures appearing before him, Tityvillus toys with meaning and signification from his opening line: “Ego sum dominancium dominus and my name ys Titivillus” (475). Emerson observes that “the devil’s Latin

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<sup>58</sup> Tityvillus also appears in the Towneley “Judgement” and declares himself “master Lollar” (311).

resembles Pilate's arrogant language" ("Englysch Laten" 321), but his blasphemous announcement has a closer antecedent: like Chester's Antichrist's parody of God's opening lines, Tityvillus's declaration directly parallels Mercy's earlier introduction, "Mercy ys my name by demonynacyon" (122); however, its evocation of the Biblical verse also parodically aligns Tityvillus with God. Tityvillus also sends out New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought to steal horses from neighboring estates (492-4), a direct parody of Christ's sending out of his disciples to retrieve the donkey and colt in Matthew 21.2. The Worldlings even respond with parodic Biblical quotations to develop this inverted allusion: Nought replies, "Non nobis, domine, non nobis" (487)<sup>59</sup> and decides to spare one local master because he is near death, "in manus tuas" (516).<sup>60</sup> Nowadays similarly remarks that he will exempt someone because he is "noli me tangere" (512).<sup>61</sup> Tityvillus's invisibility and word-collecting net also casts him as an inversion of God, who goes invisible and tracks all of one's words; as Mercy warns, "for euery ydyll worde we must zelde a reson" (173). Tityvillus further develops his parodic role by blessing the Worldlings with "my lyfte honde" (522), recalling Antichrist's parodic blessing, and evoking religious diction in his concluding lines, "Aryse and aske mercy" (602).

As Michael T. Peterson demonstrates, "The Vices' goal is to sabotage or render untrustworthy all signifying systems which might lead man to knowledge, and to leave him alone and confused in the fallen world of non-meaning" (161).

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<sup>59</sup> "Not unto us, Lord, not unto us." Translation mine. See Psalm 113.9.

<sup>60</sup> "Into your hands." Translation mine. See Luke 23.46. Christ says these words on the cross.

<sup>61</sup> "Do not touch me." Translation mine. See John 20.17. Christ says this when he is resurrected and appears to Mary Magdalene.

Ultimately, Peterson argues, their attack on language “demonstrate[s] the absence of any metaphysical underpinnings to language, which is merely free-floating and subject to its user’s intentions” (163). Emerson echoes Peterson by maintaining that *Mankind* shows both clerical abuse of Latin and devout employment of it by believers, with the play ultimately supporting the latter and condemning the former. He, too, finds that, in *Mankind*, the morality of language is in its “purpose” (“Englysch Laten” 325).

As Ashley is the first to note, Mankind’s fall into and redemption from sin can be traced through his linguistic register, and she contends that “the perversion of the word is a major way in which Mankind’s disregard of God’s word is dramatized” (141). Ashley finds that two distinct rhyme schemes differentiate the virtuous and the vicious—Mercy’s opening speech employs “8-line stanzas, rhyming ababbcbc” whereas the vices’ language uses “8-line tail-rhyme stanzas, rhyming in most cases aaabcccb” (131). She asserts, “without even considering the ‘content’ of messages from the various spokesmen, we can see that the *manner* of delivery quite powerfully conveys the contrast between good and evil, and underscores Mankind’s vacillation” (131).

When Mankind is in a state of grace, he mimics Mercy’s Latinate diction and ababbcbc rhyme scheme. Mercy’s opening sermon uses this register, stretching the first forty-four lines, and his heavy Latinate wordstock was discussed above. Mischief then introduces the opposing scheme, aaabcccb, loaded with parody and the vernacular. Mercy’s language appears unchanged, as he resumes his earlier

stanzaic form when he completes his sermon in lines 162-185. It is here that Mankind enters and imitates this same form, speaking in Mercy's ababbcbc scheme from lines 186-216. His speech, too, is loaded with Latinate words, like "propagacyon" (186), "deryvatt" (187), "congrygacyon" (188), and "predestynatt" (189) in the first half-stanza alone. Both Mercy and Mankind employ this form through the initial encounter with the Worldlings in scene 1.

However, after Mercy's departure, Mankind begins to fall into the vices' aaabccb rhyme scheme, with several half-stanzas rhyming aaab, and a more vernacular wordstock. After the vices are put to flight, Mankind delivers an twelve-line soliloquy with an aaabccb scheme, nearly void of the Latinate register he employed earlier:

I promytt yow þes felouse wyll no more cum here,  
For summe of þem, certenly, were summewhat to nere.  
My fadyr Mercy avysyde me to be of a goode chere  
Ande agayn my enmys manly for to fyght.  
I xall convycte þem, I hope, euerychon.  
ʒet I say amysse, I do yt not alon.  
Wyth þe helpe of þe grace of Gode I resyst my fon  
Ande þer malycyuse herte.  
Wyth my spade I wyll departe, my worschyppull souerence,  
Ande lyue euer wyth labure to corecte my insolence.  
I xall go fett corn for my londe; I prey yow of pacyence;  
Ryght son I xall reuerte. (401-412)

Strikingly, his content here remains orthodox while his meter is not. Apparently language goeth before the fall. After he eschews his labors and does physically fall into sin, he imitates the vices' scatological content, which he maintains throughout scene 2. Interestingly, though, Mankind never parodies Latin or orthodoxy during his time in sin. He adopts the vice meter and diction but he never mimics the vices' parody. This distinction allows him to fall into sin but remain differentiated from the vices themselves. Mankind dabbles in heresy, but the vices are full-blown heretics.

When Mercy reenters in scene 3, Mercy still uses the "orthodox" scheme of ababbcbc and his "Englysch Laten," but Mankind does not revert back to this register until he asks,

What, aske mercy zet onys agayn? Alas, yt were a wyle petycyun.

Ewyr to offend and euer to aske mercy, yt ys a puerilite.

Yt ys so abhominabyll to rehers my iterat transgrescion,

I am not worthy to hawe mercy be no possibilite. (819-22).

Mankind has not fully repented, but his rhyme scheme changes and he once again employs the Latinate diction of Mercy, with "petycyun," "puerilite," "transgrescion," and "possibilite" forming the rhyme scheme. Language goeth before redemption as well. Mankind fully repents thirteen lines later: "Pan mercy, good Mercy!" (835).

Mankind's shift from one register to the other does not simply equate register with morality because his register and content do not always correlate—he uses the vice meter shortly prior to his fall and adopts Mercy's meter before fully accepting grace. Unlike Chester's Antichrist, whose religious and verbal heresies are simultaneous, Mankind demonstrates the cause-and-effect relationship between

verbal heterodoxy and religious dissent. Thus, while form may be one indicator of meaning, *Mankind* privileges content above form as a marker for morality.

The play's coupling of form and content to determine meaning is particularly apparent in Mankind's use of two Latin phrases in close proximity, one immediately before his fall and one immediately afterwards. He begins his labors in the field with,

Now Gode of hys mercy sende ws of Hys sonde!

I haue brought sede here to sow wyth my londe.

Qwyll I ouerdylew yt, here yt xall stonde.

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti now I wyll begyn. (541-4)

Although the meter mimics the vices, this initial praise of God signals Mankind's virtuous content. His Latin quotation of "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti" is orthodox in the context of his extolling God's mercy. However, a mere five lines later, after Tityvillus's board frustrates his labor, Mankind says,

Here I gyff wppe my spade for now and for euer.

To occupye my body I wyll not put me to deuer.

I wyll here my ewynsonge here or I dysseuer.

Thys place I assyng as for my kyrke.

Here in my kerke I knell on my kneys.

Pater noster qui es in celis. (549-554)

Here, Mankind's meter has not changed, but his Latin quotation of the Lord's Prayer is heretical (even Lollard) in context (spoken in a field rather than a church).

Similarly, although Mercy returns in scene 3 with his orthodox diction and rhyme scheme, he does break his pattern once—rather than only quoting Biblical passages in Latin, Mercy quotes one Biblical verse in English as well. After Mankind’s restoration, Mercy reminds him of Jesus’s words to the woman who committed adultery. Surprisingly, Mercy simultaneously emphasizes the sanctity of the Latin Scriptures and his own voicing of them in the vernacular:

The holy gospell ys þe awtorite, as we rede in scrypture,  
‘Vade et jam amplius noli peccare.’  
Cryst preserwyd þis synfull woman takeyn in awowtry;  
He seyde to here þeis wordys, ‘Go and syn no more.’  
So to 3ow, go and syn no more.” (849-853)

Unlike his earlier Biblical quotations, which lacked translation and even contextual clues to meaning, Mercy here gives the verse in Latin *and* plain English, even repeating it—once relating Jesus’s words and again directing to them to Mankind. While his sermon began in scene 1 with “talkyng delectable” (65) but somewhat cryptic content, Mercy chooses both here, delectable words *and* straightforward content. Clearly, he does not want Mankind to repeat his earlier fumble.

As Emerson, Dillon, and Forest-Hill suggest, the linguistic registers in the play express some concern over the effectiveness of Latin or Latinate preaching. Emerson finds that Latin and English schemata endorse God and the devout but not necessarily the institutional church unconditionally (“Englysch Laten” 325). Dillon remarks that the play walks “a dangerous line between sympathy for some Lollard positions and endorsement of the orthodox church” (*Language and Stage*

57), and she finds that its linguistic investigation aims “to deconstruct words into material signs detachable from the truth they seem to embody, but then to show that the point of such deconstruction is not to prove the word’s inherent emptiness, but rather the spiritual state of the speaker or hearer” (*Language and Stage* 67). Ultimately, she sees the play as “a plea for a middle way among preachers which would avoid the exclusive excesses of Latinity and admit the necessity of some plain English without incurring the suspicion of heresy” (*Language and Stage* 68). Forest-Hill redraws the traditional lines of active and idle language in the play by calling Mercy’s ineffective preaching idle (18) and concludes that “the play thus presents a series of challenges to the status of Latin, and so develops the idea that intentions and circumstances define each use” (32). Mercy’s use of both languages here in one of his final passage perhaps reflects his willingness to smudge the orthodox line (quoting Biblical texts in English) in exchange for lay understanding. In his concluding speech to Mankind and his sermon to the audience, Mercy does return to his Latin and Latinate registers, but the central focus has been made clear: Go and sin no more. As the vice and virtue characters demonstrate, speech must be coupled with content to determine morality. If the content is orthodox—like an admonition to go and sin no more—then its vernacular form may be overlooked. Likewise, if the content is blasphemous—like a dirty joke about friars—then its Latin form cannot redeem it. The play privileges meaning over medium, even when medium might indicate meaning, much like Antichrist’s own disruptions. Similarly, orthodox apologist Reginald Pecock argues,



Fferþirmor siþen an errour or heresy is not þe ynke writen, neiþir þe voice spokun, but it is þe meenyng or þe vndirstondyng of þe writer or speker signified by þilk ynke writen or bi þilk voice spokun... (qtd. in Forest-Hill 26)

Like Chester's "Antichrist," *Mankind* demonstrates that piety must be revealed in "word and deed" and that both are necessary for righteousness or heresy.<sup>62</sup> Peterson attributes the play's reliance on such a scheme to Augustine; however, in fifteenth century England, the idea would more likely be connected to the Lollard heresy. The contingent support of authority based on morality surprisingly reflects a central tenet of Wyclif's: "authority depend[s] not upon the office but upon the righteousness of the man holding the office" (Hudson 315). However, this tenet is a two-way street: Mercy's righteousness can reinforce orthodoxy as well. This sympathy with a Lollard belief does not call the play's orthodoxy into question but rather, as Dillon and Forest-Hill insist, demonstrates an understanding for a theological problem Lollardy posed and a careful, orthodox response to it. Such a response informs the stage heretics of the Croxton *Play*, the vices in *Three Laws*, Falstaff, and Faustus, each of whom emphatically demonstrate that both word *and* deed are necessary to determine one's morality and one's meaning.

*Mankind's* condemnation of Latin-speaking vices and its endorsement of a Biblical verse in English, spoken by a representative of orthodoxy, highlights that a

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<sup>62</sup> The construction "word and deed," "verbum et factus" in Latin, appears twice in the Scriptures—Romans 15.18 and Colossians 3.17.

character's motivations and intentions in using a language—English or Latin—override its mere form. Latin verses can be put to scatological or pedagogical uses, while plain English can mock the Pope or instruct a wayward farmer. The choice of any language can be corrupted by impure intent or infused with virtuous meaning. Indeed, for the author of *Mankind*, a rose or a *rosa* both smell equally sweet, for such linguistic distinctions may be markers, but not makers, of meaning.

## HOCUS POCUS: THE CROXTON *PLAY OF THE SACRAMENT*

The modern catch phrase “hocus pocus” derives from a seventeenth-century magician, who used the corrupt Latin phrase to distract his audience from the illusion of his trick.<sup>63</sup> The recorder of the phrase calls *hocus pocus* “a dark composure of words” used to intentionally “blinde the eyes of the beholders, to make his Trick pass the more currantly without discovery” (“Hocus Pocus”). The term’s association with magic suggests its use in eliding the boundaries between the real and illusory, an elision crucial to medieval discussions of the Real Presence. A disbelief in transubstantiation, that *that really was not his body*, casts the doctrine as a magic trick, as *hocus pocus*, not a Sacramental tenet. Jonathas, of the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, believes just that—“be þe myght of hys word make yt flessh and blode— / And thus be a conceyte þe wolde make vs blynde” (202-3).<sup>64</sup> This doubt, the central concern of the *Croxton Play*, characterizes its central figures as heretics

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<sup>63</sup> John Parker attributes it to a corruption of the consecration liturgy “Hoc est corpus meum” [this is my body] (241); although the OED cites this etymology as conjectural, based solely on a reference by John Tillotson in 1694 in one of his sermons: “In all probability those common juggling words of *hocus pocus* are nothing else but a corruption of *hoc est corpus*, by way of ridiculous imitation of the priests of the Church of Rome in their trick of Transubstantiation.” The OED offers another source for the etymology, from Thomas Ady’s *Candle in the Dark* in 1655: “I will speak of one man. .that went about in King James his time. .who called himself, The Kings Majesties most excellent Hocus Pocus, and so was called, because that at the playing of every Trick, he used to say, *Hocus pocus, tontus talontus, vade celeriter jubeo*, a dark composure of words, to blinde the eyes of the beholders, to make his Trick pass the more currantly without discovery.”

<sup>64</sup> All quotations taken from Davis, Norman, ed. *Non-cycle Plays and Fragments. The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*. EETS. London: Oxford UP, 1970. Print.

and their language as corrupt parodies of the true liturgy. Their words and deeds become dramaturgical hocus pocus.

However, in a stage world where all is hocus pocus—the magic of theatre manipulating fake Hosts, clergy, and heretics—how can the Real Presence be made real? Ultimately, the Croxton *Play* finds that words alone can accomplish this—the words of the liturgy, the words of Christ himself, and the words of believers at the moment of conversion. Thus, language serves as the vehicle for the heretics' dissent (and descent) but also for their reconciliation. Furthermore, to ameliorate the suspected hocus pocus of transubstantiation, the Croxton *Play* aligns the transformative power of the consecratory words with the transformative power of believers' confessions at conversion, wherein both enact a transubstantiation and make manifest the Real Presence of Christ. In the fraught religious landscape of fifteenth-century England, both transubstantiation and conversion were contingent upon one another—one must have believe in transubstantiation to be a convert while only those converted believed in (and then partook in) transubstantiation. The Croxton *Play* establishes this symbiotic relationship as essential to bringing heretics back into the fold.

The Croxton *Play* survives in a unique manuscript, as part of a compilation of Irish origin. The text sets its own *terminus post quem* by claiming that the events enacted were “don in the forest of Aragon, in the famous cite Eraclea, the yere of owr Lord God Mcccclxj” (1007+). However, the manuscript's watermark dates 1546, furnishing an approximate date for the play's transcription. The roughly one

hundred years of interim provide an enclosed, if broad, period within which its composition, production(s), and transmission were likely. While some scholars simply accept the text's 1461 date, most scholars posit windows of time between the last quarter of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth.<sup>65</sup> Regardless of specific dates, the century of time between its supposed historical occurrence and its manuscript record provides a religious context within which the play's theological discussions can be viewed.

The text's concluding note that "IX may play yt at ease" may suggest that the play traveled;<sup>66</sup> however, its East Midland dialect and the internal allusions to East Anglian geography—such as the injunction to "Inquyre to þe colkote, for ther ys hys loggyng, / A lytyll besyde Babwell Myll]" (620-621)—suggest a limited range of circulation within East Anglia. As the banns record, the play was performed, at some point, at "Croxston" (74), near Bury St. Edmunds, the provenance of *Mankind* in the Macro manuscript as well. The abbey was a particularly appropriate environment for a miracle play because it boasted its own Host miracle in 1464, when, despite extensive fire damage to its main church, the abbey's Hosts survived, unharmed.<sup>67</sup>

Like *Mankind*, the Croxton *Play's* East Anglian provenance provides crucial cultural context for its theological discussions, as it circulated in a region riddled with Lollards. In her article on re-reading some of the play's central issues, Ann

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<sup>65</sup> Cecilia Cutts limits her scope to the late fifteenth century, and David M. Bevington and David A. Lawton agree (*From Mankind to Marlowe* 49; 286). Michael Jones dates it more specifically to "somewhere around the 1480s" (224), while Gail McMurray Gibson suggests the early sixteenth century (34). Ann Eljenholm Nichols relies on Ian Lancashire's dating of 1461-1511 (131).

<sup>66</sup> See Bevington (*From Mankind to Marlowe* 49).

<sup>67</sup> See Cutts (55); Gibson (36); Dox (107).

Eljenholm Nichols denies the widespread presence of Lollardy in the area concurrent with the Croxton *Play*'s presumed period of performance, finding the heresy issue "peripheral rather than central" (120). However, her historically naïve assumption that after the Lollard trials in the early fifteenth century "the simple folk had abjured and gone home to complete their penances" (118) completely fails to account for the documentary evidence of Lollardy in nearby dioceses and in Norwich itself in 1500, evidence she herself cites, though as "isolated cases" (119). Aristorius himself confirms this dissident-laden context when he frames the opening and concluding action by voicing concern over his own possible "eresye" (302, 857). Moreover, Nichols's oppositional treatment of anti-Lollard propaganda and affective Eucharistic piety relies on a false dichotomy, assuming that because it engages the latter, it cannot enact the former. Most scholars read the play as embedded within its East Anglian context, and often with the Lollard heresy. Foremost among these is Gibson, who observes that the play is "a text uniquely suited to the charged religious climate of East Anglia, with its simultaneous censure and sympathy for the problem of Lollardy" (32). Heather Hill-Vasquez echoes this sentiment, viewing the play as expressing a "specifically East Anglian perspective" (61). Bevington hypothesizes that the play may be a "counter-argument" to Wycliffite objections to transubstantiation (*Tudor Drama* 39), and Sarah Beckwith also connects the Jews' treatment of the Host to Lollard sacramental abuse and iconoclasm.

The play's Jewish protagonists have long been the focus of critical attention, in part because their presence is curious given England's official expulsion of Jews in

1290. This historical absence has led some scholars to read them as stand-ins for contemporary Lollards, an approach originally put forth by Cecilia Cutts, while others proffer a spectrum of anti- and philo-Semitic characterizations based on contemporary depictions of Jews, both from within England and from the Continent. Miriamne Ara Krummel collapses this critical history by identifying the Jews as an “Everythreat,” representing “all heresies that pose a threat to the medieval Christian hegemony,” including both Judaism and Lollardy (179).

Indeed, the Jews’ plural nature makes them readable under multiple lenses. On the most basic level, the Jews are skeptical of Christian orthodoxy, and like Chester’s “Antichrist,” the Croxton *Play* connects Judaism with such disbelief—Antichrist rules over the Jewish kings, while the Host’s tormentors in the Croxton *Play* are all Jewish. (Coincidentally, in both texts, their doubt is overcome by the Sacrament). The Croxton *Play*’s Jews do express doubt over certain Christian tenets, like the incarnation and the resurrection, that are not points of contention from heretical Christian sects, like Lollardy;<sup>68</sup> however, their primary subject of disbelief, and thus their impetus for conversion, is the Real Presence of the Sacrament. So, on another level, the Jews can certainly be identified with other, contemporary heretics, namely Lollards. Cutts, one of the play’s earliest critics, reads the text as “a deliberate piece of anti-Lollard propaganda composed and presented for the purpose of strengthening the faith of the people in the face of heretical teaching and influence” (45). Cutts documents the play’s didactic instructions on, foremost, transubstantiation but also on pilgrimage, confession, penance, baptism, and

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<sup>68</sup> See the Jews declaration of Christian doctrines as “heresy full playn” (393-440).

reverence for saints, priests, and the Pope, all of which were central points of contention between Lollards and the orthodox Church. More recent scholars also agree with her reading. Bevington views Jonathas as “a type of skeptic who considers the Christian dogma of the mass to be rationally indefensible” (*Tudor Drama* 38), like Lollards themselves, and Gibson notes that “the ‘pagan’ opposition to these doctrinal truths by the ‘Jews’ in the play are, in fact, the familiar challenges of the Lollards” (35). Lepow also finds “counter-Lollardy . . . more pronounced and, indeed, programmatic in . . . the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*” than in the possibly contemporary Towneley plays (30), and although Donnalee Dox argues for a construction of Jewish ‘real presence’ in the play, she admits that “the controversy over the status of the sacrament in liturgy in the writings of Wycliffe, Netter, Pecock and others, defined a language for dissent or heresy that is inseparable from the *Conversion of Ser Jonathas*” (108). Most recently, Beckwith also reads the Jewish heretics as a more domestic threat; “it is evident that what we are exploring here is the doubt of the *Christian* community” (72, emphasis mine), and she also frames her investigation in terms of Lollardy.

However, many other modern scholars are hesitant to simply read the play’s Jews as Lollards due to the risk of Christianizing them once again. These scholars find that reading the play’s protagonists as Lollards rather than Jews elides their cultural identity. Elisa Narin van Court points out that these readings cast “the Jews as unknown and absent ‘other’ . . . of no particular concern either to authors or audience, or that Jew *qua* Jew is a less compelling reading than Jew *qua* Lollard” (294). Yet, the two critical interpretations need not be mutually exclusive. Dox most



pointedly suggests that while the play “clearly links the script to Lollardy . . . it does not identify precisely the host-desecrating Jews as Lollards in a one-to-one correspondence” (109). Her observation hones in on scholars’ polarized approaches to the play’s protagonists, the desire to categorize their significations as distinctly Jewish or exclusively Lollard. David Lawton more clearly exposes this faulty approach—“it is . . . a logical error, and nothing more, to argue that if Jews in the play stand for heretics they cannot also stand for themselves” (292). This framework considers the dramatic possibility of multiple significations, relying on the two groups’ overlap in religious beliefs as the foundation for their staged depictions. While the play’s protagonists are certainly Jews, and signify as such, they also signify on another level, as Lollards.

When Jonathas takes the stage, his opening stanza demonstrates his intense piety, an odd moment given the textual and extratextual expectations towards the play’s antagonist. Surprisingly, his first words, save the reference to “Machomet” (149), could spring from the likes of Mercy:<sup>69</sup>

Now, almyghty Machomet, marke in þi mageste,  
Whose lawes tendrely I have to fulfyll,  
After my dethe bryng me to thy hygh see,  
My sowle for to save yff yt be thy wyll;  
For myn entent ys for to fulfyll,  
As my gloryus God the to honer,  
To do agen thy entent yt shuld grue me yll,

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<sup>69</sup> For instance, compare to *Mankind* (756-9).

Or agen thyn lawe for to reporte. (149-156)<sup>70</sup>

Within his first moments on stage, Jonathas demonstrates his pure intentions—he earnestly desires to honor and fulfill God’s laws. This characterization suggests that Jonathas is more closely aligned to a morality play protagonist, like the Jewish kings in Chester’s “Antichrist” or *Mankind*’s eponymous hero, because he is more a faithful believer led astray in certain doctrines than a categorically evil figure, like Antichrist himself or Tityvillus. Jonathas may fall into sin (which indeed is apparent in his next stanzas, as he delivers his “bost” (148+ SD), cataloguing all his worldly riches), but he and his companions will be offered a chance at redemption, like historical Lollards themselves.<sup>71</sup> Rather than the punishment and execution found in the play’s analogues, like the fifteenth-century French *Mystere de Saint Hostie*,<sup>72</sup> the Croxton *Play* ends in communal reconciliation.

The play itself, like Chester’s “Antichrist,” is highly attuned to matters of heresy, and it discusses heterodoxy from multiple perspectives, rather than simply coding heresy as anything dissenting from orthodoxy. In fact, again like Chester’s “Antichrist,” the play’s heretics put the word into currency, only to have it redefined by orthodoxy at the play’s conclusion. The first reference to heresy comes from

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<sup>70</sup> Like many Jews in Biblical drama, Jonathas inaccurately swears by Mohamed. See Chemers.

<sup>71</sup> As Thomson notes, “If the accused [Lollard] . . . admitted errors in belief, acquaintance with heretics, or possession of English books of which the Church disapproved and which he had failed to reveal to the ordinary, he could then ask mercy from the court, and after he abjured the articles the Bishop would grant absolution and restore him to the fold of the Church, imposing a penance on him” (227).

<sup>72</sup> The Jewish moneylender in this text is burned alive at the stake for desecrating the Host. There is no modern edition of the play available to the public. See Jody Enders and Chemers for discussions of the play and its connection to the Croxton *Play*.

Aristorius, who fears that if he is caught stealing the Host, “to þe biysshope þei wolde go tell þat dede / And apeche me of eresye” (301-302). The sincerity of his claim is doubtful, as he appears to have both the priest and clerk in his pocket, and his more likely motivation is to use the suspected danger as a bargaining chip to raise the price of the Host. However, his fear, genuine or otherwise, demonstrates how heresy within the play is structured through the Church’s system of authority—Aristorius does not fear retribution or damnation from God but rather the bishop and the ecclesiastical structures which “apeche” heretics. His fear returns (perhaps more earnestly) in the concluding scene, when the bishop leads the procession of the Host: he confides to his priest, “For an heretyke I fear he wyll me take” (857), again fearing the bishop, not God. He even admits, “I were worthy to be putt in brennyng fere” (907), alluding to the punishment for unrepentant heretics.<sup>73</sup> This disclosure again stresses the authorized channels dealing with heresy, as Aristorius attempts to absolve himself by first confessing to the priest, then seeking absolution from the bishop, and finally performing penance during the Host procession.

The Jews also discuss heresy, but they, like Chester’s Antichrist, reappropriate the term into their own theological paradigm: Jason, amid expounding the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, assures “Ageyns owr law thys ys false heresy” (415). Jason also confirms the Christian heresy of Christ’s resurrection: “And syth how he styed by hys own power; / And thys, ye know well, ys heresy full playn” (423-424). This dramatic irony, of course, actually confirms the Jews as heretics.

