Heterodox Drama: Theater in Post-Reformation London

Musa Gurnis-Farrell

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ABSTRACT

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Musa Gurnis-Farrell

In “Heterodox Drama: Theater in Post-Reformation London,” I argue that the specific working practices of the theater industry generated a body of drama that combines the varied materials of post-Reformation culture in hybrid fantasies that helped audiences emotionally negotiate and productively re-imagine early modern English religious life. These practices include: the widespread recycling of stock figures, scenarios, and bits of dialogue to capitalize on current dramatic trends; the collaboration of playwrights and actors from different religious backgrounds within theater companies; and the confessionally diverse composition of theater audiences. By drawing together a heterodox conglomeration of Londoners in a discursively capacious cultural space, the theaters created a public. While the public sphere that emerges from early modern theater culture helped audience members process religious material in politically significant ways, it did so not primarily through rational-critical thought but rather through the faculties of affect and imagination. The theater was a place where the early modern English could creatively reconfigure existing confessional identity categories, and emotionally experiment with the rich ideological contradictions of post-Reformation life.
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Introduction:
Heterodoxy and Early Modern Theater

In 1582, the future playwright Anthony Munday was working as an informant for the “priest hunter” Richard Topcliff, a government officer charged with enforcing the Elizabethan statutes against Catholics. Topcliff was a notorious sadist, his name a byword for torture. One night in April of that year Topcliff and his men arrested a descendent of the dissident saint Thomas More, confiscating a number of illegal Catholic books from his home, including the hagiography *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*. In 1592 Munday, by then writing for the theater, used the same devout biography seized during the raid as the primary source for *Sir Thomas More*, a play sympathetic to the Catholic martyr. Later, in 1599, Munday recycled material from *Sir Thomas More* in a new piece of theater, this time celebrating the life and death of a Protestant hero, *Sir John Oldcastle*. Within a space of seventeen years, in other words, a professional persecutor of Catholics wrote a play about a Catholic saint that he then used as a template for a play about a Protestant martyr.¹ Munday’s devotional career was generally complex, but this

¹ Munday led a contorted religious life. He began his literary career under the patronage of the Catholic Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere. In 1579 he was studying at the English College at Rome, a training ground for missionaries working toward the re-Catholicization of England. It is unclear, however, whether he was there as an actual student or as a spy. In the early 1580s he was back in England, working as an actor, informing on Catholic priests, and writing anti-Catholic tracts. During the late 1580s Munday delivered evidence of the puritan minister Giles Wigginton’s involvement with the Martin Marprelate tracts to the Archbishop of Canturbury, John Whitgift. Bearing in mind that Sir John Oldcastle, the subject of Munday’s 1599 play, was a lollard martyr, and that the lollards were considered the cultural forerunners of Elizabethan puritans, this means that both of Munday’s martyr plays celebrated religious groups that he himself had helped to persecute. David M. Bergeron, “Munday, Anthony (bap. 1560, d. 1633),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), May 2007 online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19531 (accessed 18 July 2011). Despite Donna Hamilton’s attempt to trace consistent Catholic commitments through Munday’s career in *Anthony Munday and the Catholics, 1560–1633* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), I would argue that there is no way to make sense of Munday’s life in confessionally coherent terms.
anecdote in particular suggests something not only about heterodoxy, but about the productive centrality of heterodoxy to early modern theater.

The myriad pleasures of early modern drama included seeing the most fraught aspects of post-Reformation culture vividly imagined on the stage. While theatergoers may have enjoyed seeing their own confessional identities celebrated, seeing alternative and unorthodox religious practices offered another kind of excitement. But early modern stage representations of religion were not always easy to parse along strict confessional lines. Indeed, I want to argue that one of the pleasures the theater provided was the opportunity to experience religious tension in a concentrated form, and, perhaps even more, to engage in fantasies that crossed sectarian lines. In what follows I will show that the early modern theater offered audiences a powerfully elastic experience of England’s conflicted religious culture. The drama promoted responses that crossed sectarian divides, inviting audiences to laugh at jokes made by a jolly Catholic priest in a play with a hard-line Protestant agenda, to recognize shared values in a puritan caricature, to sympathize with a dead Catholic whore. Where other scholars have sought coherent expressions of religious belief in the drama, I attend to the hybrid, ideologically conflicted, but emotionally and imaginatively powerful religious fantasies that appeared on the post-Reformation stage. Focusing on plays by William Shakespeare, as well as those by lesser known playwrights like Thomas Dekker, John Ford, Thomas Middleton, and James Shirley, “Heterodox Drama” argues that the early modern stage presents a range of dramatic configurations that trouble early modern religious identity categories. These plays combine narratives, visual imagery, and polemical tropes associated with, or commonly deployed by, rival religious groups to produce ideologically contradictory but
emotionally powerful dramatic effects. Through illustrative case studies, I will show how these confessionally polyvocal stage moments that encourage unorthodox fantasy and cross-denominational identification are generated by particular practices of the theater industry: collective authorship; the widespread recycling of dramatic tropes; the incorporation of hotly debated and topical controversies; as well as the religious diversity of early modern playgoers themselves. One of the greatest pleasures the theater offered, I will argue, was the chance for audiences to “suspend belief,” and to experience in a more imaginatively flexible way the competing voices of a heterodox society.

One of the common pitfalls of earlier literary studies of post-Reformation culture was to think of the early modern English as divided into two monolithic groups: Catholics and Protestants. Certainly, men and women in the period tended to identify strongly by religious group and to perceive religious differences in sharply dichotomous terms. For example, the frontispiece of John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments, after the Bible the most popular book of the period, with its engraving of godly Protestant martyrs on the left and corrupt Catholic sinners on the right, illustrates the widespread understanding of the oppositional relationship between the Protestant and Catholic churches: true church and false, Christ’s flock and Whore of Babylon. While this kind of binary thinking was a common discursive mode, it did not match the on-the-ground experience of post-Reformation life.

The enormous cultural transformation we call the English Reformation was a complex and uneven process. As the religious historian Peter Lake writes,

The tergiversations of the previous decades had left a cultural terrain strewn with the wreckage of partially disrupted belief systems, sets of assumptions about how the world worked and where the holy was to be found and how it might be approached, invoked, or manipulated . . . This variegated Christian and sub-Christian
bric-a-brac was to be found all over the social, conceptual, and representational landscape of the period . . . The available cultural materials were intensely glossable, subject to different interpretations and appropriations, and the religious scene of Elizabeth’s reign is best seen as a number of attempts conducted at different levels of theoretical self-consciousness and coherence, at creative bricolage . . .

The huge edifices of medieval Catholic belief had been dismantled, but the rubble of Catholic practice lay strewn, literally and figuratively, across the landscape of English society. What it meant for England to be a Protestant nation, as well as the future of English Catholicism, were still being defined, both through formal, ecclesiological debates and processes, and in the changing and diverse private devotional practices of lay people.

Rather than simply reproducing the binary classifications of early modern religious polemic, literary scholars are increasingly coming to recognize the work of historians who have demonstrated both a broader spectrum of available confessional positions, as well as the fact that religious identities were defined in relation to each other. Instead of anachronistically projecting onto the early modern Church of England a stable form of via media Anglicanism, destined to triumph over a backward and dwindling Catholic underground, critics are growing more attuned to the contingent, mutually entangled histories of intra-Protestant and intra-Catholic factions. A more varied cast of confessional characters has entered the scene: hot, lukewarm, and cold statute Protestants; recusant, church papist, secular, and militant Catholics; avant-garde forerunners and Laudians. The object, however, is not simply to divide the early modern

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3 For a masterful study of the survival of medieval Catholicism into the reign of Elizabeth, see Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992). For a view of English Catholicism as reconstituted by Elizabethan missionary activity, see John Bossy, The English Catholic Community, 1570–
English into endlessly proliferating confessional subcategories, but rather to understand religious identities as composite and situational, as collections of doctrinal beliefs, ecclesiological principles, attitudes toward devotional practice and ceremony, national and international political sympathies, doubts, changes of heart, confusions, and curiosities. Religious labels were relative—one man’s Arminian was another’s crypto-Catholic—and their meanings shifted over time in response to changing cultural and political circumstances.

post-reformation England. While I share Lake’s conviction that the commercial theaters constituted a key cultural site for posing and variously answering this question, I remain skeptical of his tendency to treat plays as propositional, advancing identifiable confessional positions. Nevertheless, the seriousness with which he takes the drama as a potential religio-political archive constitutes an important practice of interdisciplinary exchange.

For a long time, the dominant thinking among literary scholars held that the early modern theater was a secular enterprise. That assumption has been debunked in the last fifteen years by a “first wave” of critics who have recognized the presence of religious material in these plays, and discussed how the theater can circulate religious stereotypes and promote coherent religious agendas. The relationship between religious culture and early modern drama has thus been theorized in a variety of ways. Valuable studies have identified elements of the drama that are shaped by and perpetuate the structures of orthodox English Protestant thought. In Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage, for example, Huston Diehl convincingly connects the pervasive impulse in Stuart tragedies to kill the seductive, but corrupt, female love-object, to the Protestant, iconoclastic drive to destroy the beautiful, but spiritually rotten, devotional objects of Catholic worship. Camille Wells Slichts has shown how many of the interiority effects for which early modern drama is celebrated derive from Protestant casuistry, as popularized by divines


like William Ames. Like other scholars, most notably Alison Shell and Fran Dolan, have demonstrated ways in which the dramatic presentation of anti-Catholic tropes helped to consolidate a Protestant, English national identity. This body of work is persuasive and important. But by seeking to track coherent ideologies in the drama, previous scholarship has tended to streamline into monolithic confessional categories the more chaotic, hybrid formations of post-Reformation culture. The drama did at times demonize Catholicism and promote a Protestant, national identity, but it also produced a range of other, ideologically contradictory, effects as well.

As an alternative to a view of the theater as an institution that perpetuates a dominant Protestant ideology, some scholars have sought to identify particular playwrights as secret Catholics, who embed coded, oppositional, religious meanings in their plays to be deciphered by their co-religionists in playhouse audiences. Certainly, Catholics wrote, performed in, and attended plays, but this approach places an emphasis on authorial intention that is difficult to reconcile with the intensely collaborative processes through which meanings were generated in early modern theaters. While many plays from the period contain surprisingly sympathetic Catholic characters or moments that derive their dramatic power from Catholic culture, it cannot be assumed that these effects necessarily originate from activist, Catholic, theater practitioners, or would be accessible, or indeed

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of interest, only to Catholic audience members. Rather than setting a coherent body of oppositional, Catholic drama against a dominant, normative, Protestant theater culture, I propose that the theater functioned as an imaginatively unruly space of exchange and negotiation between competing confessional groups.

Yet by arguing that the drama encouraged affective experimentation with a diverse range of religious material, I am not suggesting that the theater erased sectarian tensions, allowing audience members to float free of their confessional moorings. While some dramatic moments invite cross-confessional identification, or pleasurable engagement with religious practices that one might reject in daily life, these imaginative experiments with the varied materials of post-Reformation culture did not take place outside the context of confessional conflict. In his influential book *Shakespeare’s Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England*, Jeffrey Knapp argues that early modern theater culture aligned itself with and promoted a tolerant, inclusive, Erasmian form of Christianity.\(^{10}\) While I am persuaded that a discourse of proto-ecumenical, Christian “good fellowship” did circulate in some early modern plays and among some theater practitioners, I am not convinced that this ethos was as definitional a part of theater culture as Knapp suggests. Just as the drama does not simply reproduce the values and aesthetics of conforming, Church of England Protestantism, or neatly advance the oppositional religious agendas of individual playwrights, neither is the fundamental, cultural work it performs the propagation of Erasmian religious tolerance *per se*. The material practices of the early modern theater business—that is, the fact that these plays are constructed by multiple agents, with variegated confessional leanings, from a range of

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cultural materials, that are themselves polyvocal, and performed for audiences that were themselves mixed in terms of religious belief, as well as engaged by a range of experiences not constrained by confessional loyalty—produced unpredictable and varied effects, as I will show in the chapters that follow.

Rather than privilege the drama’s relationship with one particular confessional group, or indeed, see it as proto-ecumenical force, I want to stress the way the theater brings together the cultural property of competing religious factions, often in odd or new configurations. Stephen Greenblatt’s *Hamlet in Purgatory* presents a particularly strong example of the drama’s ability to join irreconcilable religious discourses. Greenblatt’s evocative reading of *Hamlet* as a play about a “young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament . . . haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost” demonstrates the theater’s potential to yoke together contradictory religious impulses in jarring, ideologically unsettling fantasies. Yet Greenblatt’s conclusion that the theater appropriates devotional ritual, evacuating it of its truth claims, and transmuting religious affect into theatrical effect seems to reassert a special status for the theater—as transcendent of all things, including religious controversy. Greenblatt’s claim that “the space of Purgatory becomes the space of the stage,” and that the reenactment of performance supplants religious rites of memory, effectively brings us back full circle, to an understanding of the commercial theaters as a force of secularization. For Greenblatt, it seems to be the “weirdness” and “impossibility” of *Hamlet*’s uncanny melding of incompatible belief systems that suggests the play’s manipulation of religious

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12 Ibid., 256–7.
material is, at a certain point, something that is no longer religious, but theatrical and aesthetic. Certainly, emotional experiences mobilized by religious material in the theater are different than those incited in church, because in the playhouse the expectation of spiritual accountability is suspended—except, of course, in the eyes of the antitheatricalists. But Greenblatt’s move to reassign the “weirdness” of Hamlet from the theological to the theatrical implicitly underestimates the weirdness of post-Reformation religious life itself.

“Heterodox Drama” contributes to an emerging body of work that attends to the heterogeneity of religious life in the early modern period, and the vexed cross-pollination of competing religious cultures. For example, Susannah Brietz Monta’s work on martyrs demonstrates shared conventions and lines of influence across martyrological accounts from competing early modern sects. In her closing discussion of the theater, Monta argues in juxtaposed readings of the abovementioned play, Sir Thomas More, and Shakespeare’s Henry VIII, that “neither play can be made to fit neatly the agenda of any single religious faction.”

Benedict Robinson meticulously tracks the shifting implications of Philip Massinger’s Renegado across the different religio-political moments of its performance and publication life. Specifically, Robinson argues, “If, in the spring of 1624, the play perhaps invited a reading in terms of the threat of a Catholic match, as it circulated in print and in the stage repertory through the later 1620s and 1630s, it could have been read as evoking a Laudian understanding of global religious

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This argument is particularly compelling since in it a “Catholic threat” is not simply replaced by a “Laudian threat,” as one might expect, given the frequent charge from Calvinists in the period that Laudianism was popery by another name. Instead the play, recontextualized, makes the far more unpredictable leap from anti-Catholic animosity to Laudian sympathies. Such scholarly work seeks to develop an account of the theater that is responsive to the complexity, contingency, and contradiction that religious historians have long seen as pervasive characteristics of the mixed confessional landscape.

Early modern plays were produced by many agents. At multiple junctures of this process the expression of religious ideology might be disrupted and reshaped. This made the theater a particularly important site for the development and negotiation of heterodoxy. Many scripts were written or revised by multiple authors, a practice that tends to force the convergence or layering of conflicting agendas. Even those scripts written by single authors were impacted by industry pressure to capitalize on current dramatic trends, meaning that different cultural materials were often juxtaposed in an improvisatory fashion that could produce ideologically contradictory effects. While it is impossible for us to know, for example, how the man playing the ghost of Old Hamlet delivered his lines, whether with a sinister, untrustworthy (demonic) inflection or a tone of pious (purgatorial) horror, it is reasonable to suppose that the confessional sympathies of individual actors might prompt performance choices at odds with the religious agenda.

of a play’s author(s). Furthermore, the theatergoers who watched these plays, as I will show in chapter one, came from a range of confessional subject positions. Their practices of reception and interpretation, whether silent or vocalized, were also forms of cultural production. Indeed, the religious identities of participants on both sides of the stage were not only diverse as a group, but also individually complex; in other words, both conflicting and conflicted. Ben Jonson, for example, was a multiple convert. The actor Nathan Field, a conforming member of the Church of England, had been raised by a firebrand leader of the presbyterian movement. Avid playgoer Sir Toby Mathew became a Catholic priest, despite being born the son of the Archbishop of York. These personal, cross-confessional histories were not uncommon. Despite the ferocity and rigidity with which the early modern English labeled their confessional “others,” the religious lives of many—indeed, to a degree all—post-Reformation English men and women were striated formations, composed of varied strands of influence.

Furthermore, I will propose that part of the appeal of early modern theater was the license to experience religious culture differently than one did in real life. For example, a

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recusant theatergoer watching the triumphant coronation scene at the end of Thomas Heywood’s nationalist, Protestant celebration of Queen Elizabeth, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1605), with its fanfare and onstage crowd of cheering Londoners, may have enjoyed a feeling of English collectivity in the playhouse that might elude him in daily life, as a member of a legally marginalized social group. (To offer a contemporary example of an analogous experience: a left-wing activist may have a strong, sympathetic, affective response—tears welling, an expansive feeling in the rib cage—to American nationalism when it appears in an alien disaster movie, for example, the Will Smith vehicle, *Independence Day* [1996], even if overt displays of patriotism in real life make her suspicious or apprehensive.) Striking dramatic effects, like the trumpets and regalia of Heywood’s coronation scene (or the flags and fighter jets of *Independence Day*), can elicit responses that pull audience members into an unfamiliar cultural vantage point, from which they might reevaluate entrenched ideologies, or simply enjoy a different kind of collectivity. Early modern dramatic production was greedily absorptive of competing discourses. It offered its participants complex and powerful fantasies through which religio-political identity might be reconfigured.

Rather than unify events in a narrative of emergent religious identify, or outline confessional structures that remain consistent in the period, my readings of the interplay between the drama and the surrounding religious culture focus on moments of heightened historical contingency. By this I mean moments of particularly rapid and/or unpredictable cultural change, or potential change, which have or are perceived to have transformative consequences. At these junctures, I would suggest, audiences may have experienced the theater’s experiments with religious culture as particularly resonant or
“high stakes.” For example, the first chapter treats two plays written in 1623 and 1624, during the controversy over the Spanish Match, a potential marriage alliance between England and Spain that would have significantly reconfigured European religious politics. Chapter two deals largely with drama’s imaginative intervention in the confessional culture war sparked by the publication of Richard Montague’s *New Gagg*, a watershed event in the mid-1620s that marks the emergence of an Arminian challenge to the Calvinist consensus. Chapters three and four revolve around flashpoints, the Wyatt Rebellion and Hampton Court Conference, respectively, during the last years of Elizabeth’s reign and the early years of James’s, when the future confessional identity of the English Church was a matter of speculation. While these chapters cover a broad historical period, from the 1590s to 1640, the elements of theatrical production that are relevant to my argument—multiple authorship, the bricolage of heterogeneous confessional material, and the mixed religious backgrounds of theater practitioners and theatergoers themselves—remained constant. In other words, while the audiences of individual playhouses were increasingly more homogeneous in terms of class than they had been in the early days of the public amphitheatres—so that, for example, the Red Bull came to be associated with a lower-class crowd while Blackfriars drew a more upscale clientele—confessional difference appears at all socio-economic levels. In part, I have chosen these moments to call attention to the provisional and erratic nature of religious culture after the Reformation, and arranged them out of chronological order to resist totalizing and teleological historical narratives. In these periods of marked uncertainty and rapid change, the particular potential of the theater to shape as well as reflect the culture that produces it emerges.
James Shirley’s *The Sisters*, one of the last plays produced for the English stage before the outbreak of the Civil War, provides an example of how dramatic fantasy can condense conflicting confessional discourses to produce ideologically unsettling effects, at a particularly volatile religio-political juncture. The play is set in Parma and deals with two sisters, the proud Paulina who aspires to marry Prince Farnese, and humble Angellina who wants to be a nun. Mistaken identity hi-jinks ensue when a troupe of bandits arrives at their castle, led by the thief Frapolo who passes himself off as the Prince, but is ultimately exposed as an imposter. *The Sisters* went up in Blackfriars in September 1642, after the King Charles I’s formal declaration of war on August 22 and before the stalemate Battle of Edgehill in October. The Prologue makes reference to the king’s removal to York, “London is gone to York,” a tactical retreat following the king’s failure to secure an armory in Hull. By mentioning the current, precarious state of militarization, the prologue invites audience members to watch the romantic comedy that follows with an eye for religio-political subtext.

In the first scene a pack of thieves make plans and discusses their profession in terms that shuttle wildly between parliamentary and royalist language. The first line, “I like not this last Proclamation,” which we soon learn is in the play’s fiction a declaration against bandits, would likely call to mind the king’s recent real declaration of war (B1r). But if the thieves seem to be initially associated with Parliament, that identification is swiftly reversed. Here is the bandit leader Frapolo’s first speech:

> Threaten us with long-winded proclamations!  
> We are safe within our woods and territories,  
> And are above his edicts. Have not we

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A commonwealth among ourselves—ye Tripolites?
A commonwealth? a kingdom! and I am
The prince of Qui-va-la, your sovereign thief,
And you are all my subjects. (B1r)

Within the first dozen lines of the play, Frapolo switches from a defense of thievery in
which identification with the “commonwealth” gives the bandits the authority to defy the
Prince’s edicts and proclamations to a declaration of power that uses the monarchical
language of “prince” and “sovereign.” The volte face from parliamentary to royalist
terminology happens abruptly at the caesura “A commonwealth? a kingdom!” Not only
does Frapolo identify with opposing political factions, but he is also a thief, which makes
both of these incompatible claims to authority illegitimate.

While the parliamentarian and royalist references already carry with them implicit
confessional identifications, the continuing dialogue more explicitly destabilizes the
terms of religious identity. A little later in the scene comes this exchange between the
bandits:

Frapolo: There is a kind of religion
we outlaws must observe.
Strozzo: I never knew
Religion yet, and ‘twill now be unseasonable to learn.
Rangone: I’Il be of no religion.
Frapolo: Who was so bold
to say he would have no religion?
. . .
You shall be of what religion I please.
Longino: ‘Tis fit we should; Frapolo is our monarch.
Frapolo: And yet I must consider of some fit one,
That shall become our trade and constitutions
. . .
And you shall be no pagans, Jews, nor Christians.
Longino: What then?
Frapolo: But every man shall be of all religions. (B1v–B2r)
Just as the opening jumps from “commonwealth” to “kingdom,” this passage careens wildly between confessional positions. “I’ll be of no religion” becomes “every man of all religions” in the space of about a dozen lines. Referencing pagans and Jews could have enhanced a sense of outlandish religious extremity for an early modern English audience. Admittedly it could be argued that the end of play, in which Frapolo the usurper of royal authority is exposed and punished and social order under the true Prince is restored, accomplishes a royalist, implicitly Laudian, containment of the religio-political chaos of this scene. But the orthodox conclusions of plays do not cancel out the more ideologically disruptive effects experienced over the course of the performance. The densely layered, conflicting religio-political signals in this short scene create a strong sense of confessional instability. I will argue that this kind of dramatic moment is a form of cultural experimentation. It reshuffles familiar categories. I would suggest that at a moment of heightened contingency like September 1642, when nothing was certain except imminent change, this kind of dramatic experiment could help audiences reimagine the relationship between political authority and religious identity.

The early modern commercial theaters helped Londoners process and participate in rapid and unstable religious transformations. The theater was produced by and for men and women from across the varied spectrum of post-Reformation religious practice and belief. The importance of this basic fact has not been fully recognized by scholars. The chapters that follow are an attempt to understand the impact of this heterodoxy on the drama and vice versa. While certainly the majority of playgoers attended Church of England services on Sunday, this appearance of confessional unity occludes important intra-Protestant divisions, as well as the presence of conforming Catholics. Moreover,
theatergoers who adopted more extreme religious positions, e.g., recusant Catholics and nonconforming Protestants, exerted a cultural presence in excess of their actual numbers. Dwelling on this crucial condition of performance should change our expectations of the institutional function of the early modern theaters. Just as the socio-economic diversity of public amphitheater audiences and the presence of female theatergoers among their male counterparts has taught us to consider the theater not simply as instrument for disseminating dominant aristocratic or masculinist ideologies, but as a space of negotiation between competing class and gender subject positions, so to must recognition of the confessional heterogeneity of playgoers lead us away from a view of the theater as perpetuating Protestant orthodoxy, to an understanding of playhouses as forums of exchange between competing confessional groups.20

The early modern theaters were shaped by and reshaped the heterodox culture that produced them. In the first chapter, “‘Frequented by Puritans and Papists’: Heterodox Audiences and Early Modern Drama,” I illuminate the complex and diverse religious backgrounds of known playgoers. I then focus on two Thomas Middleton plays, The Game at Chess (1624) and The Spanish Gypsy (1623), as contrasting case studies in the ways ideological differences among playgoers could affect reception. While the exceptionally confrontational treatment of religious conflict in The Game at Chess divided its audience along sectarian lines, The Spanish Gypsy was more ambiguous. Although this play was received as anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish in some circles, it also presented a charming and romantic interfaith marriage plot, exemplifying one of the ways in which dramatic fantasy might lure playgoers across the boundaries of their real-world

20 Howard, Stage and Social Struggle.
religious identity. The theater encourages crowds to flexibly reconfigure, or reposition
themselves within, existing confessional structures. While discussions of the early
modern public sphere have tended to privilege print, I argue that the ideological
experimentation facilitated by dramatic performance constitutes an important mode of
public thought, but one that operates through embodied affect and association rather than
proto-Habermasian, rational-critical debate.

The first chapter argues that the theater’s negotiation of religious culture is not bound
to propositional thinking; rather, it allows audiences to mentally reconfigure religious
cultural materials without having to affirm or deny the products of their imaginative
handiwork. My second chapter, “Religious Polemic from Print into Plays,” asks what
happens when a religious pamphlet debate—an inherently propositional genre—migrates
into the insistently nonpropositional, dialogic form of a play. Here I examine two plays,
Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore (1630) and Shirley’s St. Patrick for Ireland (1639), that
are shaped by divisive Caroline debates concerning the proper confessional identity of,
respectively, the English and Irish national Churches. Works of controversy were highly
commercially successful in print, and I suggest that these hotly debated, topical disputes
also interested theatergoers. Drama, however, offered a different kind of encounter with
matters of religious controversy. Rather than adopt a polemical position, ‘Tis Pity dwells
on the tension of the debate it references—a pamphlet war concerning the Church of
England’s relationship to the Church of Rome—allowing audiences a more ambivalent
experience of divisive religious controversy. Whereas Ford’s play invites audiences to
view polemic exchange from a non-oppositional vantage point, Shirley’s St. Patrick for
Ireland reinforces sectarian divisions among theatergoers. The play draws material from
a contemporary print debate in which Irish Protestants sought to appropriate Patrick as their own religious predecessor, a move that Irish Catholics strenuously resisted. In *St. Patrick*, I will argue, the juxtaposition of conflicting confessional material does not loosen or reconfigure sectarian positions, but rather hardens them. Though we might expect such an effect from a play like Middleton’s *Game at Chess*, which proclaims its religious politics with very little ambiguity, it is surprising to find it here, in a confessionally polyvocal play like *St. Patrick*. My point is not that theater produced progressive or proto-ecumenical effects, but varied and unpredictable ones.