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<sup>73</sup> See “De Haeretico Comburendo.”

The term's signification solidifies only when the image of Jesus, who speaks only at the play's conclusion, fixes the notion of heresy in the expected orthodox terms, such as a denial of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross (724, 733), failing to keep his commandments (729), and rejecting his divinity (730). Jesus also calls the Jews' disbelief "blasphem[y]" (731). Then, it is the bishop, not the image of Christ, who explicates orthodoxy in his concluding sermon and procession. The replacement of Christ by the bishop and the transubstantiation of Christ back into the Host to be carried in procession by the bishop both emphatically reiterate the play's casting of heresy more in ecclesiastical than in theological terms. In each of the references to heresy above, the heresy is mediated through orthodox channels—Aristorius fears the wrath of the bishop, the Jews evoke a kind of legal heresy, and Jesus calls them to repent of heresy by confessing before the bishop, a task Jonathas confirms he will do: "The bysshoppe wyll I goo fetche to se ovr offens / And onto hym shew ovr lyfe, how þat we be gyilty" (796-797). The bishop's arrival authorizes the reconciliation of the Jews, Aristorius, the priest, and ultimately the audience. The play's emphasis on the ecclesiastical structures for dealing with heresy suggests the more local and contemporary Lollard trials of East Anglia than the thirteenth-century investigations into Judaism, two centuries before.<sup>74</sup>

The Croxton *Play* assumes orthodoxy (and thus heresy) is rooted in the ecclesiastical structures of the Church, and while a number of Christian doctrines are deliberated within the play, the central focus is undoubtedly on the Real

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<sup>74</sup> For information on the events leading up to the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 and on the late medieval reflections on the event, see Shapiro.

Presence, the main point of contention between the Church and the Lollards. The play's heretics signify as such primarily because of their disbelief in transubstantiation, and the play's prologue makes this explicit:

For þat þe dowghtys þe Jewys than in stode—

.....

Was yff þe Sacrament were flesshe and blode;

Therfor they put yt to suche dystresse. (69, 71-72)

To put the Host through “dystresse” to prove its materiality was a reported common practice of Lollards; Hudson calls it at times “outright denigration” (289). One Lollard supposedly saved his Host to eat with oysters instead, while another spit it out and took it home to burn it (Hudson 289-290). Another tale recounts how a Lollard attended fifteen masses, collecting a stone at each, and then asked a friend if he would like to see how many gods he had encountered that day (Hudson 289-290).<sup>75</sup> A surviving Lollard text says that the Host is “more imperfyt in kynde thanne hors breede or rattes breede, and the sacrament that is in the chalys is withouten comparison more imperfyt thanne venym [poison]” (Hudson 290). Jonathas confirms his own disbelief within the play, confiding in the audience that

þe beleve of thes Cristen men ys false, as I wene;

For þe beleue on a cake—me thynk yt ys onkynd.

And all they seye how þe prest dothe yt bynd,

And be þe myght of hys word make yt flessch and blode—

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<sup>75</sup> On the latter, Hudson also records that when the man attempted to pull out the fifteen stones from his pocket, he found only one there (290).

And thus be a conceyte þe wolde make vs blynde—

And how þat yt shuld be he þat deyed upon the rode. (199-204)

Jonathas not only denies transubstantiation but also the power implicit in the priest's words to effect such a change. A major Lollard criticism of the clergy was that a priest's power to enact transubstantiation implied that the creature could make the Creator, and "make a thousand Gods" at that (Hudson 285). Hudson relates an anecdote on a Lollard's argument on the subject:

Richard Vulford about 1521 provides a late instance [of this criticism]:  
seeing a wheel made to catch fish, he asked its maker whether the  
wheel could now turn and make him; on receiving a negative answer,  
he said 'Even so God hath made all priests, as thou hast made the  
wheel, and how can they turn again and make God?' (285)

Masphat also expresses his heretical doubt a few lines later, when he confirms, "That was neuer he that on Caluery was kyld, / Or in bred for to be blode yt ys ontrewed als" (214-215). Lastly, Masphat's summation of their intent speaks to a disbelief in the Real Presence, as he says "We wyll not spare to wyrke yt wrake, / To prove in thys brede yf þer be eny lyfe" (459-460).

But the Jews are not the play's only heretics. Lepow views Aristorius as a Lollard as well, finding a pun on his vow to "amende myn wyckyd lyfe" (973) as referring to his "Wycliffe life" (31), a vow Jonathas that makes as well, "owr wyckyd

lyuyng for to restore" (965).<sup>76</sup> Aristorius is a fair-weather Christian at best, and from the opening scenes, he, like Lollards, is clearly irreverent towards the ecclesiastical structures of the Church, using the clerk as his errand boy and duping the priest out of the Host. Most tellingly, he is also guilty of materializing the Host by inserting it into a material economy. Jonathas places an opening bid for the Host at twenty pounds (282) but ups it later to forty (309), by-passing the expected price of thirty pieces of silver. Apparently, even heresy is subject to inflation. But Aristorius holds firm at his price of one hundred pounds, repeating the price twice before Jonathas understands that this is not a negotiation. Aristorius becomes an antimodel of a Christian merchant, more akin to Lollards and their disrespect for and commodification of the Host. For instance, the Sparke brothers, in their 1457 East Anglian trial for heresy, were questioned on their belief that

Item, quod triginta panes huiusmodi pre Vno Vendeuntur obolo, Vbi tamen christus venditus erat pro triginta denariis; Et quod huiusmodi fictione sacramentum propter auariciam sacerdotum erat primitus adinuentum.<sup>77</sup> (qtd. in Beckwith 69)

The Sparkes argued that the Host could be (and was being) reduced to a commodity, to be bought and sold for profit.. These demonstrations, both in life and on stage, attempt to reveal that the Host does not have "sacred immunisation" to the material

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<sup>76</sup> Lepow notes that Thomas Netter also invokes this pun in his *Doctrinale Fidei Ecclesiae Catholicae contra Wicklevistas et Hussitas*, referring to Wyclif as "cognomento impiae vitae" or Wicked-Life" (qtd. 31).

<sup>77</sup> "Thirty breads of this sort are sold for one halfpenny, but Christ was sold for thirty pence. The sacrament after this fashion is therefore a figment devised to enrich priests." Translation Beckwith's.

world (Beckwith 70). The *Croxton Play* accepts the possibility of an economic exchange of the Sacrament but shows another economy within which the Host is indeed immune, an economy of words.

Underscoring the doctrine of the Real Presence and the play's endorsement of the clergy is an emphasis on confession. As Cutts notes, "the duty of auricular confession to a priest . . . by the fourteenth century had become firmly and inseparably attached to the Sacrament of the Eucharist" and this tenet, she finds, "is almost as strongly stressed as the Eucharistic doctrine itself" (48). The banns describe the Jews' conversions as both induced by the Sacrament and confirmed by the priest through the sanctioned, authorized act of confession: "The Holy Sacrement sheuyd them grette faouur; / In contrycyon thyr hertys wer cast / And went and shewyd ther lyues to a confesour" (50-52). One vexillator reiterates the importance of confession when he directly addresses the audience, admonishing them "with all your myght / Vnto youer gostly father shewe your synne" (65-66). Christ himself commands confession as well, when he directs the Jews to "Ite et ostendite vos sacerdotibus meis" (765).<sup>78</sup> Christ's command to confess to his priests, who mediate between the penitent and Christ, instead of directly to Himself, is extremely significant, for it undergirds the orthodox Church's ecclesiastical sacraments and clerical structure, structures under attack by Lollardy. Moreover, this Biblical passage, "Go show yourselves unto my priests" (Luke 17.14), was used to rebuke Lollards during heresy trials (Cutts 49), likely because the heretical sect vehemently denied any man's power to forgive and absolve sins: "For no man but

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<sup>78</sup> "Go show yourselves unto my priests." Translation Walker's. See Luke 17.14.



God assoyles of synnes, but if we clepe assoylynge schewyng of presetis þat God hymselfe assoyled” (Hudson 294). Thomas Hoccleve accuses the Lollard Sir John Oldcastle of a similar objection—“Thow seist ‘confessioun auriculeer / Ther needith noon” (81-82), and in his corresponding marginal note, he cites the exact verse Christ speaks in the Croxton *Play*: “Scriptum est ‘Ostendite vos sacerdotibus.” At the play’s conclusion, the Jews demonstrate their own conversions when they echo Christ’s commandment on confession. Masphat relates, “In contrycyon owr hartys he cast / And bad take vs to a confessore” (946-947), and indeed all of them submit to the ecclesiastical structure when they confess to the bishop, seeking “generall absolucion” (930).

The Croxton *Play*’s attention to language situates it firmly within the tradition of other contemporary parodic plays, like Chester’s “Antichrist” and *Mankind*. Amid its fantastic stage presentation of severed limbs, bleeding Hosts, and bursting ovens, the text’s focus remains doctrinal; and when placed in the mouths of its heretics, it becomes parodic. The proportion of didactic instruction to grotesque stage action is very high, emphasizing words above deeds as avenues for conversion. For instance, the Jews deliberate on Christian doctrine for eighty-three lines before they initially stab the Host, and the stabbing itself only spans a mere eleven lines. These preliminary speeches, ironically spoken by the Jews regarding orthodox doctrine, recapitulate the play’s central ideological concerns. Lawton simply describes the Jews’ explications as “rehears[ing] the articles of Christian faith” (287), but the Jews do more than rehearse. They parody.

The play's parody of the Passion has long been recognized. The Jews put Christ through a "new passyoun" (38) by stabbing the Host five times, nailing it to a post, boiling it in oil, and baking it in an oven. Their torment is certainly parodic overkill, beating a dead Host so to speak (who, granted, is not really dead). But the Jews parody in more than deed. Their words demarcate the boundary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy within the play, a boundary shored up by the play's insistence on the Real Presence as verbally-dependent.

Sister Nicholas Maltman views the play as grounded in liturgical, rather than Biblical, texts; however she does not read Jonathas's recitation of the consecration as a parody but rather finds the episode a "reenact[ment]" (152). Yet, though the words themselves may be liturgical, the context within which they are uttered codes them as parody, just as the context within which the Host is initially (verbally) consecrated by a priest guarantees the Real Presence.

The banns emphasize this transubstantiating power given to the priest:

Thus be maracle off þe Kyng of Hevyn,  
And by myght and power govyn to þe prestys mowthe,  
In an howshold wer conuertyd iwys elevyn.  
At Rome þis myracle ys knowen welle kowthe. (53-6)

Here, the Primus Vexillator attributes the miracle and the subsequent conversions to *both* God's power *and* the power of the priest's words. Aristorius also reiterates this priestly power of words when he sneaks into the church to steal the Host. He reasons that "Ser Isoder shall nott know of thys case, / For he hath oftyen sacred as yt ys skylle" (362-3). The stress is on the consecration, not the wafers themselves.

Moreover, the consecration scene takes place off-stage, reserving the mimetic recitation of its liturgy for the play's stage heretics. It does not debase the liturgy by mimesis, but instead codes the parodic mimesis as heresy.

When Aristorius hands the Host over to Jonathas, he confirms that it has been "sacred newe" (379), and the play's ensuing action emphatically demonstrates its Real Presence. Jonathas himself details the source and continuation of priests' powerful words: after his own mock recitation of the consecration liturgy, he remarks,

And thys powre he gaue Peter to proclame,  
And how the same shuld be sufficyent to all prechors;  
The bysshoppys and curatys saye the same,  
And soo, as I vnderstond, do all hys progenytors. (405-8)

This verbal consecratory ability, first instituted by Jesus and continued through priests, sharply contrasts with the Jews' own mock consecration that immediately follows.

Just as the Worldlings in *Mankind* turn Biblical passages into dirty jokes about friars, so the Jews' blasphemous recitations of liturgy become parody on the stage. In the rising action, before the climactic torment of the Host, the Jews recite a mock consecration of the Host. After Jonathas receives it from Aristorius, he remarks, "Now in thys clothe I shall the cure / That no wyght shall the see" (383-384). The stage directions then indicate that he "shall goo to þe tabyll" and "lay the Ost on þe tabyll" (384+ SD, 392+ SD). Both of these actions—wrapping the Host in cloth and placing it on a table—mimic a priest's actions during consecration. The

Sarum missal instructs priests during consecration to “reverently . . . replace [the Host] before the chalice,” returning it to the altar (*Sarum Missal*).<sup>79</sup> The missal also provides instructions regarding when to cover and uncover the Host (and paten) and the chalice (*Sarum Missal*). The staging of this scene could be even more parodic, as the scene prior depicted Aristorius and the Priest dining at a table on (suggestively) “lyght bred” and “wyne” (342, 339). Moreover, the Bishop concludes the Host procession when he “entre[s] þe chyrche and lay þe Ost on þe auter” (865+ SD), indicating a possible third use of the table space—first, as the site of material bread and wine; second, as an altar for a parodic consecration; and third, as the home of the restored Host. The visual cues of parody are quite clear before Jonathas even opens his mouth.

Then, following this highly suggestive staging, Jonathas rehearses the Christian doctrine of the Real Presence:

They say þat þis ys Jhesu þat was attaynted in owr lawe  
And þat thys ys he þat crwcyfyed was.  
On thes wordys ther law growndyd hath he  
That he sayd on Shere Thursday at hys sopere:  
He brake the brede and sayd Accipite,  
And gave hys dyscyplys them for the chere:  
And more he sayd to them there,  
Whyle they were all togethere and sum,  
Syttyng at the table soo clere,

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<sup>79</sup> The *Sarum Missal* was the most widely used missal in late medieval England.

Comedite Corpus meum. (395-404)

In this scene, Beckwith reads Jonathas as “a grotesque priest” (75), and his recitation clearly echoes the orthodox consecration liturgy:

Who, the day before he suffered, took bread in his reverent and holy hands, and lifting his eyes to heaven . . . to you his own omnipotent Father, giving thanks to thee, he blessed, he brake . . . and gave it to his own disciples, saying, Take and eat ye all of this, for this is my body.<sup>80</sup> (*Sarum Missal*)

Moreover, somewhat incongruously, Jonathas uses Latin phrases for the words of Christ, “Accipite” and “Comedite Corpus meum,” during the parodic consecration, while leaving the rest of the liturgy in English. This employment, while possibly an authorial decision to maintain orthodoxy in the volatile East Anglian religious landscape, adds force to the parody by highlighting the disjunction between the Latin passages quoted, supposedly demonstrating reverence to Christ by leaving his words in Latin, and the imminent Host desecration to come. The reverence is only a parodic reverence, and the consecration actually intends to strip rather than instill the Real Presence. This disconnect manifests in the ensuing stage action, when the bleeding Host sticks to Jonathas’s hand and both are nailed to a post. On the one hand, Jonathas’s presence merges with the Real Presence, but on the other hand, he severs this merger by leaving both Host and hand dangling on the post.

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<sup>80</sup> “Qui pridie quam pateretur accepit panem in sanctas ac venerabiles manus suas: et elevatis oculis in cœlum . . . ad te Deum Patrem suum omnipotentem . . . gratias agens benedixit, fregit . . . deditque discipulis suis, dicens, Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes. Hoc est enim Corpus meum” (*Sarum Missal*).

However, as the play will emphatically demonstrate, Jonathas's parodic words fail to rob the Host of its Real Presence. When the Jews receive the Host, it is "sacred newe" (379), so it has already been consecrated by the orthodox, if wayward, priest. The bread has been transubstantiated into the body, and the Real Presence has been sealed in. The Host becomes immune to Jonathas's mock consecration, with the orthodox words of the priest superseding those of Jonathas.

Jonathas's companions, too, join in on the parody of the divine office, as they each in turn delineate a parodic Creed. They cover all major points of Christian doctrine, and echo the Nicene Creed in both content and structure; but they qualify each tenet as "heresy full playn" (424). Jason begins by explaining the incarnation, followed by Jasdon, who expounds on Christ's resurrection, both crucial doctrines within the Nicene Creed. Next, Masphat describes the sending of the Holy Spirit and Christ's ascension:

When þe Holy Gost to them come,  
They faryd as dronk men of pymente or vernage;  
And sythen how þat he lykenyd hymself a lord of parage,  
On hys fatherys ryght hond he hym sett. (425-430)

The verbal echo to the Creed is strong, with the allusion to Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father mirroring the Creed's line, "He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father."<sup>81</sup> Structurally, this line in the Creed follows the two doctrines prior, parallel to the Jews' own discussions of those doctrines. Lastly, Malchus describes the Last Judgment:

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<sup>81</sup> "Et ascendit in cœlum, sedet ad dexteram Patris" (*Sarum Missal*). Translation mine.

How they that be ded shall com agayn to Judgement,  
And ovr dredfull Judge shalbe thys same brede,

.....

To turn vs from ovr beleve ys ther entent—

For that he sayd, ‘judicare viuos et mortos’. (434-440)

Here, the parody reaches its peak as Malchus even quotes the Nicene Creed: “Et iterum venturus est cum gloria iudicare vivos et mortuos” (*Sarum Missal*).<sup>82</sup> This direct reference concludes the Jews’ “reherisy[al] [of] the substance of ther lawe” (441).

Yet, the Jews do not remain heretics, and, when their doctrinal beliefs are converted to orthodoxy, their language converts as well, evidencing that they now serve Christ in both word and deed. Like *Mankind*, the Croxton *Play* relies on linguistic markers to demarcate its protagonists’ moments of conversion and redemption.

The opening speeches of Aristorius and Jonathas set the play’s moral soundscape. Their passages dominate the initial action, as Aristorius’s first passage spans forty-four lines and Jonathas’ fifty-six. In comparison, the priest and cleric never speak more than nine lines in a row, with a collective total of thirty-nine lines between the two of them. Moreover, Aristorius’s and Jonathas’s speeches are strikingly similar, as both proclaim alliterative catalogues of their worldly wonders: Aristorius spends nearly thirty lines listing the global cities where his fame is known (89-116), and Jonathas occupies another thirty by cataloging his jewels and riches

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<sup>82</sup> “And he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” Translation mine.

(157-188). The text's stage direction even calls Jonathas's passage a "bost" (148+ SD), placing the speech within the Biblical plays tradition of bombastic stage villains, like Herod and Pilate.<sup>83</sup> Jonathas and his companions even, oddly, swear by "Machomet" (149, 209, 332), which also aligns them with Herod, who employs this interjection.<sup>84</sup>

The priest and clerk, too, though less vocal, become antagonists as they are aligned with Aristorius in the opening scenes. The merchant confirms such an alliance when he explicitly characterizes their *speech* as "good": "Forsoth, syr pryst, yower talkyng [ys] good; / And therfor affter your talkyng I wyll atteyn / To wourshyppe my God that dyed on þe roode" (133-135). But the speech Aristorius is referencing encourages no such devotion, and in fact blasphemously applies religious diction to the merchant himself. The priest says,

No man shall you tary ne t[r]owble thys tyde,  
But euery man delygently shall do yow plesance;  
And I vnto my connyng to þe best shall hem guyde  
Vnto Godys plesyng to serue yow attruence.  
For ye be worthy and notable in substance of good,  
Off merchauntys of Aragon ye have no pere—  
And therof thank God þat dyed on þe roode,  
That was your makere and hath yow dere. (125-132)

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<sup>83</sup> Lawton says that Aristorius's speech "is closely modeled on Herod's in the cycle plays" (286).

<sup>84</sup> For example, see "Herod and the Magi" in the York cycle (1-22).



The priest's description of Aristorius as "worthy and notable in substance of good" and without "pere" characterizes the merchant as God-like. Only in the last two lines does the priest evoke any pious devotion, but even these words prove ineffective because Aristorius immediately steals the Host and profits from it. The priest's "good talking" is fruitless, just as Mercy's "talkyng delectable" (65) fails to protect Mankind against his enemies. However, he is not just derelict in word but also in deed. The priest asks his leave of Aristorius because "Yt ys fer paste none, yt ys tyme to go cherche, / There to say myn evynsong" (230-1). When he does return, he dines with the merchant, drinking "right well" of the wine and going immediately to bed (presumably skipping compline entirely) (349-51). Aristorius's comment that he "hath oftyn sacred" (363), or has consecrated en masse, also speaks to his more pragmatic and material rather than reverential and spiritual approach to the Host. The priest's "neclygens" (920), for which the Bishop chastises him, harkens to the larger criticism of the clergy and anticlerical movement in within the period, much like Mankind's idleness regarding his own evensong and Tityvillus's collecting of misspoken parts of the liturgy.

Similarly, the clerk provides no godly wisdom or instruction to the merchant but merely offers to help Aristorius find a "bargyn" (143), which is later fulfilled when he meets Jonathas and arranges for such a "bargen" (243) to take place. The clerk even refers to the avenues he will pursue as "pathes wyde" (145), a phrase Aristorius echoes when he meets with Jonathas over "pathes playne" (373), both

ominous remarks for any Christian.<sup>85</sup> Lastly, the clerk is charged with decorating his master's house for Jonathas, a more materialistic than spiritual task. Each of these characters represents a heterodox model of language.

Unlike *Mankind*, however, the Croxton *Play* does not provide an orthodox model of language until the concluding scenes, with the entrance of the play's two virtuous figures, Christ and the bishop. Given the play's spectrum of language use, the best moral index becomes the characters' employment of Latin. Surprisingly, Jonathas is the first to use Latin, not the two vexillators or the priest or clerk. The Latin that Jonathas uses appears in his parodic consecration of the Host, with "Accipite" (399) and "Comedite Corpus meum" (404).<sup>86</sup> Malchus also employs a snippet of Latin in his discussion of Judgment, quoting "iudicare viuos et mortuos" (440) from the Nicene Creed, and Jonathas concludes the doctrinal discussion with an allusion to "Tinctis Bosra vestibus" (448).<sup>87</sup> Jonathas's first two phrases are the words of Christ, adding ironic weight to his quotation of them during the mock consecration. The second two quotations are prophetic, casting the Jews as (ironic) prophets. Not only are these snatches of Latin parodic, but they are also common

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<sup>85</sup> See "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat" (Matthew 7.14 DRV).

<sup>86</sup> "Take" and "Eat, [this is] My body." Translations Walker's.

<sup>87</sup> "To judge the living and the dead" and "[Who is this that cometh from Edom] with dyed garments from Bozrah." Translations Walker's. See Isaiah 63.1.

enough in the liturgy that they do not necessarily indicate a knowledge of Latin but rather a simple recalling of services and instruction.<sup>88</sup>

However, a completely different register, and indeed miraculous knowledge, of Latin is introduced after the Jews' conversions. Lawton vaguely refers to this as the "language of poetic penance" (287), but the words indicate more than mere penance. They indicate complete conversion, both linguistic and spiritual.

Jesus introduces this register of Latin in his first words after bursting forth from the oven: "O mirabiles Judei, attendite et videte / Si est dolor sicut dolor meus" (717-718).<sup>89</sup> This marks the first sustained use of Latin in the entire play. Then, in turn, the Jews demonstrate their conversion verbally by picking up this orthodox use of Latin, quoting Scriptural passages in refrain at the conclusion of each of their stanzas. Jonathas's first words after Jesus's entrance are "Tu es protector vite mee; a quo trepidado?" (741).<sup>90</sup> This is a far cry from the fragments of liturgy he invokes earlier, with the line longer and more complex than his previous use of the language. Similarly, Jason concludes his confession with "Lacrimis nostris conscienciam nostram baptizemus!" (749) and Jason remarks, "Ne grauis sompnus irruat" (753).<sup>91</sup> Masphat and Malchus, too, cry "Miserere mei, Deus!" (757) and "Asparges

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<sup>88</sup> Walker notes that the Isaiah passage was commonly seen as a prophecy of Christ during the period (223).

<sup>89</sup> "O you strange Jews, behold and see if any sorrow is like My sorrow." Translation Walker's. See Lamentations 1.12.

<sup>90</sup> "You are the protector of my life, of whom should I be afraid?" Translation Walker's. See Psalms 26.1.

<sup>91</sup> "With our tears may we baptize our conscience" and "May grievous sleep not seize us." Translations Walker's. Maltman finds this an allusion to a liturgical Compline hymn sung during Lent (156).

me, Domine, ysopo, et munadabor” (761).<sup>92</sup> Even the Jews’ English passages evoke a Biblical register, with allusions such as “owt of dyrknes to lyght” (752) and “forgyfe me my mysded!” (756).<sup>93</sup> This highly orthodox, systematic use of Latin, both Biblical and liturgical, stands in direct opposition to the Jews’ earlier parodic employment of the liturgy. Those parodic quotations came from the mouths of Christ or prophets, but the passages evoked here are all penitential and suppliant, drawing almost exclusively on the Psalms. Their English lines change register as they also all use an anaphora of “Oh”s to exhibit their praise (742, 746, 750, 754, 756, 778, 780, 782).

Jesus confirms the orthodoxy of this speech model again by peppering his next stanzas with two Biblical passages—“Ite et ostendite vos sacerdotibus meis” (765) and “Et tunc non auertam a vobis faciem meam” (769).<sup>94</sup> The bishop also joins this register, as his first words upon his entrance pick up the anaphora with “Oh Jhesu” (806), and he also quotes Latin at length: “Estote forte[s] in bello et pugnate cum antico serpente, / Et accipite regnum eternum, et cetera” (866-867).<sup>95</sup> Bevington finds the bishop’s final speeches “profoundly ritualistic, deliberately confounding the distinction between dramatic performance and religious service” (*Tudor Drama* 38); the bishop’s words become the site of both theatrical collapse

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<sup>92</sup> “Have mercy on me, Lord!” and “Sprinkle me with hyssop, Lord, and I shall be clean.” Translation Walker’s. See Psalm 50.9.

<sup>93</sup> See 1 Peter 2.9, Exodus 10.17, and Psalm 24.18.

<sup>94</sup> “Go show yourselves unto my priests” and “And then I will not turn My face from you.” Translations Walker’s. See Luke 17.14 and Psalms 26.9.

<sup>95</sup> “Be strong in battle and fight with the old serpent, and receive the eternal kingdom, and so on.” Translation Walker’s. See Revelation 20.2.

and communal reintegration, and he ultimately passes on the orthodox speech model to the audience.

Lastly, then, the audience experiences conversion, as well. Although there is scholarly debate as to the extent of audience involvement, many scholars speculate that the Host procession within the play included the audience, as processions would have outside of the dramatic sphere. Conversely, others, like Lawton, are skeptical of the collapse between stage and reality, maintaining that all the religious accoutrements of the text, including the Host itself, were reenactments. However, the bishop's shift to direct address in the text is quite clear and his inclusiveness is emphatic:

Now folow me, all and summe,  
And all tho that bene here, both more or lesse,  
Thys holy song, O sacrum Conuiuium,  
Lett vs syng all with grett swetnesse. (838-841)

Even so, regardless of if and when the fourth wall breaks down in the play, the audience does experience some transformation, at least verbally, through the bishop's other two uses of Latin at the play's conclusion, the singing of two liturgical hymns, the Sacrum Convivium and the Te Deum Laudamus. The Sacrum Convivium serves as the antiphon of the Magnificat for the Vespers of the Feast of Corpus Christi and, more significantly, a processional antiphon for the Feast of Corpus Christi (Maltman 151). Maltman records the antiphon in full:

O sacrum convivium in quo Christus sumitur:  
recolitur memoria passionis ejus, mens implentur

gratia, et futurae gloriae, nobis pignus datur, Alleluya.<sup>96</sup> (151)

She views the play's action as "a dramatization of the antiphon," with the procession as the text's high point (151). This reconciliation of the characters' and audience's language emphasizes the play's signification to local Lollards, who were invited to be restored to the Church body. Gibson notes that "in at least one fifteenth-century heresy case, in Lincolnshire, the penance assigned to a convicted Lollard was the take part in a Corpus Christi procession" (34), much like the one that punctuates the *Croxton Play*. Thus, the procession accomplishes a physical and verbal reincorporation of all heretics, staged or otherwise, by means of conversion through the Sacrament.

The second liturgical song *Te Deum Laudamus*, an orthodox text for the Christians in the audience, continues this unification under the auspices of the liturgy. The audience recognizes this song, and, implicitly or explicitly, becomes complicit with its evocation. Its placement in the play's final line serves as the segue between the staged and real moments of conversion and reconciliation. The song "redefines audience as congregation" (Beckwith 78).

Ultimately, orthodoxy dispels the hocus pocus of its heretics' words and deeds, a hocus pocus often employed by stage heretics to counter God's omnipotence, such as Antichrist in *Chester*. However, the *Croxton Play* reappropriates this vein of illusion into its stagecraft as a method of reinforcing

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<sup>96</sup> "O sacred banquet in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory is given us." Translation Maltman's.

orthodoxy. The play's "magic" lies not in the Jews but in the stage directions—hands fall off, wafers bleed, oil turns to blood, and ovens burst. But all is done in service of the play's primary theological purpose, to confirm the Real Presence.

Maltman acutely writes that the Croxton *Play* "is clearly didactic; it might well be called propaganda. It is also good theater" (160). But what makes it so? One of scholars' foremost criticisms of the play is its reliance on blatantly illusory stagecraft to prove a doctrine based on illusion, that the bread and wine are not really bread and wine. Beckwith observes that "the play can do nothing but intensify that doubt in the very act of alleviating it. For the miracle in a miracle play is a purely theatrical event" (68). She notes that the Host has been reduced to a "mere stage prop" (68) because "having the host on stage implies that the host *can be* staged" (75, emphasis mine). Dillon also highlights the play's irony of using a 'fake' Host to demonstrate the Real Presence, a parallel irony to the play's employment of 'fake' stage miracles to demonstrate the true, miraculous nature of the Host. As she notes, "what we are viewing here is not the real, but a representation of the real that makes itself available in the workings of fantasy" ("What Sacrament" 174). Lawton finds the play's employment of illusion to teach truth particularly troublesome, making the "Host . . . an unstable sign" (297). Similarly, John Parker quips that "one illusion would here demonstrate the truth of another illusions, in other words, by pretending to puncture its illusions" (126).

However, other scholars have shown more clemency concerning the play's theatrics, arguing that they ultimately serve to overcome the audience's doubt. Richard Emmerson finds an analogue between Chester's *Antichrist* and the Croxton

*Play*, as both rely on “miraculous use of divine power to confront doubt” (“Contextualizing Performance” 99). Moreover, in both cases, that miraculous use centers on the Host. Hill-Vasquez addresses the play’s paradoxical reliance on images to stage the invisible, as it “illuminates a number of the chief points of the *Tretise [of Miraclis Pleyinge]*. . . as [a] potential site for indulging spiritual desires and exploring religious belief, while reassuringly asserting the fundamental stability and authority of Christianity” (54).<sup>97</sup> Bevington emphasizes that “the acceptance of dramatic miracle in the *Sacrament* play is therefore synonymous with the acceptance of the doctrine of transubstantiation, not abstractly but vividly and immediately” (*Tudor Drama* 39). Gibson, too, observes that the “miracle of stagecraft” performs a kind of reverse transubstantiation, turning the physical Christ who has just spoken to the audience into the Host that will be processed before them at the play’s conclusion (38). For these scholars, suspended disbelief leads to imminent belief.

The Croxton *Play* does resolve this tension inherent in its false presences to enact the Real Presence. It does so by upholding conversion as the ultimate transubstantiation, the ultimate miracle. If one’s internal conversion (a miracle intended to be experienced by the audience) trumps even the most fantastic of Host miracles, then belief in a less immediately accessible miracle, the Real Presence itself, is much more palatable.

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<sup>97</sup> *The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* is a Lollard text that argues against the theatrical playing of miracles because “no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye þe myraclis and werkes þat Crist so ernystfully wrougt to oure helpe.” See Walker (196-200).



As Norman Davis and Lawton point out, the Croxton *Play* differs from its Continental analogues by reconciling the Jews through conversion rather than punishing them as heretics (lxxiv; 288). Some scholars view this conversion critically, as a kinder prequel to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. But, regardless of the cultural contexts informing the author's choice of such events, the Jews within the play convert of their own accord, "a voluntaristic act which displays the depth of their contrition, and makes their confession valid" (Beckwith 71). Gibson remarks that the play is "about penance and healing acceptance" since the "Lollard heresy and doubt have been formally acknowledged and triumphantly resolved" (38), and Krummel finds the Jews' conversions to be "the actual marvelous miracle itself" (189). Nichols agrees and notes that "the full play title focuses on the conversion through miracle" (127). Indeed, the text titles itself "þe Play of þe Conuersyon of Ser Jonathas þe Jewe by Myracle of þe Blyssed Sacrament" (80+). Modern scholarship has dropped the first part of the title, shortening it to the *Play of the Sacrament*, placing emphasis on the Host miracles rather than the miracle of the *conversion* of Jonathas *through* the Sacrament.<sup>98</sup> Both of the text's references to its title also use the singular "myracle" (80+, 1007+), indicating a singular event like conversion, rather than the plural, which would be more appropriate if the referents were the Host-miracles themselves. The title's linking of conversion and the Sacrament stresses the play's goal of reintegration rather than punishment through the adoption of orthodox belief in transubstantiation, a goal played out literally during the play's Host procession.

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<sup>98</sup> Dox does use the play's full title and uses *Conversion* as her short title.

Christ's first words to the Jews are "O Mirabiles Judei" (717), which he then translates into English as well, "Oh ye merveylows Jewys" (719). As Parker notes, the word 'mirabiles' is a non-Biblical addition to the passage from Lamentations that follows (132).<sup>99</sup> The authorial addition highlights the play's true miracle, the conversion of the Jews. Christ also relegates Jonathas's physical healing of his hand as secondary to his spiritual healing brought through conversion: "Thow washest thyn hart with grete contrycion; / Go to the cawdron—þi care shalbe the lesse— / And towche thyn hand to thy saluacion" (775-777). Yet this healing miracle recapitulates Jonathas's internal, miraculous healing through conversion. Jonathas rejected the Host earlier by chopping it off, along with his own hand, but now the two—Host and Jonathas—are reconciled, both spiritually and physically. The transubstantiating moment when Jonathas and the Host were first momentarily united returns permanently with his conversion. Thus, the play conflates the miracle of the Real Presence and the miracle of conversion quite graphically on the stage.

The Host procession that follows offers another moment of this conflation, for it is the procession of the bishop with the Jews that causes the priest to speculate on the impetus: "Sum myracel, I hope, ys wrowght be Goddys myght; / The bysshope commyth proessyon with a gret meny of Jewys; / I hope sum myracle ys shewyd to hys syght" (843-845). The priest bookends the Jews' conversion and declaration of faith in the procession with references to the assumed miracle, and the procession itself imparts and reiterates the miracle of conversion to the audience. Implicitly or explicitly, the Host procession reminds the audience that the

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<sup>99</sup> See Lamentations 1.12.

transubstantiated Host that goes before them is a reflection of their transubstantiated selves.

These miracles of conversions are in part effected by, and in turn effect more, words. Indeed, a Host transforming into a boy (or an image of a boy) and bursting from an oven has some persuasive appeal, but even the power originally instilled in it to perform such deeds arose from the priest's consecratory words. Ovens aside, as Masphat relates, their conversions stemmed from Christ's *words*, not his miraculous deeds. He says, "There spake he to us woordys of grete favore / In contrycyon owr hartys he cast, / and bad take us to a confessor" (945-7). His words cast their hearts into contrition, not his actions. Similarly, conversion will lead to more words, as Aristorius proclaims that he will, in turn, "teache thys lesson to man and wyfe" (975). The play itself recapitulates this theme, as its own text encourages both conversion and evangelism.

Thus, this miracle of conversion, like the consecration of Host, is rooted in words. The Croxton *Play* vividly demonstrates that the act of consecration, and its invocation of the Real Presence, is analogous to the consecrating act of conversion, which also calls forth a change of internal substance. These transforming words of conversion manifest in the Latin passages of Scripture quoted by the new converts; in their words of confession to the bishop; and in their words of sharing faith in countries far and wide. Words are not mere hocus pocus but can effect such a transformation, a transubstantiation, even when the speaker is a wayward priest, a doubting Jew, or a greedy merchant. Words can make the Real Presence real. Even in theatre.

## “BY THY FRUTES”: JOHN BALE’S *THREE LAWS*

When John Bale began work on *The Three Laws*, he was faced with the task of sloughing off a century or more of Catholic orthodoxy as the voice of authority and truth on the English stage. This theatrical baggage appears to have fostered contradictory impulses in the playwright, such that even the morality of the traditional morality play was questioned. His Protestant faith made him wary of Catholic traditions, while his Catholic past confirmed the power of such dramatic propaganda. As Dillon notes, “Bale’s distrust of theatrical display, as he saw it manifested through the rituals of the Catholic church, is underpinned by a need to accommodate this powerful weapon within the armoury of Protestant propaganda” (*Language and Stage* 93). But accommodate he did, and in his accommodation, and appropriation, Bale recast traditional heroes as heretics and heretics as heroes.

Bale’s *Three Laws* relies on the prior, medieval association of heretics as employers of verbal parody, but he reshapes this tradition as Protestant, not Catholic, drama. The play’s vices, like their heretical antecedents, disrupt the assumed univocity between language and meaning by demonstrating that both are context-dependent. Bale uses this tenet to characterize the Catholic-Protestant debate as a whole—both rely on the same Word, but each functions in a different context, and thus produces different meanings of the Word. The virtues and vices within *Three Laws* illustrate the Reformation as a reformation of those contexts.

In England, the mid-sixteenth century was rife with change. Henry VIII's growing schism with the Catholic Church led to drastic religious and political metamorphoses, culminating in his excommunication in 1533 and the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which declared Henry VIII the head of the Church of England. The Defender-turned-Offender of the Faith had initiated the Reformation in England. The heretics now became the heroes.

The political and religious shifts during the Henrician period redrew the lines of orthodoxy and heresy. Reformers recast the old faith as both politically dangerous and theologically false through the opportune images of Antichrist and Babylon, aligning the Pope with the former and Rome with the latter. Similarly, the elision of Catholicism with witchcraft, and particularly the identification of the consecration of the Host as "hocus pocus," further substantiated its doctrines as heretical. These associations, which formed secondary markers of medieval stage heretics, are resurrected on the Protestant stage as well. Moreover, Catholicism's emphasis on the inherent power of the word to consecrate, sanctify, and even save sharply contrasted with Protestantism's privileging of the power of faith; this distinction between the two informed contemporary discussions on language choice, as Catholicism defended the use of the Latin Bible and a Latin liturgy while Reformers sought to provide the Scriptures and the liturgy in the vernacular. These central issues of faith defined the new heresy and the new orthodoxy against which it was set.

Bale's own life paralleled the religious turmoil of the period, what Ritchie Kendall calls "a stormy career played out against a still stormier historical backdrop" (92). Bale began as a Carmelite, becoming prior of the Carmelite Friary in Maldon in 1530. However, the shifts in religion and politics of the 1530s coincided with Bale's own conversion to Protestantism sometime after 1533. As Paul Whitfield White notes in his *Theatre and Reformation*, "Bale was one of those early English reformers whose zeal for the gospel and hatred of Rome was made all the more impassioned by bad memories of a previous career as a Carmelite friar" (12). Bale eventually came under the protection and patronage of Thomas Cromwell, who launched the Crown's massive public relations campaign to combat residual Catholicism with a new Reformation dramatic culture, produced by artists like Bale, which Cathy Shrank pointedly calls "Reformation point-scoring" (187). Among his catalogues of works, Bale lists several plays that could form a cycle comparable to those in Chester and York, along with the pseudo-history play *King Johan* and the morality play *Three Laws*. Aside from drama, Bale also wrote polemical pamphlets against Catholicism and prose defenses of Protestantism, and he devoted perhaps the most ink to the Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle, on whom Shakespeare's Falstaff is based.

The precise history of *Three Law's* construction remains unclear, though the text itself provides several clues to its evolution. Peter Happé, in his formative book on Bale, speculates that the play was written in the early 1530s, perhaps Bale's earliest extant text (*John Bale* 71), and then later revised in the 1540s, based on several of the play's allusions: The mention of Rugge and Corbet of Norwich likely

coincides with their terms as mayor and magistrate respectively in 1545, while the mention of King Henry's death and Queen Catherine Parr pushes the *terminus post quem* to 1547. The first edition of the play was likely published in 1548. White speculates that the play was part of repertoire of "Bale and his felowes" during the late 1540s and early 1550s (21).

The feverish religious climate surrounding Bale's plays informs Bale's own polemical tone—"Indeed, religious strife and angry opposition are linked with every known production of Bale's plays" (White 29). For instance, when Bale rehearsed *Three Laws* during Christmas in 1551, a local Catholic became so incensed that he called both one of the actors and Bale himself "heretike and knave, concludynge that it was a boke of perniciouse heresie" (qtd. in Happé *Complete Plays* 1.6). For Bale, heresy and drama were consistently intertwined. As Happé admires, "There is a striking originality, or at least a remarkably comprehensive power of synthesis, in the way Bale combines various manifestations of blasphemy, heresy, and idolatry" (*John Bale* 88).

The concept of heresy itself pervades Bale's play, as the word appears eight times<sup>100</sup> and dominates the dialogue in act 4, when Infidelity, Hypocrisy, and False Doctrine condemn the Law of Christ as a heretic. However, like the inverted use of 'heresy' by Antichrist and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament's* Jews, the vice's employment of the term only highlights Bale's firm depiction of Catholicism, not Protestantism, as heretical; and Bale certainly wears his anti-Catholicism on his sleeve. Despite the play's classification of the three Laws in three time periods, all

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<sup>100</sup> See (1149, 1156, 1568, 1640, 1763, 1767, 1786, and 1801).

six vice figures are suffocatingly Catholic, each dressed in some variation of Catholic garb: Idolatry is costumed like “an olde wytche,”<sup>101</sup> Sodomy like “a monke of all sectes,” Ambition as a “byschop,” Avarice as a “Pharyse or spyrituall lawer,”<sup>102</sup> False Doctrine like a “popysh doctour,” and Hypocrisy like a “graye fryre” (121).<sup>103</sup> As Leslie P. Fairfield detects, Bale’s “allegorical vices were meant to have a contemporary sting” (57). White solidifies this link, as he suggests that these costumes were likely culled from the dissolution of the monasteries: “Bale’s most effective weapon is to present those revered images before spectators only to discredit them by depriving them of their original sacred context, and substituting a profane or diabolical one instead” (34), the precise tactic of previous stage heretics, such as the vices in *Mankind* and the Jews in the Croxton *Play*. White continues that Bale upturns the traditional moral values assigned to morality play figures through his depiction of the “virtuous” characters, “almost certainly dressed as they would have been in traditional plays, but they are now revealed to be the old ‘Vices’ in disguise” (35).

Costumes aside, each character also identifies his or her Catholicism in dialogue: Infidelity is a vice-of-all-trades, including a pedlar of sacred images and a Franciscan friar; Idolatry’s witchcraft comes with the help of her “*Ave Marye*,” “holye oyle and watter,” and “bedes” (413, 442, 502); Sodomy claims that “now the Popysh

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<sup>101</sup> The identification of Catholicism with witchcraft and the Catholic clergy with conjurors is well established by this time: “‘conjuror’ came to be a synonym for a recusant priest” (Thomas 68).

<sup>102</sup> Pharisee or canon lawyer.

<sup>103</sup> All quotations taken from Happé, Peter. *The Three Laws. The Complete Plays of John Bale* vol. 1. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985. Print.



hypocrytes / Embrace me every where” (573-4); Avarice, though dressed as a Pharisee, boasts how “Our lowsy Latyne howres” tread the poor underfoot (1020); Ambition’s plot for destroying the Law of Moses anachronistically involves “sayntes worshyppyng” and “pylgrymage” (1110, 1112); Hypocrisy calls himself “the Popes owne vycar” (1439); and False Doctrine expounds on the rules of celibacy in his order. Bale also relies on the contemporary association of Catholicism and the Pope with the Antichrist to develop his discussion of Catholicism as heresy. Infidelity remarks that Sodomy’s victims will “reigne undre Antichrist” (733) and the Law of Christ calls them “pestylent Antichristes” (1702).

However, Bale also theologically repositions Catholicism as heresy by aligning it not with the voice of truth but instead with the practices of the legalistic Pharisees. Thora Blatt, in her discussion of Bale’s plays, hints at this connection in her explication of the play, but she does so only in reference to costuming and source study. Happé traces this comparison to Tyndale’s explication of the Gospel of Matthew, a source of Bale’s, which is titled *An exposition upon the V.VI.VII chapters of Mathew, which three chapters are the keye and the dore of the scripture, and the restoring agayne of Moses law corrupte by the Scribes and Pharises. And the exposition is the restoring agayne of Christes lawe corrupte by the Papistes* (86). Similarly, in his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther glosses: “Papists are our Jews which molest us no less than the Jews did Paul” (qtd. in Shapiro 21). The conflation of Jews and Catholics is made physical when Bale describes Avarice as a “Pharyse or spyrituall lawer,” marking that his costume could reflect either a first-century Pharisee or a sixteenth-century canon lawyer. Bale’s dramatic depiction comments

on Catholic practices through the lens of a Pharisaical adherence to Old Testament traditions, ceremonies, and regulations, and Bale casts both sects as obedient to the letter but not the spirit of God's Word. Furthermore, Bale's heretics rely on parody to disrupt orthodoxy.

In characterizing his Catholic's vices, Bale employs the parodic language of their dramatic Lollard predecessors. However, Bale, the unwavering Protestant, does not let even his vices parody Protestantism. Instead, the vice figures themselves unwittingly become parodies of Catholicism. Blatt focuses on the play's liturgical parodies, remarking "these musical interludes are to be taken for the hymns of Antichrist and parodies of the psalms, hymns, and antiphons of the Church" (148). White calls Bale's parody of Catholicism "an original feature" of his drama, though he admits the medieval tradition of parody in the Feast of Fools and Feast of the Boy Bishop celebrations. However, he overlooks previous parodic examples, like Chester's "Antichrist," *Mankind*, and the Croxton *Play* entirely.

Bale's jabs at Catholicism are legion. His vice figures parody the Latin and Latinate language of the old faith, particularly honing in on the liturgy, doctrines, and devotional practices. When Infidelity, Sodomy, and Idolatry first speak on stage, the three parody the Latin so closely associated with Catholicism. Sodomy begins with,

Sodomismus *Ambo* is my name full cleane.

Knowe ye not what I meane,

And are so good a clarke?

Infidelitas By Tetragrammaton,

I charge ye, apere anon

And come out of the darke. (389-394)

Sodomy uses the Latin *ambo* for “both” to identify his sexual proclivities, to which Infidelity responds with the blasphemous interjection “by Tetragrammaton.” Sodomy’s Latin introduction parallels God’s initial lines, “I am Deus Pater” (36) and the conventional Latin or Latinate introductions of God in the mystery plays. In his parodic appropriation, he also echoes Tityvillus’s introduction in *Mankind*, “Ego sum dominancium dominus and my name ys Titivillus” (475). Infidelity’s response “by Tetragrammaton,” a Latin transliteration of the Greek word for the Hebrew four-lettered name of God, evokes witchcraft, as the word and symbol was popular in conjurations.<sup>104</sup> The conflation of Latinate conjurations and Catholicism is later developed by Idolatry, the “olde wytche,” who also puts Latin to heretical uses:

She can by sayenge her *Ave Marye*,

And by other charmes of sorcerye,

Ease men of toth ake by and bye,

Yea, and fetch the devyll from hell. (413-416)

Infidelity also puns on the Latin “Dom” by alluding to a possible invasion by Danes, specifically “Dane Johan, Dane Robert, Dane Thomas, and Dane Harrye” (1338). The line begins as a simple joke but turns into a comment on England’s more recent enemy, Catholics. The vice’s concluding lines in the play continue to parody Catholicism’s Latin, as he cries, “Credo, credo, credo” (1852) when he exits to hell.

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<sup>104</sup> For example, Faustus uses it to conjure in *Doctor Faustus* (1.3.8-9).



Whan the fryre begonne, afore the nonne,  
To synge of precyouse stones,  
'From my youth,' sayt she, 'they have comfort me,'—  
As it had bene for the nones. (816-825)

The Latin passage he quotes is Psalm 128.1: "Often have they fought against me from my youth" (DRV), but Infidelity fudges the translation of "expungnaverunt," translating it as "they have comfort[ed]" rather than the accurate "they have fought against" in order to allude to the nun's sexual satisfaction. Like New Guise's Psalm-turned-joke about friars in hell, Infidelity parodically alters the context of the liturgy to produce a vulgar rather than virtuous meaning, underscoring internal intent over external manifestation as the marker for morality. Infidelity also evokes religious diction when Avarice and Ambition enter later in the act: "Come, axe me blessynge... / ...Axe blessynge, I saye" (974, 976). The vices soon consent, "We crye a mercye" (982), to which Infidelity commands, "Downe on your knees than, and axe me blessynge shortely" (983). His role as mock priest parallels Tityvillus's and Jonathas's, and the vices' inverted repentance harkens back to Mankind's relationship to Mischief and the Worldlings. Infidelity also mocks the Pope's mitre, claiming it signifies the mouth of a wolf: "If thou stoupe downewarde, loo, se how the wolfe doth gape. / Redye to devoure the lambes, least any escape" (1185-1186). He ends his spiel to Ambition and Avarice with a comment on "the lawes of se non and can non" (1191), meaning "see none" and "can do none," which Ambition converts into a pun on "the two lawes cyvyle and canon" (1193).

The play's parody of Catholicism extends to its devotional practices, as well, as the vices mock relics, pilgrimage, and indulgences. Idolatry first gives a litany of the saints and offerings that will solve various ailments; for example, "If ye can not slepe but slumber, / Geve otes unto saynt Uncumber" (531-532), and "Geve onyons to saynt Cutlake, / And garlyke to saynt Cyryake, / If ye wyll shurne the head ake" (535-537). Infidelity elaborates on her parody by instructing Idolatry and Sodomy how to corrupt the Law of Nature:

Here have I pratye gynnes,  
Both brouches, beades and pynnes,  
With such as the people wynnes  
Unto ydolatrye.

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Here is a stoole for the  
A ghostlye father to be  
To heare Benedicite,  
A boxe of creame and oyle.  
Here is a purse of rellyckes,  
Raggis, rotten bones, and styckes,  
A taper with other tryckes,  
Shewe them in every soyle. (659-662, 675-682)

Like Idolatry's "charmies of sorcerye" (414), Infidelity's trappings deflate the institutions of Catholicism by making them purely physical, stripped of any spiritual significance. He remarks that a stole makes a priest, oil makes a blessing, and old

bones make relics. Infidelity also mockingly adopts the role of priest to intervene in a debate between the Law of Christ and False Doctrine:

Peace be here, and God,      mastre doctour, by your leave,  
That I maye declare      a pardone here in my sleve,  
Of our Lady of Boston,      Ingham, an Saynt Johannes frarye,  
With the indulgence      of blessyd Saynt Antonye. (1665-1668)

He continues the charade with a mock blessing to the audience and selling of indulgences:

Good christen people,      I am come hyther verelye  
As true p[r]octour      of the howse of Saynt Antonye.  
Of cleane remyssyon      I have brought ye indulgence,  
A pena et culpa      --for all your synne and offence.  
By the auctoryte      of Pope Leo and Pope Clement,  
Pope Bonyface, Pope Pius,      Pope Johan, and Pope Innocent.  
And here I blesse ye      with a wyng of the Holy Ghost,  
From thonder to save ye,      and from spretes in every coast.  
Lo, here is a belle      to hange upon your hogge,  
And save your cattell      from the bytynge of a dogge.  
So many as wyll come      to thys holy fraternyte,  
Come paye your moneye,      and ye shall have letters of me. (1678-  
1689)

Again, the physical and material nature of Catholicism is emphasized—salvation comes from objects like bell or words like “a pena et culpa,” and more importantly, it

can be bought for a price. Later, in act 4, Hypocrisy mocks saints' healings with his own tale about such miracles:

In Parys we have        mantell of Saynt Lewes  
Whych women seke moch        for helpe of their barenes;  
For be it ones layed        upon a womannys bellye,  
She go thens with chylde,        the myracles are seane there daylye.  
(1453-1456)

Hypocrisy's narrative highlights that the "myracles" of healing these women's barrenness is physical, not spiritual. He also shares an anecdote on how the cowl of Saint Francis can bring monks into heaven, regardless of their moral actions:

For I reade of one        that shuld have gone to the devyll  
But the spretes of helle        coulde do to hym non evyll  
Tyll Saynt Frances came        and toke from hym hys cowle;  
Then went he to helle,        the fryres ded heare hym howle.  
I wyll therfor serve        Saynt Frances with hart and mynde,  
With dayly memoryes        that he maye be my frynde;  
And than I care not        for all the devyls in hell—  
That I have tolde yow        is more true than the Gospel. (1499-1506)

Infidelity's comment stresses Catholicism's materiality of salvation—not by faith but by Saint Francis will he be saved. This theology, he says, "is more true than the Gospel."