In my third chapter, “Martyr Acts: Playing with Foxe’s Martyrs on the Public Stage,” I focus on several standard practices of the theater industry to show how these factors work in various combinations to reshape even source material with seemingly clear religious politics into ideologically unpredictable, new dramatic fantasies. An early modern theatergoer buying a ticket for a play based on John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* would have expected to see onstage pious Protestant martyrs, bad Catholics, and the triumphant onward march of providential English history. Surprisingly, however, these “Protestant martyr plays” are often preoccupied with religious and political disloyalty, and sudden changes of confessional regime. This genre of martyr plays appeared between 1599 and 1606, in the late years of Elizabeth’s reign and the early years of James’s, when England’s ecclesiastical future was uncertain. The audiences who watched the dizzying religious and political tergiversations of these plays held diverse beliefs, but shared the unsettling understanding that all religious groups faced the possibility of disenfranchisement, or forced conversion, in the immediate future. I show how the concern with religious instability that dominates these plays produces distinctive
formal features. For example, in Thomas Dekker’s *Sir Thomas Wyatt* armies and individuals switch sides, and switch back, with alarming rapidity. These reversals are more than a theme: they constitute the central dramatic device of the play. Even here, in plays where we might expect to find the most straightforward religious agendas, the industry practices of the theater business accentuate the contingency of an uncertain religio-political moment.

My final chapter, “The Politics of Predestination in *Measure for Measure,*” moves away from discussions of the theater’s reconfiguration of diverse confessional material to a consideration of the drama’s particular means of managing affective diversity within one religious group. I present a reading of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (1604) that tracks the play’s preoccupation with election and reprobation. Here, I focus on the way the play’s dramatic effects mobilize a range of affective responses to predestination, a belief shared by Protestants across the Calvinist consensus. The doctrine of predestination, a powerful presence in English Calvinist culture, provoked different emotional reactions from believers: despair, comfort, indifference. My interest here is not so much in heterodoxy as hetero-affectivity, by which I mean the varying and contradictory emotional experiences produced by a particular religious belief. Through alternating scenarios and kinds of characterization, *Measure for Measure* models these different affective postures, allowing audience members to imaginatively and emotionally move between them. The flexible experience of different relationships to predestination that the play encourages, I will argue, unsettles some common assumptions about the correlation between predestinatory and socio-economic status.
In some forms of cultural expression, early modern people tended to represent religious differences in terms of stark opposition: Catholic versus Protestant, Protestant versus Puritan, true Church versus false, Christ’s flock versus Antichrist. But the early modern commercial theaters drew together heterogeneous confessional materials in unpredictable formations, and suspended spiritual accountability, allowing audiences the license to experiment imaginatively and emotionally with these unsettling reformulations of existing religio-political categories. “Heterodox Drama” embraces the lived incoherence of post-Reformation religious culture, the cross-pollination of competing sects, the strange parade of beliefs in the process of mutation, the junkyard of half-rejected rites, the orchestral cacophony of religious life, that the theater, with its many voices, lets us hear.
Chapter One:

“Frequented by Puritans and Papists”: Heterodox Audiences

Commenting on the impact of dramatic performance on theatergoers in *The Advancement of Learning*, Sir Francis Bacon writes, “it might improve mankind in virtue: and indeed many wise men and great philosophers have thought it to the mind as the bow to the fiddle; and certain it is, though a great secret in nature, that the minds of men in company are more open to affections and impressions than when alone.”¹ This sentence moves from an implicitly stage-oriented paradigm, in which spectacle acts on (“improves”) those who watch it, toward an increasingly audience-oriented model of performance. Actors and spectators collaborate like a bow and a fiddle: there is no music without their interaction.

It is a—if not the—basic dynamic of live performance that audiences respond to actors who react to those responses. Erica Fischer-Lichte describes this ongoing reciprocal action as a “self-generating and ever-changing autopoietic feedback loop,” a system that is both producer and product.² This exchange between actors and audience is generated simply by their mutual presence. While experimental theater since the 1970s has adopted the exposure and manipulation of actor-audience interactivity as a central project, this process is at work, if less visibly, in all performance.³ Indeed, it is what constitutes

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performance. As Jerzy Grotowski puts it, theater is “what takes place between spectator and actor.”

Bacon attends not only to the dialogue between actors and audience but theatergoers’ relationships to each other, to themselves as a group, men and women who together are “more open” than when alone. Bacon finds it difficult to say—it is a “great secret in nature”—why watching in company, in physical proximity to other people, should make spectators more emotionally absorptive, more mentally flexible; but he is certain it is so. As Anne Ubersfeld writes, “Theatrical pleasure is not a solitary pleasure, but is reflected on and reverberates through others; it spreads like a train of gunpowder or suddenly congeals. The spectator emits barely perceptible signs of pleasure as well as loud laughter and secret tears—their contagiousness is necessary for everyone’s pleasure.” The audience’s openness to affections and impressions, the contagiousness of theatrical pleasure, are social as well as aesthetic processes. This chapter shows how the interactions between audiences and actors, and between audiences and their constitutive

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7 For a discussion of theater’s cultural work as “feeling-labor,” that is, “the solicitation, management, and display of feelings,” see Erin Hurley, Theater and Feeling (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4. For a discussion of shared imaginative involvement in theatrical performance, see Roger Grainger, Suspending Disbelief: Theater as a Context for Sharing (Eastborne, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2010). These works are theoretical rather than historicist. As such, they do not speak to effects generated by the particular conditions of production of early modern drama. They do, however, provide a vocabulary for discussing the theatrical management of affect and collectivity.
parts, as well as the working relationships within theater companies, helped re-imagine confessional identity politics in post-Reformation England.

Early modern commercial drama was produced, on both sides of the stage, by people from across the varied spectrum of religious practice and belief. Theater companies and theater audiences were, as I show below, confessionally diverse. This heterodoxy was as ideologically productive a condition of performance as the mixture of social classes in the public amphitheaters, or the presence of paying female spectators among their male counterparts. Much of the recent work on religion and the theater, however, presupposes a homogeneous audience made up of conforming members of the Church of England, or acknowledges the confessional heterogeneity of playgoers only in passing; while work on the confessional identity of individual theater practitioners tends to argue for the transmission of particular religious agendas, rather than consider the effects of cross-confessional collaboration on the dramatic output of the company as a whole.\(^8\)

Heterodoxy permeated the theater industry at all levels of production. This, however, does not mean that the theater as an institution promoted religious toleration or proto-ecumenical Erasmian inclusiveness, as Jeffrey Knapp has argued.\(^9\) Rather, the variety of confessional positions in dialogue in theatrical performance produced unpredictable ideological effects. Sometimes dominant religious identities were celebrated at the expense of marginal ones. Sometimes dramatic fantasies recalibrated the relationships

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\(^9\) Jeffrey Knapp, Shakespeare’s Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 1–60, 115–69. Knapp tends to emphasize the Erasmian tradition in post-Reformation English religious culture at the expense of the confessional distinctions that were important to the early moderns themselves.
between confessional groups. Other moments may have encouraged feelings of religious inclusiveness, still others a sense of radical skepticism, or sectarian animosity. All of these things might happen over the course of a single play, and theatergoers might participate in any or all of these—and countless other—imaginative experiences of post-Reformation religious culture, however their own confessional identities aligned with those on stage. This chapter shows the varied religious lives of both performers and spectators, suggesting some of the equally complex and diverse ways heterodoxy may have impacted the reception of particular plays; and considers the potential political impact of the theater as an institution in which a confessionally diverse conglomeration of Londoners shared physical and imagined space.

The commercial playhouse gave post-Reformation English society a means of thinking about itself, but it did so differently than the printing press. The drama was a forum for a different set of intellectual practices than those involved in, for example, engaging with a pamphlet debate, but practices which similarly helped Londoners process and participate in religious politics. The residual influence of the work of Jürgen Habermas has established a set of misleading expectations about the nature of the early modern public sphere; namely, that it develops primarily through print culture, and that its basic function is to circulate propositions. The problem with this “Habermasian hangover” is that, by definition, it excludes the theater in advance as a technology of

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shared social thought. If we are looking for a public sphere modeled after Habermas we will not find it in the early modern playhouse.

My interest, then, is in early modern theater culture as the site of emergence of a distinctly un-Habermasian public sphere. Early modern plays tend to be suggestive rather than propositional in their treatment of political material. They elicit more ambivalent and emotional responses. ¹¹ In part, understanding the theater as a media form that nurtures a distinct mode of reflection on matters relating to the common weal depends on the recognition that rational-critical debate is not the only form of political thought. The kind of public sphere produced through performance culture privileges affect and embodiment in a way its print analogue does not. It is, in other words, much closer to Michael Warner’s description of counterpublics than to a Habermasian model. As Warner writes,

This constitutive misrecognition of publics relies on a particular ideology of language. Discourse is understood to be propositionally summarizable; the poetic or textual qualities of any utterance are disregarded in favor of sense . . . Other aspects of discourse, including affect and expressivity, are not thought to be [reproducible, transferable, and therefore of potential political impact] in the same way . . . [This] hierarchy of faculties . . . allows some activities to count as public or general, while others are thought to be merely personal, private, or particular. ¹²

Essentially, Warner is advocating a broader conception of what discursive processes “count as public” than is readily available in a theory of the public sphere tied primarily to print. As he puts it,

Readers may scrutinize, ask, reject, opine, decide, judge, and so on. Publics can do exactly these things. And nothing else . . . Counterpublics tend to be those in which


this ideology of reading does not have the same privilege. It might be that embodied sociability is too important to them; they might not be organized by the hierarchy of faculties that elevates rational-critical reflection as the self-image of humanity; they may depend more heavily on performance spaces than on print . . . It is, in fact, possible to imagine that almost any characterization of discursive acts might be attributed to a public. A queer public might be one that throws shade, prances, disses, acts up, carries on, longs, fantasizes, throws fits, mourns.\textsuperscript{13}

Warner’s call for an expanded vocabulary of public discourse (one that includes prancing as well as opining) resonates strongly with the representational practices of early modern theater. To take Greenblatt’s famous example: Old Hamlet’s essentially Catholic, purgatorial ghost begging his son to “remember me” might move a Protestant audience member to pity and fear—that is, to long for an un-Protestant connection with the dead, and to temporarily take Purgatory seriously enough to be afraid of it. My point is that in this case pity and fear are not merely private feelings, but—perhaps expressed in gasps and tears visible to surrounding audience members—public and politically significant discursive acts.

The early modern commercial theaters were spaces in which men and women processed religious material in powerful, complex, politically significant ways. Often this did not take the form of rational deliberation. It is unlikely that watching \textit{Hamlet} would have “changed someone’s opinion” on whether or not Purgatory was a real place. But \textit{Hamlet} might well have more subtly shifted the way an audience member experienced the funeral ceremonies of the Church of England. The theater was a place where private individuals could gather in large numbers to experiment with heterodox cultural fantasies and cross-identify with other religio-political groups. That is, the theaters made publics through the exchange, not of information, but of embodied affect.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 89.
Actors and Authors

Individual theater practitioners regularly found themselves in close working relationships with colleagues who held different confessional affiliations. While the subject requires further study, it is unlikely that any commercial theater company in early modern London was composed entirely of people with shared religious views. The theater impresario Christopher Beeston (1579/80–1638) married a Catholic woman. His brother was fined for recusancy, as possibly was Beeston himself. Yet he maintained a long and friendly working relationship with the Protestant playwright Thomas Heywood. Nearly all of Heywood’s twenty extant plays were written for companies run by the Catholic Beeston.¹⁴ Francis Beaumont (1584–1616) and John Fletcher (1579–1625) collaborated together on at least nine plays. According to John Aubrey, “They lived together on the Banke side . . . lay together; had one Wench in the house between them . . . the same cloathes and cloake . . . between them.”¹⁵ Despite this close professional and personal relationship, Beaumont and Fletcher had significant religious differences. Both Beaumont’s father and mother belonged to prominent recusant families. The fact that no baptismal records exist for any of Beaumont’s four children suggests that these ceremonies may have been performed in secret by a Catholic priest. In other words, Beaumont likely shared his relatives’ commitment to Catholicism.¹⁶ Fletcher, in contrast, was born into a family of staunch Protestants. His grandfather, a clergyman, was a friend

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of John Foxe, the Protestant martyrrologist. His father, who eventually became a bishop, was present at the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, calling on her to reject the faith for which she was about to die. Fletcher served as a Bible clerk at Cambridge, and seems to have been intended, like his grandfather, father, elder brother, uncle, and cousin, for a life in the Church. As a playwright he received the patronage of the Hastings family, who supported a foreign policy guided by militant Protestantism.  In short, like Beeston and Heywood, Beaumont and Fletcher were a confessional odd couple.

We should not assume, however, that either the friendship or professional collaboration between the two playwrights transcended sectarian divisions. On an interpersonal level the differences in their religious backgrounds and beliefs may have produced any number of dynamics: friendly teasing, unresolved tension, hidden disgust, erotic attraction, mutual curiosity and/or incomprehension. Professionally, both of these men produced contentious plays regarding the religious conflict in the Low Countries, but the confessional politics of these works do not align with those of their respective authors. Despite his putative Catholicism, Beaumont closed his career with a court masque in 1613 celebrating the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Fredrick V, Elector Palatine—that is, a play honoring the Protestant marriage alliance par excellence.  

Fletcher, the scion of Protestant clergymen, contributed to Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt, a play heavily censored by George Buc, master of the revels, for its degrading presentation of the Protestant prince of Orange.  In the case of Beaumont and Fletcher,


18 Finkelpearl, “Beaumont, Francis.”

19 McMullan, “Fletcher, John.”
a long cross-confessional personal and professional relationship produced plays that conflicted with the religious commitments of their respective authors. This lived ideological contradiction is not the same as Erasmian religious tolerance.

Theater practitioners sometimes found their professional and devotional lives at odds. Edward Alleyn (1566–1626) made his name playing infidels and atheists like Tamburlaine and Faustus. But in private life Alleyn was an active participant in parish business, serving as vestryman in 1607 and in 1608 as auditor of token books at St. Saviour’s. In 1619 Alleyn founded Dulwich College, formally called “College of God’s Gift at Dulwich,” with an initial endowment sufficient to support “twelve poor scholars and twelve poor pensioners.” In his will Alleyn bequeathed the funds to found ten almshouses in the parishes where he had spent most of his life: St. Saviour’s Southwark and St. Botolph without Bishopsgate. In other words, out of costume the notorious atheist was a good English Protestant, remarkable only for the extent of his charity.

Indeed, sometime after 1600 when Stephen Gosson (1554–1625) was appointed rector of St. Botolph’s, the actor and the antitheatricalist worked together to establish a fund for several poor parishioners. Gosson, author of The School of Abuse (1579) and Plays Refuted (1580), is often described as a puritan by literary scholars. But as a clergyman Gosson was a ceremonial conformist. He wore a surplice, used the Book of Common Prayer, and made the sign of the cross during baptisms. Gosson also wrote several morally instructive plays himself, although none of these have survived. Thomas Lodge records one of these lost plays as having “Scythian monsters” and “one Eurus brought

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upon on stage in Ships made of Sheepskins.” Gosson’s connection to Alleyn, his ceremonial conformity, as well as the fact that he wrote a play that included monsters and strange ships among its onstage illusions, collectively demonstrate that while there are important connections between puritanism, antitheatricalism, and hostility to the material and visual full stop, the three are by no means synonymous.

Interactions between theatrical and godly cultures could be mutually productive, if sometimes conflicted. Almost unbelievably, John Lowin, who probably played Falstaff, a character who not only continually mocks puritans but is himself a walking puritan caricature, seems also to have penned a short godly tract in 1607 called Conclusions Upon Dances. This pious, logically argued little pamphlet advocates the prohibition of dancing after the example of Calvin’s Geneva. In Conclusions Lowin declares profane dancing to be irreconcilable with proper devotion. He writes, “many of these Dances (I say) are so much artificiall, that the humaine mindes cannot be intended at or attentive to the Art of Dancing and to the praise of God together.” As Martin Butler dryly observes, “It is not impossible to reconcile the pamphlet's opinions with the outlook of an actor who came from citizen stock, and who achieved such heights of social respectability. Yet if Lowin really was the author, his theology was so much in tension with his calling that it must have made his professional life a never-ending source of

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23 Ibid., C3r.
A puritan actor played Falstaff. Lowin lived this contradiction for forty years, from the beginning of his career in 1602 to the closing of the theaters in 1642.

In contrast, the theatrical career of actor/playwright Nathan Field (bap. 1587, d. 1619/20) seems almost perfectly aligned with his religious convictions. Nathan was born the youngest son of the firebrand presbyterian leader Rev. John Field. Much of Rev. Field’s writing attacks the episcopacy and public entertainment. Ironically, one of his sons, Theophilus, became a bishop and another a famous actor. In 1616 Nathan Field, then at the height of his career, wrote an open letter objecting to certain sermons delivered by the preacher Mr. Sutton to Field’s congregation at St. Mary Overs. Field accuses Sutton of uncharitably condemning actors from the pulpit, declaring that Sutton went so far as to “particularly . . . point att me and some other of my quality [i.e. other actors], and directly in our faces in the publique assemblie, to pronounce us damned.” Field further claims that Sutton even tried “to hinder the Sacrament, and banishe me from mine own parishe church.” He closes the letter with a defense of playing, drawing from scripture to argue that actors are not damned. It is possible that Nathan Field played the role of Littlewit, the puppet master in Bartholemew Fair.25 If so, there is a compelling synchronicity between Field’s defense of acting against the antitheatricalist preaching in his own parish and act five, scene six in the play, in which a puppet (manipulated by Littlewit/Field) takes on the puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in an argument over whether

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24 Martin Butler, “Lowin, John (bap. 1576, d. 1653),” in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17096 (accessed April 11, 2010). Technically, we cannot be completely certain that Lowin wrote the pamphlet, which is only signed “J.L. Roscio.” But even if J.L. stands for someone other than Lowin, the fact remains that the author identifies himself as “Roscio,” i.e., an actor. While it doesn’t quite match the perfect irony of a real-life puritan playing Falstaff, the idea that any actor in the period would write godly tracts against dancing in his spare time is still a remarkable lived paradox.

or not the theater is a “lawful calling,” and wins. The puritan John Lowin and the anti-
puritan Nathan Field, then, not only held fundamentally opposed religious beliefs, they 
also must have had, in some sense, opposite relationships to their shared profession. Yet 
between 1616 and 1619 they acted in the same company, the King’s Men.

Both these actors were famous. Theatergoers could have been aware of their 
confessional circumstances, and these performance contexts may have offered audience 
members additional interpretive possibilities. Knowing, for example, about Field’s fight 
with Sutton may have drawn a more immediate, urgently felt connection between 
Field/Littlewit’s victory over Zeal and other analogous real-world conflicts. Knowing 
Lowin had puritan sympathies may have softened the anti-puritan satire in the Henriad, 
or, alternatively, produced sad reflections on the difficulty of living a godly life in a 
 wicked world. The case of Field and Lowin illustrates how the cross-confessional 
working relationships that sustained the daily operation of the theater business could 
produce layered and conflicted ideological effects in performance.

Audiences

In what follows I present short accounts of the religious lives of known playgoers, 
arranged in groups as they may have known and interacted with each other, or simply 
been attending a particular playhouse around a particular time.26 These clusters 
demonstrate various aspects of the theater’s mediation of religious culture. They show 
the rich ideological diversity of playgoers—that is, the range of religious perspectives 
and interests that may have informed and been reshaped by the experience of both

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individual plays and playgoing itself, considered as an act of sharing mixed-confessional public space. In some cases, my interest is in the dynamics between religious groups in physical proximity to each other in theaters, special social spaces set aside for the production and manipulation of heightened affect and ideologically unpredictable fantasy. In other instances, my focus is on the way the playhouse provided a forum in which minority religious groups might exert a visible cultural presence in excess of their actual numbers. Several of these brief biographies also present examples of how language and imagery drawn from the theater could serve as a cultural resource to be deployed in the interest of various confessional agendas. This material, then, suggests both ways the religious positions of playgoers provided an ideological framework in which individual plays had meanings, and how the theater functioned as an institution that drew a heterodox collection of Londoners into a space of particularly dense affective and imaginative possibilities.

Like Francis Bacon, Sir Humphrey Mildmay (1592–1666) considered theater a social pleasure. An avid Caroline playgoer, his diary records an average of six visits to the theater per year from 1631 to 1642. Many of his entries record the names of the friends, relatives, and business associates with whom he attended plays: “wth my Lawyer Mr Banfield to see a playe”; “wth my wife & Pretty Cozen to a play & home late.” Often he writes simply, “To a playe wth good Company.” Sir Humphrey and his playgoing companions were, as I show below, a confessionally diverse group.

Sir Humphrey Mildmay was, himself, the black sheep in a prominent puritan family. His grandfather, Sir Walter Mildmay (1520–1589), founded Emmanuel College,
Cambridge, for the advancement of godly, evangelical preaching. Sir Humphrey’s younger brother Anthony, a self-described “great opposer of tyranny and Popery,” served as Charles I’s jailer in 1648. The third Mildmay brother, Henry (1594–1664/5), himself a zealous persecutor of Catholics and opponent of Arminianism through the 1620s, later sat briefly as a judge at the king’s trial. Despite this impeccable puritan pedigree, Sir Humphrey was critical of his brothers’ religious politics, and his diary suggests that he may even have harbored crypto-Catholic tendencies. The entry for June 6, 1641, refers acerbically to his wife’s visits “among the Puritans.” On May 2, 1643, he writes, “The Crosse in Cheap taken down by the Jews. The town in much disorder,” referring to the removal of Cheapside Crosse, long criticized by hot Protestants as a popish object. Calling these godly iconoclasts “Jews” implicitly criticizes their act as excessively legalistic, a common trope in anti-puritan discourse. On October 8, 1643, he writes, “Not to Church, the covenant being hot and I none of the tribe,” indicating that he found the other members of his parish too precise to join with them in worship.

Instead, Sir Humphrey seems to have been attracted to Catholic devotional practices. The diary entry for May 4, 1634, records him lending part of a Douai Bible, that is, the

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29 Extracts from Sir Humphrey’s diary appear in Herbert A. St. John Mildmay, Brief Memoir of the Mildmay Family (London: John Lane, 1913), 78–94.

30 Ibid., 84.

31 Ibid., 87.


33 Mildmay, Brief Memoir, 89.
Catholic translation of the Bible into English, to a Mr. Bourneby. 34 Certainly, there were steadfast Protestants who owned and read Catholic books. But Sir Humphrey’s diary also records him performing “the Spaniards discipline” before bed, a reference to the Spiritual Exercises of the Spanish Jesuit St. Ignatius of Loyola, and makes frequent invocations of the Blessed Virgin Mary. 35 Collectively, these practices suggest Sir Humphrey was inclined to popery. Yet in the midst of legal difficulties in 1648, he made a formal statement denying the charge that he was ever a recusant or held Catholic sympathies. 36 We cannot gauge precisely the strength or exact nature of Sir Humphrey’s interest in Catholicism. Then again, this might have also been impossible for Sir Humphrey himself. He falls somewhere in the grey region occupied by English Protestants who felt drawn toward devotional practices too popish for the established Church, but not so strongly drawn as to necessitate conversion.

Despite their apparent religious differences, Sir Humphrey and his brother Anthony often attended the theater together. 37 This cannot be dismissed simply as an instance of family loyalty trumping confessional allegiance. Sir Humphrey’s diary also specifies five occasions between 1634 and 1640 on which he attended plays with the future regicide Dr. Isaac Dorislaus. Commitment to the Parliamentary party in the Civil War is not always a reliable index of puritan fervor. However, Dorislaus, a Dutch professor of Civil Law, found himself in conflict with the prominent Laudian divine John Cosin shortly after his

34 Ibid., 79.
36 Ibid., 92.
37 Although Sir Humphrey’s diary records only four instances in which he attended a play with his brother, the fact that two of these occasions fell within a two month period, as well as the fact that Sir Humphrey seems to have often attended plays with family members, suggests that Anthony may have been included in the playgoing “company” more frequently than he is specifically named.
arrival in England. It is safe, then, to assume that Dorislaus’ political allegiances were linked to an investment in godly religion.

However, Sir Humphrey’s playgoing circle included not only Dorislaus, the godly professor who would later sign Charles’s death warrant, but also Sir Frank Wortley (1591–1652), an enthusiastic officer in the King’s army. We should likewise not presume a flat correspondence between royalist political loyalties and Laudian religious commitments. However, in 1640 Wortley brought a hundred volunteers to fight for the King against the Scotch Covenanters, declaring eagerly that they came to fight with “good hearts.” Presumably, then, Wortley was no presbyterian sympathizer. Furthermore, Sir Humphrey seems not to have split his theatergoing friends into separate religio-political groups, but attended plays in confessionally mixed parties. For example, the diary entry for October 27, 1638, reads “fayre & Cleere all this day . . . after dynner to the fox playe [Volpone] = att bl: fryers wth my Cozen fra. Wortley & my Brother Anth,: & Came Jn Peace to Supper & bedd, I bles god.”

Apparently the puritan, the crypto-Catholic, and the episcopalian loyalist all enjoyed Ben Jonson, at times perhaps responding differently in ways inflected by their confessional sensibilities, or perhaps “more open in company,” laughing at the same jokes.

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39 Butler discusses the Mildmays as well as Dr. Dorislaus. His interest in this section, however, is primarily on their political connections, whereas my focus is on the nuances and intersections of their devotional lives, although the two subjects are obviously intimately related. Butler, “The Caroline Audience,” in *Theater and Crisis*, 113–24.
Sir Humphrey’s companions to the playhouse not only held diverse religious beliefs, they also varied in terms of their level of piety. On May 21, 1634, Sir Humphrey records attending *The Lover’s Progress* with his wife, Henry Skipwith, and two others. Skipwith had been a hanger-on of the notorious second Earl of Castlehaven, Mervin Touchet (1593–1631). Although never officially charged during the trial that had led to Castlehaven’s execution for “crimes too horrid for a Christian man to mention,” namely rape and sodomy, Skipwith was deeply implicated in Castlehaven’s sadistic rule over his household. Indeed, the earl’s legal troubles began when his son and heir James, Lord Audley, objected to Skipwith sleeping with his wife. It is unclear whether Lord Audley’s fourteen-year-old bride, Elizabeth, “consented” to sex with Skipwith or not. Either way, Castlehaven seems to have encouraged it. At one point Castlehaven even planned to have her impregnated, presumably by Skipwith, thereby forcing his own heir, Audley, to stand as father to a bastard. Many of the salacious details that emerged during the trial concerned the sexual license Castlehaven permitted his servants and favorites such as Skipwith.

The Castlehaven affair was the subject of intense and widespread gossip. Special scaffolds had to be erected in Westminster Hall for the crowds that came to view the trial, and news of the scandal reached as far as the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The point is not simply that Skipwith had a bad sexual reputation, but that he was closely and publicly associated with a household so debauched as to be considered godless. As the attorney-general at Castlehaven’s trial declared, “I shall be bold to give your Grace a reason why
he became so ill. He believed not in God.” For the early modern English, “atheism” and moral depravity were so directly and causally linked as to be nearly synonymous. Castlehaven had his defenders, and the case continued to be discussed throughout the 1630s in a variety of media: manuscripts, poems, pamphlets—including several by Castlehaven’s sister, the prophetess Lady Eleanor Davies—and in Milton’s *Masque at Ludlow Castle, Comus* (1634). Because the case was so infamous, I would suggest that Skipwith may have been recognized in the theater, and that his presence sent a ripple of gossip through the audience, turning the heads of playgoers across the confessional spectrum. Not only might Skipwith, having flourished under a godless sado-patriarchy, enjoy or interpret a play differently than, for example, the devout puritan Anthony Mildmay, but Skipwith’s appearance in the theater may itself have been a noteworthy experience for playgoers, a moment of contact with an atheist-by-association, someone outside the religious constraints on behavior in everyday life, a figure that might attract curiosity or even desire as well as fear and disgust.