Catholic doctrines do not escape the vices' wrath either, as they pervertedly refashion the Decalogue and doctrinal creeds. In act 3, the Law of Moses



summarizes the Ten Commandments for Infidelity, who then inquires of Ambition, one of the Law's corrupters, "What wyll ye saye unto the ten commaundementes?" (1107). Ambition replies with a mock list of commandments, each perverted into blasphemy to support a specific Catholic doctrine. For instance, he remarks,

Where as God doth saye, 'No straunge goddes thu shalt have,'  
With sayntes worshyppynge that clause we wyll deprave.  
And though he commaunde to make no carved ymage,  
For a good intent yet wyll we have pulgrymage.  
Though he wyll us not to take hys name in wayne,  
With tradycyons yet thereunto wyll we constrayne.  
No Sabboth wyll we with Gods worde sanctyfye,  
But wyth lyppe labour and ydle ceremonye. (1109-1116)

Avarice, not to be parodically outdone by his cohort, gives a pseudocreed based on the doctrines of Catholicism:

The artycles are these, geve eare and take good hede:  
First they shall beleve in our holy father Pope;  
Next in hys decrees and holy decretals;  
Then in holy church, with sencer, crosse and cope,  
In the ceremonyes and blessed sacramentals;  
In purgatory then, in pardons and in trentals,  
In praynge to sayntes, and in Saynt Frances whoode,  
In Our Lady of Grace, and in the blessed roode.

They shall beleve also      in rellyckes and relygyon,  
 In Our Ladyes psalter,      in fre wyll and good wurkes,  
 In the ember dayes,      and in the Popes remysson,  
 In bedes and in belles      not used of the Turkes,  
 In the golden masses      agaynst soch spretes as lurkes  
 With charmes and blessynges. (1162-1175)

Infidelity also parodies Catholic teaching in act 4, when he encounters the Law of Christ. He turns the Biblical metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ into a reference for Christ's promiscuity among his neighbors: "I thought      it was joye of your lyfe / That ye were so good      to your neybers / ...Ye ease them amonge, if it be as I heare" (1316-1317, 1319-1320). Infidelity pushes the joke when he gets the Law of Christ to admit that Paul also "fathered" children by the church, Christ's supposed bride:

Than are ye a cuckolde,      by the blessed holy masse!  
 As I sayd afore,      so cometh it now to passe,  
 For I am a prophete      by hygh inspiracyon led.  
 Now lyke I my self      moch better than I ded.  
 Ye sayt that Saynt Paule      begate your wyfe with chylde! (1373-1377)

Once again, Infidelity uses the parodic technique of reducing the spiritual to the physical to demonstrate how context determines meaning.

Bale's *Three Laws*, like each of the previous texts examined, explicates the link between words and meaning through its alterations of languages' contexts. By counterposing models of virtuous and vicious language use and demonstrating characters' movement from one model to the other, Bale, like the author of *Mankind*, asserts that one's language is intrinsically linked with one's morality. This connection is first made by the Law of Christ, who observes, "As thou art, thou speakest, after thy hartes abundaunce, / For as the man is, soch is hys utteraunce" (1321-1322). The adage alludes to Luke 6:45, a perfect model for the morality play's use of language: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (DRV).

To establish this connection, *Three Laws* relies on distinct meters and rhyme schemes for the virtuous and vice characters, and Bale's characters skillfully navigate between them to signify their morality. Blatt remarks that the meters "serve to distinguish the different levels of the dramas" (222), while Happé argues that Bale's language "provides one of the most important indentifying characteristics here and that it is used to direct the audience's attention to specific intentions" (*John Bale* 79). However, unlike the relatively simple metrical gymnastics of *Mankind*, Bale employs an impressive array of meters, rhyme schemes, and registers to mark his characters' morality. Moreover, although both Blatt and Happé discuss the presence of vice and virtue meters, the former merely notes characters' vacillations and the latter does not address them at all.

Bale departs from the traditional morality play framework by not including an emblematic human figure to trace the moral (and verbal) descent into sin and reascent into grace. In fact, his play lacks a human protagonist entirely.<sup>106</sup> Instead, each of his three Laws is matched against two secondary vices, with Infidelity as the ring leader each round. The virtuous Laws all initially use the virtuously-coded meter against the viciously-coded meter of their enemies. However, as in *Mankind*, language is contagious, and the degree of the infection marks the corruptibility of the Law in question.

Bale evokes three main rhyme schemes in *Three Laws*: rhyme royal, *rhyme couée*, and couplets. Rhyme royal uses an ababbcc scheme with ten to twelve syllables marked by caesurae. *Rhyme couée* uses an aabccb (or some variation, like aaabcccb or abcb) with shorter lines of usually six syllables. Bale's use of couplets is most extensive, marked by ten- to twelve-syllable lines with caesurae.

Blatt aligns rhyme royal with "emotional intensity" and "didactic expositions" (222), a characterization echoed by Happé, who ascribes the scheme to "formal and elevated" sections, comprised mainly of "authoritative doctrinal speeches" (*John Bale* 84). This characterization holds true for its main uses, and even accounts for the heavily Latinate wordstock that often accompanies it. It is also only used by virtuous characters—the vices never employ it. Bale, the Prolocuter, precludes the play entirely in rhyme royal, and God the Father uses it to open the first act:

I am Deus Pater,      a substaunce invysyble

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<sup>106</sup> Bevington calls Christian Faith "a Psychomachia figure" but notes that "he is only nominally the center of the play, and makes his first appearance belatedly in the last 120 lines of the 2081-line work" (*Mankind to Marlowe* 129).

All one with the Sonne      and Holy Ghost in essence.  
 To Angell and Man      I am incomprehensyble,  
 A strength infynyte,      a ryghteousnesse, a prudence,  
 A mercy, a goodnesse,      a truth, a lyfe, a sapyence.  
 In heaven and in earth      we made all to our glory  
 Man ever havynge      in a specyall memory. (36-42)

In addition to God the Father's speeches, the three Laws each speak in rhyme royal in the first act. Similarly, the Laws of Nature and Moses use rhyme royal to bookend acts 2 and 3 respectively. In both sets of speeches, the Laws evoke similar Latinate diction to complement their more doctrinally heavy content. In act 5, God the Father returns to rhyme royal, as do the three Laws and the Christian Faith in their concluding speeches.

Directly counter to rhyme royal is the vice's use of *rhyme couée*, a rhyme scheme that does not appear in any other of Bale's extant plays. As the vice register, it naturally contains a heavy demotic vocabulary, riddled with scatological jokes and gratuitous catalogues, and often relies on alliteration, all of which echo Chester's Antichrist and the vice language in *Mankind*. Happé praises that "the language of villainy is one of Bale's strong points" (*Complete Plays* 16), and Kendall remarks that "Bale is consistent in reserving the circularity of alliteration for the characterization of evil" (98). Infidelity introduces this scheme in act 2, in his encounter with the Law of Nature:

Marry, God geve ye good even,  
 And the holyman saynt Steven

Sende ye a good newe yeare.

I wolde have brought ye the paxe,

Or els an ymage of waxe,

If I had knowne ye heare. (181-186)

He and the six vices he meets all consistently use *rhyme couée* when they are not speaking in couplets. The stanzas do vary, with some longer aaabcccb versions and shorter abcb versions, however, the form and content of the vices' language clearly demarcates their villainous roles.

The couplet form appears most in the play, and it is also the most morally ambiguous. Blatt links the form with "passages where the action is carried forward by conversation and for less elevated explanation" (222). Happé vaguely attributes its use to "serious speeches . . . [and] some of the places where the vices attack the Laws in conversation" (*John Bale* 83). Every character employs it at some point, always in dialogue with others, and given its use by the staunchly virtuous God the Father and categorically vicious Infidelity, it appears to offer no indication of a character's morality. Rather, the couplet form allows the vice figures to characterize themselves through their scatological content, as opposed to the virtuous characters' plainer diction in the couplets, a register Kendall aligns with the shepherds of the mystery plays (105) and Dillon ascribes to the "idealised ploughman" (*Language and Stage* 104).

However, like Mankind's vacillation between registers, two of Bale's virtuous characters cross the linguistic border. Although the Law of Nature begins act 2 with his brief sermon in rhyme royal, his language shifts after the entrance of Infidelity in

line 175, moving into rhyme *couée* and exchanging the Latinate diction of his rhyme royal stanzas for a more on a demotic wordstock. Regarding this shift, Blatt merely relates, “[The Law of Nature] then suits his speech to that of Infidelity till the end of the act” (222). She never speculates *why* this change occurs, and Happé and Kendall ignore it completely.

When Infidelity enters act 2 dressed as a pedlar, he begins his assault by trying to sell the Law of Nature a broom and gesturing to other goods he sells, like a pax, waxen images, and candles, all apparatus of Catholicism. He only speaks in *rhyme couée*. The Law of Nature does not see the error in his wares, demonstrating his corruptibility, and he “catches” Infidelity’s meter in his first lines. The two converse in *rhyme couée* stanzas such as the following:

Naturae Lex: Thu art dysposed to mocke;

Sone mayst thou have a knocke,

If thou with me so game.

Infidelitas: Your mouth shall kysse my docke,

Your tonge shall it unlocke—

But I saye, what is your name? (213-218)

The Law of Nature does not identify Infidelity as a vice until 175 lines later, and this meter continues until the Law exits at line 372. He does not return to rhyme royal until he enters alone and leprous at the end of act 2, making his foray into the vice meter immediate and prolonged.

Blatt notes a digression in the Law of Moses’s meter as well. She argues:





[Sings.] Saepe expugnaverunt me a iuventute mea.

Moseh Lex And what includeth thys mysterye?

Infidelitas A symple probleme of bytcherye.

Whan the fryre begonne, afore the nonne,

To synge of precyouse stones,

'From my youth,' sayt she, 'they have comfort me,'—

As it had bene for the nones.

Moseh Lex I assure the playne, I set not by soch gaudes;

Thy usage shewe the to be brought up amonge

baudes.

Infidelitas It was a good world whan we had soch wholsom

storyes

Preached in our churche on sondayes and other

feryes.

With us was it merye

Whan we went to Berye,

And to Our Lady of Grace,

To the bloude of Hayles,

Where no good chere fayles,

And other holye place. (806-835)

Infidelity continues in *rhyme couée* for five more stanzas before reverting back to couplets. Presumably, the “two brief lines” of interest that Blatt refers to come in lines 815 and 820, when his lines are only seven and nine syllables respectively,

without a caesura. However, Infidelity does not move into *rhyme couée* until *after* those lines, and the Law of Moses appears to recognize Infidelity's vulgarity *before* the *rhyme couée* stanzas, as the Law reverts back to the longer-lined couplets for lines 826 and 827. The Law of Moses's two shorter lines definitely indicate interest in Infidelity based on their content, and may serve as a linguistic marker for the audience, who has already heard Infidelity's (and the Law of Nature's) *rhyme couée* in the previous act. However, the change in meter is subtle, and not directly motivated by Infidelity's meter, which only appears later. Furthermore, the Law of Moses sticks to the couplet rhyme scheme, not the aaabcccb of *rhyme couée*.

There is, however, one other point when the Law of Moses changes schemes—amid his over one hundred lines of couplets with Infidelity, there is a single digression in meter. As the Law of Nature does, the Law of Moses opens with two stanzas of rhyme royal, explicating his theological significance. When Infidelity enters, the vice begins with the couplet form, not *rhyme couée* as he does with the Law of Nature. The Law of Moses joins in, and the two speak in couplets for roughly twenty-five lines. The Law of Moses appears more wary of the shape-shifter: In his initial address to Infidelity, he calls him “good brother” (806) and inquires as to the events of the compline service Infidelity says he attended last night. However, after the vice makes a joke on the song “lapides preciosi,” the Law of Moses discerns that Infidelity was “brought up among baudes” (826).

Then Infidelity switches into *rhyme couée* when he reminisces about the religious depravity of his youth. However, notably, Infidelity switches back into the couplet form in the last line of this speech, without providing an opportunity for the

Law of Moses to pick up his previous register. He simply uses the *rhyme couée* for the low comedy speech and returns to their previous scheme to resume the conversation. The Law of Moses's digression comes later when he forces the rhyme scheme into, surprisingly, rhyme royal:

Infidelitas: By the blessed lorde, than wyll I playe Robsons  
part.

Moseh Lex: Whye, what part wylt thou playe?

Infidelitas: By cockes sowle, geve over so sone as I fele smart.

Moseh Lex: It wyll be to late if I ones cupple with the.

Infidelitas: Then lete me alone, and we shall sone agre,  
And I shall be glad to be acquaynted with ye.

Moseh Lex: Acquayntaunce, good fellowe? Thou mayst sone  
have of me. (904-910)

Despite the almost forty lines prior of straight couplets, the Law of Moses forces the new rhyme scheme with the introduction of "playe" and then supplies the rhyme on "the," while Infidelity attempts to continue in couplet form, with his four lines split between two rhyming pairs: "part," "smart," "agre," and "ye."

The context of this moment comes in Infidelity's outrage that the Law of Moses requires, "If we be stryken, we maye not stryke agayne?" (890).

Humorously, Infidelity then offers to fight the Law of Moses over it—"I defye your worst, and to yow there is my glove!" (893). The Law initially provokes

Infidelity's challenge: "What, wilt thou not fyght? Thy wittes are better than so"

(894). However, he then warns the vice "to kepe thy pacyence" (897) against the

quarrel, reminding Infidelity that “that lawe sleath in hys wreath” (903), despite the Law’s own loss of patience. The Law of Moses continues to mock Infidelity’s offer to fight with, “Whye, what part wylt thy playe?” (905), and the two escalate the argument until the Law of Moses, just shown to prohibit physical violence, threatens, “It wyll be to late if I ones cupple with the.” The stanza could be read in earnest, with the rhyme royal marking a significant theological moment; the Law of Moses *is* perhaps the most punitive of the Laws. However, given the context of its content and the fact that the Law of Christ, clearly privileged by the Protestant Bale, lacks any similar moments of possible theological significance, an ironic reading is more likely. The rhyme royal stanza embedded in the long-running couplets marks the supremacy of the Law of Moses over Infidelity but also highlights the irony of the Law’s violent threat—when the meter suggests theological virtue, the Law of Moses has slipped into vice. Infidelity does not push the issue but instead brushes it off as his “worst fault” of hastiness and quickly changes the subject. The tension is defused as the two return to their couplet form for the remainder of their conversation, and like the Law of Nature, the Law of Moses reenters corrupt at the act’s conclusion, ending in five stanzas of rhyme royal.

The Law of Christ, as both of his predecessors do, opens his act with two stanzas in rhyme royal. He then moves into couplets with Infidelity and his minions, maintaining this meter until his first exit almost one hundred twenty lines later. When he reenters towards the end of act 4, he resumes the couplet form until he exits a second time. Notably, Infidelity, not the Law of Christ, closes out act 4, with twenty-four lines of couplet rhymes. The Law of Christ clearly appears less taken in

by Infidelity, and unlike his counterparts, who ask for Infidelity's name, the Law of Christ is able to identify him: "Thu aperest by thy frutes to be Infydelyte" (1398). Never once does the Law change his meter or rhyme scheme.

In the play's second act, Infidelity pointedly asks of Sodomy and Idolatry, "What sedes that thy cannyst sowe / Mankynde to over throwe" (552-553), reminiscent of Tityvillus's plot against Mankind. The seeds appear to be verbal. Though the three Laws appear parallel in action, their use of language points to subtle differences in their characters. The Law of Nature employs *rhyme couée* for the bulk of act 2 while the Law of Moses's meter change is a single stanza, and significantly, the Law of Christ never changes meter at all. This scaling back of vice register as the Laws progress indicates their morality—the Law of Nature is corrupted immediately, while the Law of Moses has only a brief moment of moral digression, and the Law of Christ is never corrupted but only burned. This spectrum of moral decay directly relates to the forms the Laws take. The Law of Nature is unwritten and thus easily fooled by Infidelity and his minions. The Law of Moses is clearly written but still corruptible by its own strict, hypocritical adherence; this connects to Bale's discourse on the Pharisees. The Law of Christ, also clearly written but privileged by (the Protestant Bale's) God, is never corrupted but only persecuted as a heretic. He represents the ultimate contextual lens through which truth can be received, incorruptible but often discarded.

Central to the debate between Catholicism and Protestantism was language choice, and Bale places language at the center of his morality play. As Dillon notes,

Bale finds Latin suspect because of its “foreignness, and in turn [he] construct[s] that foreignness as deceitful and exploitative” (*Language and Stage* 92). She also notes the characterization of Latin as material and constructed in Protestant drama, and Scriptural truths are often translated out of the Latin, or both Latin and English quotations are provided. Moreover, the English of virtuous characters is often plain, as “the unadorned truth of scripture itself” (Kendall 99). The plain-speaking characters once condemned as idle heretics become the heroes of Reformation drama, verbally battling the verbose, Latin-minded antagonists.

However, Bale does not discount the use of Latin out of hand; rather he lifts the veil by offering translations of Biblical verses. As Shrank notes, “The early moderns did not reject the language that had dominated medieval scholarship and diplomacy: like other aspects of their medieval inheritance, they used it for different purposes” (192). Through the mouth of Avarice, Bale offers his own satirical view of Catholicism’s choice of Latin:

The byshoppes must hold      their prestes in ignoraunce  
 With longe Latyne houres,      least knowledge to them chaunce;  
 .....  
 Se the laye people      praye never but in Latyne;  
 Lete them have their crede      and servyce all in Latyne  
 That a Latyne beleve      maye make a Latyne sowle:  
 Lete them nothyng knowe      of Christ nor yet of Powle.  
 If they have Englysh      lete it be for advauntage  
 For pardons, for dyrges,      for offerynges and pylgrymage.

I reckon to make them a newe crede in a whyle,  
And all in Englysh, their conscyence to begyle. (1145-1146, 1153-  
1160)

Avarice later provides such a “newe crede,” concluding with “Thys crede wyll  
brynge in moneye; / In Englysh therfor we wyll it clarkely convey” (1175-6).  
Bale, here, directly responds to not only Catholicism’s demand for Latin services but  
even criticizes its attempts to provide documents in English, such as the *Lay-folk’s  
Prayer Book* or *Prymer*, as done so in service of profit, not the people. He also  
criticizes the Catholic Church through a quotation from 1 Corinthians, said by the  
Law of Christ:

No man wylleth Paule to speake in the congregacyon  
In a straunge language without interpretacyon.  
In your Latyne houres the flocke do ye not consydre  
But declare your selves to be Romysh all togydre.  
‘Be not led about,’ sayth Paule, ‘by any straunge lernynge.’  
What els is your doctryne but a blynde popysh thyng? (1649-  
1654)

Bale eschews “straunge language” in his own texts by either having his  
virtuous characters give Scriptural quotations in English, like the Law of Christ’s  
“‘Thys people,’ sayth God, ‘with ther lyppes honour me;’ (1345), or by providing  
translations of Latin passages, such as the Law of Christ’s explication of Scripture to  
Infidelity:

The Corinthes first epystle hath thys clere testimony:

'In Christo Jesu per Evangelium vos genui—  
I have begote yow in Jesu Christ,' sayth Powle,  
'By the Gospel preachynge to the confort of your sowle.' (1369-  
1372)

Conversely, Infidelity's Latin prayer and "Lapides preciosi" song remain untranslated, hidden by the linguistic veil.

Bale explicitly connects Catholicism with this veiling of Scripture, likened to the veiling of Moses himself: Avarice, the Pharisee and doctor of canon law, says, "A vayne wyll I sprede upon the face of Moses, / That non shal perceyve the clerenes of hys contaunce" (1104-1105). This parallelism in action forges a crucial link between Catholicism and Pharisaical Judaism.

Whatever the heresy, it seems it was connected to Judaism, as is evidenced by texts such as Chester's "Antichrist" and the Croxton *Play*. Indeed, a connection to Judaism is a frequent secondary marker of stage heretics. From the play's very beginning, Bale frames contemporary sin in Old Testament terms of being "unclean." The Prologue moralizes, "But Infydeyte so worketh in every place / That under the heavens no thyng is pure and cleane, / So moch the people to hys perverse wayes leane" (19-21), and when Idolatry and Sodomy later corrupt the Law of Nature, they are called "uncleane vyces" (788). In contrast, God the Father says that the purpose of the three Laws is to teach humanity to walk "in clenness of lyfe" (53), and the Law of Christ refers to the church as "cleane and holy" (1325). This initial concern with clean and unclean reflects the dichotomy found in the Torah, but its application to the present time of the play and to all three Laws



suggests a larger, more universal framework appropriate to the morality play. Bale uses the Old Testament, Pharisaical model to condemn contemporary Catholic practices. Bale even appropriates this dichotomy himself in his *Answer*, when he aligns his Catholic-Protestant conversion with Paul's own Pharisee-Christian transformation (Happé *John Bale* 59).

Bale draws his moral lines quite clearly, in what Kendall calls "bold primary colors" (92), as the "clennes" of the Protestant characters opposes the "uncleane" Catholic villains. The correlation of these Catholic vices to the Pharisees ironically comments on both sects, who in their strict obedience to cleanliness actually become unclean. Infidelity first aligns his minions Avarice and Ambition with the Pharisees of Christ's time: "Soch knyghtes wyll I have as shall confounde them all, / As Sadducees and Scrybes, with the sect pharysaycal" (960-1). In act 3, the same vices enter costumed as a Pharisee and scribe respectively, and the Law of Moses aligns his dramatic corruption with his historical one—"the Pharysees corrupted me anone" (1282). False Doctrine also admits connection with the Pharisees, as he describes how he first killed Christ: "As he preached here, we followed from place to place, / To trappe Hym in snare, and Hys doctryne to deface. / Than founde we the meanes to put Hym so to death" (1555-7). He then quotes Caiaphas' "counsell pharysaycall" (1564) and elaborates on his (the Pharisees') plot to guard Jesus's tomb. These lines indicate that the vice was present, in the false doctrines of the Pharisees, while Christ was on earth, and they also forge a parallel between Christ's persecution on the cross and his later condemnation by Infidelity, Hypocrisy, and False Doctrine as a heretic in act 4. Through the

positioning of the vices as Pharisaical figures, the Laws (and particularly the Law of Christ) become sacrificial Christ figures, corrupted or falsely condemned.

By equating his Catholic vices with the Pharisees, Bale also aligns Catholic practices with Jewish ones. For instance, Avarice conflates his corruption of “the Jewes ceremonyall lawes” with his instating of “longe Latyne hours” (1139, 1146). Similarly, the Law of Christ relies on Old Testament passages from Isaiah, originally critical of Jewish legalism, to condemn the contemporary Catholic practices of the vices. When Infidelity boasts of adultery among Catholic priests, the Law of Christ responds with a passage from Isaiah:

‘Thys people,’ sayth God,      ‘with ther lyppes honour Me’,  
In vayne worshyp they,      teachynge mennys fatuyte.  
Apparaunt is that church      and open to the eyes;  
Their worshyppynges are      in outwarde ceremonyes,  
That counterfet church      standeth al by mennys tradycyons,  
Without the scriptures      and without the hartes affeccyons.

.....  
By the word of God      thys church is ruled onlye,  
And doth not consyst      in outwarde ceremonye. (1345-50, 1353-4)

Here, Bale casts the Catholic rituals as “outwarde ceremonyes” made by “mennys tradycyons,” two words Bale frequently uses to condemn Catholic practices.<sup>107</sup> The second reference to Isaiah comes a mere three hundred lines later, after Hypocrisy, a Franciscan friar, catalogues his day in the monastery. The Law of Christ explains:

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<sup>107</sup> See (1114, 1116, 1129, and 1130).

Ye forsake the Lorde, as Esaias doth tell,  
 And hyghly blaspheme the holie of Israel.  
 In hys first chaptre thys horryble sentence is:  
*Quis haec frustranea quaesivit de manibus vestris;*  
 'Who hath requyred of yow soch sacryfyce?  
 In vayne offer yow that uncommaunded servyce.  
 Your incense to me is great abhomynacyon;  
 I sore abhorre it and moch detest your fashyon.  
 What ye praye to me, I geve ye non attendaunce,  
 But avert my face, sayth God, and My countenaunce.'  
 By thys ye maye se that the Lorde doth not regarde  
 Your mangy mutteryng, ney[t]her graunt it any rewarde. (1637-  
 1647)

The shift to direct address at the passage's conclusion elides the Jewish legalism of its original audience with Hypocrisy's practices inside the monastery. Like the practices of the Pharisees, Catholicism offers "uncommaunded servyce" to the letter, irrespective of the spirit. Finally, the Law of Christ's condemnation of Hypocrisy and False Doctrine is drawn directly from Jesus's anaphoric lines in Matthew 23. The Law of Christ says,

Wo, Pharysees, wo! Ye make cleane outwardlye,  
 But inwardes ye are full of covetousnesse and baudrye.  
 Paynted tumbes are ye, [aperynge] ryght bewtyful;

But within ye stynke, and have thoughtes very shamefull. (1708-1711)

The corresponding Biblical passage reads,

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within you are full of rapine and uncleanness. Thou blind Pharisee, first make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all filthiness. So you also outwardly indeed appear to men just; but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23.25-28, DRV)

As Happé notes, “Bale is adept at bringing in accusations about the literal application of the law by papists” and “the political intention is an attack on Catholic prelates who obscure the true law as Bale saw it, in parallel to the Scribes and Pharisees” (*John Bale* 78, 86-7). Through these key passages, Bale argues that the rituals and traditions of Catholicism make men unclean, just as the Pharisees’ legalism did. He further develops this argument through the metaphor of Catholics as wolves among sheep and the unclean animals dogs and swine.

When Avarice extols all the harm he has done to the people, as both Pharisee and Catholic scholar, he boasts, “We are soch mercenaryes, / And subtyle proprietaryes / As from the flock all carryes / The wolle, skynne, flesh, and all”

(1012-1015) and continues that his corruption occurs at “a wolvysh rate” (1063).

Infidelity also observes that Ambition’s miter becomes wolvish:

If thu stoupe downewarde,      loo, se how the wolfe doth gape.  
Redye to devoure      the lambes, least any escape.  
But thy wolvyshnesse      by thre crownes wyll I hyde,  
Makynge the a Pope,      and a captayne of all pryde. (1185-1188)

The dichotomy between sheep and wolves stems from Jesus’s exhortation in Matthew 7.15-16: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (DRV).<sup>108</sup> The Pharisaical false prophets of Jesus’s time were seen as wolves in sheep’s clothing, scattering the flock of the true shepherd. They outwardly appeared innocent but inwardly were villainous. For Bale, the Catholic clergy is no different.

Ambition introduces a second image for the Pharisee-Catholic elision, that of dogs and swine. He says,

Of men make we swyne      by the draffe of our tradycyons,  
And cause them nothyng      to regard by superstycyons.  
As dogges unresonable      on most vyle carren fede,  
So wyll we cause them      seke ydolles in their nede; (1129-1132)

Infidelity later reiterates this point:

Wyth hys rytes bestiall  
Wyll make the people swyne.

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<sup>108</sup> This image was used against Lollards in the fifteenth century as well. See “Lollards and Catholics and Magicians—Oh My!”.

In draffe wyll he them lede,      And with tradycyons fede  
Where they shall suppe or dyne.

Covetousnes wyll warkes      That many one shall barke  
Lyke dogges agaynst the truth. (1224-1231)

Dogs and swine are unclean animals, like the “uncleane vyces” (788) they represent. Lastly, Infidelity, Hypocrisy, and False Doctrine discuss what “newe heretykes” (Protestants) claim about Catholic dietary restrictions. First, Infidelity says that these heretics “report also      that dogges have no devocyon / To hys holy lawes, nor to hys olde instruccyon” (1523-1524). False Doctrine then asks Infidelity to elaborate on why even the doggish Catholics hate the Pope, to which Infidelity responds, “They love no pese porrege,      nor yet reade hearynges in Lent, / Stock fysh nor oysters,      but curse hym body and bone, / And wolde hys reade sprottes and rotten fysh were gone” (1526-1528). As Happé notes, peas porridge, red herrings, stock fish, oysters, and red sprats were foods allowed to be eaten during Lent and on fast days, much like the dietary restrictions of kosher laws in the Torah, and the comment is pointedly directed toward False Doctrine (2 n.175 l.1526-8).

The text then indicates that the audience, too, condemns these “fast foods,” as Infidelity says he hears “the people complayne very moch” and False Doctrine notes their “pratlinge” (1531, 1532). The presumed racket from the audience, themselves former Catholics, gives Infidelity cause to further explain what is offensive about False Doctrine and his dietary restrictions:

They saye thu teachest      nothyng but lowsy tradycions,  
And lyes for lucre,      with damnable superstycions.

And thus they conclude that the draffe of popysh prystes  
Is good ynough for swyne, by whom they meane the papystes.  
Yea, and they saye also, the dyet of men is all  
To most vyle carren, the dogges wyll sonest fall. (1533-1538)

Bale uses the precise term, “tradycions,”<sup>109</sup> and a similar one, “superstycyons,” to connect the Catholic diet for fast days to the Pharisaical practices condemned in both Isaiah passages. According to Infidelity’s report of the Protestants’ criticism, the diet of Catholics is fit only for swine (themselves unclean animals) and becomes carrion (another unclean food), on which dogs will feed. Ironically, the machinations of cleanness actually *make* Catholics unclean, turning their diets into food fit for swine and dogs. False Doctrine then heavy-handedly reiterates the connection between the papists and dogs: “Than do they compare the papystes unto dogges” (1539). Here, Infidelity expands the Protestant attack with another metaphor, “Marry, that they do, and to soch swynysh hogges / As in swyll and sosse are brought up all their lyfe” (1540-1541).

Bale’s use of these animal similes evokes two New Testament parables that suit well the play’s dichotomy of clean and unclean. The first is referenced in 2 Peter 2.22: “The dog is returned to his vomit: and, The sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire” (DRV). Thus, Catholics return to their vomit, their peas porridge and red herrings, and the clean sow gets dirty again, like the very swine Infidelity mentions, brought up in filth all their lives. The second parable references Jesus’ teaching regarding pearls before swine: “Give not that which is holy to dogs;

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<sup>109</sup> See (1349).

neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you” (Matthew 7.6, DRV). According to Bale, God’s holy Word was cast before Catholicism, and it trampled the Word under its feet.

But why, exactly, is the parallel between the Pharisees and Catholics so scathing? After all, one of the virtuous characters in the play *is* the Law of Moses, which put the Jewish ceremonies into practice. Appropriately, the Law of Moses himself answers this question:

Ceremonyall rytes        are also commendable,  
In holy dayes, garmentes,        temples, and consecracyons,  
Sacryfyces and vowes,        with offerynges and expiacyons,  
Whych are unto Christ        as fygurs, types, and shadowes.  
As Paule doth declare,        in hys Pystle to the Hebrues,  
These are only fygurs        and outwarde testymonyes,  
No man is perfyght        by soch darke ceremonies:  
Only perteyne they        unto the third Commaundment  
Of the Sabboth daye,        tyll Christ the Lorde be present,  
In ys death endynge        the whole Judaycal presthode. (938-47)

The Law of Moses, in a very Protestant manner, explains that Christ’s death abolished the ceremonies and practices of Judaism because, while important outward testimonies, they are not in themselves the means to salvation. They prefigured Christ and were acceptable for that pre-Christ period (though even then abused by Pharisees), but in the post-resurrection era, they are mere “darke



ceremonies” that save no one. Based on Bale’s analogy, Christ’s death invalidates the legalistic Catholic practices as well. For him, they save no one.

Bale offers one additional motif to develop the play’s relationship between language and morality—the Biblical metaphor of fruit. Bale carefully merges the Biblical notion of fruit as the external marker of inward morality with Jesus’s tenet that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45 DRV). The fruit of one’s mouth indicates the cleanness of one’s heart—be it orthodox or heterodox.

While Bale draws his condemnatory images primarily from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, he lifts the trope of fruit from this chapter as well. Jesus’s warning against the wolves in sheep’s clothing is immediately followed by his discussion of fruit as the litmus test for morality:

By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.

(Matthew 7.16-20, DRV)

The image is also picked up in Jesus’s instruction in John 15:

I am the true vine; and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit, he will take away: and every one that beareth fruit, he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now

you are clean by reason of the word, which I have spoken to you.  
Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,  
unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I  
am the vine: you the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the  
same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. If any  
one abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall  
wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he  
burneth. (John 15.1-6, DRV)

Moreover, the image of fruit as evidence of morality pervades New Testament  
theology.<sup>110</sup>

Bale first evokes fruit in act 1 when he links the forbidden fruit with Satan's  
tempting words:

Thys lawe was geven Man,      in tyme of innocency,  
In no wyse to eate      of the forbydden frute.  
.....  
Those lawes had broken,      the lawe of wycked Sathan  
Impugned your lawes      by craft and subtyle practyse.  
Where yow sayd Eate not!      he sayd unto the woman  
Eate! (79-80, 85-88)

Eve, of course, eats of the fruit of his words. Similarly, the vice figures are known by  
their fruits. In his costuming description, Bale denotes "the aparellynge of the six

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<sup>110</sup> The medieval Antichrist tradition also holds that Antichrist took a fruit-bearing tree and  
turned it upwards by the roots. See "Conspicuous Consumption: Chester's 'Antichrist.'"

vyces, or the frutes of Infydelyte” (121). In this perversion of Jesus’ metaphor, Infidelity becomes the anti-vine and the vices his fruit; and collectively, their blasphemous and parodic language mark them as fruits of unfaithfulness. The Law of Christ, in his exchange with the blasphemous Infidelity, notes, “Thu aperest by thy frutes to be Infydelyte” (1398). Like the vices he produces, Infidelity’s language betrays his villainous identity because it gives voice to the heretical motives of his heart.

Bale’s starkly Protestant drama reshapes not only the characters and conventions of the medieval, Catholic stage, like the stage heretics of Chester’s “Antichrist,” *Mankind*, and the Croxton *Play*, but it also revisits some of the theater’s most pressing questions on words and meaning. The univocity between heart and lips is a theme most fitting for a morality, wherein language serves as the primary manifestation of intention, and Bale explicates this theme in *Three Laws* to define moral and spiritual cleanness based not on what one digests but on what one produces.

## “YOUR WASTE IS GREAT”: FALSTAFF AND THE ECONOMY OF WORDS

The stage heretic tradition developed in Chester’s “Antichrist,” *Mankind*, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, and Bale’s *Three Laws* gets absorbed into early modern drama in a variety of ways. The period’s two leading playwrights, Marlowe and Shakespeare, both appropriate the tradition into their own texts but with widely divergent results. Marlowe adopts the stage heretic as a model for his arch heretic Faustus, and, through Faustus’s own dissent into oblivion, drives the conventional significations of the tradition with him. He is, characteristically, extreme in his deconstruction. Conversely, Shakespeare, also characteristically, further constructs the tradition by expanding the treatment of the stage heretic into a treatment on the stage itself.

In *2 Henry IV*, the Chief Justice accuses Falstaff of “wrenching the true cause the false way” (2.1.113).<sup>111</sup> Many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries leveled this charge against *him* for his satirical depiction of the Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle in his infamous character Falstaff. But, beyond his historical bounds, Falstaff constantly wrenches the true cause the false way, through both his religious heresy and his Biblical parody. This misappropriation of both language and context

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<sup>111</sup> All quotations taken from Shakespeare, William. *1 and 2 Henry IV*. Ed. David Bevington. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. NY: Pearson Longman, 2009. Print. 787-825, 830-872.

suggests Falstaff's own question: "Is not the truth the truth?" (1 2.4.227-8). The *Henry IV* plays suggest that the truth is not always the truth, for both the true cause *and* the true way are necessary to arrive at true meaning.

However, the context of Falstaff's question on truth also suggests a shift in the location of that truth. For Falstaff asks Hal the question rhetorically after extolling his entirely fictitious battle against robbers, the impetus of which was Hal's own covert robbing of the rogue. Hence, Falstaff's entreaty "Is not the truth the truth?" is blatantly ironic given its intended subject, one who knows firsthand that Falstaff's truth is not the truth. However, the audience too knows that his truth is not the truth, and this dramatic irony, for both Hal and the audience, demonstrates that the economy of meaning is not mere bartering between signifiers and signifieds. It must include an audience as well. Thus, the plays demonstrate that meaning is also contingent not only on the dispenser but on the receiver of signifiers. In theatrical terms, not simply within the character but within the audience as well.

*1 and 2 Henry IV* are half of the *Henriad*, which traces England's royal succession from Richard II to Henry V. Part 1 was likely first performed in early 1597, with subsequent public and aristocratic performances, and the play first appeared in print in 1598. It went through two editions that year, indicating its

astounding popularity and currency, in large part due to its jocular rogue knight.<sup>112</sup> Riding on the coattails of Part 1, Part 2 was likely written later in 1597 and performed in 1598. It also saw one quarto edition in 1600, but no other. Both plays appear in the 1623 First Folio.

Falstaff is nearly all things to all people, and any source study of him must admit that his antecedents are as numerous as the adjectives applied to him. Falstaff describes himself as containing “a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name” (2 4.3.18-20). Falstaff does indeed encompass many tongues, and produces them as well, as generations of actors, students, theater-goers, and scholars have teased out the many voices of Falstaff. His girth enfolds part medieval Vice, part braggadocio, part Lord of Misrule, and to view him as exclusively, or even predominantly, one above the other silences the various tongues that cry his name. But one of Falstaff’s tongues is that of the infamous Lollard martyr, Sir John Oldcastle.

Though there has been some scholarly debate as to the exact presence and extent of historical reference between Shakespeare’s Falstaff and the historical Sir John Oldcastle, most scholars agree that the case for historical reference is irrefutable. Scoufos’s seminal book examines Falstaff as a satire of the Oldcastle and Cobham line, and she explicates the numerous historical allusions to the martyr’s

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<sup>112</sup> As David Scott Kastan, in his own edition of the play, notes, “Only about one-third of all the plays that were printed before 1640 ever reached a second edition, and only twelve achieved it in the same year as the first” (106).

biography.<sup>113</sup> David Scott Kastan vividly remarks that Oldcastle's imprint remains "somewhat like phantom pain in an amputated limb" (53).

Oldcastle was a popular figure in early modern England, as his biography appeared initially in John Bale's *Brefe Chronycle Concernynge the Examinacyon and Death of the Blessed Martyr of Christ Syr Iohan Oldecastell the Lorde Cobham* and then in Foxe's 1563 *Acts and Monuments*. These accounts were part of Thomas Cromwell's settlement propaganda and deliberately cast Oldcastle as a pre-Reformation martyr; however, other Catholic accounts depicted him as a rebel, for his 1414 insurrection, and a religious heretic. Foxe responds to the latter tradition with an extensive "Defense of Lord Cobham" in his 1570 edition, and other chroniclers followed suit by including one of the two Oldcastle traditions in their histories. The Lollard even graced the stage in the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (Corbin and Sedge), a source text for Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays.<sup>114</sup>

The case for Falstaff as Oldcastle draws on both internal and external textual evidence, documented by scholars like Scoufos, Gary Taylor, and Kastan. Within the play, there are numerous allusions to Oldcastle's biography, while contemporary

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<sup>113</sup> Sir John Oldcastle married Joan Cobham in 1408 and gained the title (Kastan 52).

<sup>114</sup> Sir John Oldcastle served with Henry IV on expeditions into Scotland and Wales. By 1411, he was heavily involved in the Lollard movement and known to be harboring unlicensed preachers, against the guidelines of Arundel's *Constitutions*. Charges were cautiously brought against the knight, primarily because of his friendship with the now King Henry V, and he was given extended time to recant. When he refused, Henry V counted it as a break in their friendship. He was formally tried and convicted of heresy. He was sent to the Tower but escaped in late 1413. He spent the next two months organizing a massive uprising, consisting primarily of the lower and middle class, against the King. In early 1414, the insurrection occurred, but Oldcastle's force was defeated. Many were arrested and tried, but Oldcastle escaped to Wales. He spent the next three years plotting various attempts to overthrow the Crown, but he was eventually captured and sentenced to death. In December 1417, he was hanged horizontally on the gallows and burned to death at St. Giles Field. Prior to his death, he had predicted that he would be resurrected three days later, and a crowd indeed gathered three days after his death, awaiting his return. See Scoufos (44-69).

performance and reception records confirm such an elision.

Historical references to Oldcastle appear in Falstaff's very first scene, establishing the link immediately on the stage. Hal initially jests that Falstaff is his "old lad of the castle" (1 1.2.41), a sly reference to his historical counterpart, and Falstaff then prophesies, "I'll be traitor then, when thou art king" (1 1.2.142). The latter allusion refers to the most famous event in Oldcastle's biography, his attempt to overthrow the Crown. This event is satirically depicted later in *1 Henry IV*, seamlessly blended with the Feast of Fools mock coronation, when Falstaff and Hal each in turn playact the part of Henry IV. Falstaff first exclaims, "This chair shall be my state, this dagger my scepter, and this cushion my crown" (2.4.374-5). Then Hal desires to switch roles, to which Falstaff ironically replies, "Depose me? If thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker or a poulter's hare" (2.4.430-2). Both of these quips suggest Oldcastle's contentious relationship with Henry V. Then, with Hal as Henry IV, Falstaff continues to jest, "If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more" (1 2.4.134-7). Similarly, in *2 Henry IV*, Lancaster first says of Coleville, "A famous rebel art thou," to which Falstaff ironically replies, "And a famous true subject took him" (4.3.65-6). Falstaff's line not only puns on 'true' as an allusion to his historicity but also to his plural literary tradition—to Catholic chroniclers, he was a famous rebel, but to Protestant ones, he was a famous true subject: Sir Thomas More recounts how Oldcastle's rebellion threatened the realm with "greate peryll and jeopardie," while Foxe says he was "a valiaunt Captaine"



(qtd. in Scoufos 58, 65). The playacting's mock ending, wherein the Prince banishes Falstaff, and the final ending in Part 2, when he is taken to the Fleet, both harken back to the ultimately fatal resolution to Henry V and Oldcastle's conflict.

One of the most pervasive historical allusions in the *Henry IV* plays is to Oldcastle's death—he was horizontally hanged by the gallows and burned.<sup>115</sup> In both *1* and *2 Henry IV*, Falstaff's (and Oldcastle's) impending death hangs over the play. Throughout, Falstaff seems preoccupied with hanging, the gallows, and burning, as they are mentioned either by or in reference to him more than a dozen times in Part 1 and another handful of times in Part 2.<sup>116</sup> In the opening scene, Hal says that when he is king, Falstaff will be a "rare hangman" (1.2.70), which Scoufos views as an explicit reference to Oldcastle's unusual method of death. Similarly, Falstaff's feigned death at the end of *1 Henry IV* alludes to the Lollard martyr as well. Historically, Oldcastle prophesied that he would rise from his grave three days after his death (an obvious allusion to Christ)—his followers believed him and a large crowd gathered at his grave. No Oldcastle was seen. The martyr's real death and absent resurrection is satirically reflected in Falstaff's fake death and flamboyant resurrection.

However, the most overt allusion to Falstaff's predecessor comes in the Epilogue of Part 2. The speaker equivocates, "for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already 'a be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a

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<sup>115</sup> For the famous woodcut of Oldcastle's death, as depicted in the 1563 printing of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, see Poole (19). This unusual death was noted in nearly all contemporary chronicles.

<sup>116</sup> In Part 1: (1.2.38-40, 1.2.61, 1.2.65, 1.2.70, 2.1.70, 2.2.14-15, 2.2.57, 2.2.73, 2.2.108, 2.4.130, 2.4.236, 2.4.435, and 2.4.500). In Part 2: (1.2.92, 1.2.219, 2.2.95, 4.3.29, and Epilogue 28).

martyr, and this is not the man” (27-30). The explicit prophecy of death by sweating, or burning, confirms rather than denies that this *is* the man, and the suggested connection underhandedly reinforces it.

In Part 2, the Epilogue’s ambivalent address of the Oldcastle-Falstaff connection corroborates the external performance and reception evidence for such a reading. The name ‘Oldcastle’ was used instead of ‘Falstaff’ for court or private performances, and one record even titles the play itself *Sir John Old Castell* (Kastan 79). A speech prefix in Part 2 still even still says “Old.” (Taylor 91, 85). Numerous contemporaries remark how the character “was not Falstaffe, but Sr Jhon Oldcastle” (qtd. in Taylor 86). Moreover, in 1599, the Admiral’s Men produced *The First Part of the True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, the Good Lord Cobham*, which explicitly defends Oldcastle against his earlier Falstaffian depiction as a “pamper’d Glutton [and] aged Councillour” (Scoufos 33). Moreover, the association between the two was strong enough to attribute parts of the collaborative play *Sir John Oldcastle*, written in 1619, to Shakespeare. Even under the name ‘Falstaff,’ the Lollard and Puritan connection persists through the historical Sir John Fastolfe:<sup>117</sup> as Kristen Poole observes, in *Henry VI*, “Shakespeare shows Fastolfe deserting the hero Talbot on the field of battle. The Puritans rejected this as . . . slander, because they regarded him as a Lollard sympathizer” (n.194).

Thus, Falstaff’s connections to the Lollard heresy abound, and, as usual on the Elizabethan stage, the historical often stands in for the contemporary. Falstaff’s

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<sup>117</sup> Sir John Fastolfe fought in France under Henry IV and supposedly acted “with much cowardice” during one battle (qtd. in Poole n.194).

staging of this Lollard heretic offers commentary not only on the early modern concepts of Lollardy but also its contemporary descendant, the Puritans. Scoufos explicitly finds the Oldcastle/Cobham line the target of such satire because of their “Lollard-Puritan stance” (xiii). Taylor echoes these sentiments, noting that “Sir John’s moralizing, swearing, threats of repentance, and mimicry of Puritan idiom would have been especially delicious, and satirical, in the mouth of Oldcastle” (94). Kastan also notes that

whatever Shakespeare’s own religious leanings, . . . certainly most members of his audience in 1596 would most likely have viewed the travesty of a Lollard martyr not as a crypto-Catholic gesture but an entirely orthodox commitment, designed to reflect upon the nonconformity that the Queen herself had termed ‘prejudicial to the religion established.’ (Kastan 60-61)

The image of Oldcastle, to both supporters and critics, evoked generic religious nonconformity. Thus, Falstaff is not just part Oldcastle, he is also part heretic.

John Capgrave calls Oldcastle “a grete heretik” in his chronicle (qtd. in Brooks 342), and Douglas Brooks describes him as “the Lollard thorn in Henry V’s side” (337). Scholars have read this mocking of a Lollard and Puritan as either a mainstream Protestant critique of the more radical sect or indicative of Catholic sympathies on Shakespeare’s part. However, as Gary D. Hamilton observes, the mainstream Protestant and Catholic critiques of Puritans likely did not differ greatly (147), and the impetus does not affect Falstaff’s ultimate role as a stage heretic.

Poole emphasizes that the term 'Puritan' in early modern England was a "derisive synonym for 'schismatic'" and applied to those who "destabilized systems of order and confounded traditional social and ecclesiastical categories" (3). A contemporary sermon titled "To the Pvritan" demonstrates this fluidity of meaning: "Concerning the name (Puritan) it is ambiguous and so it is fallacious" and the text calls a Puritan simply "a Protestant Non-Conformist" (Widdowes). Both of these highlight the ambiguous but dissenting nature of Puritans. Poole continues that while modern scholars have attempted to crystalize the term's meaning, Elizabethans employed it specifically to express "taxonomic crisis" (4), and she argues that Falstaff "both catalyzed and epitomized the early modern representation of the stage puritan" (21). Falstaff, as with other stage heretics, produces a taxonomic crisis, indeed.

His first line in Part 1, "What time of day is it, lad?" (1.2.1), is the first harkening to Falstaff as a Lollard. Roy Battenhouse interprets this line as not a question about clock time but about "the real state of things," politically and socially (40). Scoufos reads it as establishing Falstaff's "timelessness" (73). Similarly, Peter Milward interprets this moment as indicative of Falstaff's universality: "such problems as that of time are for political personages to worry about, but as a comic vice, Falstaff is above the passing of time" (49). However, these readings only vaguely and abstractly relate to the dense Biblical parody that follows. Falstaff's inquiry of time is best understood within the Lollard framework, particularly in light of Hal's response,

Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day. (1.2.2-12).

Falstaff would not need to know what time it was to catch his favorite television show or leave for work—the only time-bound institution Falstaff would be concerned with was Church services. However, as Hal points out, Falstaff has even no need for these, for his religion lies in sack, not in the church. This slight on Falstaff's church attendance harkens to the practices of Lollards, who were notorious for eschewing Sunday services.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, Lollards rejected laws on fasting, namely abstaining from meat during Lent, a transgression Falstaff hints at in Part 2: he satirically chides Mistress Quickly, “there is another indictment upon thee, for suffering flesh to be eaten in thy house, contrary to the law, for the which I think thou wilt howl” (2.4.343-5). The Lollards’ “failure to fulfil the established obligations with regard to fasting and to abstention from work on Sundays and holy days . . . led to persistent and deliberate flouting of ecclesiastical laws” (Hudson 147).

Falstaff also subtly alludes to the Lollard and Puritan practice of open-air preaching when he recounts to Hal how “an old lord of the council rated me the

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<sup>118</sup> See “Language Goeth Before a Fall: *Mankind*.”

other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and *in the street, too*" (1.2.87-91, emphasis mine). Falstaff's superficial disregard for the street preacher's admonitions against Hal underhandedly support the idea, as Falstaff's intent in the passage is to chide Hal teasingly over his dubious moral pursuits. Hal picks up on Falstaff's hint and wryly replies, "Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it" (1.2.92-3), quoting Proverbs 1.20. This tidbit hints at the common Lollard practice of having unlicensed preachers sermonize in open fields—a direct challenge to ecclesiastical authority—and the historical Oldcastle was charged with harboring such preachers.<sup>119</sup> Robert Crowley's 1550 edition of Langland's *Pierce Plowman* was printed as a Lollard text and provides a contemporary analogue in its vivid sermon scene, which depicts Reason's address to "the field full of folke," bearing the marks of popular Lollard preaching.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, David Owen, in his tract "The Pvritan Turn'd Jesuite," harps on Puritans' "many and long prayers [and] much vehement preaching" as evidence of their hypocrisy and heresy. Similarly, in his catalogue of types of Puritans, the rector Giles Widdowes includes "factious sermonist" as one, who "serues God with sermons and

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<sup>119</sup> See "Lollards, Catholics, and Magicians—Oh My!" for more on unlicensed preachers.

<sup>120</sup> Crowley firmly situates his edition within the Lollard tradition, as seen in his Preface to the Reader: "In whose [Edward III's] tyme it pleased God to open the eyes of many to se hys truth, geuing them boldenes of herte, to open their mouthes and crye oute agaynste the worckes of darckenes, as did Iohn wicklefe, who also in those dayes translated the holye Bible into the Englishe tonge, and this writer who in reportynge certaine visions and dreames, that he fayned him selfe to haue dreamed: doeth moste christianlye enstruct the weake, and sharply rebuke the obstinate blynde. There is no maner of vice, that reigneth in anye estate of men, which this wryter hath not godly, learnedly, and wittilye rebuked."

extemporary praier.” The figure of the preaching Puritan is almost a staple on the streets of Elizabethan London.

Falstaff also alludes to his religious heterodoxy when he mocks the supposed Catholic doctrine of salvation by merit, a doctrine Lollards and contemporary Protestants of all stripes denied, when he remarks of Gadshill, “O, if men were to be saved by merit, what hole in hell were not hot enough for him?” (1.2.111-2). This doctrinal attack by Lollards and subsequent Protestants on Catholicism pokes fun the doctrine by noting that a merit-based theology cuts both ways—it can be as damning as it can be saving. Tellingly, Falstaff also robs pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, clearly an anti-Catholic move and perhaps a sly nod at Oldcastle’s (and the Lollards’) rejection of pilgrimages. Lastly, Falstaff wishes he “were a weaver; I could sing psalms or anything” (2.4.130-1), a reference to Puritans, who favored the profession and were known for their hymn-singing. Falstaff similarly remarks in Part 2 that “For my voice, I lost it halloing and singing of anthems” (1.2.187-8).

The primary vehicle of Falstaff’s taxonomic crisis is his language use. Like previous stage heretics, Falstaff parodies the language of orthodoxy, but the decoding of such parody becomes more difficult when shifts in both orthodox and heterodox registers of language muddy the interpretive waters. In all the preceding plays with stage heretics, the dynamic of authoritative and dissenting language is primarily between Latin and English; however, with the rise of English in England, the traditional coding of orthodox and heterodox register dramatically shifted, creating a dynamic of two English registers—mainstream Anglican versus radical Lollard or Puritan. Thus, the decoding of these registers becomes more subtle, as

both employ the same language to signify orthodoxy or heterodoxy. This common language uncouples language choice from meaning and instead further focuses attention both on intent over form and on audience over speaker.

Undoubtedly, the most distinctive mark of both Lollardy and Puritanism within the plays is Falstaff's relentless deployment of Biblical language. As Alfred Ainger observes, "the Lollard of the fourteenth century was in this respect the Puritan of the sixteenth, that the one certain mark of his calling was this use of the language of Scripture, and that conventicle style which had been developed out of it" (qtd. in Poole 35). J. Dover Wilson remarks that "traces of Lollardry may still be detected in Falstaff's frequent resort to Scriptural phraseology" and that "the habit of citing Scripture, may have [its] origin . . . in the puritan, psalm-singing temper of Falstaff's prototype" (qtd. in Poole 34, 35). As Naseen Shaheen counts, Falstaff makes twenty-six of the fifty-four Biblical allusions in *1 Henry IV* and another fifteen in Part 2. However, Falstaff employs this verbal register not in earnest but in constant parody.