The early modern commercial theaters were as much spaces of social display as of dramatic spectacle. Audience behavior established a language of cultural gestures through which confessional positions might be asserted and contested. Conspicuous attendance could be a religio-political statement, as when George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628) visited the Globe just weeks before his assassination on August 23, 1628 for a performance of *Henry VIII*. Thomas Cogswell argues persuasively that Buckingham’s appearance was an attempt to rehabilitate his public image by

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asserting a connection to the Henrician Duke of Buckingham, Henry Stafford, dramatized in the play as a sympathetic figure wrongly maligned. To strengthen this identification, Villiers and his entourage made their exit immediately after Stafford’s execution.\(^4^3\)

Theatergoers, however, may have rejected Buckingham’s attempt to associate himself with Stafford, and instead connected him to the play’s scheming, Catholic arch-villain, Cardinal Wolsey. These two simultaneously available interpretive possibilities demonstrate the richness and malleability of the theater as both a semiotic resource and socially significant space for gestural public discourse.

Dr. John Lambe’s (1545–1628) fatal visit to the Fortune theater on Friday the 13th, June 1628, was a significant public event, an act of collective violence that subsequently provided a powerful language for popular, religio-political dissent. Lambe was a quack physician and fortune-teller. In 1608 he was charged with conjuring devils and attempting to disable a man by sorcery. Subsequently he was employed by Buckingham for whom, it was widely believed, he practiced black magic. Shortly before Lambe’s death he was accused of raping an eleven year old girl.\(^4^4\) The fact that Buckingham maintained Lambe as part of his entourage confirmed contemporary suspicions that the duke had poisoned James I, and used black magic to maintain his influence over Charles I.\(^4^5\) In June 1628, after the king rejected Parliament’s Petition of Right, Buckingham was


\(^{45}\) Cogswell, “John Felton,” 367. For a contemporary sensational account of King James’s death that implicated Buckingham as his murderer, see George Eglisham, *The Forerunner of Revenge* (Strasburgh, 1626).
so widely reviled in London that his safety was considered at risk.\textsuperscript{46} On June 13, the duke’s sorcerer attended a play at the Fortune, “where the boyes of the towne, and other unruly people having observed him present, after the Play was ended (after the manner of the common people, who follow a Hubbubb, when it is once a foote) began in a confused manner to assault him, and offer violence.”\textsuperscript{47} Despite the efforts of a paid guard of sailors and several constables to bring him to safety, Lambe was stoned and beaten to death by the angry crowd. According to one contemporary account, some of Lambe’s assailants shouted during the attack that “if his Master were there, they would give him as much.”\textsuperscript{48} Lambe was not only affiliated with the duke through patronage, but as someone considered wicked in terms of both sex and religion, he made a particularly resonant stand-in for aggression against Buckingham, who was suspected of sexual immorality as well as secret Catholicism.

Ominous verses circulated in London after Lambe’s death that threatened Buckingham with similar violence. One ran, “Let Charles and George do what they can, / The Duke shall die like Doctor Lambe.”\textsuperscript{49} An anonymous posted libel declared that “they intend shortly to use [Buckingham] worse than they did his doctor.”\textsuperscript{50} Just as after Buckingham’s assassination later that summer, drinking toasts to his killer John Felton was considered enough of a seditious act to be prosecuted in the court of the Star

\textsuperscript{46} Cogswell, “John Felton,” 371.

\textsuperscript{47} Anon., \textit{Notorious Life of Iohn Lambe}, 20.

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Cogswell, “John Felton,” 372.


\textsuperscript{50} Quoted in Cogswell, “John Felton,” 376.
Chamber; similarly, these *ad hominem* poems attacking Lambe and the duke constitute a popular language of religio-political opposition. They voice grievances and mobilize action. Indeed, Felton was seen reading one of these verses just days before stabbing Buckingham. The direct link between dodgy Dr. Lambe’s murder by a mob of playgoers and the assassination of as major a political figure as the Duke of Buckingham exemplifies the threat Tudor and Stuart authorities had always considered the commercial theaters to pose: namely, that allowing large numbers of ordinary Londoners to gather without the direct supervision of religious or civic authorities would occasion transgressive behavior that could grow into full-blown sedition. Not all of the contemporary accounts of Lambe’s murder make an explicit connection to Buckingham. But there is a continuum between the sensational descriptions of Lambe’s black magic and the informal beginnings of the attack (“boyes . . . and other unruly people . . . who follow in a Hubbubb . . . began in a confused manner . . . to offer violence”), and the public articulation of Lambe’s murder as a symbolic act (“if his master were there, they would give him as much”). The playgoers who tore out Lambe’s eye, who beat out his brains, were rehearsing collective, violent action on a substitute figure for larger religio-political targets. This event began in the Fortune; its afterlife in verse, libels, and tavern

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51 A week after Buckingham’s assassination Alexander Gil (1596–1642) drank to Felton’s health in an Oxford tavern. The incident was reported. Gil was examined by Laud and on November 6, 1628, “the court of Star Chamber sentenced him to be degraded from the ministry, dismissed from his ushership at St Paul’s, deprived of his university degrees, fined £2000, to lose one ear in the pillory at Westminster and the other in Oxford, and to be imprisoned in the Fleet prison at the king’s pleasure.” Gordon Campbell, “Gil, Alexander, the younger (1596/7–1642?),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, January 2008 online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10730 (accessed 26 July 2011).

52 Cogswell, “John Felton,” 378.

talk shows the theater as a focalizing point of several interconnected spheres of popular religious and political engagement.

The commercial theaters were forums in which marginalized religious groups might become more visible. Sometimes the conspicuous appearance of religious minorities in the theater underscored confessional conflict. In August 1612 the recently widowed Elizabeth Wybarn attended a play at the Globe with one of her dead husband’s nieces, either Mary Windsor or Margaret Francke, along with the co-executor of her late husband’s will, Dudley Norton, recently appointed secretary for Ireland; his servant Joseph Mulis; and another unknown man. There the party was approached by Ambrose Vaux who addressed Elizabeth as his wife and asked her to leave with him. According to a complaint later lodged by Vaux, Norton, his servant, and twelve other armed men resisted and forcibly carried Elizabeth off against her will. The incident concerned the disputed estate of Elizabeth’s recently deceased first husband, William Wybarn.\(^{54}\)

Most of the named participants in this scuffle—Elizabeth Wybarn, Ambrose Vaux, Mary Windsor, and Margaret Francke—came from prominent Catholic families. In 1600 the Wybarns were fined for recusancy, and in 1601 both Elizabeth and her then husband William were excommunicated from the Church of England.\(^{55}\) Ambrose Vaux had received a Catholic education at the English College in Douay. His oldest brother, Henry, was a Catholic priest and his middle brother, George, married Elizabeth Roper, another scion of a staunch Catholic family. In 1592 Ambrose and George were charged


\(^{55}\) Ibid., 564.
with hiring thugs to assault one Henry Norwich “for splena and displeasure borne by
them unto him for prosecuting some of their frindes for Recusancy.”

Indeed, the conflict over the Wybarn estate that sparked the tussle at the Globe
revolved around legal problems caused by the late William Wybarn’s recusancy, and was
complicated by the fact that Elizabeth’s recent marriage to Lord Vaux could not be
immediately verified since it had perforce been performed in secret by a Catholic priest.

Because Elizabeth Wybarn’s primary assailant Dudley Norton was anti-Catholic enough
to have been entrusted with keeping down the native Irish, and because the dispute boiled
down to the question of the legal rights of English Catholic subjects, we might presume
that the scuffle included the exchange of some confessionally hostile language. Just as
the mix of social ranks in the public theaters could cause class tensions to erupt in
violence, as when the butchers Ralph Brewyn, Gilbert Borne, and several others were
charged in 1611 with “abusinge certen gentlemen at the playhouse called the Fortune,”
the theaters were also a site where confessional conflicts might come to a head.

With nearly twenty participants, the Wybarn fracas would have been hard to miss.
Assuming that others in the theater could have grasped that the fight had a religious
element, either by recognizing some of the principals as prominent Catholics, or by
overhearing anti-Catholic slurs, the sympathies of these observers may have been divided
according to their own confessionally affiliations. However, because audiences at the
Globe were also mixed in terms of class and gender, other subject positions may have

546; as quoted in Blackstone and Louis, 562–3.

57 Ibid., 566.

58 Gurr, Playgoing, 225.
prompted reactions from playgoers that did not line up with their religious loyalties. The sight of a woman in “great feare and perplexitie” facing more than a dozen men “armed arrayed and weaponed with Rapiers daggers Pystalls and other weapons as well defensive as offensive,” may have garnered sympathy for Elizabeth Wybarn on the basis of her gender from Protestant playgoers who would otherwise have sided against her on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Lower-class spectators standing in the yard (a.k.a. “groundlings”) may have been amused by the sight of their social superiors brawling in the galleries, participating in the kind of unruly behavior they were often—justly or unjustly—accused of themselves. For some, the pleasure of laughing at the indecorum of aristocrats may have superseded their confessional investments, whether Protestant or Catholic. While the presence of competing religious groups in the playhouse could sometimes cause conflict, these dramas within the audience were, like those on stage, subject to multiple interpretations and appropriations, including some that skirted or recalibrated the confessional dynamics of the inciting incident.

The public appearance of a Catholic at a play, however, did not usually end in a fistfight. These displays could also assert a cultural presence in ways that affirmed Catholic identity but did not pose a direct challenge to the Protestant establishment. For a Catholic nobleman to show himself at the theater was not the same as to be seen attending mass. Indeed it was the seemingly nonpolitical and nonreligious nature of the playhouse that made it an acceptable forum for the important political act of simply being Catholic in public. “We know that most of the principal Cathlicks about London doe go

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59 Blackstone and Louis, “Toward ‘A Full and Understanding Auditory,’” 559–60. While both men and women might pity Wybarn, this sympathy may have had different, gendered inflections. That is, some women may have sympathized with Wybarn out of a protective fellow-feeling, while some men may have done so out of chivalry.
to plays,” writes Father Thomas Leke to his superior, the Archpriest William Harrison. Because they harbored illegal priests and because they could afford to pay the fines for recusancy, the Catholic upper classes served as an important resource and behavioral model for their coreligionists in post-Reformation England. Certainly, the majority of ordinary Catholics who attended plays would have been indistinguishable from the Protestants around them. Indeed, one common trope in anti-Catholic polemic was the fear that Catholics were passing as Protestants while secretly plotting sedition, a paranoia summarized in the popular expression “English face, Spanish heart.” In the context of the Protestant anxiety that Catholic traitors looked like loyal subjects, the visibility of well-known Catholics in the playhouse, like Sir Toby Matthew, set an important counter-example of Catholic normalcy.

Of course, even these “casual” appearances could sometimes stir controversy. In 1637 around the time of her conversion to Catholicism, Lady Newport, née Anne Boteler (d. 1669) took in a play at the Cockpit. Lady Newport’s conversion created a scandal. Her husband, Mountjoy Blount (1597–1666) demanded that Archbishop William Laud punish those responsible. Queen Henrietta Maria interceded on behalf of those accused, and escalated the conflict by encouraging Lady Newport and other recent converts to celebrate mass in her private chapel, despite Charles I’s attempts to curb this practice. The Calendar of State Papers records the king’s frustration, “that the Roman Catholic party upon that ease they have lately enjoyed had forgotten themselves, and had taken that liberty to themselves that his Majesty never intended and is directly against the

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60 Quoted in Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare’s Audience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 72.

laws.”  

In 1637 even Lady Newport’s visit to the playhouse contributed to a rising sense at court that prominent Catholics had taken advantage of the tacit acceptance granted them, and were now flouting the law. As one court observer wrote in that year, “Much ado we have here both in Town and Country about the Increase of and a general fear conceived of bringing in Popery.”

Lady Newport’s appearance at the theater was subject to various interpretations. One contemporary gives this account:

Here hath been an horrible Noise about Lady Newport’s being become a Romish Catholick; she went one evening as she came from a playe in Drury-Lane to Somerset-House, where one of the Capuchins reconciled her to the Popish Church, of which she is now a weak Member.

The letter writer introduces Newport’s conversion as a scandal, and goes on to describe the uproar that ensued at court. This frame encourages the writer’s correspondent to interpret her visit to the theater as flaunting her newfound devotion to an illegal religion. But if Newport’s appearance in the playhouse could call public attention to her conversion, it could also be used to question the validity of her religion. The letter writer describes Newport as “now a weak member” of the Roman Church; that is, her faith is feeble and perhaps only a phase. The fact that in this account she goes directly from the theater to the Capuchins suggests the two are equivalent. The implication is not only that Lady Newport takes her religion no more seriously than a stage play. This detail also invokes the long tradition in anti-Catholic polemic that treats Catholic worship as...

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64 Ibid., 128.
playacting. Within the gossip surrounding Lady Newport’s conversion, recounting her visit to the theater could serve different confessional agendas. It might be understood either to assert a positive Catholic cultural presence, or to expose the Catholic faith as mere theater. The performances of confessional identity that took place within the audience could be as powerful and polyvalent as those on stage.

Case Studies: *A Game at Chess* and *The Spanish Gypsy*

Below I take *A Game at Chess* (1624) and *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623) as case studies to suggest ways in which heterodox audiences, both as whole entities and in their constitutive confessional parts, may have experienced specific plays. Given *A Game’s* provocative, sectarian content, it seems likely that audience responses to the play would be split along confessional lines, albeit in more complicated ways than we might expect. *A Game*, however, is an unusually divisive piece of theater. A more ambiguous play, like *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623), can invite audience members across the threshold of their real-world beliefs. Watching *The Spanish Gypsy* in the heterodox space of the theater allowed audiences to participate in imaginative experiments through which they might reconceptualize religious categories.

There is nothing ambiguous about *A Game at Chess*. Written by Thomas Middleton and performed by the King’s Men at the Globe over nine consecutive days in August 1624, the play draws from and feeds into popular anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic feeling surrounding the recent collapse of negotiations for the proposed marriage between Prince
Charles and the Spanish Infanta. A Game at Chess is a topical satire peopled with recognizable, living political figures, both Spanish and English, presented allegorically as chess pieces; English Protestants are white, Spanish Catholics are black. In other words, this is a play that literally represents international religious politics as black and white.

The target audience is clear. A Game at Chess plays to the sensibilities of the Calvinist majority for whom the Catholic Church was Antichrist, the Jesuits were scheming Machiavels bent on bringing all of Christendom under the thrall of the Pope, and Spain the implacable enemy of all things English. It is reasonable to suppose that Calvinists hostile toward Catholic Spain made up most of the audience, both because this particular play would appeal to this demographic, and simply because the majority of Londoners would fall into this group. However, we also know from the unusually large number of contemporary accounts of A Game at Chess that the play’s audience was not totally homogenous in terms of confessional identity. Looking not only at what contemporaries wrote about the play, but also at who wrote about it, and to whom, it is evident that A Game attracted a confessionally mixed audience. Inside the Globe, a smattering of Catholics and Arminians brushed shoulders with Calvinist spectators.

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68 For full texts of all known contemporary references to the play, see Thomas Middleton, A Game at Chess, ed. T.H. Howard Hill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 193–213.
Hotter Protestants sat among their more moderate counterparts. As John Chamberlain writes to Sir Dudley Carleton of *A Game at Chess*:

I doubt not but you have heard of our famous play of Gondomar which has been followed with extraordinarie concourse, and frequented by all sorts of people old and younge, rich and poore, masters and seruants, papists and puritans, . . . Lady Smith wold have gon\(^69\)

In addition to noting differences in age, social station, and gender, Chamberlain also remarks on the confessional diversity of audience members. He observes what contemporary scholars usually overlook, that among the men and women, “rich and poore, masters and servants,” were also some “papists and puritans.”

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Early on in *A Game*, the Black Bishop’s pawn, a Jesuit, attempts to corrupt the White Queen’s pawn, an English Protestant “Everywoman,” by drawing her into the intimacy of confession. She responds:

I must confess, as in a sacred Temple  
thronged with an Auditorie, some come rather  
to feege on humayne object than to taste  
of Angells Foode; so in the congregation of quick thoughts  
wch are more infinite than such assemblies  
I cannot wth truths safetie speake for all,  
some have been wanderers, some fond, some sinfull\(^70\)

This representative English Protestant compares her many “wander[ing]” thoughts to people in a crowded church, numerous individuals with varied and conflicting ideas of what their shared acts of worship actually mean. “To feege on humayne object” indicates visual activity, looking (i.e., to feed the eyes on an object of sight). This could suggest someone inattentive in church, a “lukewarm” Protestant or “neuter” in religion, a person

\(^69\) John Chamberlain to Sir Dudley Carleton, 21 August 1624, in *A Game at Chess*, 205.  
\(^70\) Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, act 1, scene 1, lines 139–45.
more interested in what the woman in the next pew is wearing than in the sermon or ceremony. More likely, given the play’s pervasive anti-Catholic satire, the phrase works as a dig at the Catholic mass, commonly attacked by Protestants as both excessively visual and a form of cannibalism.

“Angel’s food,” too, is subject to multiple readings. Literally a reference to manna in the wilderness (Psalms 17:24–5), Lancelot Andrewes uses the term to describe the Eucharist. This, however, should not be considered expressive of an orthodox understanding of the Eucharist since Andrewes’s position toward the sacrament was notoriously avant-garde. Indeed, the phrase appears in a ceremony for “consecrating newe church plate” written by Andrewes while he was still Bishop of Ely (1609–1618). Andrewes’ ceremony exemplifies, and provided a model for, the kind of heightened ceremonialism that would become so contentious in the late 1620s and 1630s. In fact, the use of this very ceremony was one of the charges brought against Archbishop Laud during his trial. On the other hand, “Angel’s food” may not refer to the Eucharist at all but rather to the living word of God preached to his faithful. This is after all a temple thronged with an “Auditorie,” listeners. To “taste” Angel’s food suggests a set of terms connected to a puritan culture of sermon consumption: “tasting,” “savoring,” “digesting” the gospel. That is, these lines which describe the ideological cacophony within an

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71 Lancelot Andrewes, “Form for Consecrating Church Plate,” in Two Answers to Cardinal Perron and Other Miscellaneous Works (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1854), 159, 161.


73 [James Bliss, ed.], headnote to Andrewes, “Form for Consecrating Church Plate,” in Two Answers, 159.

74 Allison Deutermann, “Hearing and Listening in Early Modern Drama” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008).
English church (and English woman’s mind) might themselves be interpreted differently by individual theatergoers depending on their various confessional sympathies.

In performance there would be an obvious connection between the “throng[ing] auditorie” filling the “Temple” and the audience inside the Globe. Onstage references to crowds—particularly to crowds of witnesses—typically have the potential to make the audience aware of itself as an audience, or to position the audience as an extension of its counterpart within the play. Moreover, audiences attending these particular performances might have identified with the “infinite” “congregation” simply because, as multiple accounts report, the theater was exceptionally crowded during the run. John Holles, Lord Haughton, perhaps even unconsciously echoes the language of this speech when he writes to the Earl of Somerset “yesterday to the globe I rowed, which hows I found so thronged, that by scores thei came away for want of place”.\(^75\) To sum up, at the beginning of this seemingly black and white play, an English Protestant “Everywoman” compares her wavering thoughts to the heterodox congregation inside an English church in a meta-dramatic speech to a theater audience that is itself confessionally heterogeneous.\(^76\) That is, even here where we might least expect it, in a play that so insistently presents confessional identity in simple binaries, the language of this metaphor lets in—if only briefly—the reality of a much larger spectrum of religious possibility. Similarly, when we turn to accounts by and referring to people who went to see the play, we discover an ideologically mixed audience.

\(^75\) John Holles, Lord Haughton, to the Earl of Somerset, 11 August 1624, in *A Game*, 198.

Exactly how mixed is impossible to say. The evidence is limited but suggestive. Not only were there certainly some Catholics in the theater but even within this minority group there are differences that likely affected how these individuals experienced the play. Don Carlos Coloma, the Spanish ambassador whose outrage at \textit{A Game} helped close it down, seems not to have seen the production himself. However, he does mention “a few Catholics . . . who went secretly to see the play.”\textsuperscript{77} These unnamed Catholics tell Coloma his “person would not be safe in the streets” and advise him to “keep to [his] house with a good guard.”\textsuperscript{78} For Coloma and his anonymous Catholic sources the play is not only offensive but dangerous, in that it might incite mob violence toward Coloma, successor to \textbf{Don} Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count of Gondomar (1567–1626), the Spanish ambassador satirized in the play for his role in the Match negotiations as the Machiavellian Black Knight.

The Florentine ambassador, Amerigo Salvetti, does seem to have seen \textit{A Game} himself, but does not appear to have been offended or frightened by it like his Spanish counterpart, despite their shared religion. Salvetti describes \textit{A Game} as “a very satirical thing [that] gives very great enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{79} The satirical pleasures of \textit{A Game} include seeing the play’s scheming villain, the Black Knight, carried onstage in the same chair custom made for his real world counterpart with a hole in the seat to accommodate Gondomar’s anal fistula. Satire, as a genre, tends toward transgression; its purpose is to expose to ridicule something normally treated seriously. The unruly laughter provoked

\textsuperscript{77} Don Carlos Coloma to the Conde-Duque Olivares, [10] 20 August 1624, in \textit{A Game}, 197.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Amerigo Salvetti, Florentine Ambassador, to Picchena, [13] 23 August 1624, in \textit{A Game}, 201.
by the onstage appearance of the former Spanish Ambassador’s anal fistula chair could have loosened Salvetti’s sense of the dignity properly owed to one’s coreligionists. Simply put, it is often more fun to be shocked into laughter than shocked into outrage. Salvetti even presents the possibility of a subversive reading, suggesting that the play’s presentation of Gondomar as a Machiavellian backfires in that it ultimately shows Gondomar as a clever “man of worth” and the members of the English court as his gullible dupes. But for the Spanish ambassador, or his play-going informants, this does not register as an interpretive possibility. For Coloma the play’s presentation of Gondomar is simply “atrocious and filthy” (195).

There is also a report of A Game in the letter of an English Catholic, Paul Overton, to Dr. William Bishop, Bishop of Chalcedon:

wee have noe stay of persecution, nor is any likelihood yet. one mr. Coale a Preist was lately taken by Gee, and is in newegate. At the globe playhouse is dayly presented an odious play against Spaine, but principally Gondomar and the Jusuits. There is not enough evidence here to determine whether Overton was one of those Catholics who “went secretly” to see A Game or whether his report is secondhand. Although Overton frames the play as a “persecution,” something damaging for “we” Catholics in general, he also identifies the play’s primary targets as Spain, Gondomar, and the Jesuits. This is particularly significant given that Overton is writing to the Bishop of Chalcedon, whose very presence in England represented a victory for the secular clergy in their longstanding conflict with the Jesuit Order. That is, if Overton shared his correspondent’s loyalties in this internecine struggle amongst English Catholics he might

80 Ibid.
well have stood in the theater and been offended by the play as a Catholic, but also have felt that the play was not totally directed against him (or his “identity category”), but against a group with which he himself was also in conflict, the Jesuits.\footnote{For the Bishop’s role in the conflict between the secular clergy and Jesuit Order within the English Catholic community, see Peter Holmes, “Bishop, William (c.1554–1624),” in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2474 (accessed 11 February 2010).} Even among these three records from Catholic sources, national loyalties as well as factional divisions within the English Catholic community generate markedly different responses.

Chamberlain claims that “papists and puritans” went to this play. The documents above demonstrate that some Catholics did go see \textit{A Game at Chess}. That there were also puritans in the theater is both far more likely and harder to prove.\footnote{For a compelling discussion of the play’s potential puritan London audience and court patrons see Margot Heinemann, \textit{Puritanism and Theater: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stewarts} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 151—71.} As Martin Butler observes, “if any play would have been attractive to puritan feeling, it would have been this one.”\footnote{Martin Butler, “William Prynne and the Allegory of Middleton’s \textit{Game at Chess},” \textit{Notes and Queries} 30, no. 2 (April 1983): 153–4.} Indeed, the print afterlife of the play suggests that \textit{A Game} had a special appeal for puritans. In 1625, the year after the play was shut down, Londoners could buy illicit copies of \textit{A Game} allegedly printed in the Netherlands. The false imprint may have been a form of advertising designed to target puritan readers. That is, because of the association between the Netherlands and the cause of international Protestant solidarity, a frontispiece declaring “Leiden” as the place of publication might well have caught the eye of a potential godly book buyer. In 1643 a pamphlet appeared titled \textit{The Game At Chess: a Metaphorical Discourse Showing the Present State of the Kingdom} that recast the Parliamentary forces as white chess pieces and made the King and Cavaliers black.

While the terms of the pamphlet are primarily political, the author does complain that the
“blacke Bishops” give the King bad religious council while “in the meane time stirring
the people to their part by wresting Texts of Scripture to serve their purpose.”85 Certainly,
putting King Charles and the episcopacy of the Church of England in the positions
previously occupied by villainous Spanish Catholics radically rewritesthe religious
politics of Middleton’s play. However, the closeness with which The Game At Chess
references A Game At Chess suggests that the pamphleteer may have understood his tract
as a sympathetic adaptation or cross-genre “remake” of the play rather than an aggressive
act of literary appropriation. That is, the tone of the pamphlet suggests that there was
already something about Middleton’s play that made it particularly amenable to the later
puritan reworking.

In part the challenge of identifying puritans in the audience is the familiar difficulty of
defining the term.86 The production and reception history of A Game at Chess is an
object lesson in the way that “puritan” attitudes can shade off imperceptibly into the
mainstream, Calvinist consensus. That is, at what point can we no longer distinguish
between the fierce desire for an aggressive, interventionist foreign policy driven by the
conviction that the Pope is Antichrist (political puritanism) and strong anti-Catholic
feeling coupled with animosity toward Spain (popular English Protestantism)?
Middleton’s play draws heavily on the puritan Thomas Scott’s pamphlets from the early

85 Anon., The Game At Chess: A Metaphorical Discourse Showing the Present State of This Kingdom (London:
Thomas Johnson, 1643), 6–7.

86 See Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of
California Press, 1967), 11–5; and Peter Lake, Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church (Cambridge:
1620s. But as Peter Lake points out, “the incorporation of attitudes central to the puritan world-view into the contemporary establishment enabled zealots like Scott to present an activist puritan case as but the natural development of premises and principals generally held to be true. Scott was operating within what he and certainly most of his contemporaries assumed to be an ideological consensus.” In 1620 when Scott fled to Holland to avoid punishment for *Vox Populi*, one of *A Game*’s source texts, Sir Dudley Carleton, to whom John Chamberlain addresses his eyewitness account of the play, intervened on Scott’s behalf. These textual, personal and ideological connections illustrate the continuum between puritan fringe and Calvinist center.