Many scholars and editors have teased apart aspects of Falstaff's parody. Arthur Kinney analyzes him as a parody of Oldcastle, the *miles gloriosus* tradition, and the morality vice. Battenhouse, quite generously, suggests that Falstaff's parody only disguises his well-meaning charity, turning him into a holy fool. Joan Hartwig explores Falstaff's parodic connections to the plays' other kings, while Poole argues that Falstaff's parody of the very register he would be expected to sympathize with is not of his own accord but rather "Falstaff—in and of himself—is a parodic



representation of a ‘puritan’” (37). Thus, Falstaff appears to actively parody multiple registers, seamlessly shifting from one to another, and the two parts of the *Henry IV* plays provide a zodiac of space for his verbal antics. His Biblical parody, which is only a portion of his disruptions within that scope, manifest in two primary ways: through the application of Biblical language to a blasphemous context and through parodic Biblical actions.<sup>121</sup>

Much like the Worldlings in *Mankind* and the vices in *Three Laws*, Falstaff employs the first tactic quite densely in his opening scene of Part 1. For instance, Falstaff calls Hal’s orthodox, Biblical quotation from Proverbs that wisdom cries out in streets “damnable iteration” (1.2.94) and ironically retorts that the Prince “art indeed able to corrupt a saint” (1.2.95). He then feigns contrition, “[I am] little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over! By the Lord, and I do not, I am a villain!” (1.2.98-101). Falstaff uses Puritan language here—‘saint’ and ‘the wicked’—in his mock conversion, and he picks up this register later in the scene when he tries to convince the Prince and Poin to go thieving with him: “God give thee the spirit of persuasion and him the ears of profiting, that what thou speakest may move and what he hears may be believed” (1.2.155-7).<sup>122</sup> This passage has a Biblical cadence and draws on the Scriptural images of “Spirit of . . . power” (2 Timothy 1.7 Geneva) and “eares to heare” (Ezekiel 12.2 Geneva). Falstaff relies on the Puritan favorite ‘spirit’ in this pseudo-benediction but applies

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<sup>121</sup> Falstaff also engages in social and political parody, as befits his connections to the medieval Vice and the Lord of Misrule, but these do not stem from his religious connection to the Lollard and Puritan heresies.

<sup>122</sup> Falstaff uses ‘the wicked’ in Part 2 as well (2.4.319). See Kastan (n.156 l.88), Weil and Weil (n.77 l.73, 76), and Weil and Weil (n.79 l.123-7).

the liturgical syntax to the blasphemous context of a conversion to theft, subverting the virtuous connotations.

Falstaff's initial resolution to "give it over!" fades instantly when Hal immediately suggests "shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?" (1 1.2.103). Falstaff ironically replies, "An I do not, call me villain" (1 1.2.105). On the heels of his feigned contrition, Falstaff valiantly proclaims of thievery "'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation" (1 1.2.108-9). Shakespeare uses the Latinate word 'vocation,' a word often used by Puritans in connection to religious offices, to describe Falstaff's purse-taking and thievery.<sup>123</sup> Falstaff even calls it a "double labor" to steal and then pay the money back (3.3.185). This perverse vocation satirizes the Lollard and Puritan celebration of innocent, hard-working labor as a metaphor for spiritual labor. The Christian images for both sects—the plowman and the weaver—earn their spiritual and physical bread by the sweat of their brow. Falstaff becomes a parody of this tenet because he is neither innocent nor hard-working (though thieving does make him sweat). Falstaff gets his bread not from his own labor but from the pockets of others. Ironically, Falstaff does not even spend his "earnings" on bread at all but on sack, as his tab shows: "O monstrous! But one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack!" (2.4.541-2).<sup>124</sup>

Falstaff picks up his parodic Biblical register in his next scene in act 2. He continues to misappropriate Biblical language, such as "villains and sons of

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<sup>123</sup> See Bevington (n.790 l.102,3).

<sup>124</sup> Scoufos finds Hal's line on Falstaff's lack of bread a Lollard slight on transubstantiation (78).

darkness" (1 2.4.169) in ironic contexts, such as turning the Biblical injunction, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nether of darkenes" (1 Thessalonians 5.5 Geneva), into a curse upon the cowards who robbed him.<sup>125</sup> After his tirade against them, he concludes with the question, "Is there no virtue extant?" (2.4.117-8), which alludes to Romans 3.10, "There is none righteous, no not one" (Geneva). Later in the scene, his parodic register escalates in his playacting with Hal. Pretending to be Henry IV, Falstaff sermonizes,

There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to man in our land by the name of pitch. This pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest. For, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink but in tears, not in pleasure but in passion, not in words only but in woes also. (1 2.4.407-13)

Here, Falstaff melds several Scriptural references. His first is to Ecclesiasticus 13.1: "He that toucheth pitch, shall be defiled with it: and he that hath fellowship with the proud, shall put on pride" (DRV). He then alludes to Paul's assertion that the "Gospel was not vnto you in worde onely, but also in power" (1 Thessalonians 1.5 Geneva) and that "when I came to you, came not with excellencie of wordes, or of wisdom, shewing vnto you the testimonie of God" (1 Corinthians 2.1 Geneva). Even in his defense of abusing his ragged soldiers, Falstaff employs religious diction: he calls them "slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton's dogs licked his sores" (1 4.2.24-6), referring to Lazarus and Dives, and "prodigals lately

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<sup>125</sup> The phrase "sons of darkness" appears no where else in Shakespeare's corpus, giving further weight to Falstaff's intentionally parodic use of it.

come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks" (1 4.2.34-5), alluding to the prodigal son.<sup>126</sup> He concludes with the parodic exclamation that "No eye hath seen such scarecrows" (1 4.2.37), referring to Isaiah 64.4, "nether hathe the eye sene another God beside thee" (Geneva).<sup>127</sup> His deft employment of Biblical language demonstrates his constant parodic shifting, from ancient wise man to Paul and even to Christ.

Falstaff's parody does dip briefly into Latin: in his recount of his narrow escape from death, Falstaff narrates that some dozen men (the number gradually swells to fifty-three by the end of the tale) set upon him, and as evidence of his valiant struggle, he thrusts up his broken sword and exclaims, "ecce signum!" (1 2.4.166-7).<sup>128</sup> "Ecce" is a common refrain of the Mass, and the phrase "ecce signum" is most likely a corruption of "ecce lignum crucis" from the Good Friday liturgy (Kastan *King Henry IV* n.216 l.162).<sup>129</sup> This quip develops Falstaff as a parodic Christ figure, as his cross-shaped sword serves only to accentuate not his victory but his cowardly retreat.

Falstaff's final scene in Part 1, his reconciliation with Hal, further highlights his parodic role. Like his earlier equivocation "Is not the truth the truth?" (2.4.227-8), Falstaff claims that he is "not a double man; but if I be not Jack Falstaff, then I am a Jack" (5.4.137-8), a statement that is false on all fronts—he is more than a double

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<sup>126</sup> See Luke 16.19-31 and Luke 15.11-31.

<sup>127</sup> This passage is also quoted in 1 Corinthians 2.9.

<sup>128</sup> "Behold the proof." Translation Bevington's.

<sup>129</sup> Bevington observes that the words are familiar from the Mass; however, the phrase does not appear in any liturgy of the period. Robin in *Faustus* makes the same exclamation (3.2.2).

man physically, verbally, spiritually, and theatrically. Then his final words in the play pander to the expected repentance of someone like Mankind or Everyman, but as usual, Falstaff undercuts this expectation through parody: "I'll follow, as they say, for reward. He that rewards me, God rewards him! If I do grow great, I'll grow less; for I'll purge, and leave sack, and live cleanly as a nobleman should" (5.4.160-3). Falstaff here alludes to several verses. First, his passage echoes God's promise "for them that honour me, I wil honour" (1 Samuel 2.30 Geneva) and also Christ's assurance that "Whosoeuer therefore shal confesse me before men, him wil I confesse also before my Father, which is in heauen" (Matthew 10.32 Geneva). Thus, Falstaff places himself in the role of God/Christ. Yet, Falstaff also materializes the exchange—in the Scripture, the object of exchange is abstract, like honor and acknowledgment, whereas Falstaff's object is material, a monetary reward. The second half of the passage parodies John the Baptist's words in John 3.30: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Geneva). However, while John refers to his own spiritual humility, Falstaff puns on his own physical reform, namely that with the Crown's favor, he will be able to lose weight.

Falstaff consistently employs this type of reappropriation of Biblical language in Part 2 as well. For instance, he mimics Christ's Sermon on the Mount in his own beatitude, "Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice" (2 5.3.140-1), and he also inverts Christ's commandment to "loue your enemies, [and] blesse them that curse you" (Matthew 5.44 Geneva).<sup>130</sup> In his recruitment of soldiers, Falstaff casts himself as Samuel leading his Elizabethan

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<sup>130</sup> See Shaheen (446).

Israelites into battle, when he quips, “Will you tell me, Master Shallow, how to choose a man? Care I for the limb, the thews, the stature, bulk, and big assemblance of a man? Give me the spirit, Master Shallow” (2 3.2.257-60). This passage mocks the Puritan emphasis on the spirit and alludes to 1 Samuel 16.7: “But the Lord said vnto Samuel, Loke not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I haue refused him: for God seeth not as man seeth: for man loketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord beholdeth the heart” (Geneva).<sup>131</sup> Falstaff continues his religious register when he commands his soon-to-be captive Coleville to “rouse up fear and trembling, and do observance to my mercy” (2 4.3.14-5), alluding to Psalm 55.5, “Feare and trembling are come vpon me, and a horrible feare hathe couered me” (Geneva).<sup>132</sup> Not only does he use the Puritan rhetoric of “fear and trembling” and “mercy” but his use of it situates himself as God.<sup>133</sup>

In contrast, Hal often serves as the orthodox register against which Falstaff’s parody is set. This foil is first established in their opening scene together, when Hal replies to Falstaff’s joke about street preachers with “Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it” (1 1.2.92-3), alluding to Proverbs 1.20. At other times, Hal simply employs Biblical allusion in orthodox contexts: for example, in his first soliloquy, Hal says, “I’ll so offend to make offence a skill, / Redeeming time when men think least I will” (1.2.210-1). His phrase “redeeming time” alludes to Ephesians 5.15-16, which reads, “Take heed therefore that ye walk

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<sup>131</sup> See Shaheen (441).

<sup>132</sup> See also Psalm 2.11: “Serue the Lord in feare, and reioyce in trembling” (Geneva).

<sup>133</sup> See Shaheen (443).

circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, for the days are evil” (Geneva), and this reference develops one of the play’s crucial themes—the separation of wisdom and folly. However, Hal also explicitly highlights Falstaff’s Puritanical style by mocking his religious diction, such as ‘the wicked’ and ‘zeal’:

See now whether pure fear and entire cowardice doth not make thee wrong this virtuous gentlewoman to close with us. Is she of the wicked? Is thine hostess here of the wicked? Or is thy boy of the wicked? Or honest Bardolph, whose zeal burns in his nose, of the wicked? (2 2.4.325-30)

Falstaff responds in kind with, “The fiend hath pricked down Bardolph irrecoverable” (2 2.4.332-3).

Yet, amid all of Falstaff’s verbal bravado, he poses a crucial question: “Is not the truth the truth?” (1 2.4.227-8). Falstaff intends this question to buttress his tale of the now fifty-three robbers, eleven of whom supposedly set on him personally. But the question probes deeper, into the core of language and meaning—are words asserting truth not always true? Falstaff’s parody punctures this orthodox assumption, as his predecessors’ did. In this case, his question asserting the truth of his tale actually signifies its falsehood, and this gap between language and meaning is the precise space Falstaff’s verbal acrobatics occupy.

Falstaff uses the Biblical image of a tree and its fruit to exploit this gap. While playacting as Henry IV, he lectures to Hal, “If then the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that

Falstaff" (1 2.4.423-5).<sup>134</sup> Falstaff's analogy suggests a univocity between tree and fruit, fruit and tree—one consistently, uniformly, and absolutely signifies the other. This assumption speaks to traditional models of language, in which the signifier (the fruit) and the signified (the tree) are one. But, like Antichrist's upturning of the tree to produce inverted meaning, Falstaff's verbal fruit, orthodox in form, signifies a heterodox tree through its parodic intent.<sup>135</sup> The relationship is entirely antithetical, not synonymous.

Perhaps Falstaff's most famous perversion of religious rhetoric, and disruption of signifier and signified, comes in his honor speech. Hal employs the earnest Biblical register when he exhorts, "'Why thou owest God a death" (5.1.126), with a double meaning on 'death' and 'debt,' which were Elizabethan homophones. This propels Falstaff to respond heretically, with the religious register but unorthodox subject:

Tis not due yet; I would be loath to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word 'honor'? What is that 'honor'? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible,

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<sup>134</sup> See Matthew 12.33 and Luke 6.44.

<sup>135</sup> Aside from this image appearing in Chester's "Antichrist" play, John Bale also uses it to characterize his vicious and virtuous figures. See *Three Laws* (79-80, 85-88, 121, 1398).



then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why?

Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon. (5.1.127-40)

He terms his dialectic investigation his “catechism” (5.1.141), but rather than instructing him on his course of action, it justifies his fears and desire to abandon the field. Moreover, Falstaff’s explication also emphasizes the very gap that his Biblical parody exploits, the gap between the word and the action, between the signifier and the signified. Falstaff rightly points out that ‘honor’ is no more than a breathed word, wholly separate from the meaning behind it.

But what does this separation do? Kinney remarks that “parody provides a resource against which a statement (or speech or trait or event) may not merely be comprehended but against which it may be measured” (124). David Laird argues that “in Falstaff’s exercise of freewheeling linguistic legerdemain, words are made to mean what he chooses them to mean and, in the resulting scramble, words are stripped of any predictable meaning” (23). Thus, Falstaff’s parody provides a model of language use, a use that divorces sign from meaning, against which other models may be judged. Falstaff’s separation of signifier and signified critiques the Lollard and Puritan practice of wielding Scripture as a moral weapon, for as Falstaff demonstrates the mere quotation of the Scriptures does not guarantee virtue. His dubious morality shades in the stark divisions Puritans relied on: Falstaff speaks like a saint but lives like the wicked.

Thus, Falstaff not only relies on his verbal prowess to parody Biblical orthodoxy, but he uses his physical actions as well. One such posturing is his role as

a morality play protagonist, an innocent man fallen into sin with repentance imminent. In his first scene in act 3, Falstaff alludes to this literary ancestry by employing the language of repentance common to the genre. He confesses to Bardolph,

Well, I'll repent, and that suddenly, while I am in some liking, I shall be out of heart shortly, and then I shall have no strength to repent. An I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is made of, I am a peppercorn, a brewer's horse. The inside of a church! Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me. (3.3.4-10)

His words could be those of Mankind in *Mankind*, who indeed repents before he loses heart in despair, forgets the inside of a church as he eschews services, and is ruined by villainous company. Falstaff continues in this register with,

I was as virtuously given as a gentleman need to be, virtuous enough: swore little, diced not above seven times—a week, went to a bawdy house not above once in a quarter—of an hour, paid money that I borrowed—three or four times, lived well and in good compass; and now I live out of all order, out of all compass. (3.3.14-20)

Falstaff's pauses, indicated by the dashes, exaggerate the dissonance between his language and his intent, producing humor because of the disparity between expected confession (not dicing above seven times in a lifetime) and the actual one (not dicing seven times in a week). Falstaff continues this morality play mode in the scene's end, when he says to Hal, "Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy?" (3.3.165-7). Falstaff is

certainly never staged in a state of innocence, and his deferral of blame only highlights his own culpability.

Falstaff's final scene in Part 1 physically merges many of his significations. In fear for his life, Falstaff plays opossum on the battlefield while Hotspur, Hal, and others fight. The foil is obvious, as both Falstaff and Hal fight on different parts of the stage—Hal to victory over Hotspur but Falstaff to a feigned death with Douglas. Hal, and the audience, assume Falstaff's death is real, until he "riseth up" twenty-five lines later (5.4.110+ SD). This faux resurrection elicits two connections: first, to the Antichrist tradition (a secondary marker of stage heretics); and second, to Christ.

In the Chester "Antichrist" play, Antichrist attempts to prove his divinity by faking his own death and then his own resurrection. Marsalek analyzes Shakespeare's appropriation of the motif as a "dual deployment of both theatrical tradition and the Antichrist elements in the conflicted Oldcaste myth" in order to "place the onus on the interpretative faculties of the viewer" (218), the very locus of meaning Falstaff's verbal parody requires. She suggests that "Shakespeare deliberately courts a hermeneutic dilemma, using hagiographic parody to stage an Antichristian performance that invites iconoclastic censure" (239). Indeed, like Antichrist before him, Falstaff's counterfeit resurrection forces the audience to discern the validity and interpret the meaning of his actions.

Falstaff's false resurrection also aligns him with Christ. Marsalek notes a strong parallel between Falstaff's soliloquy to the audience post-resurrection and Christ's soliloquy in much of resurrection drama (233). Falstaff also drags Hotspur's body "on his back" (1 5.4.128+ SD) and exits "bearing off his body" (1 5.4.163+ SD),

a parodic allusion to both the traditional stage role of the devil, who carries off his victims on his back, and Christ's defeat of Satan. Upon Falstaff's post-resurrection entrance, Hal plays the doubting Thomas, saying,

Art thou alive?

Or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight?

I prithee, speak. We will not trust our eyes

Without our ears. Thou art not what thou seems't. (1 5.4.133-6)

Interestingly, Hal focuses on the ears, not the eyes, as definitive evidence of resurrection, which connects to the play's discussion of words and meaning, or more specifically, of oral and aural truth. Falstaff's meaning lies not in his words themselves but in Hal's hearing of them, in his trusting of his ears. Falstaff delivers the desired proof in his next line when he equivocates, "No, that's certain, I am not a double man" (1 5.4.137). He continues to confirm his real presence by employing more parodic Biblical rhetoric: at the scene's end, he reestablishes his own role as Christ when he assures Hal, "If I may be believed, so; if not, let them that should reward valor bear the sin upon their own heads" (1 5.4.146-8).

In Part 2, Falstaff continues to parodically don the role of (anti)Christ in the betrayal of the final scene when Hal rebukes him with, "I know thee not, old man" (5.5.47). The scene draws parallels to Christ and Peter on Maundy Thursday, when Peter quickly betrays Christ before inquisitors, saying "I knowe him not" (Mark 14.68 Geneva). However, in *2 Henry IV*, Hal's rejection and betrayal of Falstaff is justified and endorsed (he is a parodic wolf in sheep's clothing, with the appetite to

prove it), highlighting rather than collapsing the distance between the old man and the Son of God.<sup>136</sup>

Falstaff's various physical roles, like numerous character costume changes, expand the gap his verbal parody opens. Falstaff terms this gap between signifier and signified "counterfeit," and he redefines the concept's negative connotations, rationalizing:

Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit. To die is to be counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit but the true and perfect image of life indeed. (5.4.114-9)

Thus, Falstaff removes the discussion from the insular cycle of sign and intent by placing the moral onus not on word or deed but on effect—it is not counterfeit to save one's life by pretending to lose it. Likewise, if the ends of his words and actions are not false, then Falstaff is not false. It is not counterfeit to parody the Scriptures if they still, in the end, instruct. Falstaff's Biblical parody requires the audience to recall the passages alluded to, contrast his own usage with their orthodox contexts, and thereby discern his blasphemy. This exercise is in fact instructive to the audience. This dual role of Falstaff as both blasphemer and instructor elucidates

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<sup>136</sup> Falstaff even parodies the king of all parody, Faustus himself. His initial scene slyly aligns him with the rogue magician, a parodic "Monsieur Remorse" (1 1.2.110-11), who took the stage six or seven years before: Poins jests, "How agrees the devil and thee about thy soul that thou soldest him on Good Friday last for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg?" (1 1.2.112-4). The reference is clear to Faustus's infamous pact, and the further reference to Good Friday heightens the parodic Christ imagery. Hal encourages this characterization with, "the devil shall have his bargain, for he was never yet a breaker of proverbs. He will give the devil his due" (1.2.115-7). Then both point out, humorously, the double bind Falstaff, as such a maker of pacts, is in:

Prince: Then thou art damned for keeping thy word with the devil.

Poins: Else he had been damned for cozening the devil. (1.2.118-21)

audiences' ambivalence when he is finally rejected—as blasphemer, he must be put aside, but as instructor, he gains sympathy.

Falstaff's philosophy makes meaning ultimately subjective not to the speaker but to the hearer, and this model is precisely what Hal (or any good Tudor monarch) must reject. For to admit that meaning is contingent on something outside of one's self, that it is subject to the interpretive whims of an audience, is to admit verbal vulnerability. Hal's final words to Falstaff are clearly an attempt to wrest meaning back. His statement, "I know thee not, old man" (2 5.5.47), fiercely demonstrates that Hal can counterfeit, too—his sentence, while clearly false, still conveys his own "truth," namely that he rejects the rogue (and the subjectivity that he stands for). Falstaff refuses to cede to Hal's absolutism and ironically asserts, "I will be as good as my word. This that you heard was but a color" (2 5.5.86-7). He will not be as good as his word, though the remark was but a counterfeited "color." Thus, Falstaff's rejection simultaneously confirms that meaning depends on the receiver, not giver, of signs but also that those in power will always seek to contain and control its distribution.

This economy of meaning privileging the hearer, not the speaker, invites the Epilogue's indulgence in equivocation: Falstaff's fate resides in the audience's reception—"Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already 'a be killed with your hard opinions" (28-9)—while the speaker ambiguously remarks that "this is not the man" (30), forcing the audience to decide whether what he speaks is true, or counterfeit. Is not the truth the truth? No, not until the audience decides so.

This precise contingency of meaning informs the parody of previous stage heretics, for despite their disruptions of signifier and signified, the ultimate site of meaning must be not on the stage but in the audience. Antichrist's and *Mankind's* vices' wordplay is only theatrically effective when the audience discerns their heretical ends. Likewise, the parodic liturgy of the Croxton *Play's* Jews and Bale's vices evokes blasphemy rather than virtuous worship only because the audience differentiates the theatrical rather than ecclesiastical contexts. Lastly, *Doctor Faustus* will further disrupt the locus of meaning by detaching it from all previous sites—signifiers, audience, or otherwise. For Faustus, the economy of words actually bankrupts meaning entirely.

## ABSOLVE ME OF ALL AMBIGUITIES?: DOCTOR FAUSTUS

While chronologically played prior to the *Henry IV* plays, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* represents the more radical appropriation of the stage heretic tradition. As might be expected of the tendentious playwright, *Faustus* pushes the theatrical convention to the extreme, such that the foundational assumptions and *modus operandi* are exposed. Also typical of the playwright, Marlowe appears to offer no prospect of rebuilding or refashioning but concludes in its (and thus Faustus's) annihilation.

The Chorus in *Faustus* previews the play with this brief summary: "we must perform / The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad" (7-8).<sup>137</sup> In Aristotelian terms, the tragedy of Faustus should contain his fortunes, good *and* bad (or, more precisely, *from good to bad*). But the conjunction 'or' proffers only one adjective, not two. As T. McAlindon notes, "the seemingly casual phrase 'good or bad' is the first indication of a radical instability" within the text (47). Are Faustus's fortunes good or bad? The text itself does not seem to know. Neither does Faustus. This, in fact, is the scholar's very problem. Faustus lacks any such resolution, adjectival or otherwise.

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<sup>137</sup> All quotations taken from Marlowe, Christopher. *Doctor Faustus (A-Text, 1604)*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005. Print. 5-53.



An early modern English proverb exhorts, “He that casts all doubts shall never be resolved” (Tilley D571), and resolution is a controlling theme in *Faustus*. The text is obsessed with variations of *solvo*, Latin for ‘to loosen, untie, or release.’ Faustus calls for himself to be resolved and ultimately dissolved. Yet, one variation is conspicuously absent: In *Faustus*, there is no ‘absolution.’ Neither are there absolutes. Faustus’s heresy is his indecision, his faith *and* his disbelief. This contradictory state complicates any traditional categorizations of Faustus as a ‘believer’ or ‘heretic’ and instead removes him from the orthodoxy-versus-heresy system entirely. Without a definitive decision, he cannot be categorized at all, and without absolutes, all discussions of belief and disbelief or orthodoxy and heresy fail as Faustus defers and defers and defers his decision. Ultimately, his resistance to the theological systems in play exposes the flaws in each system: the traditional, orthodox voices in the text maintain that Faustus can repent all the way up until his last breath; likewise, the heterodox ones continue to tempt and distract him for fear that the contract for his soul is not airtight. Both sides accommodate theological wavering—moments of faith or doubt—yet both sides necessitate an absolute decision (a labeling of ‘orthodox’ or ‘heretic’) *before* the wavering is permitted. Faustus simply refuses to play the game.

Faustus’s language use reflects this ambivalent spiritual state, as he simultaneously employs both the orthodox language of the Church and the parodic language of previous stage heretics. Thus, the spectrum of language use depicted in the preceding plays collapses into Faustus’s idiolect, and, like his predecessors’, his promiscuous use exposes the nonabsolute value judgments attached to orthodox

and heterodox language. Like previous stage heretics', Faustus's parody emphasizes how context-dependent meaning is. This is, in fact, a lesson Faustus must learn himself as well. But the play also suggests that a mere privileging of signified over signifier is reductive—Faustus's damnation (apparently not because of language or intent, signified or signifier) suggests a third mode of meaning, a mode spectacularly staged but never actually resolved. Like Falstaff suggests, this mode resides outside of one's signs and significations, but unlike Falstaff's positioning of meaning within the audience, Faustus tragically finds that it is ultimately situated in the temporally unknowable.<sup>138</sup>

Like its equivocal contents, the early textual and performance histories of *Doctor Faustus* are fraught with problems. The play currently exists in two forms—the A and B texts. Although scholars conjecture that Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus* in 1590, the A-text of 1604 survives as the play's first publication, by Thomas Bushell, who supposedly took the text from Marlowe's drafts. However, in 1616, John Wright published a longer version, now known as the B-text, which includes additions that historical records indicate were made after Marlowe's death. Thus, scholars now agree that the A-text is likely closer to Marlowe's original text, while the B-text represents a performance record of the play in the early seventeenth century.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> See "Your Waste is Great: Falstaff and the Economy of Words."

<sup>139</sup> See Kastan's edition (ix-xi) for textual history.