Anti-Catholicism was the glue that held together the Calvinist consensus, that tied a respectable civil servant like Sir Dudley Carleton, ambassador to the Hague, to someone like Thomas Scott, hiding out in the Netherlands in disgrace for his “radical” pamphlets. It is significant, then, that the same year puritan and more moderate Calvinists were laughing together at *A Game*’s savage mockery of their shared papist enemies, Richard Montague’s *New Gagg* first appeared in print. The *New Gagg* broke from the long-standing Calvinist orthodoxy that held the Church of Rome to be literally Antichristian, the Whore of Babylon. Instead, Montague declared the Roman Church to be a true church, albeit a corrupt one, and so opened the possibility of a *rapprochement* between the Church of Rome and the Church of England. The publication of the *New Gagg* was a


89 Ibid., 813.

90 See Lake, *Moderate Puritans*. 
watershed moment for English Protestantism in that it opened a visible rift between the Calvinist majority and a rising Arminian faction. While I discuss the theatrical reverberations of this pamphlet at length in the next chapter, for our purposes here, the point is that the uproar surrounding the New Gagg called attention to the presence and growing influence of Arminians within the Church and at Court. Since we know that A Game was of special interest to people with Court connections, and we know there were Arminians at Court, we can assume some of them went to the play. How they might have responded is another question. It is possible that Court-affiliated Arminian spectators may have been put off by the rowdy anti-papist humor, or even have understood some jokes to be at their own expense. But we also know that George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, “laught hartely” at the play, his newfound eagerness for war with Spain outweighing his conciliatory, Arminian attitudes toward the Catholic Church.\(^{91}\) Indeed, Cogswell suggests that Buckingham’s attendance at the play was a “carefully scripted media event” designed to ingratiate himself with mainstream Calvinists who had been alienated by the Spanish Match negotiations.\(^{92}\) In this case, Buckingham’s display of affect—laughing heartily—constitutes a form of religio-political discourse.

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If A Game at Chess split its audience along confessional lines, it is important to remember that this was an unusual play. This kind of divisive religio-political topical satire was the exception, not the rule. How, then, might ideologically mixed theater audiences have engaged with more ambiguous dramatic material? In 1623, the Lady

\(^{91}\) John Woolley to William Trumbull, 20 August 1624, in *A Game*, 203.

\(^{92}\) Cogswell, “John Felton,” 376.
Elizabeth’s Men staged *The Spanish Gypsy* at the Phoenix, a tragicomedy co-written by John Ford, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, and William Rowley. Set in Madrid, the main plot follows Roderigo, who unwittingly rapes his best friend’s fiancée but later repents and marries her. The subplot follows a family of gypsies who sing and tumble through the play, forming their own little band on the fringes of legitimate society. Everyone who meets them is charmed by their romantic, vagabond life and captivated by Preciosa, a beautiful young gypsy repeatedly presented in terms reminiscent of the Infanta.⁹³

Peppered with topical references to Prince Charles and Buckingham’s trip to Spain, *The Spanish Gypsy*, like *A Game*, appealed to the public’s interest in the Spanish Match. While the play was considered anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish enough to be performed at Court on November 5, the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, following Charles and Buckingham’s return after the collapse of negotiations for the Match, it also offers audience members a surprisingly positive image of cross-cultural marriage. In act four, scene one a character named Don Juan is sworn in as a member of the gypsy band so he can be handfasted to Preciosa, with whom he is in love and who loves him in return. As I will show, the scene invites audiences to imagine a cross-national, cross-confessional marriage in a positive, pleasurable way that is hard to reconcile with contemporary popular anxieties surrounding the Spanish Match. Here is the first ceremony, the vow that binds Don Juan to the gypsies:

[Gypsy] FATHER: (to Don Juan)
Thy best hand lay on this turf of grass.
There thy heart lies; vow not to pass

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⁹³ The playwrights, for example, lower her age from fifteen, in the source material, to twelve, the age of the Infanta at the time of the marriage negotiations.
From us two years for sun nor snow,
For hill nor dale, howe’er winds blow.
Vow the hard earth to be thy bed
With her green cushions under thy head,
Flow’r banks or moss to be thy board,
Water thy wine
SANCHO: and drink like a lord
OMNES: [sing]
Kings can have but coronations;
We are proud of Gypsy-fashions.
Dance, sing, and in well-mixed border
Close this new brother of our order. 94

The speech puts spectators in the green world: a space of verdant plenty and good fellowship. Hard earth with green cushions will be Don Juan’s bed; his table will be flower banks. This life of simple delights is valued above court decadence. Water will be Don Juan’s wine but he will drink it like a lord. As the Father declares, “Kings can have but coronations / We are proud of Gypsy-fashions.” This rejection of court values distances the scene tonally from the play’s references to the diplomatic intrigues surrounding the Match. The octosyllabic meter has a nostalgic effect. It invokes the popular and powerful cultural fantasy of a lost past without dearth or strife: a merry world where men were brothers.

It is also a kind of conversion scene. Don Juan turns gypsy. He undergoes a ceremony in which he exchanges a socially legitimate identity for an exotic and illegitimate one. And that conversion makes it possible for him to marry a woman repeatedly compared to the Infanta. The scene has Catholic overtones. “Close this new brother of our order” suggests monastic life. As I will discuss at greater length in chapter three, the kind of merry world recalled here was sometimes specifically located in the

pre-Reformation, i.e., Catholic, English past. Curiously, then, many of the elements of this speech that welcome audiences into the illusion that they too are gypsy brothers in the green world, are the same features that mark that imagined space as Catholic.

After Don Juan’s gypsy conversion, the Father handfasts him to Preciosa:

[Gypsy] FATHER: (to Don Juan and Preciosa)
Set foot to foot; those garlands hold.
Teach him how. Now mark what more is told.
By cross arms (the lover’s sign),
Vow—as these flowers themselves entwine,
Of April’s wealth building a throne
Round—so your love to one or none.
By those touches of your feet,
You must each night embracing meet,
Chaste, howe’er disjointed by day;
You the sun with her must play
She to you the marigold,
To none but you her leaves unfold.
Wake she or sleep, your eyes so charm,
Want, woe, nor weather do her harm. (4.1.47–77)

This scene is designed to generate delight, to give the audience a sense of idyllic pleasure and innocent love. Internal stage directions like “those garlands hold” and “these flowers . . . entwine” suggest that there may have been actual flowers onstage; and lines like “Now foot to foot,” “cross arms,” “by those touches of your feet,” suggest Don Juan and Preciosa stand close together, face to face, perhaps holding onto each other’s arms. Visually, this tableau—young lovers embracing, entwined with flower garlands—is orchestrated to charm audiences, to position them as sympathetic witnesses to the handfasting ceremony, well-wishers to this appealing couple.

However, Preciosa has already been connected in the play to the Infanta, the last person English Calvinists wanted to see as a bride. The closing couplet, “Wake she or sleep, your eyes so charm, / Want, woe, nor weather do her harm,” evokes Catholic,
apotropaic blessings. But while these gypsy ceremonies carry Catholic connotations, it is hard to imagine that even the fiercest anti-Spanish Calvinist in the playhouse could watch this scene without a flicker of delight. Rather, this lush and lovely gypsy wedding creates an emotional community out of its confessionally diverse audience, despite the fact that many of them would find the real-world corollary of the onstage fantasy repugnant.

The commercial theaters provided early modern English people a space in which to imagine, believe, fear, desire, and occupy subject positions differently than they did in their day-to-day religious lives. These affective and imaginative experiments with the heterogeneous materials of post-Reformation culture constituted an important mode of public religio-political engagement. Unlike many of the print and manuscript genres which have been the focus of recent discussions of the early modern public sphere(s), the theaters were not generally in the business of circulating propositions for rational-critical debate. But many of the most politically fraught aspects of post-Reformation religious life could not be accessed through rational-critical thought alone. The theaters helped early modern Londoners affectively negotiate the ever-changing and contradictory confessional landscape. They reconfigured existing religious categories and the relationships between them in new, hybrid fantasies. The theaters gathered heterodox audiences who were together “more open” to the complexities of their mixed confessional culture, and therefore more capable of imagining its possible futures.
In the previous chapter I argued that theatrical effects, generated by a variety of industry practices, can reorient audience responses to diverse confessional material. This, I proposed, was an important mode of collectively processing and participating in religio-political culture. In other words, the theater was a site in which “publics” were formed. But unlike print debates, around which discussions of an emergent public sphere in the early modern period have focused, the theater does not primarily address rational-critical faculties, but emotional and imaginative ones. The difference is not only in the ways print and playhouse audiences respectively make sense of the material before them. These media also seek to elicit different kinds of “take away” from their audiences. The reader of a pamphlet debate is expected to agree or disagree with a set of propositions. A woman watching *Tamburlaine* is not asked to affirm or reject the religious views of the scourge of God, but simply to imagine them. This does not mean that the theater had less impact on confessional politics than arguments advanced in pamphlet wars. The feeling of exhilaration from watching the declaiming atheist defy kings and burn holy books, perhaps connected to an erotic attraction to the leading actor Edward Alleyn, may well have shifted an early modern individual’s attitude toward religious authority in as powerful, if perhaps less conscious, ways as reading a presbyterian tract like John Field’s *Admonition to Parliament*.¹ Indeed, I would suggest that it was, in part, the seemingly

¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* (London: Richard Ihones, 1590); John Field, *Admonition to Parliament* (Hemel Hempstead, UK: J. Stroud, 1572). Admittedly, the pairing of these two texts is slightly misleading, since the presbyterian tracts circulating while *Tamburlaine* was first performed were part of the Martin
nonreligious and nonpolitical nature of theatrical entertainment, the absence of the expectation that audiences would form or change their opinions on specific religio-political issues by watching plays, that allowed the theater to do its most venturesome and productive ideological work.²

How does religious polemic—a fundamentally propositional genre—change when refashioned in the theater, a medium that encourages nonpropositional thinking? Kristen Poole and Jesse Lander have offered two valuable models of ways theatrical productions can interrupt the religio-political agendas of polemical source material. In *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton*, Kristen Poole tracks the migration of depictions of puritans as carnivalesque gluttons from the Marprelate pamphlet controversy to the anti-Martinist plays of the late 1580s to Shakespeare’s Falstaff in the Henriad. She argues that the sense of *communitas* and festivity that surrounds these satirized puritan figures “overwhelms the pressures of satire, and the audience finds itself in the position of laughing with the target of the attack.”³ This potentially subversive

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² This statement requires qualification. Certainly, I am not suggesting that theater practitioners and playgoers were naively unaware that early modern plays carried religio-political implications, or that all of the stage’s ideological work happened at a subconscious level. It is, however, significant that the theaters were legally forbidden to explicitly address religion or politics. The minutes of the Privy Council for November 12, 1589, on the establishment of a Commission of Censorship to oversee theatrical production, specify that censors are to “strike out or reform such parts and manners as they shall find unfit and undecent to be handled in plays, both for divinity and state”; as quoted in Arthur F. Kinney, *Shakespeare by Stages: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 143. Annabel Patterson argues persuasively that both the state and playwrights found it to their advantage to pretend that plays were not political, in *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). While I tend to disagree with Patterson on the degree to which individual playwrights were able to exert ideological control over their plays, my point is that it was under the pretense of “not being political” that the theater was given tacit license to explore, if indirectly, sensitive religious and political material.

dynamic, Poole suggests, while already latent in some of the anti-Martinist polemic, manifests more insistently in theatrical performance. Poole’s argument is a particularly useful model, in that she recognizes both how works of polemic themselves can contain internal contradictions, and the particular ways that stage performance can exaggerate, and involve the audience as a group, in these disruptive effects.

On a different tack, Jesse Lander argues in *Inventing Polemic* that while both quarto editions of *Hamlet* are shaped by a range of contemporary religious controversies, Q2 adopts a skeptical distance from the culture of polemic. Lander describes the second quarto as a work of “anti-polemic” that rejects the extreme certainty that characterizes scrimmages of controversy. Part of Lander’s larger project is to show how literature in the eighteenth century came to be defined in opposition to polemic as “aesthetic, not political; disinterested, not tendentious; exploratory, not restrictive; imaginative, not dogmatic.” Like Poole and Lander I am interested in the ways that the move across genres—from page to stage—can refract the tropes of religious controversy, wresting them away from their intended polemical end. My goal, however, is emphatically not to

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reify the terms of the eighteenth-century distinction between polemic and the literary, but rather to demonstrate the different ways that the aesthetic, exploratory, and imaginative qualities of theatrical production do religio-political work.

In what follows I examine two plays deeply engaged with Caroline print controversies regarding the confessional identities of the English and Irish national Churches: John Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s A Whore (1630) and James Shirley’s St. Patrick for Ireland (1639). While the texts that these plays refashion are not all, in a strict generic sense, works of polemic—one is, for example, a libel, another a hagiography—they are all written in a polemical mode: vituperative in tone, confrontational rather than conciliatory, and responding directly to the opposing side of a specific debate. I will show how both of these plays disrupt the polemical agenda of their source material, but also how they each produce different effects of their own, suggesting the limitations as well as the possibilities of mixed-confessional theater.

I will argue that ‘Tis Pity She’s A Whore aligns its central dramatic conflict with the crux of a controversy surrounding the relationship between the English and Catholic Churches. Specifically, the play establishes correlations between, on the one hand, the audience’s disgust at the central lovers’ incestuous relationship and Calvinist polemic

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6 While the religious debate ‘Tis Pity references is, in a strict sense, about the relationship between the Roman and English Churches, rather than the nature of the English Church as an isolated institution, I would suggest that what made this issue controversial was precisely what the nature of the Roman Church might mean for the Church of England. The underlying question was: are we a Church that gets in bed with the Antichristian Whore, or not?; John Ford, ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore, ed. Simon Barker (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); James Shirley, St. Patrick for Ireland (London: Printed by J. Raworth for R. Whitaker, 1640). Subsequent references to both plays will appear parenthetically in the body of the text.

7 On the polemical uses to which different early modern English confessional groups put martyrological and hagiographical writing, see Brad S. Gregory, Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Lander also defines polemic capiciously as “a genre, a concept, and a practice”; Lander, Inventing Polemic, 35.
that treated the Roman Church as Antichristian; and, on the other, the audience’s sympathy for the sibling lovers’ impure but still beautiful romance and Laudian gestures toward reconciliation with the Church of Rome. By developing an analogy between the terms of the play and those of the pamphlet war, ‘Tis Pity creates an associative network in which mixed feelings for the play’s lovers carry a correlated religious ambivalence. By leaving the tension between disgust at and sympathy for the couple’s incestuous love unresolved, ‘Tis Pity allows the audience to experience the tension of the controversy as embedded in the drama without having to adopt a polemical side.

While Shirley’s St. Patrick for Ireland combines material from opposing sides of a polemical debate, I will argue it does so in ways more likely to sharpen than soften confessional tensions. Shirley’s play, written for the Werburgh Street Theater in Dublin, engages with a contemporary debate between Catholics and Calvinists as to who had the right to claim the nation’s patron saint as a legitimating religious ancestor. Possibly in an attempt to attract as broad an audience as possible to the fledgling theater, Shirley’s depiction of St. Patrick shuttles between buzzwords and tropes from competing sectarian positions, continually reminding his audience of the ideological stakes of the debate around the saint but frustrating any attempt at a coherent partisan reading. Unlike ‘Tis Pity, Shirley’s play does not offer its audience a synthesized or alternative position from which to reimagine the confessional conflict it references. Despite its polyvocality, I would suggest that St. Patrick ultimately reinforces sectarian divisions among Irish audiences by invoking conflicting Catholic and Calvinist narratives, which interrupt and invalidate each other, deepening an already entrenched cultural impasse. The contrasting effects created by the different aesthetic and affective structures of these plays
demonstrates that confessionally polyvocal theater produced unpredictable results. Dramatic combinations of contradictory religious tropes could intensify confessional conflict as well as help imagine alternatives to it.

‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore and Reassessments of the Whore of Babylon

‘Tis Pity She’s A Whore first appeared onstage just as a pamphlet war over whether the Roman Church was a true Church or the Whore of Babylon had come to a point of crisis. In the mid-1620s rising Laudian, anti-Calvinist bishops like Richard Montague and John Cosin broke from the long-standing Calvinist orthodoxy that held the Church of Rome to be literally Antichristian, the Whore of Babylon described in Revelations. Instead, these divines maintained two new propositions: one, that the Roman Church was a true Church, albeit a corrupt one; and, two, that because Rome was a true Church it was possible, even desirable, to have communion or a rapprochement between the Church of Rome and the Church of England. These avant-garde, Laudian ideas shocked old school Calvinists and produced a heated exchange in print, the pulpit, and Parliament. After 1629 when Charles I banned the further publication of tracts on the issue, the debate over the status of the Roman Church migrated into the theater.

While Anthony Milton gives an excellent account of the controversy over papal anti-Christianity in his magisterial study of the Church of England’s shifting relationships with both the Catholic Church and other reformed, Protestant Churches on the Continent, below I track the fallout from Montague’s tracts in further detail to give a fuller sense not only of the content of the debate but also of its escalating rancor and

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8 Milton, Catholic and Reformed.
impact across a variety of cultural forums. The controversy begins with Richard
Montague’s 1624 tract, *A New Gagg for an Old Goose*. The most incendiary passages
deal with the status of the Church of Rome. Montague jettisons the deep-rooted Calvinist
identification of the pope as Antichrist:

> Whether the Pope bee that Antichrist or not, the Church resolveth not, tendreth
> it not to be believed any way. Some I grant are very peremptory, too peremptory
> indeed, that he is: He for instance, that wrote and printed it, *I am as sure that the Pope
> is Antichrist, that Antichrist that is spoken of in Scripture, as that Iesus Christ is God.*
> But they that are so resolute, peremptory and certain, let them answere for themselves
> they are old enough, the Church is not tyed, nor any man that I know, to make good
> their private imaginations. Nor can or ought the severall fancies of men, to be
> imputed unto the authorized and approved Doctrine of the Church: A fault more than
> ordinary with you Papists, to charge the Church of *England* with every private opinion
> that any man holdeth in our Church, though he be singular and alone.  

The *New Gagg’s* rejection of the standard position on papal Antichristianity was indeed
“New” in English Protestant thought.  
Despite variations within theories of papal
Antichristianity, and despite moments when for political expediency English monarchs
sought to suppress anti-papist polemic (as, for example, James I did during negotiations

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Lownes and William Barret, 1624), 74.

10 Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 113–4; Montague’s tract makes a startling departure from contemporary
works of anti-Catholic polemic, such as the anonymous 1624 *Gagge for the Pope and the Jesuits*. This tract,
whose full title runs *The Arraignment and Execution of Antichrist, Shewing plainly that Antichrist shall be
discovered and punished in this World to the amazement of all obstinant PAPISTS*, exemplifies the Calvinist
party line on Roman Antichristianity which dominated anti-Catholic writing in the period (London: I.D. for
Edward Blackmore, 1624). See also from that year I.P.P.M., *The Bloody Rage of That Great Antichrist of Rome*
for All Those That Abhor . . . the Scottish Illusions of Romish Antichrist* (London: Richard Field, 1624).

Reformation: From John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978);
Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1979); Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to
the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in
over the Spanish Match), the belief that the pope was Antichrist had long held the status of unofficial or semi-official orthodoxy. In the 1609 *Apology for the Oath of Allegiance* James I writes, “As for the definition of the Antichrist, I will not urge so obscure a point as a matter of Faith to be necessarily believed of all Christians: but what I think therein I will simply declare.” The King then moves through a lengthy exegesis of Revelations in which he “proove[s] Rome to be the seat of the Antichrist and the second half of that spirituall week between the first and second coming of Christ [i.e. now] to be the time of his Reigne.” James, as Montague would point out, does frame this section as private opinion rather than Church doctrine. But the private opinion of the head of the English Church expressed in print as preface to an oath of religious conformity might as well be doctrine, in that it marks the orthodox center of Church thought.

Anti-popery had for a long time been the glue that held together godly margin and conformist center. Although anti-papist polemic could be mobilized by presbyterians and other hot Protestants seeking the expurgation of residual popish elements from the English Church, fringe elements of the Church also used anti-Catholic polemic in which papal Antichristianity was a central trope to demonstrate their conformity. In the middle of the Admonition controversy of the late 1560s and early 1570s regarding the proper

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12 For example, on September 1, 1622, James Seldon preached a sermon at Paul’s Cross in which he “proved the Beast [i.e. the Antichrist] to be the Church of Rome” and declared it “morally impossible . . . for England to return to the Roman fold.” Seldon received a sharp reprimand from for this sermon, which was perceived as an embarrassment to James during negotiations over the Spanish Match. Millar Maclure, *The Paul’s Cross Sermons: 1534–1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 244.


14 Ibid., 61.

vestments to be worn by English clergymen, the presbyterian Thomas Cartwright and the episcopal conformist John Whitgift could agree that the pope was Antichrist and that true religion could only be established through a complete break with Rome even as they fought over the implications of that principle for Church ceremony and discipline.\footnote{Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 13–70.}


This attempt to recalibrate the relationship between the English Church and Rome did not go uncontested. New Gagg prompted several responses in print and the pulpit accusing its author of Arminianism and Popery,\footnote{See the sermon of Robert Abbott (brother to George, the staunchly Calvinist Archbishop of Canterbury) which speaks pointedly of the damnation of those who fail to recognize the Antichrist in his true form; Robert Abbott, The Danger of Popery (London: I.L. for Philemon Stephens and Christopher Meredith, 1625).} which in turn elicited a reply from...
Montague in 1625, _Appello Caesarem_.  

Appello threw gasoline on the fire New Gagg started. In it Montague insists on Rome’s status as a true church. He writes:

I profess my selfe none of those furious ones in point of difference now-a-days, whose profession and resolution is, That the farther in any thing from communion with the Church of Rome, the nearer unto God and Truth: that we ought to have no commerce, society, or accordance with Papists in things divine, nor almost human, upon pain of eternall damnation; but must bid defiance irreconcileable unto them for ever, I am absolutely perswaded . . . that the Church of Rome is a true, though not a sound Christ, as well since, as before the Councell of Trent; a part of the Catholick though not the Catholick Church . . . a Church, in which, among many tares [weeds], there remaineth some whete [wheat].

Technically, granting Rome the status of a true church was not a new idea. English Protestants as early as Hooker had defended this point because it allowed them to make several useful arguments. If Rome was “in some sense” a true church then all English people living before the Reformation were not automatically damned. Allowing Rome to be a true Church was one way to deny that she was the true Church as Roman Catholics themselves claimed. Indeed, in some lines of argument even the demonstration that the pope was Antichrist depended on the proposition that Rome was a true Church. The point, in 1625, was that previous Protestant claims for Rome’s status as a true Church were heavily qualified or prelude to anti-Catholic vitriol. What contemporaries found so offensive about _Appello_ was that—essentially for the first time in English Protestant thought—it gave the idea that Rome was a true Church positive value.

Montague stresses the fact that the Roman and English Churches shared basic Christian beliefs. “In Essentials and Fundamentals they agree, holding one Faith, in one
Lord, into whom they are inserted through one Baptism,” he writes.\textsuperscript{24} He includes the
Roman Church as a member, though not a sound member, of the Catholic, i.e. universal, Church.\textsuperscript{25} Most importantly, Montague’s claim that Rome was not Antichristian but a part of the Catholic Church and shared with the English Church the foundational tenets of Christianity opened the possibility of reconciliation with Rome.

It is hard to overstate how shocking the idea of communion with Rome must have been to most English Protestants in 1625. The theory of the Two Churches, irreconcilably opposed, true and false, saved and damned, reformed and corrupt, English and Romish, as conceived by John Bale and developed by John Foxe, so permeated English culture that it might be said to have operated at the level of presupposition. The two most popular, foundational texts of English Protestant culture, the Geneva Bible and Foxe’s \textit{Acts and Monuments}, both explicitly and repeatedly identify the pope as Antichrist.\textsuperscript{26} Here is the description of the Whore of Babylon from Revelations:

\begin{quote}
I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemie, which had seven heads, & ten hornes.

And the woman was arrayed in purple & skarlat, & guilded with golde, & precious stones, and pearles, and had a cup of golde in her hands, ful of abominations, and filthiness of her fornication.

And in her forehead \textit{was} a name written, a Mysterie, great Babylon, the mother of whoredoms and abominations of the earth.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

This the Geneva glosses as follows:

This woman is the Anti-christ, that is the Pope with ye whole body of his

\textsuperscript{24} Montague, \textit{Appello}, 113.


\textsuperscript{26} For the importance and longevity of the Geneva Bible in English Protestant culture, see David Daniell, \textit{The Bible in English} (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003).

This woman is the Antichrist, that is the Pope: English Protestants understood their faith, the true religion of Christ, largely in terms of its opposition to Rome. Montague was suggesting the unthinkable, the reconciliation of the irreconcilable, the joining of Christ and Antichrist.

*Appello* drew fire from Parliament. On July 7, 1625, the “Committee for Mr. Mountagew” made a report to the House of Commons. Montague was already in trouble for the *New Gagg* and had received an Admonition from the Calvinist Archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbott, the previous year. But it was *Appello* that the Committee marked out as a “factious and seditious Book, tending manifestly to the Dishonour of our late King, and to the Disturbance of our Church and State.” The House of Commons’ primary concern was Montague’s rejection of papal Antichristianity and affirmation of Rome as a true Church. The report states:

That all the Committee of Opinion, that many Things in these Books, which directly contrary to the Articles established by Parliament; viz. That the Church of Rome is vera Christi ecclesia, et sponsa Christi [a true Church of Christ and bride of Christ].

That is, the committee unanimously identifies the proposition that the Roman Church is a true Church as an abrogation of a foundational tenet of the Church of England. It is also

28 Ibid.


31 Ibid.
significant that Montague’s remarks against “puritans” figure prominently in the 1625 report. The committee objected that:

He rails at [John] Yates, and [Nathaniel] Ward, and says, they are Puritans, although they have subscribed.—“Puritans in Heart.”—He doth plainly intimate, that there are Puritans Bishops.32

That is, they understood these passages of _Appello_ to be an attempt by Montague to recast centrist, Calvinist bishops as members of a “puritan” fringe. Essentially, the wrangle over _New Gagg_ and _Appello_ in the House of Commons in the late 1620s was a struggle between Calvinists and Laudians for the power to determine what constituted Church orthodoxy.33

_Appello_ provoked a number of polemical tracts and sermons in response.34 Particularly active in the print campaign were the controversialist Henry Burton and the puritan printer Michael Sparke. Burton countered Montague early and often. In 1626 he produced _A Plea to an Appeal_, a polemical dialogue between Asotus (the “Prodigal”), Babylonius, and Othodoxus. The _Plea_ opens with the hilariously clueless Asotus—the personification of wavering English religious opinion—pleasantly greeting the Antichrist with the line “Master Babylonius you are well met.”35 Babylonius tries to seduce Asotus

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33 Provocatively, in his sermon to the 1628 Parliament, Laud spoke in favor of “unity” with Rome. While he admitted obstacles to this reconciliation he took for granted that it was a desirable goal. In context of the furor over Montague’s tracts on the Roman Church, Laud’s plea for unity must have been extremely divisive. William Laud, _The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud, D.D._, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1975), 165.

34 See Anon., _Anti-montacutum. An Appeale or Remonstrance of the Orthodox Ministers of the Church of England_ (London: B. Alsop and T. Fawcet, 1629); John Squire, _Plaine Exposition_ (London: Robert Allot, 1630). The latter book consists of a number of sermons that were, presumably, delivered in the late 1620s.

35 Henry Burton, _A Plea to an Appeal_ (London: W.I., 1626), B1r.
into reconciliation with Rome using Montague’s *Appello*. Orthodoxus appears and sets Asotus straight. One of the running jokes of the dialogue is the way Babylonius, and implicitly Montague, use the accusation of “puritanism” to trick Asotus into voicing popish opinions. Babylonius declares, “For it were no hard matter (I wis) to reconcile you and me, and such as wee are, as well in Religion and opinion, as we already are in affection, were it not for these make-bate *Puritans*.” Increasingly, it becomes clear that by “puritans” Babylonius means all conforming English Protestants. This joke suggests that Burton was aware that he was not writing simply an issue-specific piece of polemic, but participating in a larger factional struggle, resisting a kind of anti-Calvinist “palace coup” within the English Church.  

Burton’s opposition to the rising anti-Calvinist party did not go unchecked. When the *Plea* came out, Burton was cited before the High Commission. Undaunted, he continued to pen tracts through the late 1620s arguing against Montague, Cosin, and others, and for papal Antichristianity. Even the titles of these works, so full of antitheses—*Truth’s Triumph ouer Trent: or, The Great Gulfe betweene Sion and Babylon. That Is, the Vnreconcileable Opposition between the Apostolicke Church of Christ, and the Apostate*


Synagogue of Antichrist; Babel No Bethel, That Is, The Church of Rome No True Visible Church of Christ—exemplify Burton’s insistence on the dichotomous relationship between the Roman and English Churches.38

In May 1629 Michael Sparke faced charges for the illicit printing of Burton’s Babel No Bethel. Sparke was a committed puritan printer and bookseller who published a significant body of godly literature, including works by Thomas Beard, John Preston, Samuel Rowlands, and the separatist American minister Francis Higginson. He spent most of the period between 1626 and 1641 in trouble for various kinds of ideologically motivated publications. He was pilloried with William Prynne for Histriomastix in 1633, and was regularly cited for importing cheap, unlicensed Geneva Bibles (which the godly strongly preferred over the authorized, King James edition) from Amsterdam.39 Sparke gives a bold answer to the Ecclesiastical Commission’s accusations regarding Babel No Bethel. Sparke admits that he printed the book, “but conceives there is nothing contrary to the established doctrine of the Church of England therein.” He goes on to state that:

He conceives the book itself to be a just and necessary defense of the Church of England against the Arminians . . . he has done all to the glory of God, the honour of the King, the good of the Church, and the welfare and doctrine of the Church of England and the religion established.40

Sparke is a religious engagé and cannot be taken as simply representative of popular

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opinion. But it shows the degree to which the Calvinist understanding of the Roman Church as false and Antichristian had become a cultural commonplace, that Sparke, who had his finger in a number of separatist pies, here perceives himself as defending the orthodox center of the English Church.

Burton too was called in for Babel No Bethel. Indicative of the growing clout of the anti-Calvinist faction, Burton’s autobiography describes the increasing difficulty of obtaining a license for works calling the pope Antichrist in the late 1620s. Burton had “much ado” to get a license for Truth’s Triumph over Trent. He claims to have been refused a license for a book because “therein I proved the Pope to be Antichrist. Which . . . began in those days to be Noli Me Tangere.” Of Babel No Bethel Burton writes:

And so for writing against the Church of Rome, as no true Church of Christ, and because such kind of bookes were printed without license when none could be obtained, I was brought . . . into the High Commission.

Part of the accusation against Burton was that by dedicating Babel to Parliament he had sought to divide Parliament and the King. Burton denied the charge but was nevertheless briefly imprisoned. The incident marks the degree to which this theological question was understood to have political stakes in the context of the widening rift between king and Parliament.

By 1629 the debate over papal Antichristianity had grown so divisive that Charles I issued a Proclamation calling in Montague’s book and ordering “that men no longer

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42 Ibid., B2v.


trouble themselves with these unnecessary questions, the first cause being taken away.”

This seeming punishment was considerably mitigated by the fact that Montague had been elevated to the episcopacy the year before, and soon after the Proclamation received a royal pardon for his part in the controversy. The anti-Calvinists were not the real targets. Laud continued a vigorous campaign to censor writing that maintained papal Antichristianity. These efforts, however, were not wholly successful. In 1630 an anonymous “Proclamation” was posted on the Exchange. It read:

the said Doggs to wit the said Bishops . . . have at their command the Stacioners of London to compose Print & make & sell books for the helping & furthering of the said spitefull dogs to wit the said Bishops, a treacherous evil working for the Popish infidels Churches Religion to bee favoured helped & furthered to have the English protestants Churches cause more and more wronged.

The vituperative language here—“spiteful dogs,” “treacherous evil,” “popish infidel”—directed against Laudian Bishops, as well as the public and extra-legal status of the “Proclamation,” suggest how hostile and potentially dangerous the debate had become.

At this moment, in 1630, when the question of whether Rome was a true Church or the Whore of Babylon had grown so divisive that it prompted a government crackdown on the press, ‘Tis Pity She’s A Whore, a play that echoes the terms of this debate but offers audiences a more ambivalent, less combative mode of engaging with the controversy, was staged at the Cockpit.

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45 Charles I, A Proclamation, for the Suppressing of a Booke, Intituled Appello Caesarem, or, an Appeal to Caesar (London: Bonham Norton and John Bill, 1628).


47 “A Proclamation for Suppressing Treasonous Evil Workers for the Popish Infidel Church’s Cause: Dogs, as the Apostle Calls Them,” 14 April 1629. The National Archives, London. SP 16/140, f. 88.
Set in Parma, the main plot of Ford’s play follows the unfortunate romance of Giovanni and Annabella, who are brother and sister. ‘Tis Pity opens with Giovanni, newly returned from studying in Bologna, trying to justify his incestuous attraction to his sister to his horrified tutor Friar Bonaventura. Annabella, meanwhile, is busy rebuffing the advances of a number of disappointing suitors while secretly pining for her brother. When Giovanni declares his love for her she reciprocates immediately and the two begin a clandestine sexual relationship aided by her nurse Putana. When Annabella becomes pregnant she marries one of her suitors, Soranzo, to conceal her predicament. But when Soranzo realizes she is pregnant by another man he locks her in her room and has one of his servants trick the nurse Putana into revealing Giovanni as the father of his sister’s child. Annabella tries to warn Giovanni that Soranzo knows about their affair, but unhinged and doubting his sister’s fidelity he turns up at a feast at Soranzo’s house, stabs Annabella in her bedroom after one last tender scene, and holding up her bloody heart on a dagger announces his crimes to the assembled guests. Giovanni and Annabella’s father dies of shock. Giovanni stabs Soranzo and is then himself killed in the ensuing melee.

Huston Diehl has rightly identified this play as one of a number of Stuart love tragedies in which the Protestant, iconoclastic directive to destroy the Whore of Babylon manifests in the murder of a beautiful but corrupt woman. Diehl writes:

Inasmuch as the male lovers [in Stuart love tragedies] rage against what they desire and kill what they love, they resemble the Protestant iconoclasts who “bewhore” and “kill” sacred images they had once adored . . . If the iconoclastic impulses of early Protestantism are in fact played out on the beautiful body of the female beloved, the violence perpetrated against women in the love

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48 For a crypto-Catholic reading of this play, see Lisa Hopkins, John Ford’s Political Theater (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). For a discussion of the plays’ ambiguity, see Michael Neill, “‘What Strange Riddle’s This?’: Deciphering ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” in John Ford: Critical Revisions, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
tragedies may thus enact on a symbolic level the kind of radical, inner purification the reformers call for when they urge believers to tear images out of their hearts.\textsuperscript{49}

That is, Diehl argues, the recurring impulse in Stuart love tragedies to destroy seductive but false women originates in the repeated call in iconoclastic, anti-Catholic discourse to destroy seductive but false images, the trappings of the Whore of Babylon. Diehl’s work, along with that of Fran Dolan\textsuperscript{50} and Alison Shell, has demonstrated how the drama condenses into potent fantasies the pervasive associative network that connected femininity, decadence, external beauty, corruption, idolatry, and Catholicism. As Shell writes:

For a certain cast of Protestant, the Whore of Babylon was inherent in all images and posed a perennial threat to one’s spiritual chastity. She epitomized the favorite Protestant theme of how idolatry was akin to spiritual whoredom (Jeremiah 3:9); and it is almost impossible to overstate her ubiquity and her synonymousness with the Catholic Church during the English Reformation and its aftermath...Within drama, her presence is ubiquitous. She appeared on-stage in many Tudor anti-Catholic interludes and in Dekker’s \textit{The Whore of Babylon} (1606), but she is also invoked by much of the language of decadence and female depravity typical of Italianate tragedy, and that invocation, sometimes only an innuendo, is enough to spark off a gunpowder-train of pre-existing association.\textsuperscript{51}

Shell shows how beautiful, dangerous women could embody the spiritually dangerous beauty of Catholic worship. She demonstrates how the \textit{femme-fatales} of revenge tragedy consolidate and libidinize the link between gynophobia and anti-Catholicism. The tremendous value of Diehl, Dolan, and Shell’s work has been to uncover a formative and pervasive set of associations as they appear in an imaginatively forceful, popular genre.


But this work does not take into account the degree to which the image of the Whore of Babylon was contested, both in print and on stage, in the aftermath of the New Gagg controversy.

While Annabella does participate in a stage tradition in which seductive, sinful women personify the dangers of Catholic idolatry, she also registers the way the figure of the Whore of Babylon had been destabilized by the controversy over papal Antichristianity in the six years preceding the play’s first performance. Annabella is, in some sense, the inverse of characters like Lucrezia Borgia in Barnabe Barnes’ The Devil’s Charter, or Pope Alexander the Sixth (1606) and the Empress in Thomas Dekker’s The Whore of Babylon (1606).\(^{52}\) Both written in the immediate aftermath of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, these plays present arguably two of the most literal and hostile versions of the \textit{femme fatale} as walking anti-Catholic polemic. The prologue of The Devil’s Charter calls on audiences to “Behold the Strumpet of proud Babylon / Her cup with fornication foaming full” (Barnes, A2r), echoing the language of Revelations, “a cup of golde in her hands, ful of abominations, and filthiness of her fornication.”\(^{53}\) Pope Alexander VI is shown to have sold his soul to the Devil, who appears in the final scene, “\textit{dressed in his pontificals}” (Barnes, SD L3v), to drag the pope to hell. Lucrezia Borgia, the pope’s daughter who murders her husband and conducts incestuous affairs with both her father and brother, dies by poisoned make-up (Barnes, H1r-H2v). As Shell has observed, her death literalizes a set of tropes that treat Catholicism as a religion of spiritually corrosive

\(^{52}\) Both these plays were first staged in 1606 but only published the following year. Barnabe Barnes, The Devil’s Charter, or Pope Alexander the Sixth (London: Printed by G. E. for Iohn Wright, 1607); Thomas Dekker, The Whore of Babylon (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1607). Hereafter both plays are cited parenthetically within the text.

\(^{53}\) Revelations 17:5.
glittering surfaces.\textsuperscript{54}

While \textit{The Devil’s Charter} splits the personification of the Whore of Babylon between Pope Alexander and Lucrezia Borgia, Dekker’s \textit{Whore of Babylon} presents, as the title suggests, an even more explicit staging of the figure. Dekker’s play announces itself as a religio-political allegory of Queen Elizabeth’s providential escape from a variety of Catholic plots. The list of dramatis personae describes the play’s villainess as the “Empress of Babylon, under whom is figured Rome.” She makes her first entrance flanked by “persons in pontificall roabes” (Dekker, SD A4r). Later she appears in a dumb show “on the Beast” (Dekker, SD H3r), a stage image taken directly from Revelations, “I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemie, which had seven heads, & ten hornes,”\textsuperscript{55} that would also have been familiar to audience members from popular woodcuts (see fig. 1), which typically presented the Whore of Babylon as a woman in pontifical robes riding on a seven-headed beast. The difference between these overt, post-Gunpowder Plot female personifications of papal Antichristianity and the post-\textit{New Gagg} Annabella, whose spiritual status is much more ambiguous, suggests while the Whore of Babylon was indeed a seminal construct in the English national imagination, its tenor and cultural function were historically contingent.

\textsuperscript{54} Shell, \textit{Catholicism, Controversy}, 28.

\textsuperscript{55} Revelations 17:3.
Certainly, *Tis Pity’s* presentation of Annabella draws on the terms of gynophobic anti-Catholicism identified by Shell, Dolan, and Diehl. Repeatedly the play describes her as the object of idolatrous worship. Giovanni declares that Annabella’s beauty “if framed anew, the gods / Would make a god of, if they had it there / And kneel to it as I do kneel to them” (1.1.21–3). The Friar calls her “this idol thou ador’st” (1.1.61). Rejecting his aged confessor’s rebuke, Giovanni insists that “had you youth like mine / You’d make her love your heaven, and her divine” (2.5.35–6). He cries out “O that it were not in

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religion sin / To make our love a god, and worship it” (1.2.140–1). Soranzo, her cuckolded husband, laments, “I did too superstitiously adore thee” (4.3.118). The anti-Catholicism embedded in the play’s language of love idolatry is reinforced by a subplot in which the Cardinal callously invokes the privilege of his office to shield a murderer, “as nuncio from the Pope / For this offence I here receive Grimaldi / Into his Holiness’ protection” (3.9.53–5). The Cardinal’s corruption prompts the dismayed observation that “Justice is fled to Heaven and comes no nearer / . . . When cardinals think murder’s not amiss” (3.9.162–6). In this way the play locates the idolatrous lovers in a political world governed by Catholic moral depravity.

The identification of Annabella as a spiritually dangerous object of idolatry in a wicked, Catholic world, however, is complicated by the play’s insistent suggestion that the incestuous couple is bound by real love. In sharp contrast to The Devil’s Charter where incest is an unambiguous sign of spiritual whoredom, ‘Tis Pity devotes considerable dramatic energy to redeeming Giovanni and Annabella’s romance. With its forbidden love, bawdy nurse, and meddling Friar, ‘Tis Pity would have been recognizable to theatergoers as an homage to Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. Giovanni and Annabella share an easy, intimate rapport, often expressed in passages of stichomythic dialogue in which they metrically complete each other’s lines. For example:

GIOVANNI: But I shall lose you sweetheart.
ANNABELLA: But you shall not.
GIOVANNI: You must be married, mistress.
ANNABELLA: Yes, to whom?
GIOVANNI: Someone must have you.
ANNABELLA: You must.
GIOVANNI: Nay, some other.
ANNABELLA: Now prithee do not speak so without jesting;
You’ll make me weep in earnest.
GIOVANNI: What, you will not!
But tell me sweet, canst thou be dared to swear
That thou wilt live to me, and to no other? (2.1.21–7)

The tenderness and mutuality of these scenes generate sympathy for the incestuous lovers. The play validates their mutual attraction by presenting both brother and sister as good-looking, clever, and virtuous. Compared to Annabella’s other suitors—an idiot, a murderer, and a womanizer—Giovanni is an appealing love interest.

While there are any number of tragic heroines who embody the seductive danger of Catholic idolatry but are nevertheless presented with some degree of sympathy (Bianca in *Women Beware Women*, Desdemona in *Othello*, Vittoria in *The White Devil*), Ford’s play not only invites the audience to feel for Giovanni and Annabella, but insistently presents their relationship as a natural and spiritually legitimate bond. Kneeling, they swear their love to each other by the ashes of their shared, dead mother (1.2.243–8). Turning their consanguinity from an obstacle to a justification, Giovanni argues, “Say that we had one father, say one womb / . . . gave us both life and birth; / Are we not therefore each to other bound / So much the more by nature” (1.1.28–31). Appropriating the sign of lawful matrimony, Annabella gives Giovanni a ring their mother left her with the strict instruction “not to give’t / To any but your husband” (2.6.37–8). For Giovanni, it is Annabella’s marriage to another man, not their own incestuous relationship, that threatens to corrupt her soul: “Marriage? Why, that’s to damn her! That’s to prove / Her greedy of a variety of lust” (2.5.41–2). Moments before Giovanni murders Annabella the two share an intimate discussion of how their relationship might continue in the afterlife:

GIOVANNI: A dream, a dream; else in this other world
We should know one another.

57 These are all examples discussed by Diehl, *Staging Reform*, 156–181.
ANNABELLA: So we shall.
GIOVANNI: Have you heard so?
ANNABELLA: For certain.
GIOVANNI: But d’ee think That I shall see you there, you look on me? May we kiss one another, prate or laugh, As we do here?
ANNABELLA: I know not that. (5.5.36–42)

Although this exchange is shot through with doctrinal uncertainty, and stands as prelude to Annabella’s murder, there is, nevertheless, a compelling shared sense of the strength and spiritual reality of their love.

Indeed, the play’s most striking defense of the couple’s incest is Giovanni’s insistence that their love is not sin. From the beginning Giovanni claims himself bound to Annabella “by the links . . . even of religion” (1.1.30–3). Seducing his sister for the first time, he assures her, “I have asked counsel of the Holy Church, / Who tells me I may love you, and ‘tis just / that since I may, I should; and will, yes will” (1.2.231–3).

Certainly Giovanni’s theological arguments are conspicuously unsound. Here, for instance, the swift move he makes from “may” to “should” is an example of probabilism, the principle that in doubtful circumstances an individual may adopt any course of action that is plausibly just, even if an alternative action is more probably correct, which was fiercely condemned by Protestant moral theologians.58 While Giovanni’s religious reasoning is shown to be flawed—the Friar rejects all his arguments in defense of incest, and Giovanni slides into declarations of atheism before his bloody end—his adamant belief that he and his sister share a holy love resonates powerfully with the overall sympathetic depiction of the couple and with Annabella’s moving repentance and death

scenes. Although Annabella confesses her guilt in act five, scene one, searching her conscience and addressing her penitent soliloquy to a merciful God, she maintains her emotional attachment to her brother. When they meet again for the last time in act five, scene five, she kisses him and swears her love. Together these scenes generate a sense of pathos rather than the suggestion that Annabella’s penance is hypocritical. The clear implication is that even though Annabella does not repudiate her feelings for her brother she nevertheless finds spiritual redemption.

While it would be reductive to describe ‘Tis Pity as an extended coded commentary on the contemporary controversy surrounding papal Antichristianity, the play does offer a redemptive reinterpretation of the dramatic tradition in which deadly seductresses personify Catholic idolatry, a reinterpretation that evidences the impact of the recent attempts to recuperate the Roman Church. Regardless of whether or not individual theatergoers consciously recognized ‘Tis Pity’s connection to the debate, the play asks the audience to refrain from condemning Annabella and her incestuous romance as they would Lucrezia Borgia or the Empress. That is, the play’s revision of the familiar tropes of spiritual whoredom reconfigures the audience’s imaginative engagement with the discourse of gynophobic anti-Catholicism. This process may be more emotional than intellective, but it still constitutes a culturally important shift.

Although it is not necessary for the audience to be aware of the religious subtext for it to have an impact, the play’s relationship to the controversy is at times fairly overt. ‘Tis Pity presents incest as a theological problem, a subject of religious debate. In five out of the eight scenes in which Giovanni figures prominently, a significant portion of his lines are devoted to an explicitly theological discussion of incest. The argument that Giovanni,
fresh from university, makes to his tutor Friar Bonaventura in defense of his attraction to
Annabella in the opening scene is a scholarly one. Giovanni’s syllogisms may end in non
sequiturs but he mimics the structures of casuistical reasoning, and draws on key
concepts in case divinity; for example, when he describes the sibling relationship as a
“customary form” (1.1.25), thereby placing incest within the adiaphora, that is, in the
category of “indifferent things” considered in moral and religious thought to be neither
required nor forbidden.59 The first lines spoken onstage foreground the theological
aspect of the incest debate: the Friar cries to Giovanni to “Dispute no more in this, for
know, young man / These are no school-points; nice philosophy / May tolerate unlikely
arguments, / But Heaven admits no jests” (1.1.1–4). It seems plausible that theatergoers
in 1630 could have drawn a connection between the play’s extended
reflection on the theological status of incest with the contemporary controversy
surrounding spiritual whoredom.

In the final stage image of the play, the corrupt, red-robbed Cardinal, having just
confiscated all the “jewels or gold or whatsoever” belonging to the corpses that litter the
stage “to the Pope’s proper use” (5.6.145–7), stands over the body of Annabella, bloody
in her white wedding dress, and delivers the closing lines:

Of one so young, so rich in Nature’s store,
Who could not say, ‘Tis pity she’s a whore? (5.6.155–6)

The wicked cardinal, dressed in red, snatching up jewels and gold for the Pope, makes
manifest the set of anti-Catholic tropes that treat the Roman Church as an amoral religion
of adornment. It could easily have struck audience members as ironic to hear this

59 See Slights, Casuistical Tradition, 29.
emissary of the Whore of Babylon describe Annabella as a “whore.” Indeed, the stage picture presents a visual pun. If the Cardinal’s vestments identify him as a representative of the Antichristian Roman Church, Annabella’s wedding dress may position her as a figure of the true Church, the “sponsa Christi” or bride of Christ. Even if many audience members did not make this specific identification, the tableau presents a striking juxtaposition of spiritual whoredom and purity.

The play’s final line “‘Tis pity she’s a whore” can be read in two ways: with the accent on whore, expressing condemnation, or more sympathetically, with the stress on pity. The tension between these two inflections, always simultaneously available not only in the last line but in general in the play’s treatment of the incestuous lovers, registers in an imaginative, affective form the conflict between recent anti-Calvinist attempts to recuperate the Roman Church and the Calvinist insistence on papal Antichristianity. The fact that Ford took the play’s closing paradox as the title suggests a certain self-consciousness about the way ‘Tis Pity problematizes the category of whoredom. While the play gives incestuous Annabella a nurse whose name literally means “whore” (Putana), and includes an extended scene in which her cuckolded husband drags her about by the hair repeatedly calling her “whore,” “harlot,” “strumpet,” “whore of whores” (4.3.1–20) these elements serve less to confirm Annabella’s corruption than to provide an ironic contrast to the purity of her love for her brother. That is, while the play frequently terms Annabella a whore, it often does so in ways that make the label seem inappropriate or misapplied, as in this scene where a spectator’s sympathy for Annabella’s physical suffering at the hands of her husband could easily undercut the validity of his moral condemnation.
Indeed, the play makes overt appeals for a generous, redemptive interpretation of Annabella and her relationship with Giovanni. Moments before he stabs her Giovanni exclaims:

If ever after times should hear
Of our affections, though perhaps
The laws of conscience and of civil use
May justly blame us, yet when they but know
Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigour
Which would in other incests be abhorred. (5.5.68–72)

Implicitly the speech makes a meta-theatrical address to the audience, who occupy the position of those who “hear of our affections.” Giovanni begs theatergoers to judge their incest charitably. With an aural pun on “abhorred,” he insists that the truth of their love makes their relationship something other than “whoredom.” That is, Giovanni calls on the audience to recognize real love even in a corrupt form, just as the anti-Calvinists sought to recuperate what was true and Christian even in the tainted Catholic Church.

Thomas Ellice’s prefatory poem to the printed playbook reinforces this connection. He writes, “With admiration I beheld this Whore / Adorned with beauty, such as might restore / . . . Her Giovanni in his love unblamed” (1–4). Ellice’s diction could easily have alerted readers to the play’s religious subtext. The phrase “Whore Adorned” invokes the Whore of Babylon in all her corrupt ornamentation, but the wit of the poem’s conceit lies in its surprising approbation, “unblamed . . . admiration,” of this figure so widely and fiercely condemned in Calvinist culture.

’Tis Pity She’s A Whore not only reflects a change in religious culture, it also provides an alternative mode of processing polemical religious debate, one that does not require audience members to adopt a sectarian stance. ‘Tis Pity is neither “pro-Calvinist” nor “pro-Laudian.” No one would be expected to exit the theater declaring the play had
“changed their mind” about papal Antichristianity. While the play’s sympathetic presentation of its heroine marks a shift from the hostile treatment of generic predecessors like Lucrezia and the Empress, ‘Tis Pity’s gestures toward recuperating its lovers are always incomplete, always in tension with the fact of Giovanni and Annabella’s incest. The dramatic crux of the play is the unresolved paradox of a true but corrupt love: a whore we pity, a bride stained with blood. By keeping the question of the legitimacy of the couple’s incestuous love unanswered, the play implicitly leaves open the correlated question of the status of the Roman Church. Whereas the haphazard medley of Catholic and Calvinist references in James Shirley’s 1639 St. Patrick for Ireland seems likely to have disoriented and irritated playgoers, splitting audiences along sectarian lines but satisfying no one with its confused religious politics, ‘Tis Pity, in contrast, delivers an aesthetically unified, but nonsectarian, treatment of the tension of controversy. Indeed, part of the pleasure of this play for theatergoers may have been the ambivalent emotional experience it offers of material that in other genres was handled with extreme certainty.

‘Tis Pity translates the strident, competing claims of polemical debate into a richly ambiguous fantasy. Admittedly, polemical tracts can produce effects that stray from or run counter to their intended claims, particularly as these works are often structured around the very argument they seek to refute. Polemic is, in this sense, a dialogic genre: tract answers tract. Writers of polemic frequently quote extensive passages of their opponent’s work. Some works of controversy literally take the form of dialogue, as seen above in the case of the debate between Babylonius and Orthodoxus in Burton’s Plea to
While polemic can be polyvocal, it is always propositional: the burden on the reader is to agree or disagree. But plays tend to elicit forms of engagement other than assent or disagreement. Despite early modern theories of drama that identify moral instruction as the primary function of the theater, and despite individual plays that promote overt agendas like *The Whore of Babylon*, or *The Game at Chess* discussed in chapter one, early modern plays by and large invite their audiences into imaginative experiences that cannot be reduced to a set of claims. While polemical debate solicits rational-critical thinking from its readers, theatrical performance addresses other faculties. A play asks audience members to like or dislike, to pay attention or become distracted, to be startled, sigh, laugh, desire, wince. These too can be powerful forms of public engagement with controversial questions.

**Polemical Patricks**

While *‘Tis Pity* blends opposing strands of the debate around papal Antichristianity into a dramatic fantasy that offers its audiences a more ambivalent perspective from which to view the controversy, *St. Patrick* juxtaposes sectarian accounts of the saint in a choppier fashion. The play does not synthesize Catholic and Calvinist interpretations of Patrick’s life, or offer an alternative to them. Shirley’s play moves abruptly between conflicting confessional material, in a way that seems likely to have alienated Irish audiences and deepened sectarian animosity among playgoers, who were, like their London counterparts, ideologically diverse.