Marlowe's own ambivalent background has also cultivated speculation about his most famous tragic hero. The playwright's contemporaries accused him of various heresies, including a denial of the Trinity and wholesale atheism;<sup>140</sup> however, the contexts of these accusations, within the seedy underbelly of Tudor politics, casts doubt on their reliability. As a spy (and an audacious playwright), Marlowe was required to equivocate, and his motivations in doing so are not always clear. Marlowe, it seems, was as duplicitous as his text. Yet, rather than grounding meaning, the biography of its author only encourages equivocal readings of the play.

The text's obsession with the Latin *solvo*, with being loosened and untied, characterizes Faustus's heresy of indecision. The *solvo* root appears eleven times, always in connection to Faustus's pursuit of knowledge and power.<sup>141</sup> The text's first use of the root comes in his opening soliloquy, in which he speculates that with his magic, he can "make spirits fetch me what I please, / Resolve me of all ambiguities, / [And] perform what desperate enterprise I will" (1.1.79-81). Wedged between Faustus's materialistic concerns (making spirits run his errands), he observes that the spirits could answer his questions that need solving. This is Faustus's most basic desire—to resolve his ambiguities. But they need more than resolving. They need absolving.

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<sup>140</sup> For such contemporary reports, such as the Baines letter and excerpts from Beard's *The Theatre of God's Judgements*, see Kastan (127-30).

<sup>141</sup> See (1.1.80, 1.1.133, 1.1.134, 1.3.14, 1.3.100, 2.1.6, 2.1.63, 2.1.120, 2.3.32, 2.3.61, and 5.2.104).

In their varied readings of Faustus, critics must privilege an initial framework of the hero before discussing his transformation within the play. Those who read him predominantly as an Elizabethan morality play protagonist emphasize his role as an orthodox believer who falls into the moral trap of desiring knowledge and power. Those who read him as a classical tragic hero highlight his initial (heretical) Humanist stance as a Promethean charge against traditional orthodoxy. However, each of these approaches chooses an initial reading of Faustus based on select passages and ignores his pervasive equivocal and ambiguous nature throughout the text. If Faustus cannot decide what he believes, neither should the critic.

Despite the wealth of criticism on the play, only a handful of scholars have addressed the central role doubt and indecision play within it—doubt *qua* doubt.<sup>142</sup> John S. Mebane finds that the play contains “a calculated ambivalence to the most radical currents of Renaissance thought” and calls it “a tragedy which dramatizes a conflict between two irreconcilable systems of value” (114, 118). William M. Hamlin argues that doubt and desire create “an endless cycle of evacuation and substitution” (268), wherein Faustus employs doubt to remove presumed assumptions only to fill that space with objects of his desire, such as knowledge and sexual gratification. Hamlin suggests that “casting doubt is as fundamental to Faustus as resolving ambiguity; it seems a natural outgrowth or consequence or resolution, and perhaps points to the ultimately unsatisfactory stasis of dogmatic

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<sup>142</sup> For an overview of the play’s sources, scholarship, criticism, and performance history, see Sara Munson Deats’s *Doctor Faustus: A Critical Guide*.

conclusion" (267). He argues that without doubt, there is no possibility for growth; however, he also finds that Faustus fails to use these possibilities and instead is defeated by his own material and carnal desires. Cox connects Faustus's verbal maneuvering to the equivocation necessary to navigate Tudor religious politics, while Andrew Duxfield reads the text's discussion of ambiguity as the impetus for Faustus's goal of what he terms "a unified understanding of things." The latter believes that "the play centres . . . upon the utter failure of Faustus to achieve this unifying goal which he sets for himself, and upon the impossibility of him, or anyone, ever doing so."

While both Mebane and Hamlin privilege ambiguity within the text, they ultimately rely on a dialectical approach, polarizing possible meanings in order to critically resolve the ambiguities. Hamlin suggests that the act of doubting critiques the "unsatisfactory stasis of dogmatic conclusion" (267); however, the static position is not what is unsatisfactory, but rather it is the dogmatic system that necessitates stasis while simultaneously permitting motion. Cox and Duxfield view the play's ambiguity cynically as evidence that unified resolution—religious, social, political—is a futile desire in a duplicitous world. To them, these cracks in the Elizabethan worldview not only place Faustus quite literally in the jaws of hell but also interrogate the validity of the picture to begin with. However, Faustus's equivocal nature does not persist indefinitely. Resolution does come, but it appears off-stage and after death.

Certainly, Elizabethan political and social overtones are present in the play. However, the root of *Faustus's* ambiguity is religious: as A. D. Nuttall remarks,

“Marlowe’s play is frankly—thunderously—theological” (23). The question, though, is *which* theology, or more precisely, *how many*? Faustus is, in fact, a serial theologian. He seemingly panders to various theologies repeatedly: To the Calvinist bent on predestination, he grants “Che sera, sera” (1.1.47) and confesses “My heart’s so hardened I cannot repent” (2.3.18). Yet, to the moderate Anglican, proponent of free will, he affirms his range of choices: “I do repent; and yet I do despair” (5.1.63). He even subtly critiques wholesale Christian orthodoxy through a sly nod at empiricism, relying only on experience for knowledge, “I think hell’s a fable” (2.1.123), and Epicureanism, which relies heavily on materialism, “All beasts are happy, for when they die / Their souls are soon dissolved in elements, / But mine must live still to be plagued in hell” (5.2.103-5).<sup>143</sup> And yet he never believes or disbelieves. He cannot decide, and none of the belief systems he appeals to accommodate his initial indecision. The Calvinist is troubled by his passionate moments of repentance and the apparently tenuous hold the devils have on his soul; the Anglican becomes concerned when Faustus’s cries for mercy seem to fall on deaf ears; even the ardent humanist and atheist are dumbfounded as Faustus is clearly, emphatically, damned to hell.

Faustus’s occupation of this theological limbo is his true heresy. In fact, the etymology of the Greek *αἵρεσις* [heresy] means “choice” (*Etymological Dictionary of Greek*), and Faustus’s refusal to make a choice makes him a heretic of heretics. As Revelation 3.15-6 warns, “I knowe thy workes, that thou art nether colde nor hote: I

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<sup>143</sup> For a Calvinist reading, see Pauline Honderich; for mainstream Anglican readings, see Sara Deats’s “Ironic Biblical Allusion” and Michael Hattaway; and for a Humanist reading, see Robert Ornstein.

wolde thou werest colde or hote. Therefore, because thou art luke warme, and nether colde nor hote, it wil come to passe, that I shal spewe thee out of my mouth" (Geneva). Faustus is actually both cold and hot, and he will be vomited up by the end of act 5. Thus, this verse characterizes him, by contemporary standards, as an unresolved skeptic. The anonymous treatise *The Sceptick* defines the noun in very Faustian terms: "The Sceptick doth neither affirm no deny any position, but doubteth of it, and opposeth his reasons against that which is affirmed or denied to justify his not consenting" (qtd. in Hamlin 261). In a country with religious stakes as high as England's, this is the most perilous heresy because unlike the dissensions of traditionally-defined heresies, including atheism, the heresy of indecision resists the absolutes necessary for dealing with it. Faustus's wavering keeps this limbo space open, removing him from the definitive spaces traditional understandings of orthodoxy and heresy require.

Faustus's vacillating motion of faith demonstrates instability within each overarching religious system that he tackles, much like the planets' "double motion" (2.3.51) that Mephistopheles describes, rotating individually and revolving universally; and like the unstable universe, which has "not conjunctions, oppositions, aspects, eclipses, all at one time" (2.3.61-2), Faustus represents "inaequalem motum respectu totius" (2.3.64).<sup>144</sup> McAlindon observes that Elizabethans referred to pagan gods as erring or wandering stars, much like Faustus's own erring within the universe (54). Tellingly, this unequal motion of the universe is another ambiguity from which Faustus wishes to be "resolve[d]"

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<sup>144</sup> "Unequal motion in respect to the whole." Translation Kastan's.

(2.3.61). Like one of the planets, Faustus moves in circles for twenty-four years only to end up exactly where he began. Twenty-four years might equal one revolution, but no resolution.

Faustus's cyclical motion is crucial to the text because one common reading of *Faustus* finds his acquisition of magic the impetus for a dissenting, degenerating moral trajectory. The argument generally runs that "in contrast to the lofty promises he makes to himself . . . Faustus fritters away his twenty-four years in idle horseplay" (Duxfield). However, this reading, itself laden with value judgments, also selects certain passages as support and ignores others. A few scholars have offered hybrid trajectories, which account for Faustus's religious wavering but also posit a moral fall. For instance, Bevington combines the cyclical and degenerative models by reading Faustus's digressions locally within each scene, noting that "in every pair of alternations the transition is from sublimity to triviality" (*Mankind to Marlowe* 256). Similarly, Hamlin calls Faustus's path "a series of cyclical trajectories" (262) within his cycles of doubt and desire.

However, while Faustus clearly circulates among a sea of religious beliefs, his infamous moral digression is not as apparent as other scholars have suggested. When Faustus first decides to study magic, he fantasizes about the "world of profit and delight, / Of power, or honor, of omnipotence" he will gain (1.1.53-4). In the next scene, he elaborates on these dimensions, describing both seemingly trivial tasks, like "ransack[ing] the ocean for orient pearl" and "search[ing] all the corners of the new-found world / For pleasant fruits" (1.1.83, 84-5), and grandiose feats, like "reign[ing] sole king of all the provinces" (1.1.94). This spectrum of the uses of



magic continues, circularly but steadily, throughout the five acts of the play. The Chorus opens act 3 with a description of Faustus's feats, including wreaking havoc on "some part of holy Peter's feast" (3.9) and learning "the secrets of astronomy . . . [and] cosmography" (3.1, 6). Within the scene, Faustus discusses his Grand Tour of Europe just before pulling pranks on the Pope (3.1). The Chorus reiterates in the beginning of act 4 that Faustus's recent pursuits have not dissolved into childish antics, but rather he has "ta'en the view / Of rarest things and royal courts of kings" and "answered [questions of astronomy] with such learned skill," and now "his fame spread[s] forth in every land" (4.1-2, 10, 12). In act 4, he does precisely what he dreamt of in act 1: he brings the Duchess of Vanholt grapes in the dead of winter. Thus, Faustus does not morally descend because of his magic; he merely attempts to accomplish what he amorally set out to do. His inclusion of both "profit and delight" and "power . . . [and] omnipotence" (1.1.53, 4) demonstrates the range to which magic can be put. It also demonstrates his circular, rather than linear, moral trajectory.

Faustus's religious circularity pervades the text. His very first words—"Settle thy studies" (1.1.1)—frame his heresy in terms of indecision. The entire play is about this decision, about Faustus's settling of his studies, a decision he never actually makes (but is, at last, made for him). Initially, Faustus clearly chooses magic over his other possible subjects, employing the *solvo* root each time he chooses. He first says to Valdes, "as resolute am I in this / As thou to live" (1.1.134-5). Faustus confirms this resolution again in his conjuration scene, though his summoning of it again conversely suggests its waning: "fear not, Faustus, but be resolute / And try

the uttermost magic can perform" (1.3.14-15). Faustus employs the root one last time in act 1, asking Mephistopheles to "resolve me of thy master's mind" (1.3.100). This employment of *solvo* also speaks to Faustus's ambiguity, because one fully converted to the Dark Side would likely refer to Lucifer as "our master" rather than "thy master," which creates distance rather than proximity between Mephistopheles's state and his own.

Faustus's sporadic resolution quickly wanes by the opening of act 2, when Faustus hints that he has been "think[ing] of God or heaven" (2.1.3). In this soliloquy, Faustus's reaffirmation of his resolution again only undermines it, further entrenching him in his heretical indecision:

Despair in God and trust in Beelzebub.

Now go not backwards; no, Faustus, be resolute.

Why waverest thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears:

"Abjure this magic; turn to God again!"

Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.

To God? He loves thee not.

The god thou servest is thine own appetite,

Wherein is fixed the love of Beelzebub. (2.1.5-12)

These theological vacillations bring forth the Good and Evil Angels to ply his belief, and Faustus settles his thoughts momentarily, once again, on magic. But, his resolution is so thin that he must remind himself to "cast no more doubts" (2.1.26).

But then he doubts. In fact, even Faustus's own blood cannot make up its mind. In the contract scene, blood "trickles from mine arm" (2.1.57) but then

“congeals” (2.1.62). This causes Mephistopheles to “dissolve it straight” (2.1.63) (another employment of *solvo*) and prompts Faustus to wonder “What might the staying of my blood portend?” (2.1.64). Eventually, his “blood begins to clear” (2.1.71), only to leave behind the ominous inscription “Homo fuge!” (2.1.76). The wavering of his blood between compliance and resistance undergirds the ambivalent nature of Faustus’s beliefs. When Faustus starts at the words written upon him, he questions:

But what is this inscription on mine arm?

“Homo fuge!” Wither should I fly?

If unto God, he’ll throw me down to hell.

My senses are deceived; here’s nothing writ.

I see it plain; here in this place is writ

“Homo fuge!” Yet shall not Faustus fly. (2.1.75-80)

Later in act 2, he once again wavers between his proclamation, “I will renounce this magic and repent” (2.3.11) and his admission seven lines later, “My heart’s so hardened I cannot repent” (2.3.18). He then employs the *solvo* root to attempt to solidify his indecision: “I am resolved: Faustus shall ne’er repent” (2.3.32). Yet, less than fifty lines later, he cries out, “Ah, Christ, my savior, / Seek to save distressed Faustus’ soul!” (2.3.79-80). Then, just as quickly, he reverts back to his resolution on damnation:

Faustus vows never to look to heaven,

Never to name God, or to pray to him,

To burn his Scriptures, slay his ministers

And make my spirits pull his churches down. (2.3.92-5)

Faustus tilts between belief and disbelief at a dizzying pace, unsettling his studies, but settling his heresy, as he goes.

Faustus's indecisive dissent is most evident in his last interaction with Mephistopheles. Faustus appears first swayed by the Old Man's appeals to grace and repentance, only to relapse back into his allegiance to Mephistopheles and Lucifer:

Faustus:       Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now?  
                  I do repent; and yet I do despair.  
                  Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast.  
                  What shall I do to shun the snares of death?

Mephistopheles:   Thou traitor, Faustus, I arrest thy soul  
                          For disobedience to my sovereign Lord.  
                          Revolt, or I'll in piecemeal tear thy flesh.

Faustus:       Sweet Mephistopheles, entreat thy Lord  
                  To pardon my unjust presumption,  
                  And with my blood again I will confirm  
                  My former vow I made to Lucifer. (5.1.62-72)

Faustus's crucial line in this exchange, and indeed in the entire play, is his ambiguous, equivocal confession, "I do repent; and yet I do despair." This line contains a Biblical allusion to Christ's casting out of spirits in a young boy in Mark 9: A father brings his demon-possessed boy to Jesus, who encourages him, "If thou canst believe it, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9.23, Geneva); the boy's father replies, "Lord, I believe: help my unbelief" (Mark 9.24, Geneva). The

father first confirms his belief, situating himself as an orthodox figure, and then admits doubt within the confines of that system. The father's belief, albeit mixed with unbelief, is enough to effect the healing of his son. However, for Faustus, "I believe" is one clause he never utters, and so his indecision, albeit mixed with both repentance and despair, effects his damnation.<sup>145</sup> Faustus's inability to be absolute in belief or unbelief initially averts him from the judgments such categories require. Ultimately, though, it only delays it.

The play's dramatis personae has often been split into traditional orthodox and heterodox teams, with the Good Angel and the Old Man battling for religious orthodoxy against the Bad Angel, Mephistopheles, and Lucifer for heterodoxy within the text. Both teams of characters require Faustus to make a decision, and by refusing to do so, he exposes the theological chinks in their armor. These characters harken back to the medieval morality play structure, evidenced in plays like *Mankind*, which track the protagonist's moral positioning based on his decisions—the initial decision to believe and follow orthodoxy, then a decision to turn and fall into sin, and lastly a final decision to repent and be reconciled. However, Faustus repeats this pattern seemingly *ad infinitum* (and almost *ad nauseum*). He avoids decision altogether. Thus, the twenty-four-year battle for Faustus's soul and Faustus's refusal ever to take sides demonstrate the tenuous and precarious hold both sides have on his (or anyone's) soul.

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<sup>145</sup> The words "I believe" occur nowhere in the text.

Tellingly, Faustus exhibits the orthodox language of repentance throughout the play, language that saves all of his medieval predecessors: The kings in Chester's "Antichrist" are rescued when they entreat, "Jesu, for thy mycle grace, / forgyve us all our trespasse / and bringe us to thy heavenlye place" (601-3); in *Mankind*, *Mankind* is saved by the mere cry, "mercy, good Mercy!" (835); and in the *Croton Play*, Jonathas exclaims, "Of thy grete mercy lett vs receyue þe showre; / And mekely I aske mercy, amendys to make" (744-5). Faustus echoes all of this language. In act 2, he cries, "When I behold the heavens, then I repent / And curse thee, wicked Mephistopheles" (2.3.1-2).<sup>146</sup> A mere ten lines later, he repeats this decision, "I will renounce this magic and repent" (2.3.11), and affirms that "God will pity me, if I repent" (2.3.16). At the end of this scene, Faustus beseeches, "Ah, Christ, my savior, / Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul!" (2.3.79-80). When facing damnation at the end of act 5, Faustus also avows, "I'll leap up to my God! . . . See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! / One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!" (5.2.73-5). Yet, these exclamations are clearly not sufficient to guarantee salvation, and Faustus's damnation exposes a flaw in the traditional understanding of Christian theology—words of repentance, even coupled with virtuous intent, do not save him.

Similarly, Mephistopheles says that the bloody contract is a "security" (2.1.36), but it appears to secure very little, as both Mephistopheles and Lucifer genuinely fear that Faustus might repent, a fear that indicates that he *can* repent.

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<sup>146</sup> This passages also alludes to Psalm 8.3-4: "When I beholde thine heauens, euen the workes of thy fingers, the moone and the starres which thou hast ordained, What is man, say I, that thou art mindful of him? And the sonne of man, that thou visitest him?" (Geneva).

The precariousness of Faustus's impending damnation is repeatedly clear, as Mephistopheles distracts him from faith with dumb shows and parades of vices. During the contract scene, when Faustus contemplates fleeing from his sin, Mephistopheles confesses in an aside, "I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind" (2.1.81). Similarly, when Faustus questions the devil about the universe, he tersely responds, "Think thou on hell, Faustus, for thou art damned" (2.3.70). Lucifer reinforces the tenuous nature of Faustus's breach when he appears and says, "We come to tell thee thou dost injure us. / Thou talk'st of Christ, contrary to thy promise" (2.3.87-88). If Faustus were unequivocally damned, Mephistopheles and Lucifer would not care what occupies his thoughts or words. Thus, while Faustus is indeed damned at the play's end, he is not damned during it.

But Faustus's "double motion" must eventually come to an end, and Mephistopheles demonstrates that, ultimately, absolute divisions must be made. Or, more precisely, divisions will be made. Just not by Faustus. Cox finds the text's ambiguous conclusion the result of "deliberately deconstructing the traditional opposition between God and the devil as seekers for Faustus's soul," and he instead views the central conflict as one over power, not religion ("To Obtain His Soul" 41). He ultimately argues that *Faustus* leaves questions of salvation "irresolvably ambiguous, because it emphasizes the suffocating impossibility of human autonomy rather than the destination of the soul" ("To Obtain His Soul" 43). But Faustus's damnation is a shockingly resolute ending in a text that resists resolution. Faustus may waver in limbo for twenty-four years, exploiting the weakness of competing religious faiths even beyond the simple binary of traditional notions of orthodoxy

and heresy, but his deference cannot be permanent, and his damnation suggests that such irresolution, such inabsolution, cannot stand indefinitely. At last, death will come, and then the truth will be known. Yet the text simultaneously suggests that these absolute answers are unknowable before death. They cannot be absolute in life, or on stage. Significantly, the agent(s) of Faustus's resolute ending—God? Lucifer? Mephistopheles?—are conspicuously absent from the final scene. That resolution is deferred also, to the imagination of the audience.

Mephistopheles delineates the resolution of the afterlife, at once definite and impenetrable, in his poetic description, and definition, of hell:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed

In one self place, for where we are is hell,

And where hell is, there must we ever be.

And to conclude, when all the world dissolves

And every creature shall be purified

All places shall be hell that is not heaven. (2.1.117-122)

Hell is circumscribed by default, when God circumscribes heaven. Likewise, Faustus is not so much damned to hell as he is damned to not-heaven. When Faustus mocks, "I think hell's a fable," Mephistopheles retorts, "Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind" (2.1.123-124). Mephistopheles highlights the flaw in Faustus's empiricism—he may think hell is a fable, but thinking does not make it so. Faustus may be able to defer a decision about faith while he lacks the experience of either heaven or hell, but that experience (that ultimate choice of an absolute destination)



is inevitable. Heaven will be a defined, absolute space, and all places outside of it shall be hell.

Thus, Faustus does not go gently into the good night. In his last soliloquy, he ironically cries,

Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,

That time may cease and midnight never come.

Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make

Perpetual day; or let this hour be but

A year, a month, a week, a natural day

That Faustus may repent and save his soul. (5.2.64-69)

Faustus believes that stopping the heavens would delay his choice—yet it has been his perpetual revolution, his perpetual “double motion” that has in fact inhibited his decision. Here, Faustus ironically alludes to the sun standing still when the Israelites fought the Amorites, a moment the Scriptures emphasize as novel because of “the Lord heard the voyce of a man” (Joshua 10.14 Geneva).<sup>147</sup> But the Lord does not obey Faustus. His illusion of suspended animation quickly dissolves, as he confesses, “The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike, / The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned” (5.2.71-2).

Not surprisingly, Faustus's heresy of indecision is made manifest in his language use, both orthodox and parodic. As his indecision emphatically indicates, his words—be they resolutions to repent or oaths to despair—are ineffective at

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<sup>147</sup> See Joshua 10.12-4.

solidifying his religious belief or his eternal destination. His contract, his lamenting despair, and blasphemies do not damn him; however, nor do his orthodox inquiries, desperate cries, and Scriptural allusions save him. Words, for better or for worse, are ultimately meaningless in Faustus's (and *Faustus's*) search for resolution.

Faustus, as indecisive heretic, illustrates both orthodox and heterodox uses of Latin, and his employment of Biblical language, both earnest and parodic, serves as a gauge of his own indecision. His uses, in fact, vary as widely as his own intellectual processes. Daniel Gates views this scope of language as propagating a “profoundly skeptical interpretation of theological speech acts” (77). Faustus's skepticism is not just theological but verbal as well.

Scholarship has long focused on the opening scene in Faustus's study as a theological framework for interpreting the text, often teasing out specific themes and motifs as lenses for traditional, heterodox readings. Yet, Faustus's infamous opening speech actually provides the model for orthodox Latin language use, despite the heterodox ends to which it is put. Faustus begins, as any good scholar should, with quotations from his primary sources. He first deduces that “to dispute well [is] logic's chiefest end” from his translation of “Bene disserere est finis logices” (1.1.8, 7)<sup>148</sup> and that “the end of physic is our body's health” from his quotation “Summum bonum medicinae sanitas” (1.1.17, 16).<sup>149</sup> He continues with the law, calling the mind-numbing passage “Si una eademque res legatur duobus, / Alter

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<sup>148</sup> “The purpose of logic is to dispute well.” Translation Kastan's.

<sup>149</sup> “Health is the greatest good of medicine.” Translation Kastan's. These first two quotations are accurately translated and appropriately applied, but Faustus falsely attributes them to the wrong authors, thinking he quotes Aristotle and Galen when he really quotes Ramus and Aristotle. His next quotations, however, from Justinian and the Vulgate are accurately attributed.

rem, alter valorem rei, etc.” a petty “case of paltry legacies” (1.1.28-9, 30).<sup>150</sup> His final evocation of Latin in this scene is Scriptural, and this moment has been the focus of Faustus’s supposed descent into necromantic sin. However, his quotations themselves are not as heterodox as they have been cast. He first quotes from Romans 6:23: “Stipendium peccati mors est” (1.1.39).<sup>151</sup> Most scholars harp on Faustus’s partial quotation of the passage—he omits the second half, which reads, “gratia autem Dei vita aeterna in Christo Iesu Domino nostro,”<sup>152</sup> and such faulty syllogisms were sometimes attributed to the devil.<sup>153</sup> However, the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles demonstrates a similar partial quotation, which demonstrates a wider cultural currency than previously assumed: Article IX confirms that “in euery person, borne into this world, it deserueth Gods wrath, and damnation” (Rogers 41). Faustus’s second quotation aligns even closer with the Articles. Faustus recites, “Si peccasse negamus, fallimur, / Et nulla est nobis veritas” (1.1.41-2),<sup>154</sup> omitting the next verse, “si confiteamur peccata nostra fidelis est et iustus ut remittat nobis peccata et emundet nos ab omni iniquitate.”<sup>155</sup> However, as Michael Keefer notes, Article XV only partially quotes this passage as well, ending with “if we say, we have

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<sup>150</sup> “If the one and the same thing is bequeathed to two people, one should have the thing itself and the other the value of the thing, and so forth.” Translation Kastan’s.

<sup>151</sup> “The wages of sin are death.” Translation Kastan’s. See Romans 6.23.

<sup>152</sup> “But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6.23 DRV).

<sup>153</sup> See Snyder and Kocher (106-7).

<sup>154</sup> “If we say that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves and there’s no truth in us” (1.1.43-4). See 1 John 1.8.

<sup>155</sup> “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity” (1 John 1.9 DRV).

no sinne, we deceiue our selues, and the truth is not in us" (Rogers 62).<sup>156</sup> Thus, Faustus's opening scene signifies a more complex language use than the traditional heterodox reading. It sets up the vacillating and ambiguous register that he will employ throughout the rest of the play.

Faustus's Latin use quickly turns parodic, as clearly seen in his next use during in the conjuration scene. His invocation of Latin here delineates the play's parodic register, as Faustus attempts to call forth Mephistopheles:

Sint mihi dei Acherontis propitii! Valeat numen triplex Jehovahae! Ignei, aerii, aquatici, spiritus, salвете! Orientis princeps Beelzebub, inferni ardentis monarcha, et Demogorgon, propitiamus vos, ut appareat et surgat Mephistopheles! Quid tu moraris? Per Jehovaham, Gehennam, et consecratam aquam quam nunc spargo, signumque crucis quod nunc facio, et per vota nostra, ipse nunc surgat nobis dicatus Mephistopheles! (1.3.16-22)<sup>157</sup>

Faustus mixes various religious registers in his parody. His initial subjunctive cry and use of "beseech" mimic prayer, while his employment of "Hail" suggests religious praise. His sprinkling of holy water and crossing himself heavily mocks the Mass, as does his expectation that his words will call forth the real presence of Mephistopheles. In this scene, Faustus takes the husks of orthodox language

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<sup>156</sup> For Keefer reference, see Nuttall (38).