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Patrons of the Werburgh Street Theater in Dublin, Ireland’s first commercial playhouse established in 1635–6, would have been conspicuously mixed in terms of socio-religious affiliation. In one sense, the Werburgh Street Theater would likely have been associated with its patron Sir Thomas Wentworth, Lord Deputy of Ireland (1633–1640), part of whose brief was to bring the Church of Ireland into closer alignment with the Church of England under Archbishop Laud. But Werburgh Street audiences would have also included a mixture of Old English and New English merchants and nobles. The Old English belonged to families that had been settled in Ireland since the twelfth century. They professed loyalty to the English crown but were largely Catholic. The New English were Protestant settlers and administrators who had come to Ireland after the Reformation and tended to have strong Calvinist or Presbyterian leanings. Henry Burnell, the first Irish playwright, stands as an example of the way rival socio-religious groups intersected in the Dublin theater scene. Burnell, himself an Old English Catholic royalist, whose *Landgartha* was performed in Werburgh Street in 1640, was connected

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by blood or marriage to both Old and New English families, as well as to Wentworth himself.\textsuperscript{63}

*St. Patrick*, a play about a beloved national saint, was likely a conscious attempt on Shirley’s part to cater to his Irish audience.\textsuperscript{64} Shirley had been invited to Ireland in 1636 by the supervisor of Werburgh Street in the hopes that the preeminent London playwright would bolster the prestige of the fledgling theater. The play, however, seems to have been a commercial failure. The prologue promises a “Second Part” of the story of St. Patrick if the first is well received, but the promised sequel never materialized and Shirley returned to London the following year (A1r). Why did this play flop? One explanation is that Shirley’s treatment of his subject matter confused and alienated both Catholic and Calvinist segments of the audience. In the 1630s St. Patrick became an embattled figure, subject to multiple attempts at appropriation from competing socio-religious groups. The contest among rival factions to claim St. Patrick as an ideological ancestor was representative of a larger struggle among native Irish, Old English, New

\textsuperscript{63} Fletcher, *Drama, Performance, and Polity*, 276–7; Deana Rankin, “Burnell, Henry (fl. 1640–1654),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4054 (accessed 18 October 2009). Shirley’s own confessional affiliation is difficult to parse. While many scholars still accept Anthony Wood’s claim that Shirley converted to Catholicism sometime around 1618, there is little evidence to support this account. Shirley subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles in 1617. He was ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1619 but left the priesthood four years later. He may have been rumored to be Catholic because he received patronage from the Catholic Queen Henrietta Marie, but in the early 1630s and in 1641 his children were baptized in the Church of England, and toward the end of his life, in 1662, he signed the Bill of Uniformity. His relationship to Laud is also ambiguous. Wood reports, again without corroboration, that Shirley was a favorite of Laud’s at Oxford. Ira Clark, “Shirley, James (bap. 1596, d. 1666),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25427 (accessed October 18, 2009). However, Martin Butler has called attention to the strong anti-Laudian sentiment that runs through Shirley’s 1641 play *The Cardinal*. Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis: 1632–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 236. The evidence, then, regarding Shirley’s personal religious beliefs is inconclusive. We will never know for certain whether Shirley was Protestant or Catholic, or what kind of Protestant (Laudian or Calvinist?) or Catholic (crypto- or openly practicing?) he may have been, or whether his beliefs changed over time. Any number of rumors about Shirley’s confessional identity may have been circulating in Dublin at the time of the play’s production.

\textsuperscript{64} Dutton, “Werburgh Street Theater.” See also Albert Wertheim, “The Presentation of James Shirley’s ‘St. Patrick for Ireland’ at the First Irish Playhouse,” *Notes and Queries* 14 (1967): 212–5.
English, and Laudian settlers for cultural and political hegemony. For Shirley in 1639 to stage a play in Dublin called *St. Patrick for Ireland* was immediately to raise the question, whose Patrick and whose Ireland?

Although St. Patrick had long occupied a privileged position in Irish Catholic devotional life, there was an attempt in the period to co-opt the national saint as a proto-Protestant, the founding father of the Church of Ireland. In 1631 the Calvinist theologian James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, published *A Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and British*. In it Ussher seeks to demonstrate doctrinal unity between ancient Irish Christianity and the Church of Ireland. *A Discourse* describes the form of Christianity St. Patrick brought to Ireland in terms that would be familiar to an Irish Protestant: no Purgatory, idolatry or transubstantiation; communion in two kinds; confession not a means of absolution; marriage not a sacrament; clerical celibacy not mandatory. Ussher gets around the embarrassing problem of St. Patrick’s monastic legacy by describing ancient Irish monasteries as “seminaries of the ministry, being as it were so many colleges of learned divines,” in essence miniature versions of godly Trinity College Dublin, founded to promote Protestantism in Ireland, where Ussher himself had been the first professor of theological controversies.

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Unsurprisingly, Usher’s revisionist treatment of St. Patrick infuriated Irish Catholics.

An Irish Franciscan at Louvain, B.B., translated Jocelyn of Furness’s twelfth century life of St. Patrick to discredit Ussher’s account. B.B. insists that:

…[St. Patrick’s] pen never delivered, his tongue never uttered, not himself never practiced indeed any thing that might have the least colour of favoring or establishing that Religion, which the preachers of the fift Ghospel proudly vaunt, and vainely boast, to be the doctrine and fayth of the Primitive Church. And since they obtrude their new found Ghospel on you, under the specious vizard of venerate antiquity; loe we offer here St. Patrickes life, written by a learned pen 400 years ago . . . Loe I say we offer them St. Patrickes life, who lived in the purer times of christianity, let them examine it, let them search it, & point us out what they shall find in it to cou[n]tenance their cause, or to advance their religion: but sure I am that they will shrinke from such a disquisition, as would turne to their notable prejudice and open confusion, by discovering the fondnes and novelty of their religion.

B.B. goes on to list conspicuously Catholic elements in Jocelyn’s *Life*, including nuns and tonsures. In part Ussher and B.B. are engaged in a familiar polemical wrangle over which Church gets to claim continuity with primitive Christianity. But B.B. is also anxious to thwart Ussher’s attempt to tie Protestantism to Irish national feeling.

Ussher’s work on St. Patrick tries to generate a sense of the *Irishness* of Irish Protestantism. Repeatedly, he uses phrases like, “our Patrick,” “our Brendan,” “our

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67 James Ussher’s *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and British* appeared as an appendix to Christopher Sibthorp, *A Friendly Advertisement to the Pretended Catholickes of Ireland* (Dublin: Society of Stationers, 1623). Although some of the written debate surrounding the confessional identity of St. Patrick appears in the 1620s, this controversy was given fresh currency in the 1630s by the publication of the extended version of Ussher’s argument in 1631 as well as by the wrangle over Lough Derg. Identified in the thirteenth century as the physical entrance to Purgatory believed to have been opened or discovered by St. Patrick, Lough Derg in Donegal was an important pilgrimage site until 1632, when it destroyed by 20 armed men under the supervision of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher, James Spottiswoode, at the behest of the Privy Council for Ireland. For a Protestant account of these proceedings, which records some of the resistance of Irish natives to this act of iconoclasm, see Henry Jones, *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory: Containing the Description, Originall, Progressse, and Demolition of That Superstitious Place* (London: Richard Royston, 1647). Queen Henrietta Maria appealed, unsuccessfully, to Wentworth during his tenure as Lord Deputy of Ireland to have the pilgrimage site reopened; Morash, *History of Irish Theater*, 8.

national church,” “our ancestors.” B.B. rejects Ussher’s attempt to inscribe the Church of Ireland as a truly Irish Church and insists on a Catholic Irish past and Catholic national identity. He dedicates his translation to his “deere Countreymen”. He asks:

what is more powerfull to stirre up in your breasts the zeale of Catholike religion . . . then to offer unto your intellectuall view S. Patricke the Abraham from whome you descended, and Irland the Sara, by whom you were borne? Figuring a Catholic St. Patrick as husband to the Irish nation and father of its people naturalizes Irish Catholicism; equating Patrick with Abraham and Ireland with Sara gives B.B.’s Catholic account of early Irish Christianity the air of scriptural authority and authenticity. The status St. Patrick had long held in Irish Catholic devotional life made the attempt by the Archbishop Ussher to appropriate the saint as a spiritual ancestor of the Calvinist Church of Ireland particularly contentious. The struggle between Calvinists and Catholics to position themselves as the legitimate ecclesiastical heirs of St. Patrick was synecdochic for the larger sectarian contest to determine the nature of Irish national identity.

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70 B.B., Life, iii.

71 Ibid.

72 While it is accurate to describe Ussher in 1631 as seeking to absorb St. Patrick into a Calvinist Church of Ireland, the mid-1630s saw an intra-Protestant power struggle between the more fully reformed, Calvinist, sometimes Presbyterian-leaning Church of Ireland under Ussher and the more ceremonial, Arminian Church of England under Laud. Part of Wentworth’s mission as Lord Deputy was to subordinate the Church of Ireland to that of England both in terms of worship and church hierarchy. In 1634 Wentworth and Laud both backed the appointment of an Arminian, William Chappell, as provost of Trinity College Dublin, which had traditionally been a puritan stronghold. In the same year Wentworth tried to impose the English canons and Thirty-nine Articles on the Irish Church, and to subject the Irish Church to closer administrative oversight from Canterbury. Ussher resisted. The result was a compromise in which the Irish Church conceded some points of ceremony but maintained a degree of formal autonomy. Still, it was clear by 1635 that the balance of power between Protestant factions in Ireland had shifted. Dismayed by the ascendancy of the Arminian party in Dublin, Ussher withdrew from church politics to spend more time in his Drogheda library. McCafferty, “‘God Bless Your Free Church of Ireland’”; Alan Ford, “Ussher, James (1581–1656),” in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, October 2009 online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28034 (accessed 18 October 2009).
The plot of Shirley’s play centers on the efforts of the pagan Irish to resist St. Patrick’s attempts to convert the island to Christianity. Repeatedly, the play’s pagan priest, Archimagus, sends spirits or demons to attack Patrick, while the pagan king, Leogarius, tries to kill the saint through more mundane means: deceit and poison. St. Patrick is miraculously preserved from all attempts on his life and over the course of the play converts the Queen and several members of the court. In the final scene Archimagus sends snakes against Patrick and his converts. Patrick banishes them. Archimagus sinks into a fiery pit, and King Leogarius feigns conversion out of fear. The play invites two incompatible interpretations. It is by turns the story of the conversion of a pagan country by a Catholic saint, and an anti-Catholic play in which pagan worship stands in for Catholic idolatry.\footnote{For a reading of the play as a neutrally “Christian” rather than a specifically “Catholic” triumph over paganism, see John P. Turner Jr., \textit{A Critical Edition of James Shirley’s St. Patrick for Ireland} (New York: Garland, 1979), 64; quoted in Dutton, “Werburgh Street Theater,” \textit{Localizing Caroline Drama}, 144.}

\textit{St Patrick for Ireland} is a cacophonous play that crowds together conflicting religious material. Particularly contradictory is the plays’ treatment of the physicality of Catholic worship. While the miracles and ceremonial acts of devotion performed by St. Patrick are celebrated in the play as outward signs of holiness, these scenes are intermixed with others that present Catholic materiality as idolatry.

The play, like B.B.’s hagiography which Shirley used as his primary source, devotes significant attention to miracles performed by the saint. Shirley’s St. Patrick is impervious to fire and poison. He commands snakes. He raises the dead. Angels appear onstage to protect him. The pagan nobleman Dichu is physically unable to lift a sword against him. Protestants frequently criticized the emphasis on miracles and wonders in Catholic hagiography. The prominence of miracles in Shirley’s play may have been
understood by audience members as characteristic of a Catholic sensibility. *St. Patrick’s* stage effects recall elements of medieval Catholic drama. Hugh MacMullan speculates that the play may have drawn on depictions of St. Patrick’s expulsion of the snakes in early Irish ecclesiastical plays. Certainly at least two stage images strongly evoke similar visual moments from *English* medieval cycle drama. The image of Dichu unable to raise his sword against St. Patrick visually recalls the inability of the soldiers to lift Pilate’s banner, which bows spontaneously and uncontrollably in the presence of Christ in the York Tilemaker’s pageant *Christ Before Pilate II: The Judgement*. As the play’s last big stage effect, Archimagus sinks into the ground, presumably through a trap, while delivering the lines:

> A fire, a dreadful fire is underneath me,  
> And all those fiends, that were my servants here,  
> Look like tormentors, and all seem to strive,  
> Who first shall catch my falling flesh upon  
> Their burning pikes. There is a Power above  
> Our gods, I see too late. I fall! I fall! (Shirley, 13v)

This stage image references, in an overt, un-secularized way, the Hell-mouths of cycle plays like the Chester Tanners’ *Fall of Lucifer*. That is, both the prominence of Patrick’s miracles and the theatrical style in which they are presented signal a positive connection to Catholic culture.

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74 Dutton, “Werburgh Street Theater,” 144.


*St. Patrick for Ireland* not only uses the theatrical conventions of medieval Catholic cycle drama to produce some of its onstage miracles, but also presents recognizably Catholic devotional practices as spiritually valid. St. Patrick makes his entrance with an angel, Victor, while “*bearing a banner with a cross*” and leading a procession of priests singing in Latin (B1v). The priests wear tonsures and hoods. This stage moment would read as unmistakably Catholic to an early modern audience. The frontispiece of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* parodies just such a procession, complete with a banner of the cross, by including the arm of a devil reaching over the scene. The King highlights the strong elements of ritual devotion in the entrance, saying, “Observe their ceremony” (B1v). Calling critical attention to heightened ceremony is a primary trope of anti-Catholic polemic, but here the obviously Catholic ceremonial procession has positive value. It introduces the virtuous hero of the play, St. Patrick. Even the King describes the Latin hymn as “harmon[ious]” (B1v).

On the other hand, *St. Patrick for Ireland* is also a virulently anti-Catholic play, which repeatedly uses pagan worship as a stand-in for Catholic idolatry.\(^78\) *St. Patrick* literalizes Calvinist iconoclastic discourse. The play has three false gods, actual imposters dressed up as statues of divinities. The stage directions introducing the first scene of false worship read, “*An altar discover’d, two Idols upon it* [actually Ferochus and Endarius], *Archimagus and priests, lights and incense prepar’d by Rodamant*” (C4v). Here the two young noblemen are said to be disguised as “Idolls,” a term of opprobrium. That is, they are impersonating gods that are already false. The stage directions specify the presence

\(^78\) Cf. Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martyr* (London: Printed by Bernard Alsop for Thomas Jones, 1622.)
of candles and incense, elements of Catholic ceremony frequently targeted in Calvinist iconoclastic writing. Moreover, the scene opens with a servant arranging the candles and incense on the altar. This itself produces a demystifying effect, like watching a stagehand set up props. Rodamant, the servant, then delivers the line, “These be new deities, made since yesterday” (C4v). In terms of the plot this is accurate, Ferochus and Endarius have only recently begun disguising themselves as gods to escape the death sentence laid on them by the King as punishment for their father Dichu’s conversion. But as the opening line to a scene that shows false gods worshipped with heightened ceremony, the reference to “new deities” echoes the Calvinist accusation that Catholic worship was riddled with “innovations,” relatively recent ceremonial accretions that disfigured or departed from the purity of early Christianity.79

In stark contrast to the legitimate miracles performed by St. Patrick, Ferochus and Endarius then perform a false miracle. When the King, Queen and court come in to worship the idols with kneeling and singing, the supposed statues seem to come to life and speak, condemning Patrick. Archimagus, who has orchestrated the fraudulent miracle, shamelessly instructs the court, “With devotion / Expect what follows, and keep reverend distance” (D1r). It is significant that the audience is in on the joke from the beginning. At the end of Shakespeare’s Winter’s Tale, even audience members who already suspect that the statue is really Hermione are invited to experience the “transformation” as a wonder. But this scene from the outset deflates any possible sense of the miraculous. The exposure of Catholic miracles as tricks is a stock trope of English

79 See, for example, John Jewell, “An Homily Against the Perill of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches,” in Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed To Be Read in Churches (London: Ralph Hodgkinson and John Norton for Richard Whitaker, 1640), 11–2.
anti-Catholic polemic. As Huston Diehl has pointed out, foundational Protestant texts like *Acts and Monuments* are full of stories in which miraculous statues that seem to move by themselves are discovered to be mere puppets manipulated by unscrupulous priests.  

The play also dramatizes the anti-Catholic trope in which idolatry is represented as spiritual adultery. This connection between adultery and idolatry was a cultural commonplace, which the play makes literal by showing false gods engaging in illicit sexual behavior in religious space. Having performed the false miracle, Ferochus and Endarius dance with and kiss their mistresses in the temple. Rodamant, the comic servant, provides running commentary on the unfitness of having an amorous encounter in a place of worship. He quips sarcastically, “here’s like to be holy doings” (D1v), with a pun on *doings* in the sense of sexual acts. Even Endarius is shocked when Archimagus proposes that the lovers dance. “I’the temple!” he exclaims (D1v). A later scene finds Ferochus and Endarius again in the temple dallying with the King’s daughters, Ethne and Fedella. Here the lovers not only violate sacred space, but also blasphemously use religious language to express erotic pleasure. Ethne declares herself “safe in the arms / of my dear servant.” To which Endarius responds, “You make it heaven / By gracing me” (G3r). Ferochus speaks of “blest enjoyings,” and Endarius of “blest” kisses (G3r). While it is certainly true that the eroticization of religious language was a common trope in secular love poetry, the fact that the lovers are kissing and embracing in an actual temple makes it difficult to read this language simply as a neutral romantic metaphor. Instead, by showing sexual acts performed by false gods in an explicitly religious space complete

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80 Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*, 1–39.
with incense and an altar, the scene literalizes the familiar discourse that treats Catholic idolatry as “spiritual whoredom,” a trope in which the physicality of Catholic worship is understood as a depraved and excessive materiality, the “seduction” of the “Romish harlot.”

*St. Patrick*, then, is a play that celebrates Catholic miracles and exposes them as false, that shows reverence for Catholic ceremony and treats candles and incense as the stage props of false gods. Overloaded with contradictory religious tropes, the play teases audiences with the possibility of a sectarian reading but refuses to adopt a clear or coherent polemical stance. In *St. Patrick for Ireland* a saint positively coded as Catholic converts the Irish from paganism negatively coded as Catholic idolatry. The density of competing sectarian material shows in miniature a larger struggle for cultural space among rival socio-religious factions in Dublin. The juxtaposition of opposing tropes in *St. Patrick* invokes sectarian feelings but makes an interpretation of the play as either pro-Catholic or pro-Calvinist impossible. Controversial material here registers cultural gridlock but does not advance a coherent religious agenda.

The play’s polemical content no longer functions as polemic, but neither does it present an imaginative alternative. While market pressure to draw a broad audience into the new Dublin theater may have motivated Shirley’s decision to incorporate both Catholic and Calvinist material on the saint’s life, the play’s polyvocality effectively promises incompatible confessional payoffs, that it then fails to deliver. I suspect Irish audiences left this play irritated, and with heightened sectarian animosity. While this is something we might expect from a play with an overt and combative religious agenda,

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81 *Geneva Bible* marginal commentary to Revelations 27:8.
like *A Game at Chess*, it is surprising to find it here in a play that would have had a financial incentive to appeal to Irish playgoers across the religious divide. If Shirley was trying to unify his audience around a version of St. Patrick accessible to both confessional groups, he failed. In a similar fashion, as I will discuss in my next chapter, Henslowe’s attempt to produce a group of Protestant martyr plays that would appeal to the sympathies of a godly London audience was subverted by the multiple and complex conditions of theatrical production. Mixed-confessional theater did not uniformly generate religious ambivalence, cross-identification, or proto-ecumenical effects. What it did produce were unpredictable, and to a degree uncontrollable, configurations of the available materials of post-Reformation religious culture.
Chapter Three: 
Martyr Acts: Playing with Foxe’s Martyrs on the Public Stage

An early modern theatergoer buying a ticket for a play based on John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* would have expected to see onstage pious Protestant martyrs, bad Catholics, and the triumphant onward march of providential English history. But the “Protestant martyr plays,” as Michael O’Connell terms them, that appeared between 1599 and 1606 baffle these expectations. *Sir John Oldcastle* (1599), *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1600), *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1602), *When You See Me You Know Me* (1605), *1 and 2 If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* (1605 and 1606) all stage stories of the lives and deaths of pious Protestants that would be familiar to audiences from Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, or from cheaper, shorter versions of Foxe’s work like Timothy Bright’s 1589 *Abridgment of the Book of Acts and Monuments*.¹

¹ This list excludes a number of titles that Michael O’Connell, Marsha Robinson, and others include in their work on the genre. As I have suggested in the introduction, although *Sir Thomas More* (1594) dramatizes the life of a Catholic saint, it functions as a model for later Protestant martyr plays. I exclude *The Virgin Martyr* (1620) on the grounds that it treats early Christian rather than English history and *The Whore of Babylon* (1606) because, as staged allegory, it operates in a different theatrical mode than the plays considered above. I leave out *The Duchess of Suffolk* (1624) and Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* (1613) because of their temporal isolation from each other and from the earlier cluster of Protestant martyr plays. Arguably, *Henry VIII* is in dialogue with these earlier plays but still seems to be responding to a different political moment and is therefore better considered separately. As I argue below, the plays I have included are not only joined in terms of content but also through material practices of production. It seems likely, or at least possible, that the two lost Wolsey plays of 1601, *The Rising of Cardinal Wolsey* and *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey*, as well as the lost sequel to *1 Sir John Oldcastle*, may also have been part of this theatrical trend. All of the main characters of the plays listed above appear in Timothy Bright, *An Abridgment of the Book of Acts and Monuments of the Church* (London: I. Windet, 1589). Bright’s six page version of Foxe’s account of Oldcastle, much like the play, emphasizes Oldcastle’s loyalty to the King and rejects the possibility of his involvement in the rebellion (1:310–16); Bright’s short biography of Cromwell records almost all of the major incidents that appear in the stage version of his life (2:42–6); similarly, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* closely follows Bright’s account of Elizabeth’s trials under Mary (2:268–78); Wyatt’s rebellion and beheading as well as the beheading of Jane Grey both appear in Bright (2:106); Cranmer, a key figure in *When You See Me You Know Me*, also appears in a pious death scene in Bright’s *Abridgment* (2:202). The debt that *Sir Thomas Wyatt* and *1 If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* owe to Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* is remarked in John King, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302–3. David Loades recognizes the influence of *Acts and Monuments* on Samuel Rowley’s *When You See Me You Know Me* and Thomas Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me You Known Nobody*; David Loades, “The Early Reception,” The Unabridged
The fact that these plays are based primarily on Acts and Monuments, or on more affordable adaptations of that book, would generate certain audience expectations; namely, that the plays would be hagiographical, providential, anti-Catholic, triumphalist treatments of the history of English Protestantism. Although Acts and Monuments was appropriated by both nonconformist and conformist Church of England Protestants, there was overlap as well as division in the ways that readers across the confessional spectrum of Protestantism understood Foxe’s book. Acts and Monuments is a providential, hagiographical history that consistently represents the Catholic Church as anti-Christian. So while readers disagreed about whether, for example, the book demonstrated the special election of the English nation as a whole or only of the scattered true church within it, playgoers walking into the theater to see If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, a dramatization of Foxe’s account of Elizabeth’s persecution under Mary, would reasonably have expected to see a play that demonized Catholics, presented a saintly Elizabeth, and showed the hand of Providence guiding English history toward the triumph of true religion. This chapter demonstrates how these plays foil some of the expectations raised by their source material.

Audiences would have been able to recognize these plays as a group not only because they were drawn from the same source, but also because, except for Thomas Lord Cromwell, these plays were all produced by companies managed by Philip Henslowe: the

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Admiral’s Men, Worcester’s Men and its successor the Queen Anne’s Men. Michael O’Connell argues that these “Protestant martyr plays” were designed by the Henslowe companies “to entice into the theatre those [moderate puritans] that had previously shunned it.” Even if these plays were not intended to target moderate puritans as O’Connell suggests, they still appeal to a sensibility of pious Protestant triumphalism. But if Henslowe was trying to appeal to a godly market demographic, the vagaries of theatrical production instead generated plays that develop tensions—rather than the triumphalism—present in Foxe, and often contain material that simply cannot be reconciled with the basic religious politics of their primary source.

In what follows I focus on the potential of theatrical production to disrupt the transmission of religious ideology, even in a genre that seems as ideologically straightforward as the Protestant martyr plays. The disruptions I chart are not all of the same kind. Sometimes, a polyvocal line or scenario causes divided responses between confessional groups within a theater audience, as happens in When You See Me You Know Me. Or, as in Sir Thomas Wyatt, the political context of performance pulls a play towards a set of concerns that seem incompatible with the ideological commitments of the play’s author(s). Or, sometimes, the practice of recycling theatrical material injects into a play passages with religious implications that are in direct opposition to the

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4 O’Connell, Idolatrous Eye, 113.

5 Here I am arguing against Marsha Robinson who argues that these plays (which she terms Foxean history plays) reproduce Foxe’s historiographical framework. Marsha Robinson, Writing the Reformation: Acts and Monuments and the Jacobean History Play (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002).
religious politics of the play as a whole, as is the case in Sir John Oldcastle. In a form of cultural production like the public theater with multiple agents and a wide range of redeployed cultural materials and performance contexts, there are as many ways of disrupting even what seem the most fixed ideological positions as there are ways of creating meaning.

Mixed Audiences and Unfinished Reformations

Certainly these plays contain many of the elements one would expect to find in plays based on Foxe’s Acts and Monuments. What is interesting about this genre is that it is both strongly hagiographical and at times strongly disruptive of the hagiographical and providential histories it proposes. Samuel Rowley’s When You See Me You Know Me dramatizes part of the reign of Henry VIII. It focuses primarily on the birth and early life of Edward VI, presented as a budding Protestant hero, and the fall of Thomas Cromwell, depicted as a meddling priest whose usurpation of royal authority King Henry checks in the play’s closing scenes, implicitly affirming the Church of England principle of royal supremacy in matters of both church and state. The play contains a number of scenes that linger over the education of the pious Prince Edward at the hands of his tutor, the Protestant reformer and Marian martyr Thomas Cranmer. These scenes are modeled on Foxe’s account of Prince Edward’s extraordinary precocity and piety as a child, and Cranmer’s affectionate supervision of young Edward’s religious education.  

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music, as well as his tender-heartedness and wit. In Rowley’s play Edward demonstrates all these qualities; one scene in particular stands out as an extended exhibition of the young prince’s “towardness” in learning and religious zeal. In this scene, after impressive displays of Edward’s good nature and mastery of logic, Latin, and theology, the boy and the martyr sing. Cranmer directly and at length (17 lines) connects earthly music to divine harmony, saying “Musicke is heavenly, for in Heaven is Musicke.” Following this speech and in the context of the tradition in native English drama by which heaven or the divine is represented through harmonious singing, Edward and Cranmer’s song generates a sense of sanctity.

Part of the theatrical appeal of *When You See Me You Know Me* is clearly its dramatization of Protestant hagiography. The scene described above goes on for some time without at all advancing the plot, which suggests that it had a strong affective payoff for early modern audiences. But the play also picks up on some of the disruptive ambiguities of Foxe’s book. Foxe’s representation of Henry VIII—the part-time Protestant reformer who also burned a number of martyrs to the true faith—is, unsurprisingly, ambivalent. Rowley’s Henry VIII also demonstrates conspicuously erratic religious sympathies. He is by turns adamantly anti-Lutheran—“But by my George, I sweare, if Henry live / Ile hunt base Luther through all Germany” (C3r)—and receptive to Protestant thought when it appears naturalized as the common sense observations of a woman, and therefore a “weake Scholler,” Queen Katherine (H3v).

What seems at first a fairly simple play that celebrates the onward march of English

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7 Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me You Know Me* (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1605), H1v. Subsequent citations will be listed parenthetically.

8 For a concise example of Foxe’s ambivalence toward King Henry VIII, see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, bk. 8, 1291.
Protestantism, in fact prompts conflicted assessments of the course of English religious history.

Rowley’s play draws out interpretive divisions between groups in the theater audience with different confessional leanings. Specifically, the play opens a gap between the likely responses of hot Protestants, who sought further reform, and conformist Church of England Protestants. At the end of the play, the fall of Cardinal Wolsey stands in for Henry’s larger break from Rome, but it is clear that Prince Edward, not King Henry, figures the promise of a Protestant English future. As the king declares to Cranmer, “That what our age shall leave unfinished, / In his faire raigne shall be accomplished” (F2v). In a literal sense Henry here promises or foretells something that for the audience has already happened: the historical Edward VI did further the reformation. Arguably, such an understanding on the part of the audience makes this moment function as an affirmation of a teleological, providential history of English Protestantism.9

Alternatively, the play might also be understood to disrupt the teleological history it invokes. The key question here is whether or not individual audience members in 1605 would consider the work of the reformation “accomplished.” In the early years of the seventeenth century, the desire for further ecclesiastical reform sometimes manifested as hopeful investment in James I’s eldest son, Prince Henry.10 In this light, the play’s attention to the pious young prince no longer seems proof of the fulfillment of God’s providential design for the advancement of English Protestantism, but rather presents a history of the reformation that is still uncomfortably “unfinished.” The play’s publication

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9 Marsha Robinson makes just this point in Writing the Reformation, 18.

history enforces such a reading. The printer Nathaniel Butter’s title page places the two “Prince[s] of Wales” side by side. Indeed, Butter’s decision to reprint the play in 1613, the year of Henry’s death, suggests that *When You See Me You Know Me* may have been understood to make a connection between the two princes, a connection that would function as a critique of the English Church as only imperfectly reformed, rather than an affirmation of the accomplishment of God’s providential plan in England’s ecclesiastical history.