<sup>157</sup> "May the gods of Acheron be generous to me! Away with the threefold power of Jehovah! Hail spirits of fire, air, and water! The prince of the East, Beelzebub, monarch of burning hell, and Demogorgon, we beseech you that Mephistopheles may rise and appear. Why do you delay? By Jehovah, Gehenna, and the holy water I now sprinkle, and by the sign of the cross I now make, and by our vows, may Mephistopheles himself arise at our command." Translation Kastan's.

models—prayer, praise, invocation, and consecration—and infuses them with unorthodox meaning by displacing God with dissenting entities, like Beelzebub and Demogorgon. This begins his parody. Dillon notes that this passage was added by Marlowe and is absent from the *Faustbook*, which only provides a description of Faustus conjuring. As she remarks, “Only in the play is language made central as gesture” (*Language and Stage* 197); assuredly, Marlowe places the emphasis on language, parodic Latin language at that, within the scene.

The distance between Faustus’s first two evocations of Latin collapses in the contract scene, as the orthodox and parodic registers fold one on top of the other. The scene has long been read as a parody of Christ’s death and the Mass, with Faustus cast as a parodic Christ figure when his “flesh literally becomes words” (Gates 74). The use of his blood to sacrifice his soul certainly forges such a reading. Faustus begins with a parodic employment of Biblical Latin: he punctuates his signing of the pact with, “Consummatum est” (2.1.73), referring to Christ’s last words on the cross.<sup>158</sup> This allusion casts Faustus’s selling of his soul as parodically sacrificial, like Christ’s death of the cross, purchasing eternal damnation rather than eternal life.<sup>159</sup> Yet, both readings—the contract scene as mock crucifixion or mock Eucharist—take the kernel of meaning—that it *is* finished—as truth, as both view

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<sup>158</sup> “It is finished.” Translation’s Kastan’s. See John 19.30.

<sup>159</sup> Interestingly, the power of magic is nowhere mentioned in the writ, presumably because Faustus could conjure (to whatever extent the illusion of magic dictates) prior to selling his soul. While many scholars assume that Faustus sells his soul for power and knowledge, neither are mentioned in the deed. He only mentions that Mephistopheles “shall do for him and bring for him whatsoever” (2.1.98-99), which only allots for power and knowledge by proxy.

the scene as a terminal point in Faustus's moral stance. But, as the remainder of the play demonstrates, it is not finished. In fact, it is just beginning.

Faustus himself (or more precisely, his blood) responds to this parody with an earnest exhortation: "Homo fuge!"<sup>160</sup> The injunction alludes to 1 Timothy 6.10-12, which reads,

For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, fly these things [homo fuge]: and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness. Fight the good fight of faith: lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast confessed a good confession before many witnesses. (DRV)

Faustus now manifests, however unwittingly, the orthodox register of his initial Biblical quotations. Here, he appears the typical morality play protagonist in danger of damnation when the voice of orthodoxy gives him warning, only that orthodox voice is his own. Faustus even debates with himself over this very admonition: "Homo fuge! Yet Faustus shall not fly" (2.1.80).<sup>161</sup>

Apparently Faustus's language is also contagious, for his dual registers appear individually in other characters within the text—the parodic in Wagner, Robin, and Rafe and the orthodox in Mephistopheles. Wagner's comic scenes

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<sup>160</sup> "Man, flee!" Translation Kastan's.

<sup>161</sup> Faustus also parodies liturgical Latin in his call for Mephistopheles, "'Veni, veni, Mephistopheles'" (1.3.34, 2.1.29), a direct allusion to the hymn "Veni, veni Emmanuel." Some of his other snippets of Latin are morally neutral, such as his commands to Mephistopheles, "Quin redis, Mephistopheles, fratris imagine?" and his allusion to Ovid in his final scene, "O lente, lente currite, noctis equi" (5.2.70).

recapitulate Faustus's parody, as he employs the same reading practices as his master, using snippets of authoritative Latin, but to an unauthoritative end. When the two scholars inquire about Faustus's whereabouts, Wagner mockingly replies, "Yes, sir, I will tell you; yet, if you were not dunces, you would never ask me such a question; for is not he corpus naturale? And is not that mobile?" (1.2.19-21). He then slides into a mockingly Puritan register, "like a precisian" (1.2.27), to conclude his speech with a parodic benediction: "And so, the Lord bless you, preserve you, and keep you, my dear brethren, my dear brethren" (1.2.30-2).

In his next scene, his own antic conjuring mimics Faustus's apparent success immediately prior, as he promises Robin, "I'll make thee go like 'Qui mihi discipulus'" (1.4.14-5) and concludes, "call me 'Master Wagner,' and let thy left eye be diametarily fixed upon my right heel, with quasi vestigiis nostris insistere" (1.4.71-3).<sup>162</sup> Robin calls this "Dutch fustian" (1.4.74) or gibberish, but he later catches this parodic register as well.

When Robin and Rafe enter immediately after the Vatican scene (toting a book and silver goblet, obvious parodies of the props from the scene prior), both mock the scholastic and Biblical registers as they reenact Faustus's parlor tricks from before. Robin begins by asking, "Did not I tell thee, we were for ever made by this Doctor Faustus's book? Ecce signum!"<sup>163</sup> Robin's phrase "ecce signum" is likely a corruption of the Good Friday liturgy "ecce lignum crucis" (Kastan *King Henry IV*

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<sup>162</sup> "You who are my pupil" and "as if to follow in our footsteps." Translations Kastan's.

<sup>163</sup> "Behold, the proof!" Translation Kastan's.

n.216 l.162).<sup>164</sup> This allusion casts the magic book, not the cross, as what “for ever ma[kes]” the ruffians. This spurs Robin on to “gull [a vintner] supernaturally” using Faustus’s necromantic texts (3.2.6). Robin then attempts to conjure from the book, calling, “Sanctobulorum Periphrasticon . . . Polypragmos Belseborams framanto pacostiphos tostu Mephistopheles” (3.2.25-8). This is indeed “Dutch fustian” or gibberish, a further corruption of the already parodic Latin Faustus uses to conjure in act 1. When Mephistopheles does appear and “sets squibs at their backs” (3.2.28+SD), the vintner appears genuine in his fear and cries, “O, nomine Domine!” (3.2.29). However, Robin and Rafe respond by mocking the vintner’s language of repentance with parodic Biblical quotations: “Peccatum peccatorum!” and “Misericordia pro nobis!” (3.2.31, 32).<sup>165</sup> Wagner’s, Robin’s, and Rafe’s parodies not only echo Faustus’s own but also the blasphemous Scripture quotations of Antichrist, the anticlerical taunts of the Worldlings in *Mankind*, the caustic snippets of Latin from Bale’s vices, and the moral bravado of code-switching Falstaff.

However, the play also depicts one particularly unique model of language—the orthodox register of Mephistopheles. When he initially enters dressed as a friar, he conjures up a long tradition of devilish, corrupt clergy, such as Mischief in *Mankind* and all of Bale’s vices. However, Mephistopheles quickly punctures these expectations with his starkly orthodox language use. He emerges, in fact, as one of

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<sup>164</sup> “Behold the wood of the cross.” Translation Kastan’s.

<sup>165</sup> “Sin of sins” and “pity for us.” Translations Kastan’s.



the most truthful characters on the stage.<sup>166</sup> In his first appearance in the conjuring scene, Mephistopheles instructs Faustus in highly orthodox doctrine, confirming the narrative of Lucifer's fall "by aspiring pride and insolence" (1.3.67) and the angels who followed, as well as the existence and nature of hell opposed to "the eternal joys of heaven" (1.3.78). Mephistopheles could double as an actual friar. Later, when Faustus asks him why Lucifer desires human souls, Mephistopheles responds in Latin: "Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris" (2.1.42), echoing the Biblical injunction to "weep with them that weep" (Romans 12.15, DRV). Further, when Mephistopheles distracts Faustus with a dumb show and the apostate inquires what it means, the devil does not mask his intentions: "Nothing, Faustus, but to delight thy mind withal / And to show thee what magic can perform" (2.1.83-4). Similarly, the devil openly resolves Faustus's questions on creation, even including the scholastic Latin phrase "per inaequalem motum respectu totius" to explain astronomical inconsistencies (2.3.64). In the Vatican scene, Mephistopheles does aid Faustus in his pranks, but his Aristotelian remark that "thou shall see a troop of bald-pate friars, / Whose summum bonum is in belly cheer" rings strikingly true (3.1.51-2). He even confesses, quite orthodoxly, that the Old Man's "faith is great. I cannot touch his soul" (5.1.78).

*Faustus's* spectrum of language use, across a spectrum of characters, dislocates the moral assumptions about language more than any of its antecedents. Previously, stage heretics questioned the univocity of signifier and signified, and

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<sup>166</sup> He is not, of course, entirely truthful, but in a play plagued with illusion and self-delusion, Mephistopheles is clearly one of the more transparent, honest characters.

even the univocity between speaker and hearer, through their parody; however, this disruption still polarized characters as orthodox and heterodox, based on intent. In Chester's "Antichrist," the coding of Antichrist as heretical made his language, correlatively, heretical, and likewise the virtue of Enoch and Elijah coded their language as orthodox. This pattern repeats in *Mankind's* Worldlings and Mercy, the Croxton *Play's* Jews and the Bishop, *The Three Laws's* vices and Laws, and *Henry IV's* Hal and Falstaff. But in *Faustus*, this dichotomy falls apart as heterodox characters employ orthodox language and vice versa. Faustus employs both. Not only is there no univocity between words and meaning but neither is there univocity between speaker and intent, particularly when the speaker himself is not unified in his intent. This chaotic system of elements reduces signifiers to free radicals, unattached to the signified, the speaker, or the intent.

Within this system, then, *Faustus* explores language as both material and abstract. In Faustus's choice of "necromantic books" (1.1.50), he introduces his preferred method of reading, reading materially. Daniel Gates describes this as Faustus's "explicitly carnal relationship to language" (71). After dismissing the canonical texts, Faustus declares, "necromantic books are heavenly; / Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters— / Ay, these are those Faustus most desires" (1.1.50-52). He shifts the emphasis from the language use seen in his earliest quotations to their physical forms—lines, circles, letters, and characters. He finds these, not the quotations, most desirous. Mephistopheles later encourages this material reading, as he instructs Faustus,

... take this book, peruse it thoroughly.

The iterating of these lines brings gold;  
The framing of this circle on the ground  
Brings whirlwinds, tempests, thunder, and lightning;  
Pronounce this thrice devoutly to thyself,  
And men in armor shall appear to thee. (2.1.155-159)

The focus on the lines and circles rather than the words themselves, coupled with the emphasis on “iterating” and “pronouncing” rather than meaning or intending, speaks to the materiality of the necromantic texts. The Good Angel hones in on this disparity and instructs him,

O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside  
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul  
And heap God’s heavy wrath upon thy head.  
Read, read the Scriptures. That is blasphemy. (1.1.70-73)

The Good Angel contrasts the “damned book” on which Faustus gazes, passively, to the Scriptures on which Faustus should read, actively.

However, the play dismantles this materialism as quickly as it constructs it. By the end of the first scene, Faustus admits that words, while materially powerful, are insufficient to enact change alone. He first says to Valdes and Cornelius,

Know that your words have won me at the last  
To practice magic and concealed arts.  
Yet not your words only but mine own fantasy  
That will receive no object for my head  
But ruminates on necromantic skill. (1.1.101-105)

Faustus makes it clear that his dissent is not simply a matter of whose words were most persuasive, or even most beautiful materially, but whose words got coupled with his preset intention. Mephistopheles confirms this belief (to Faustus's surprise) two scenes later.<sup>167</sup> When Faustus wrongly believes that his necromantic prayer has called forth the devil, thinking "there's virtue in my heavenly words" (1.3.27), Mephistopheles corrects him, countering that he came "of mine own accord" (1.3.44). The devil then elaborates on this relationship between words and meaning: he explains that Faustus's blasphemous words only caused his appearance "per accidens" (1.3.46),<sup>168</sup> as an indicator of his preexistent heretical condition.<sup>169</sup> Faustus's words, like those in *Mankind*, are markers but not makers of meaning.

Yet, unlike in *Mankind*, Faustus's words eventually fail to even mark meaning. Throughout its five acts, the play repeatedly makes clear that Faustus's fate is not settled—Faustus can be saved or damned up through the final scene, and his language repeatedly fails to decide his fate. Significantly, his language does not change in his last soliloquy. He is still the same equivocating Faustus, crying "Ah, my Christ!" and "O, spare me, Lucifer!" a mere two lines apart (5.2.75, 77). So what does change? What mode of meaning prevails? Ironically, it is the unstaged variable who drags Faustus off to hell, the thing about which Faustus asks, "Who pulls me down?"

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<sup>167</sup> Mephistopheles continues to tempt and distract Faustus with models of materialistic reading, such as his remark that the spells to raise the dead and the secrets of astronomy and biology are "here . . . in this book" (2.1.164); however, given Mephistopheles deflation of the materiality of language, the text rather suggests that the devil is appealing to Faustus's gullibility to keep him in sin.

<sup>168</sup> "By accident." Translation mine. Mephistopheles uses scholastic Latin here.

<sup>169</sup> The same appears to be true for Robin, who is able to call up Mephistopheles with garbled Latin, and he cannot even read the spells (3.2, 2.2).

(5.2.73). This ambiguous, invisible force conveys the play's ultimately meaning. In the silence of the play's final moments, the prevailing agent—God?, Lucifer?, Mephistopheles?—signifies the final signified: damnation. As the silence illustrates, this signified is devoid of language entirely. In sharp opposition to Faustus's verbal wavering, this mode of meaning is silent but definitive.

Faustus's tragic defeat conjures up associations with the Antichrist and magic traditions, just like previous stage heretics. Robert Ornstein notes that Faustus "plays the role of an antichrist. Unlike the God who became man, Faustus is man who would be god" (1384). Parker observes that the figure of Simon Magus in the Middle Ages "epitomize[d] this constant rivalry between apostolic miracle and the commercial spectacles of Antichrist" (230), and other scholars often connect the magic in *Faustus* to a range of magicians, such as Agrippa and John Dee.<sup>170</sup>

Like Chester's Antichrist, Faustus shines in his showmanship, but his flamboyant physicality only masks his spiritual heresy. His deeds also harken to the Antichrist tradition: in his conjuration, Faustus blasphemes "Away with the threefold power of Jehovah!" (1.3.16-7), much like Antichrist's denial of the Trinity, and Faustus is particularly desirous to "raise up spirits when I please" (2.1.163), like Antichrist's raising of the three dead kings. Given Antichrist's propensity for false resurrections, the audience might easily have expected Faustus to rise again in his final scene, making his damnation all the more powerful.

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<sup>170</sup> For example, see Mebane, Gareth Roberts, Parker, and Duxfield.

Faustus warns his patrons that his magic cannot “present . . . the substantial bodies” of the dead (4.1.46) but it can only “lively resemble” them (4.1.51), and this “omnipotence” extends to his other uses of magic as well.<sup>171</sup> As in the Croxton *Play*, magic is illusory in its powers. It looks attractive in the dim light of Faustus’s study, but in the harsh light of day, it sorely disappoints. Magic is nothing more than having a glorified personal assistant, and magic, like traditional understandings of orthodoxy and heresy, is simply another belief system.

However, magic is a system that accommodates Faustus’s indecision. Faustus need not profess or deny any doctrine, for magic is a construct above those systems that draws both orthodox and heterodox characters, to encourage repentance or despair respectively. Magic has also been read as one of the primary foci of the play, with its symbolic role being read as everything from Catholicism to education and even the theater itself. Magic can (and may) represent all of these things. But the role of magic also manifests materially Faustus’s heresy of indecision. For, magic is the one system in which Faustus engages that does *not* require decision. Magic, in contrast, only requires doubt. Faustus prophesies that “All things that move between the quiet poles / Shall be at my command” (1.1.56-7), and the image rings true, as he himself is something that theologically moves between the two poles of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Magic provides him that scope. Significantly, magic does not affect the Old Man because “his *faith* is too great” (5.1.78, emphasis mine). Similarly, Mephistopheles appears sober to the hollow realities of magic through his

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<sup>171</sup> The neologism was coined by Constance Brown Kuriyama in *Hammer or Anvil*.

empirical belief in hell and his nostalgia for “the joys of heaven” and “the face of God” (1.3.77-8). In both cases, *belief* is what makes them impervious to magic.

Unlike the Croxton *Play*, which casts the theater as instructive magic, *Faustus* aligns magic with the theater to show its inefficacy, particularly the inefficacy of the theatrical past. As Marlowe demonstrates, this religious mode of theater relied on and presupposed belief: belief in orthodoxy for those the theater strengthen in faith or heterodoxy for those the theater sought to convert. Belief, in fact, was necessary for suspended disbelief. But *Faustus* illustrates the opposite: magic and theater only encourage indecision. Darryll Grantley argues that in “*Doctor Faustus*, religious and other forms of power are interrogated precisely by re-producing them as theatrical constructs—therefore as both contingent rather than absolute—and compromised by the essentially illusory nature of theatre” (225). The magic of theater, like *Faustus*’s magic, does not effect change. When *Faustus* begins to repent in act 2, Mephistopheles shows him a dumb show and the parade of vices, the very theatrical tool that *should* convert him (and does convert his theatrical predecessors). The vices in the parade enter each in turn and deliver predictable speeches, but they have the opposite effect—*Faustus* is so repulsed by them that he reconfirms his pact with the devil. Likewise, the psychomachia debates between the two Angels and the gaping Hellmouth both find counterparts in earlier medieval drama, and yet both only solidify *Faustus* in his heretical, indecisive state. The Good and Bad Angels only fuel his indecision, and the Hellmouth, at once present but substantially absent, only contributes to *Faustus*’s dismissal that “hell’s a fable” (2.1.123). Mephistopheles’s

empirical counter, “till experience change your mind” (2.1.124) cuts both ways—Faustus *will* experience it, but only on stage.

Faustus indeed takes heresy to a new level. He rejects the binary codings previous stage heretics—like Antichrist, *Mankind*'s vices, the Croxton *Play*'s Jews, Bale's vices, and Falstaff—rely on to categorize both their religious beliefs and their language use. Faustus blatantly—heretically—supersedes these boundaries, catapulting him into a realm of irresolution and ultimately dissolution. All that he lacks, tragically and eternally, is absolution.



## BOLDLY BITTEN

Satan's injunction to "bite boldly on" (*York* "Fall of Man" 80) in the garden raises serious questions about language, particularly language in a utopia. The Genesis account begins with creation through the language, but it soon slides into how quickly language can be used for destruction. Quite surprisingly, Genesis admits a fallibility in language before humanity's fall. There is no univocity, even in Eden.

In the garden, the serpent keenly utilizes this lack of univocity in his temptation of Adam and Eve. His first line of attack is to call the signifiers of God's command into question—"hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?" (3.1, DRV). The serpent encourages Eve to doubt what God *said*. But she is at first impervious and repeats the signifiers back to him: "Of the fruit of the trees that are in paradise we do eat: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die" (3.2-3, DRV). So, the serpent then tries a second approach. If the signifiers have been clearly understood, perhaps the signified of God's command is vulnerable. Perhaps she knows what God *said* but not what God *meant*. The serpent replies to Eve, "No, you shall not die" (3.4, DRV). This time, Eve bites. The serpent, much like the stage heretics that follow him, exploits

the gap between language and meaning, the very weakness between signifiers and the signified, to tempt Adam and Eve into sin.

The stage heretics discussed above follow this pattern, as their Biblical parodies interrogate the same linguistic weakness as the serpent. They use what God *said* but change what he *meant*. The medieval dramatic texts—the Chester “Antichrist” play, *Mankind*, and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*—all rely on Latin Biblical and liturgical models of what God has said, but they demonstrate their subjective meaning by repositioning them not as truth but as parody. All of these stage heretics also have connections to Lollardy, whose endorsement of a vernacular Bible bolsters the heretics’ interrogation of Latin as the language of truth. The Reformation texts—Bale’s *Three Laws*, Shakespeare’s *1* and *2 Henry IV*, and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*—develop this model by exploring (or, in Faustus’s case, creating) other linguistic gaps, such as those between language choice, between speaker and audience, and even between words and silence. Post-Reformation, these heretics demonstrate a broader range of theological dissensions, spanning Catholicism, Puritanism, Calvinism, and humanism.

Chester’s Antichrist opens the play by employing Biblical Latin to position himself as Christ. He introduces himself with Latin quotations, signatures of God and Christ elsewhere in the cycle, and he continues his campaign by citing Old Testament Biblical passages as prophecies of his coming. This initial inversion of Latin forces the audience to depend on the context of his language use to discern his heresy. The play’s virtuous characters eventually set Antichrist’s inversion upright

through the power of the Host, as Word incarnate, to identify orthodoxy and heresy. Antichrist's heretical disbelief in the Host exposes his Latin language use as parodic.

The morality play *Mankind* also contains a disruption in the assumed authority of Latin as the language of truth. The vices within the play parody ecclesiastical uses of Latin, such as in sermons, the liturgy, and the court system, to demonstrate how context-dependent meaning is. The play not only establishes the expected polarity of virtuous and vice figures, who each rely on a distinct register of language, but also traces the protagonist's movement from virtue to vice and back to virtue again through his adoption of the respective registers. This technique emphasizes the intimate connection language has to one's morality, a connection heavily reflective of the contemporary debate between orthodox Christianity and Lollardy. Just as in "Antichrist," *Mankind* indicates that one's moral position serves as crucial context for one's language.

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* parallels Chester's "Antichrist" in its emphasis on the centrality of the Host and *Mankind* in its exploration of specifically ecclesiastical uses of Latin. Through the Jews' mock consecration of the Host, the play examines what gives words the power to invoke the Real Presence, a question central to Lollard attacks on ecclesiastical authority. The play distinguishes between the sanctioned words of the consecration and the parodic mimesis of it by the Jews. The play elucidates this examination by aligning the power of a priest's consecration to the power of believers' confessions, wherein both are mediated through the ecclesiastical structures and thus enact a transubstantiation, invoking the Real Presence of Christ.

Bale's Reformation morality play *The Three Laws* reshapes the medieval dramatic genre into a battle between Protestant and Catholic understandings of the Word, inverting the medieval associations of Latin as the authoritative Biblical language. Like their predecessors, the vices, each costumed in Catholic garb, focus their parody on the formulaic Latin of the Catholic Church, privileging the form over the content of the words. This register is opposed by the three virtuous Laws, who deliver their speeches in English. Bale characterizes this gap between (in his characterization) opaque Latin and plain English through the Scriptural dichotomy of the letter and the spirit, and this duality forms the basis of his condemnation of Catholicism as legalistic and his veneration of Protestantism as spiritually-guided. Thus, Bale echoes the previous authors in his insistence on context to determine meaning, but Bale finds that the Spirit, not one's own morality, provides such appropriate context.

Post-Reformation, Falstaff's parody churns the waters of Biblical language use, made murkier when both orthodox and heterodox registers rely on English. Rather than evoking the conventional division between Latin and English, Falstaff employs a (parodic) Puritan register against Hal's mainstream Anglican discourse. By removing language choice from the orthodox-heterodox equation, Falstaff's parody demonstrates that meaning heavily relies on contextual clues, beyond even the speaker's morality. This subjectivity in meaning is underscored by Falstaff's connection to the Lollard Sir John Oldcastle, who was seen contemporarily as proto-Protestant martyr by Anglicans and seditious traitor by Catholics. Ultimately,

Falstaff's deconstruction of Biblical language examines the gap between speaker and audience, positing that meaning is predominantly dependent on the latter.

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* melds several strands from the preceding five plays, synthesizing over a hundred years of the stage heretic tradition. The text intently relies on medieval depictions of Antichrist, the morality play structure, and liturgical Biblical parody in its depiction of its protagonist, in the vein of Chester's "Antichrist," *Mankind*, and the Croxton *Play*. It also explores the same linguistic gaps of context and audience as Bale's vices and Falstaff. *Faustus* also contains the spectrum of orthodox and heterodox language use, but the text collapses this spectrum into Faustus's idiom. However, unlike all the previous plays, *Faustus* resists any resolution of the tension between words and meaning through Faustus's perpetual wavering of faith. Words are impotent to save or damn him; in fact, words appear to do little at all. Through his range of Biblical language use, Faustus uncouples language from all sites of meaning, and his end is ultimately signified by silence.

Perhaps more striking is not that language was corruptible in Eden but that, by extension, it is thus irredeemable. If even in perfection, the disjunction between words and meaning can produce sin, then there appears no hope for a perfect reconciliation of word and meaning in this world, or even the next. The plays offer space for the heretics' redemption from their religious dissent, but they lack a clear space to redeem their verbal transgressions. Tragically, the stage heretics' souls may be saved but never their language.

This study of stage heretics and their Biblical parody connects two major strands of medieval and early modern criticism. Through the figure of the stage heretic, it provides a fuller picture of religious dissent and a deeper analysis of the texts' deconstructive parody. Thus, the project sketches a tradition of stage heretics that, despite the religious and social upheaval of medieval and early modern England, remains consistent in its tethering of heresy and parody across the medieval-early modern divide. Moreover, while this study focuses primarily on Christian heretics within the period, the history of the stage heretic also bears on depictions of Jewish and Muslim figures on the medieval and early modern stage. Much like the Croxton *Play's* Jews, these stage figures often parody Biblical language as evidence of their dissenting beliefs.

This tethering of heresy and parody is no doubt strategic in the plays' attempts to mitigate the ideological threat the heretics' parodies pose, as they rely on a variety of modes to contain their linguistic skepticism in light of the shifting contemporary theological landscape, spanning the medieval emphasis on context and character as markers for orthodoxy to the Reformation expansion of such contexts to include language choice, audience, and even silence. Thus, their verbal dissents expose a history of skepticism about the univocity of words and meaning, a skepticism about meaning usually associated with later critical traditions and often overlooked in medieval and early modern texts. These plays explore the very ideas that Saussure would centuries later, providing examples of structuralist—and in the case of *Faustus*, post-structuralist—examinations of signs. They also precede

reader-response approaches by demonstrating the subjectivity of meaning, within both the words themselves and the audience, and by recognizing that stabilized meaning requires uniform audience contexts, such as a shared sense of orthodoxy. The deconstruction of language, a staple of contemporary criticism, has early roots in the Biblical parody of medieval and early modern stage heretics.

Thus, these stage heretics, quite boldly, suggest that the absolute link between words and meaning is a specious construction. This proposition bears heavily on all forms of communication, including the very words on this page. Even these words, as the preceding stage heretics show, depend on a variety of contexts for their own meaning; and after each of these contexts inform the meaning of this text, only Faustus's ultimate context remains: The rest is silence.

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