Here, the same set of references elicits conflicting responses from groups within the audience with different confessional orientations. This example suggests the value of attention to internal interpretive differences within Protestantism. Not only are there different kinds of Protestants at any given historical moment, but the shape and meaning of confessional leanings within Protestantism change over time, and are contingent on shifting religious, political, and cultural conditions. These differences inform the interpretive framework through which members of a confessionally mixed theater audience make meaning of a play.

**Religious Thought Experiments in Theater**

Above I suggested some of the ways the confessional affiliations of audience members determine how they make sense of a play. Now I turn to ways a play can invite audience members to suspend some of the religious beliefs they maintain in real life to participate imaginatively in thought experiments that fall outside the ideological boundaries of their real-world confessional identities. This “suspension of religious belief” is similar to the kind of suspension of moral belief an audience member participates in when he or she enjoys watching Richard III murder his relatives, despite
believing that murdering one’s relatives in real life is wrong. In this section I look at a play, *I If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, that is deeply invested in a narrative of providential deliverance but momentarily suspends that deliverance narrative to consider a different kind of historical plot. Deliverance narratives carry significant weight throughout the broad spectrum of English Protestantism; a large portion of the play’s audience would likely find this kind of dramatic narrative congruous with their real world beliefs. But this play, I will argue, temporarily suspends its deliverance narrative and in so doing opens up space for the audience to experiment imaginatively with an alternative schema that might organize historical experience.

Heywood’s *I If You Know Nobody You Know Not Me: The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth* dramatizes the persecution of Elizabeth under Queen Mary, and her providential deliverance from death at the hands of her Catholic enemies. The play follows almost to the letter Foxe’s account in *Acts and Monuments*, which is subtitled “The myraculous preservation of Lady Elizabeth, nowe Queene of England, from extreme calamitie and danger of life, in time of Q. Marie her sister.” Heywood takes not only the major incidents of the play from Foxe (e.g., Elizabeth’s transportation to court while deathly ill, her imprisonment in the Tower, her interrogation by Mary, her time under house arrest, King Phillip’s mercy toward her, her constant fear of death, her deliverance from danger, and her accession to the throne); but reproduces minor incidents, gestures, and bits of dialogue from Foxe as well (Elizabeth’s collapse on the

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Tower steps, the boy who brings her flowers in the Tower, her words “tanquam ovis” to her followers, the Clown who suggests her strict keeper interrogate a goat found near her as a potential spy, some of her responses to Mary’s interrogation, and King Phillip’s concealment behind a screen during that exchange). Of all the Protestant martyr plays, *I If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* most closely follows its source text. In general Heywood’s play embraces Foxe’s model of English history in which providence advances the cause of English Protestantism. *I If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* has (mostly) a teleological imagination. Like the stories of the Armada or the Gunpowder Plot, this play tells a story of providential deliverance, not only of Elizabeth but also of the English nation. The play traces the near martyrdoms (the “troubles”) of Elizabeth’s early life so that it can end with Elizabeth safe, crowned, kissing and raising an English Bible: both she and the nation providentially delivered from the Catholic Mary.

Unexpectedly, just before this climactic last scene, the play’s triumphalism is suspended. The penultimate scene opens on two Clowns on their way to a bonfire to celebrate Elizabeth’s accession. One says to the other:

Come neighbor, come away, every man his faggot,
And his double pot, for joy of the old Queenes death,
Let bells ring, and children sing.
For we may have cause to remember,
The seaventeenth day of November.\(^{13}\)

This date, November 17, would be familiar to contemporary audiences as Accession Day, the commemoration of Elizabeth’s accession celebrated annually from the late 1560s

\(^{13}\) Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody; or, the Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*, (London: Printed for Nathaniel Butter, 1605), G2v. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the body of the text.
through the Stuart period in much the way the Clown describes: through communal
drinking, the ringing of church bells, and public bonfires. The audience is watching a
celebration they themselves participate in annually. For English Protestants, Accession
Day marked not simply the accession of a single monarch but a providential turning point
in English history, a deliverance from the persecutions of the Marian regime and the
promise of the development of God’s true church.

But the Lord of Tame interrupts these bonfire builders, saying,

And you do well: and yet me thinke ‘twere fit,
To spend some funeral teares upon her hearce
Who while she liv’d was dear unto you all. (G2v)

In 1605 the “Old Queen” whose death Tame asks the revelers to pause to mourn surely
calls to mind Elizabeth as well as Mary. This in itself is odd. In one sense the play
clearly marks Elizabeth’s accession as a seismic shift in English history. Indeed, the
difference between Mary’s reign and Elizabeth’s was a commonplace of Accession day
sermons.\(^\text{14}\) But here, momentarily, Elizabeth and Mary are collapsed. Tame continues:

Did you not love her father when he liv’d
As deerly as you ere did love any
And yet rejoiced at his funeral
Likewise her brother, [de]em’d him deere,
Yet once departed, joyfully you sung,
Runne to make bone-fires, to proclaime your love
Unto the new, forgetting still the old:
Now she is gone . . .
Were it not fit a while to mone her hearse,
And dutifullly there rejoice the tother;
Had you the wisest and the lovinest Prince,
That ever swayd a scepter in the world,
This is the love he shall have after life. (G2v)

\(^{14}\) For example, “Mary left [England] in war, Elizabeth hath govern’d it in peace; Mary left it in debt, Elizabeth
hath enrich’d it; Mary left it weak, Elizabeth hath strengthen’d it…Mary banishes true religion, Elizabeth hath
restored it; Mary persecuteth, Elizabeth hath defendeth it; Mary cast it down, Elizabeth hath advance’d it.”
Isaac Colfe, *A Sermon Preached on the Queenes Day being the 17 of November, 1587 at the town of Lidd in
Kent* (London, 1588); quoted in Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 54.
In a play that treats Elizabeth as a kind of Protestant saint whose accession marks a providential turning point in English history, here is a passage that considers Henry, Edward, Mary and (implicitly) Elizabeth together without placing them in a historiographical framework governed by confessional difference. Where we might expect a confessionally divided schema of Tudor history, what surfaces instead in this speech is a sense of discomfort with the relative willingness or ease with which the English people (at least outwardly) conformed to the religio-political changes of the mid-sixteenth century.

Tame’s interruption undercuts the audience’s identification with the bonfire builders. The revelers’ defense seems crudely accommodationist, “We must live by the quicke, and not by the dead” (G2v). But when they leave to “make a bonfire and be merry,” Tame’s response is ambivalent: “I blame you not, nor do I you commend / For you will still the strongest side defend” (G3r). This scene breaks from the play’s triumphalist trajectory. It articulates a sense of contingency in the middle of a providential history. It defers the climax of a teleological drama to voice a sense of England’s religious past as uncomfortably changeable.

This representation of past religio-political reversal comes out of a present moment of religio-political uncertainty. Dekker writes in *The Wonderful Year* (1603), “Upon Thursday it was treason to cry ‘God Save King James, King of England’ and upon Friday it was high treason not to cry so.”¹⁵ The end of Tame’s speech returns the audience to the present time of performance (1605, in which the “lovingest prince” is a “he”); but

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implies that England’s political and religious settlement, even after James’ accession, is still subject to reversal,—“this is all the love he shall have after life”—still contingent.

The sense of English religious history as uncomfortably changeable so prominent in this genre speaks to the historical moment of its production. The years in which Protestant martyr plays were staged, between 1599 and 1606, from Essex’s return from Ireland to the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, constitute a moment of heightened religio-political contingency. The scene described above puts the play’s deliverance narrative on pause. It is the performance equivalent of the *parergon*, an addition to a work that is external to it but also inextricable from it because linked to a lack within the work. The scene seems almost to come from another play; it opens up space to register some of the sense of instability and contingency, the possibility of having to reverse one’s religious loyalties to accommodate political change, that must have been very present to Londoners in these transitional years but which cannot be articulated or made sense of within the framework of a deliverance narrative. This scene suggests how theatrical performance can temporarily suspend real-world religious beliefs to make room for imaginative engagement with alternative explanations of lived historical experience.

The suspension of a teleological narrative here is only momentary. Below I examine a play, *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, that deals more extensively with the limits of providential historiography and the problem of historical contingency, and with more sustained attention to a particular moment of religious and political instability: the Essex rebellion.

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Sir Thomas Wyatt: Historical Contingency and Accommodationism

The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt, first printed in 1607 as written by Thomas Dekker and John Webster, is probably a condensation of two plays, 1 and 2 Lady Jane, produced by Henslowe in 1602 and written by Henry Chettle, Thomas Heywood, and [Wentworth?] Smith in addition to Dekker and Webster. The play as we have it opens moments before the death of King Edward VI. The Duke of Suffolk and the Duke of Northumberland scheme to have their respective children, Lady Jane Grey and Guilford Dudley placed on the throne—despite Henry VIII’s will, which stipulates that the crown should pass to his daughters, Mary and then Elizabeth, should Edward die without an heir. Motivated by dynastic loyalty, Sir Thomas Wyatt raises an army for Mary to secure her the crown. The Privy Council sends an army to fight the faction Wyatt leads on Mary’s behalf. Wyatt then convinces the Privy Council to reverse their decision and name Mary queen, despite her Catholicism, in keeping with Henry VIII’s will. Mary takes the throne, orders Jane and Guilford’s execution, and announces she will return England to the Catholic Church and marry King Phillip of Spain. Wyatt, horrified by the idea of a Spanish Catholic as king of England, raises an army against Mary. Mary sends an army against Wyatt, which defects to Wyatt’s side, but then abandons him. Wyatt is captured. Wyatt, Jane, and Guilford are all beheaded.

17 W.L Halstead, “Note on the Text of the Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt,” Modern Language Notes 54, no. 8 (December 1939), 585; Philip Henslowe, Henslowe's Diary, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 218–9. Henslowe’s Diary lists a “Mr. Smith” among the authors who received payment for 1 Lady Jane. The Database of Early English Playbooks records a “Wentworth Smith,” author of The Hector of Germany (1615); Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks, http://deep.sas.upenn.edu. More importantly perhaps, while Henslowe records payment in two installments (October 15 and 21, 1602) to all the authors listed above for 1 Lady Jane, only Dekker seems to have been given money “in earnest” for 2 Lady Jane on October 27 of the same year.
Mixed in with these tergiversations of church and state are scenes that are clearly influenced by Foxe’s affecting description of Jane’s piety and patience in the face of death: Jane going to prayer, Jane with a prayer book, Jane symbolically setting aside worldly things as she is undressed for execution. There are strong hagiographical elements here, but clearly this is a play preoccupied with rapid and unstable religious and political change. The disconnect between the two titles, Lady Jane and Sir Thomas Wyatt, suggests two competing focal points of dramatic energy. In the existing version of the play Wyatt and Jane are never onstage at the same time. The Jane scenes are more atmospheric than plot-driven; they linger over demonstrations of Jane’s pious suffering. In contrast, the Wyatt scenes are plot intensive, characterized by a succession of sudden reversals in loyalty that have major religio-political consequences. In general, the Jane scenes are static and concerned with hagiographical material, while the Wyatt scenes are more dynamic, heavy with dramatic irony, and stage religio-political change. In other words, the play offers the audience affecting stage deaths of Protestant martyrs, but it also disrupts its own heroic treatment of English Protestantism by staging England’s religio-political history as extremely contingent—that is, subject to chance and sudden reversal rather than inexorably guided toward a Providential end—and also as a history in which religious and political loyalties are often at odds.

The sense of English religious history as uncomfortably changeable, which is so prominent in this play, engages the cultural moment of its production. In 1602 the succession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne was by no means a fait accompli. Moreover, there were four other serious candidates with widely varying religious sympathies: Arabella Stuart, Lord Beauchamp, the Earl of Derby, and the
Infanta Isabella. Even if James were to succeed, the religious consequences of a Stuart monarchy were far from clear, with both puritans and moderate Catholics hoping for toleration or favor in his reign.\(^{18}\) Patrick Collinson describes James in the last few years of Elizabeth’s reign as “that player, who from time to time and as occasion offered, put on all three masks, the protestant-puritan-papist.”\(^{19}\) At the moment of \textit{Sir Thomas Wyatt}’s original staging, religious groups across the confessional spectrum were playing a tense game of wait-and-see. As the puritan minister Josias Nicholls wrote in that year, “we reserved ourselves to a better time, when it should . . . please the minds of our superiors to bee more favorable.”\(^{20}\) If the sense of imminent regime change promoted rosy hopes in some quarters, there must also have been a tacit understanding that one way or the other all confessional groups faced the possibility of religio-political disenfranchisement in the immediate future.

\textit{Sir Thomas Wyatt} stages the most rapid, most unstable sequence of religio-political change in English history in a city still dealing with the aftermath of the Essex rebellion. On February 8, 1601, Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex, led a twelve-hour failed insurrection in the streets of London. The rebellion was in part the result of Essex’s personal, precipitous fall from royal favor, in part the product of longstanding rivalry

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\item Collinson, “The Religious Factor,” 247.
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between the Essex and Cecil factions at court, and certainly was exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding the succession. Ill conceived and badly executed, the rebellion depended on Essex’s popularity with the London crowd, and the support of key city officials; neither materialized. Theoretically, Essex’s intention was to secure from the queen a guarantee of James’s succession to the throne, and to plead the case for his own return to public life. But this was not the public perception of the rebellion. As Essex moved through London, shouting for the people to join him, he did not speak of James. Instead he declared there had been an attempt on his own life and that the Cecils were plotting to put the Infanta on the English throne. Unsurprisingly, the state construed the rebellion as simple treason, a power grab that could easily have ended in the assassination of the queen, and Essex was promptly tried and executed.

This event brought heightened urgency and attention of the question of the succession and its religious consequences. Sir Thomas Wyatt has a sustained imaginative engagement with the Essex rebellion and its religio-political implications. Some of the parallels between Wyatt and Essex are obvious; both are popular, Protestant, aristocratic heroes who lead anti-Spanish rebellions. Wyatt addresses the London crowd to stir them to rebel against Mary and Philip as follows:

Sticke to this glorious quarrel, and your names
Shall stand in Chronicles ranck’d even with Kings
You free your Countrie from base Spanish thrall,
From Ignomious slaverie,

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Who can digest a Spaniard, that’s a true Englishman?22

His speech appeals to the same bluff, hearty, masculine, nationalist sentiment that Essex seems to have been trying to generate the year before the play’s first staging when he went through the streets, “publishing that the realme should have been sold to the Infanta, the better to spurre on the people to rise.”23 Sir Thomas Wyatt is not “about” Essex’s revolt in the sense that it is not a narrowly topical play or close political allegory, but it does draw extensively on the cultural scripts of the recent Essex rebellion to engage with the question of religious instability that accompanies changes of political regimes.

The theatrical Wyatt and historical Essex are not only parallel figures in that they are both Protestant rebel/heroes; they are more intriguingly alike in that they are both Protestant heroes who are also associated with a degree of confessional instability or illegibility. One strain of popular discourse presented Essex as a Protestant hero in simple terms.24 As the Essex of a 160[1] ballad declares on the scaffold, “Know I neuer lou'd Papistry.”25 But after the failed coup there were also attempts on the part of the government to expose the mixed-confessional or partly Catholic nature of the Earl’s milieu. Francis Bacon writes in the quasi-official pamphlet, A Declaration of the Practices and Treasons Attempted and Committed by Robert Late Earl of Essex:

22 Thomas Dekker and John Webster, The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt (London, 1607), D4r. Subsequent references will appear in the body of the text.

23 Francis Bacon, A Declaration of the Practices and Treasons Attempted and Committed by Robert Late Earl of Essex (London: Robert Barker, 1601), F4r.


And knowing there were no such strong and drawing cordes of popularitie as religion; he had not neglected . . . in a profane policy to serve his turne (for his own greatnesse,) of both sorts & factions, both of Catholicks and Puritanes, as they terme them, turning his one side to the one, and his inside to the other, and making himselfe pleasing and gracious to the one sorte by professing zeale, and frequenting sermons, and making much of Preachers, and secretely under hand giving assurance to Blunt, Davies and divers others, that (if he might prevaile in his desired greatnesse,) thee would bring in a toleration of the Catholicke religion.26

Bacon’s account is obviously hostile and may not have been widely accepted.27

However, it is well documented that Essex’s circle was conspicuously mixed in terms of confessional identity. John Davies and Christopher Blunt, both executed for their participation in the rebellion, were in fact both Catholics who declare in their confessions that Essex had promised “libertie of Catholic religion.”28 At the same time, Essex house in the months before the rebellion was visibly drawing “a whole pack of puritans.”29

Patrick Collinson, speaking of the godly preachers who continued to place their hopes in Essex until the bitter end, describes Essex house in 1601 as “a kind of puritan cave of Adullam,” referring to the cave in 1 Samuel in which David, already anointed to succeed

26 Bacon, Declaration of the Practices and Treasons, B3r–B3v.

27 Arnold Hunt argues that an initial round of sermons on the rebellion in which a number of preachers overplayed allegations of Essex’s participation in a Catholic conspiracy rang hollow with Paul’s Cross audiences. This backlash prompted a second round of sermons which acknowledged the sincerity of Essex’s Protestantism but still insisted on the grievous nature of his crime against the state, and the possibility of still more nefarious designs on the part of his Catholic supporters. Arnold Hunt, “Tuning the Pulpits: The Religious Context of the Essex Revolt” in The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History, 1600–1750, ed. Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 86–114.

28 Bacon, Declaration of the Practices and Treasons, M3v.

Saul, took refuge from him.\footnote{Patrick Collinson, “The Religious Factor,” 246. For a succinct treatment of Essex’s changing relationship with the puritans through the 1590s, see also Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 444–7.} William Barlow in his 1601 sermon on the Essex rebellion attributes the “originall poyson of the late Earles hart” to the 1594 dedication of *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland*, about which Barlow claims that the Jesuit Robert Parson, writing under the pseudonym Doleman:

> makes the crowne of England a tennis ball and tosseth it, from Papist to Puritan and from Puritan to Protestant, but . . . the whole sway of disposing it, he ascribeth to the late Earles power of placing it where it should please him, and to him therefore he dediceth his booke\footnote{William Barlow, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Cross . . . with a Short Discourse of the Late Earle of Essex . . .* (London: Printed for Mathew Law, 1601), B5v.}

So while one strand of popular discourse marked Essex as a Protestant hero, that discourse was in competition with treatments of the Earl such as Barlow’s, in which Essex is represented as a figure of confessional instability, a means through which the future of the church and state might be bandied about like a tennis ball amongst various religious factions.

Dekker and Webster’s *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, then, not only incorporates traces of Essex the Protestant hero, it also includes elements of the other Essex then in circulation, the Essex whose political intervention had uncertain confessional valences and consequences. The play’s Wyatt is not only the hero of an anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish rebellion, he also spends the first half of the play supporting Mary’s claim to the throne totally unfazed by her Catholicism. *Sir Thomas Wyatt* thus not only presents a hagiographical history of English Protestantism exemplified by the deaths of Foxean martyrs; it also stages a religious history of England that is contingent, subject to reversal, and shaped by political faction rather than providence. Furthermore, as I will show, it
confronts the theater audience with a portrait of the English people as accommodationist
timeservers, and continually puts pressure on the relationship between religious and
political loyalties. In short, *Sir Thomas Wyatt* disrupts the operation of a providential
Protestant historiography.

This kind of reflection on historical contingency, on the suddenness of changes in
religio-political regimes, on the human forces that bring about those changes, and on the
kinds of adjustments ordinary people have to make to adapt to them, must have seemed
particularly timely to Londoners in 1602. The Essex rebellion made explicit the
unspoken reality of the last years of Elizabeth’s reign: that regime change was imminent,
and that this change would affect religious life in England in some crucial, unforeseeable
way. Implicit throughout the play is the understanding that the theatrical audience may
soon become historical actors in a similar drama. The play not only interrupts a
teleological history with rapid plot reversals and heavy dramatic irony; it also, through
close engagement with recent, shared urban history and intimate modes of address to its
audience, asks that audience to reflect on their position within a religio-political world
governed by extreme contingency.

Religio-political reversal is not simply a major theme of *Sir Thomas Wyatt*; rapid
reversal is the dominant dramatic device. The play text introduces a fresh reversal or
betrayal every few pages. For example, while the Privy Council initially supports
Suffolk and Northumberland’s bid for (vicarious) power, proclaiming Jane Queen and
giving Northumberland an army to lead against Mary, Wyatt quickly convinces them to
reverse their decision and revoke Northumberland’s military commission. When
Arundell sends Northumberland off to fight he declares:
My Lord most lov’d with what a mourning heart
I take your farwell, let the after signes
Of my imployment witnesse. I protest
Did not the sacred person of my Queene [Jane]
Whose weele I tender as my soules cheefe blisse,
Urge my abode, I would not think it shame
To trail a pike where you are generall. (B1v)

In this play professions of loyalty usually indicate some eminent betrayal. Three scenes later, after the Privy Council has reversed its position on the succession, Arundell and Northumberland meet again. Northumberland greets Arundell (sarcastically) as “my honored friend,” to which Arundell (officiously) answers, “I am no friend to Traitors: in my moste high & / Princely Souveraignes name [Mary], / I do arrest you of high Treason” (C1v). The scene stresses the blatant irony at the center of this kind of religio-political about-face. Northumberland continues:

. . . when we parted last
My Lord of Arundel, our farwell was
Better than our greeting now.
Then you cride God speede,
Now you come on me ere you can say take heede (C2r)

The rhyming couplet hammers home the irony of Arundell’s disloyalty. Earlier Northumberland asks sarcastically if there “is not a great mortalitie . . . at court?” since all his erstwhile “friends” seem “dead” (C1v). Transcripts of exchanges between Marian interrogators and Protestant prisoners sometimes register similar complex interpersonal histories that were a consequence of the religio-political tergiversations of the mid-sixteenth century. Foxe records the examination of Thomas Wats (a linen draper burnt in 1555), in which

Anthony Brown, justice, said unto him, “Wats I pray thee tell me who hath been thy schoolmaster to teach thee this gear, or where didst thou first learn this religion?” “Forsooth,” quoth Wats, “even of you, sir: you taught it me, and none more than you. For in King Edward’s days in open session you
spake against this religion now used; no preacher more . . .”
Then said Brown to my lord Riche, “He belies me my lord. What a knave is
this! he will soon belie me behind my back, he doth it before my face:”—and my
lord Riche said again, “I dare say he doth so.”

The marginal gloss has the last word; it reads, “Anthony Brown a gospeller in king
Edward’s days, and a persecutor in queen Mary’s days.” However, this kind of
exchange is rare in Foxe, a needle in a haystack of documents that seek to demonstrate
exhaustively the separation between persecuting Catholic villains and persecuted
Protestant heroes. But the battle lines in Sir Thomas Wyatt are not clearly drawn. The
play returns repeatedly to religio-political betrayal. If the dominant gesture of Foxe’s
Acts and Monuments is the ascent or deliverance of the persecuted from the clutches of
the persecutors, the dominant gesture of Sir Thomas Wyatt is the religio-political pivot or
volte-face. This is not providential ecclesiastical history, but rather a history in which, to
borrow Barlow’s terms, the English church is the ball in a tennis match in which the
players keep changing sides.

This chapter has, thus far, largely ignored the play’s authors and its “producer”
because it seems incomprehensible at first that Dekker (co)wrote this play and Henslowe
staged it. How could the author of Whore of Babylon (1606), perhaps the most
triumphalist Protestant play of the period, have also written this play so full of religio-
political reversal and contingency? If Henslowe was trying to lure the godly into the
theater with plays about “Protestant heroes,” as O’Connell suggests, why would he back
a production with such a confessionally erratic protagonist? In part this may be because

32 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, bk. 11, 1594.
33 Ibid.
34 O’Connell, Idolatrous Eye, 113.
the collaborative conditions of production of early modern theater limited the agency of individual participants, or simply because no writer is ever fully in control of his or her text. But it may also be, at least in Dekker’s case, that 1602 and 1606 made possible or necessary different understandings of English religious history; that in 1606, after the accession of James I, after Hampton Court, and after the “deliverance” from the Gunpowder Plot, Dekker could write a flagrantly triumphalist, idealized, providential history of English Protestantism, but that 1602 required or generated the conditions for a more complex examination of the causes and effects of religio-political change. If Henslowe and Dekker were trying to create a play about the triumph of heroic Protestantism, what they produced instead is a play that insistently demonstrates the political, rather than providential, mechanisms driving English ecclesiastical history, a play extremely relevant to its precise historical place and time: London in 1602. It is strange to see conflicting models of history side by side in a single play. The fact that Sir Thomas Wyatt can integrate this timely preoccupation with historical change and reversal into a play that is otherwise essentially staged providential hagiography demonstrates the ideological capaciousness of theatrical production. It also suggests how specific religio-political moments have their own gravitational pull that can draw plays and playwrights out of their normal ideological orbits.

If Sir Thomas Wyatt is a play largely about religio-political change, the play also explores the ways people adapt to or accommodate alterations in state religion. Sir Thomas Wyatt stages several moments of unsettling ideological flexibility on the part of the English people. Certainly many of the dramatic effects of the play rely on the audience being shocked by religious defectors, but often the play’s representation of
religious accommodationism is surprisingly ambivalent. This mixture of condemnation and tacit acceptance of religious timeservers, people who change their faith to suit the times, has a parallel in the publication history of *Acts and Monuments*. The book itself is strictly anti-Nicodemean; that is, it maintains that Christ demands the open profession of the true faith even in times of persecution. But substantial amounts of the money required for the book’s first print run probably came from people who had stayed in England and “kept their heads down” under Mary.35 Similarly, *Sir Thomas Wyatt* is a play that celebrates Jane’s profession of the true faith but is peopled with characters who switch their religious allegiance at the drop of a political hat, and, furthermore, is performed for (i.e., funded by) an audience who might soon be asked to do the same.

In an early scene one of Northumberland’s men commands country people on their way to market, “Crie God save the Queene as you goe,” meaning Queen Jane (B4r). To which a Maid replies, “God save the Queene, what Queene? there lies the sense. / When we have none, it can be no offense” (B4r). Although the Maid, when instructed more specifically to cry “God Save Queen Jane,” expresses her dismay and loyalty to Mary, in the context of the mundane details of the scene (e.g., people going to market, soldiers more interested in “pies and apple-women” than politics), the line still suggests that the Maid’s primary political desire is not to give “offense” to those in power, regardless of who those in power might be.36 Curiously, in the same scene the crowd of market-goers expresses clear loyalty to Mary over Jane. Northumberland has a herald proclaim Queen

35 Loades, “The Early Reception.”

36 Her full line is, “Is the right Queene called Jane: alacke for woe / at the first she was not christened so.” (B4r). Although this line could certainly be played for laughs (at the Maid’s “mistake”), I prefer to read this as an expression of dissent rather than ignorance. Indeed, I think this could be played as expressing a political opinion and still be funny.
Jane. The stage direction reads, “A Trumpet sounds, and no answere. The Herald soundes a parley, and none answers” (B4v). A page later, when Northumberland learns his political base has abandoned him, he orders the same herald to proclaim Queen Mary, which is met with a “shout” from the crowd (C1r). This vocalization of public support for Mary would likely alienate most of a 1602 audience, either as an uncomfortable reminder of the English people’s historical support for Mary’s accession, or by drawing into focus the possibility of conflict between political obedience and religious belief at a moment when, given the unpredictable ecclesiastical consequences of the succession, such a conflict was one way or another a possibility in the near future for almost everyone.

But if Sir Thomas Wyatt sometimes simply acknowledges the reality of religious accommodationism without immediately condemning it, the play also registers a sense of the social disintegration generated by rapid religious and political alteration. One particularly disturbing scene opens with the Duke of Suffolk alone on stage, starving, having spent three days hiding in the woods after the failed coup. His servant, Homes, appears with food. While Suffolk eats, Homes recounts how his house was searched and he himself “threatened [with] the rack” if he did not give up his master. Suffolk interrupts, “And thou hast done it, thou has betraied me” (C2v). But Homes denies it:

Done it! O betrayed you? O noe!  
First I would see my loved wife and Children  
Murdered, and tos’d on speares, before I would  
Deliver your grace unto their hands,  
For they intend your death.  
. . . and offer’d a thousand Crownes to him that can  
bring newes of your abode, twas offer’d in my hands.  
Which I beseech may stop my Vitall breath,  
When I am feede with golde to worke your death. (C2v)
Clearly there is heavy dramatic irony in this exchange. Not only might the audience know that the historical Suffolk was betrayed by his servant in just these circumstances, they also know they are watching a play in which “oaths are vain” and Homes, the “protesting” servant, protests too much. A moment later Suffolk kisses his servant “in requital of . . . this love,” Homes kisses his master’s hand in return, and the Sheriff appears with his officers delivering the line “So Judas kissed his master” (C2v). While Homes, like Judas, suddenly suicidal with remorse, goes off to get the rope, a Clown enters and, starving, starts eating the scraps of the interrupted meal. When Homes re-enters “with a halter about his neck,” the Clown steps aside to watch (C3v). Homes delivers a penitent soliloquy and the Clown makes an aside, “This is rare, now in this moode hee woul'd hang himselfe twere excellent” (C3v).

The juxtaposition of these two direct addresses to the audience produces an alienating effect. The Clown’s aside shifts suddenly the nature of the stage spectacle. His voyeurism, his delight in the “rare” and “excellent” performance of death, implicates the audience. The breach of the third wall and collapse of on-stage and audience viewers makes the spectacle of Homes’ suicide something strangely like watching a real death.

After Homes hangs himself the Clown delivers this speech:

So, so, a very good ending, would all falce Servants might drink of the same sauce.
Gold, you are first mine, you must helpe
To shift my selfe into some counterfeit suite
Of apparel, and then to London:
If my olde Maister be hanged, why so:
If not, why rusticke and lusticke:
Yet before I go, I do not care if I throwe this Dog in a Ditch come away dissembler: this cannot chuse but be a hundred pound it wayes so heavy. (C3v)
The opening of the Clown’s speech, which joins another comment on Homes’ death as spectacle (“So, so, a very good ending”) with a clichéd platitude (“would all false servants might drink of the same sauce”), re-establishes the link between the Clown and the audience. The Clown is obviously an unsavory character, scavenging the dead, casually disloyal (“If my old master be hanged, why so: if not [even better]”), and duplicitous (“a counterfeit suit of clothes”); he is also the character who leaves the scene alive, fed, free, with a hundred pounds in his pocket. By aligning the gazes of the audience and the Clown and by having the Clown ventriloquize a version of the kind of commonplace response the audience might have to Homes’ suicide, the scene establishes the Clown as the audience’s unflattering surrogate. There is an indictment here, but also simply a recognition, of the kinds of “shifts” ordinary people make to survive religio-political change.

The conditions of extraordinary religio-political instability established in the play generate not only the breakdown of social or communal codes but also create confessional instability on the psycho-linguistic level. When Northumberland learns his allies have abandoned him, he declares

And since the Lords have all revolted from me,
My selfe will now revolt against myself. (C1r)

And he orders the herald to proclaim Queen Mary. *Sir Thomas Wyatt* is not a play that produces many obviously strong interiority effects, but the self-undoing reflexive pronouns in Northumberland’s line signal some kind of destabilization of identity, or at least linguistic breakdown, attendant on religio-political reversal. Curiously, Northumberland’s rejoinder to the herald’s proclamation, “Amen, I be a part / I with my tongue, I doe not with my heart,” echoes a common catchphrase of anti-Catholic
polemic, “English face, Spanish heart,” an odd reference to attach to a Protestant, although the conceit of confessionally-mixed body parts was also used more generally to criticize serial converters or “time-servers” (C1r). In a similar vein, Andrew Perne, whose surname became slang for a religious turncoat, was once said by Gabriel Harvey to have “a pleasing Tongue for a Protestant, a flattering eye for a Papist.”

This confessional confusion at the linguistic level is made more explicit later in the scene when Northumberland, lamenting the fact that his treason will likely cost his children their lives, cries

O at the generall Sessions, when all soules  
Stand at the bar of Justice,  
And hold up their new immortalized hands,  
O then let the remembrance of their tragick endes  
Be racd out of the bed-rowle of my sinnes:  
When ere the black booke of my crime's unclaspt,  
Let not the Scarlet Letters be found there:  
Of all the rest, only that page be cleere. (C2r)

The “black book” with “scarlet letters” could equally suggest The Book of Common Prayer, or a number of Catholic liturgical and devotional texts. But the “bede-roll” refers specifically to the list of names of all the parish dead read aloud in pre-Reformation Catholic churches so that the living could offer their intercessory prayers; a practice that was, indeed, “racd [razed] out” during the Edwardine reformation.

Technically, Northumberland misuses the term “bede-roll.” It is not a list of “sins,” but

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38 It is worth noting that even if we assume that (at least some of) the audience takes “black book” to refer to The Book of Common Prayer, the “scarlet letters” in that text were themselves controversial, considered by hot protesters to be too “popish.”

of dead wives, children, parents, husbands, neighbors, and friends. This is not an instance of neutral, or successful, linguistic appropriation. Northumberland’s use of “bede-roll” does not sever the word from its Catholic meaning. “Bede-roll” cannot function neutrally here, because the speech as a whole invokes the same affective familial connections, the same bonds of duty between the living and the dead that were central to the practice of reading the bede-roll. That is, “bede-roll” in this instance cannot mean simply “a list”; it retains a strong resonance of its original meaning because there is an affective alignment between Northumberland’s situation and the practice of intercessory prayer. It is odd to have a Protestant rebel register strong emotion through the language of Catholic devotion; it is even stranger that this affective nexus is traversed by “razing.” The bede-roll maintains the bond between the living and the dead through remembrance, but Northumberland seeks to fulfill his paternal obligations through an act of forgetting: “let the remembrance . . . be [razed].” Arguably, one might say that in this sense the speech runs counter to, or undermines the devotional and affective structures associated with the bede-roll. One might even say that the speech criminalizes Catholic affect and devotional practice by turning the bede-roll and black book into records of sin (rather than instruments of worship). However, the phrase razed from the bede-roll clearly suggests the actual razing of bede-rolls, and while the iconoclasm of the Edwardine period would certainly not be an immediate trauma for a 1602 theater audience, there does seem to be cultural evidence that indicates a sense of discomfort or even loss associated with the historical eradication of traditional funereal practices. What we have

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40 Arguably, religious language used in other discursive contexts might be said always to retain connotative traces of its original meaning. But clearly this seems to be more true in some cases than in others. “Saint” in love poetry often (but not always) has a weak religious “pull”; in the instance above the devotional resonances seem strong. My point is simply that linguistic appropriation is an uneven process.
here is a Protestant rebel delivering a speech that generates strong affect by simultaneously tapping into and moving against a Catholic devotional practice. I do not think it is possible to extract a confessionally coherent reading of this passage; indeed, I would suggest that the heightened affect of the speech comes in part from the confessional illegibility of its language. There is an energy here that comes from, not in spite of, the tense juxtaposition of scraps from incompatible belief systems.

I have been arguing that the emphasis in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* on religio-political reversal and contingency resists or disrupts a providential historiography, and also that the conditions of extreme religious and political instability established in the play are imagined to generate a series of social, internal, and linguistic disintegrations. Conceivably one might claim that the last scene of the play, Jane’s execution, re-establishes a hagiographical, providential framework. Certainly, this scene is hagiographical in tone and there is a contrast here with the sense of extreme religio-political contingency that dominates the rest of the play. In part whether or not one thinks that Jane’s pious death erases the religio-political uncertainty and instability that precedes it comes back to the familiar question: do the gestures of stabilization at the ends of plays close out or contain the disruptive possibilities presented earlier in the drama? My answer is: usually not. Even in these last moments the play’s insistent demonstration of religio-political reversal is not totally suppressed. There is a conspicuous meta-theatrical element in one of Guilford’s first speeches in the scene:

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Our office is to die, yours to looke on:
We are beholding unto such beholders,
Time was Lords, when you did flock amaine,
To see her crownd, but now to kill my Jane,
The world like to a sickell bends it selfe,
Men runne their course of lives as in a maze,
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Our office is to die, yours but to gaze. (F4v)

This speech collapses historical and dramatic spectators. It calls the audience to an awareness of itself as complicit “beholders” of the betrayals of the drama, and implicitly as also guilty of being complicit with a history, and perhaps a future, of religio-political reversal. Essentially Guilford accuses the audience, whose “office” is simply to “looke on” to swift reversals of church and state, of being timeservers.

A few lines later Guilford delivers a prophecy:

Oft dying men are fild with prophesies,
But ile not be a prophet of your il,
Yet know my Lordes, they that behold us now
May to the axe of justice one day bowe,
And in that plot of ground where we must die,
Sprinkle thir bloodes,
Though I know no cause why. (G1r)

Nominally this speech is directed at Guilford’s Catholic persecutors. Marsha Robinson argues that this moment of prophecy “anticipates a future that for the dramatists and their audiences had already come to pass . . . It anticipates the return of Protestant power and the ascendancy of Elizabeth.”\textsuperscript{41} In a straightforward sense this is true: in the context of the world of the play, Guilford’s speech prophesies the end of the Marian regime. But in 1602, in the context of the uncertain ecclesiastical consequences of the succession, on the heels of a metatheatrical address, the bloody and incomprehensible future that Guilford foresees (“thir bloodes . . . I know no cause why”) could not, for the audience, be understood as safely contained in the past.

\textsuperscript{41} Robinson, \textit{Writing the Reformation}, 18–9. Robinson does here acknowledge the fact that this scene also “subversively” reminds the audience of the “reversals and falls that demarcated Tudor history,” but still insists on placing any religio-political instability firmly in the past.
There were other prophecies and strange rumors in circulation with volatile religio-political implications, despite the government’s best efforts to suppress them. In 1599 a vagrant named Thomas Vaughan was arrested for saying that a “substitute child had been put to death in King Edwards place, and he himself had been conveyed to Denmark,” from whence, it was implied, the Protestant prince might soon be expected to return. In 1602 a Catholic tailor confessed that a prophecy foretelling a “Golden Day” coming soon when Catholicism would be restored in England was “common speech” among recusants. These prophecies demonstrate the rosy hopes of various confessional groups for the fast approaching future of the English church. Sir Thomas Wyatt does the opposite. The fundamental, tacit assumption driving the play is that regime change is coming and that change might bring with it another period of extreme religious instability. That possibility generates a more flexible mode of historiography.

Sir Thomas Wyatt demonstrates too a surprisingly flexible attitude toward religious accommodationism, or at least a sustained interest in the conditions that cause it. There is an unusual exchange in Foxe’s Acts and Monuments in which the martyr John Bradford reminds his interrogator George Day, Bishop of Chichester, that Day himself had been a Protestant in Edward’s reign and rebukes him for returning to “the Romish church” under Mary. Day replies:

Ah, master Bradford! you were but a child when this matter began. I was a young man, then coming from the university, I went with the world: but I tell you, it was always against my conscience.

42 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 421.
43 Ibid., 406.
44 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, bk. 11, 1616.
It is extraordinary to find in Foxe this quite human glimpse of a Catholic young man conforming to Protestant worship but struggling privately because of it. Indeed, any sympathetic admission of the pressures of “to go with the world” in religion is rare in *Acts and Monuments.* But *Sir Thomas Wyatt* contains a number of representations of accommodationism which, if not entirely sympathetic, at least demonstrate some understanding of the conditions that produce timeservers. The Maid in the market scene who reluctantly changes her cry from “Queen Mary” to “Queen Jane” is no Anne Askew, but neither does she seem likely to be reviled by the audience as a religious turncoat. By showing soldiers ordering “apple women” to declare their support for a Protestant regime, the play is hardly presenting a history of the English reformation as the dawning of the light of true religion. There are no “conversions” in *Sir Thomas Wyatt.* Religious-political affiliation in the play is rarely the product of the movement of the Spirit, but instead depends mostly on which faction at any given moment has a monopoly on violence. It is startling to find in a play drawn from *Acts and Monuments* this kind of object lesson in historical contingency and the conditions that generate religious accommodationism, but the social conditions of 1602 provoked such a response. *Sir Thomas Wyatt* addresses itself to the particular position of a mixed confessional London audience in the wake of the Essex rebellion to disrupt triumphalist narratives of English Protestantism at a moment when the future of the national church must have seemed a frighteningly open question, but also a question that could not be asked openly. This play allows audience members to suspend certain beliefs in providential history, and in the

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prohibition against religious accommodationism, to consider a world full of change and how to live in it.

Sir John Oldcastle: A Catholic Priest Walks Into a Protestant Play

From looking at the way the pressures of a specific historical moment can shift the ideological balance of a play, I turn to an assessment of how the practice of recycling theatrical tropes, characters, bits of dialogue and business—a practice endemic to the early modern theater industry—generates confessional incoherence. Staged in 1599 by the Admiral’s Men, 1 Sir John Oldcastle, written by Michael Drayton, Richard Hathway, Anthony Munday, and Robert Wilson, opens by announcing itself as a corrective to the representation in Shakespeare’s 1 & 2 Henry IV of the lollard martyr Oldcastle as the debauched, self-promoting coward renamed Falstaff. The prologue declares:

It is no pampered glutton we present,  
Nor aged counsellor to youthful sins:  
But one whose virtues shone above the rest,  
A valiant martyr and a virtuous peer.  

Part of the play’s strategy of revision is to transpose onto the imaginative landscape of 1 & 2 Henry IV a different set of confessional markers. Like 1 & 2 Henry IV, Sir John Oldcastle moves between court and tavern, and it presents a similar range of characters and dramatic incidents: a king playing commoner, aristocratic rebels, hostlers, country justices, and a carnivalesque thief who nominally occupies a position of authority. The

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47 Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge note in their introduction the similar dramatic texture of the plays. The Oldcastle Controversy, 13.
obvious difference is that Sir John Oldcastle’s Lord of Misrule, its “Falstaff,” is a Catholic priest, not a puritan.

_I Sir John Oldcastle_ is a play about religious dissent and political loyalty. Oldcastle is three times accused of involvement in acts of lollard sedition but each time publicly exonerated. This repeated plot cycle provides occasion for lengthy articulations of a position of loyal dissent. In the context of the late sixteenth century discourse that read lollardy as the precursor of puritanism, and in light of internal textual evidence that signals Oldcastle as one of the godly (e.g., his reading material), it is possible to read the play as a defense of the position of loyal or moderate puritans. But while, as Peter Lake argues, the play offers an object lesson in moderate Puritanism, it also generates an inclusive stage representation of English Catholicism.

Although the play’s comic Catholic priest, Sir John of Wrotham, is in part characterized through the tropes of anti-Catholic polemic, the play also locates the priest in other discourses that place him firmly in the community of Englishness. Here is a play in which an important Catholic character is represented as both Catholic “them” and English “us.” But in contrast to the plays that Frances Dolan has identified as marked with the anxiety that English Catholics dangerously blur the line between “the English and foreigners, loyal subjects and traitors, us and them,” _Sir John Oldcastle_ seems comfortable rather than anxious with the notion of a Catholic English identity. In part

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49 Peter Lake, “Reading Reception, (i) _Sir John Oldcastle, Part I_,” unpublished MS, 11.

50 Dolan, _Whores of Babylon_, 5.
The difference may come down to generic convention. Sir John is a clown and not, like Lucretia Borgia in the Devil’s Charter, a tragic heroine. Significantly, the tropes that in this play recuperate space for an identity that is both Catholic and English are primarily conventions borrowed from other contemporary plays. This demonstrates how the recycling of theatrical material, which was necessary to meet the high demand for new plays that capitalized on current dramatic fashions, could subvert the religio-political intentions of individual playwrights working in the commercial theater.

Sir John Oldcastle’s Falstaff figure, the priest Sir John, is, at first glance, a walking anti-Catholic satire, a proverbial “Sir John Mumble-matins.” A highwayman and whoremonger, he refers to thieving and lechery in terms borrowed from Catholic religious practice. But anti-Catholic polemic is not the only discourse through which the playwrights develop their characterization of the priest. The figure of Sir John also draws on theatrical tropes from popular contemporary plays that render his Catholicism innocuous and include him in discourses of communitas or fellowship. Specifically, the play’s treatment of Sir John participates in the vogue for nostalgic representations of a “merry” English past, and rehashes the popular dramatic scenario in which the King in disguise encounters a representative English everyman. Sir John, then, is not simply the lecherous, thieving priest of anti-Catholic polemic; he is also a “madcap,” a “goodfellow,” a “tall fellow” : i.e., Sir John is one of the lads. Jolly, unthreatening Catholics are few and far between in early modern English drama. The English history plays that were fashionable from the mid-1580s to the early 1600s were a means through which an English national identity was imagined into being; that national identity, Englishness, was predicated on the exclusion or demonization of things that were “not
English”: e.g., Catholics. And yet, as I will show, this history play presents to its audience a very English Catholic priest.

In scene four Sir John addresses Harpoole, with whom he has just been fighting over Doll, as follows:

Give me thy hand; thou art as good a fellow. I am a singer, a drinker, a bencher, a wench. I can say a mass and kiss a lass. ‘Faith I have a parsonage, and because I would not be too much at charges, this wench serves me for a sexton.

(4.182–5)

To which Harpoole replies, “Well said, mad priest. We’ll in and be friends” (4.186).

Harpoole, Oldcastle’s loyal servant, has already been shown in the play to have clear lollard/godly sympathies. Here, then, is a moment of comic reconciliation between a Catholic priest and a kind of puritan. Admittedly, the two men are resolving a fight in a pub over a girl, not a theological debate, but this in itself is important. Sir John lays a claim for Catholics to a place in the nostalgic discourse of a merry England. The description of his priesthood, “I can say a mass and kiss a lass,” might evacuate the sacrament of its theological meaning, but it does offer the audience a kind of “cakes and ale” version of England’s Catholic past.

Although the printed play text records Sir John’s speech above as prose, some of the lines (“I am a singer, a drinker, a bencher, a wench”) would, in performance, sound more like tumbling verse than prose. Tumbling verse appears in a number of contemporary plays as a deliberately anachronistic devise designed to produce a comic, “old time-y” effect. Examples include The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington (1598); The Merry Devil of Edmonton (1602); and Sir Thomas More (1592–5?).

51 For an extended and persuasive articulation of this argument, see Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s History Plays (London: Routledge, 1997).
Moreover, the frequent descriptions of Sir John as “mad” or “merry,” as well as the festive, ale-house atmosphere he personifies, align him with figures like “mad” Simon Eyre of Dekker’s *Shoemaker’s Holiday*, a nostalgic comedy also staged in 1599 and set in the reign of Henry V. Harpoole, the faithful, godly servant is likewise several times called “mad” or “merry.” Both men, despite their confessional difference, function on stage as relics of an old, lost, merry world full of warmth and fellowship and hospitality: a cultural fantasy that, in the latter end of the decade of dearth and inflation that Patrick Collinson has called “the nasty nineties,” was being eagerly consumed by patrons of the commercial theater.\(^{52}\)

In addition to assigning Sir John a place in the nostalgic discourse of a merry England, the playwrights also cast the Catholic priest in the role of “stout English everyman” in the play’s version of the King-in-disguise scenario then in circulation in a number of loosely contemporary plays. Shakespeare’s *Henry V* (1599), as well as Rowley’s slightly later *When You See Me You Know Me* (1605), both contain variations of an encounter between a popular King in disguise and a slightly rough or disreputable but ultimately loyal and hearty English subject. In Rowley’s play Henry VIII runs across Black Will, a thief, pimp, and murderer, but more importantly for the dynamic of the scene, a strapping English man. Here, masculinity acts as the mechanism through which the play posits a shared English identity. King and commoner wrestle, explicitly to test Black Will’s “man-hood” (E1r). Henry VIII is described as “a good lustie tall bigge set man,” Black Will as “valiant” (E4r). His identity revealed, Henry promises to move Will from prison

\(^{52}\) Patrick Collinson, “Religious Satire and the Invention of Puritanism,” in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press in association with the Folger Institute, Washington, DC, 1995), 150–70. Collinson’s essay deals with religious rather than economic history, but the phrase has come to be used more broadly.
to the wars, “because ye shall know King Harrie loves a man” (E4r). Will responds by swearing “the wars sweet King, tis my delight . . . I’ll live and dye with thee sweet King” (E4r–v). Manliness here is the sign of Englishness, loyalty, as well as the device through which social problems (e.g., Will’s criminality) are resolved.

The parallel scenes in *Sir John Oldcastle* do similar ideological work. In scene ten Sir John robs Henry V in disguise. Their exchange is oddly good-natured and the two men each take half a broken coin as a token of the promise Henry makes to procure Sir John a royal pardon for robbery should he need one. In a play written in response to Shakespeare’s Henriad, this gesture obviously references the glove the King gives as a token in *Henry V*, thereby aligning Sir John with the blunt soldier Williams. In the next scene, Henry, again in disguise, plays dice with Sir John. When the priest gambles with the broken coin, Henry recognizes him as the “lusty thief” who robbed him. Henry reveals his identity and orders Sir John to be hanged. Sir John protests, “ye have not a taller man, nor a truer subject to the crown and state than Sir John of Wrotham” (11.137–8). When Henry pardons him the priest swears, “My Liege, if ye have cause of battle, ye shall see Sir John of Wrotham bestir himself in your quarrel” (11.162–3). Here, Sir John’s integration into a discourse of hearty, English masculinity allows him to claim a place as a loyal subject despite his criminal activity or, more importantly, despite the Catholicism for which his criminality is the sign.

While in *Sir John Oldcastle* the recycling of current theatrical tropes of merriness and hearty masculinity allows Sir John the priest to model a position that is both Catholic and English, it is unlikely that Drayton, Hathway, Munday, and Wilson intended to produce this effect when they wrote the play. At least two of the playwrights had earlier produced
anti-Catholic work or had connections to prominent, devout Protestant figures. In 1590 Drayton published a versification of biblical passages dedicated to the godly Lady Jane Devereux, and in 1593 he produced a lament for the death of Protestant hero Philip Sidney. Drayton also dedicated several poems to Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, a Calvinist patron of the arts connected to two prominent godly families: the Sidneys and the Russells. Wilson in 1586 had a job delivering letters to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, who was then leading a military campaign in the Low Countries in the name of international Protestant solidarity. Robert Wilson may also be the “R.W.” who wrote the 1591 anti-Catholic tract, *Martin Mar-Sixtus*. Sir John Oldcastle is, after all, a play that announces itself as a defense of a Protestant martyr and spends a huge amount of time articulating a position of godly, loyal dissent. What is fascinating is that Sir John Oldcastle is both a play with an obvious hot Protestant agenda and a play that delivers an inclusive representation of English Catholicism. Sir John Oldcastle illustrates how the widespread practice of recycling available theatrical material could sometimes produce dramatic effects that subverted the ostensible agendas of individual playwrights. The production of plays in the early modern commercial theater was a process of cultural bricolage. Playwrights used what tropes they had to hand to meet the market’s demand for new plays that cashed in on current dramatic trends. These cultural materials generate their own effects; they speak with other voices, voices that cannot always be made to ventriloquize the beliefs of individual historical agents.

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Even in the genre of Protestant martyr plays, where we might expect a straightforward religious agenda, the multiple agents and cultural forces in operation in the early modern theater industry could align in a variety of ways to produce a range of dramatic effects with unexpected, and sometimes subversive, ideological consequences. The combination of factors that led Dekker, the triumphalist playwright of English Protestant history, to write a play that disrupts a teleological Protestant historiography is not the same combination of factors that led the anti-Catholic propagandist Robert Wilson to write a play with a merry, homespun, English Catholic priest. After all, these plays are written by multiple historical agents, whose own individual religio-political leanings might shift over time in response to changing and complex historical moments, and who assemble pieces of theater from a range of cultural materials that are themselves polyvalent for a mixed-confessional audience. No wonder then if, even here, in a genre of plays about Protestant martyrs, where we most expect to find clear religious politics, the conditions of theatrical production open up space for the voices of a mixed religious culture.
One of the “problems” of William Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* (1604) is the difficulty of telling its heroes from its villains.¹ Set in a Vienna teeming with whores and pimps, drunks and pirates, the play focuses on Angelo and Isabella, two violently virtuous characters surrounded by casual sin, one of whom behaves worse than any wrongdoer he punishes. This slippage between the upright and the degenerate recurs throughout *Measure for Measure*, even at the level of the line. The play is full of moral oxymorons: “sanctimonious pirate,” (1.2.7) “devilish mercy,” (3.1.63) “notorious benefactors,” (2.1.50) “precise villains,” (2.1.54) “damned Angelo” (4.3.123). The earnest, dimwitted constable Elbow delivers a scene’s worth of malapropisms that replace respectable words with their dodgy antonyms, and vice versa: “profanation” for veneration (2.1.54), “cardinally” for carnally (2.1.79), “benefactor” for malefactor (2.1.50), “respected” for suspected (2.1.159-73). Even the name of the executioner, Abhorson, which jams together “abhor” and “whoreson,” suggests both “ab [from] whore / whore’s son” and “abhors whores.”² In this portmanteau name, terms from opposite ends of the moral spectrum slide together. Abhorson is a minor but resonant, almost emblematic, character, a man whose job is both sinister and righteous. This dramatic world crammed with sinners, where a virtuous minority struggle against vice, and the most honorable men are sometimes the most depraved, demonstrates a sustained


² Isabella uses “abhor” three times in the play before Abhorson first appears to express disapprobation of sexual vice, 2.2.779; 2.4.1215; 3.1.1334.
preoccupation with the problems of predestination: that is, the difficulty of knowing the
spiritual state of one’s self or one’s neighbors, and the troubling consequences of that
uncertainty for both individual Christians and the English Church. While scholars have
recognized both the play’s interest in questions of conscience and its attention to puritan
agendas of social reform, no study has yet focused on Measure for Measure’s complex
engagement with predestination, a site where matters of the soul and the state intersect.³
The play raises two interlocking questions: how do I know if I am saved or damned? And
how are the damned to be governed?

While there was broad doctrinal consensus on predestination in the Elizabethan and
early Jacobean English Church, there were significant disagreements on how and to
whom that doctrine should be taught, its implications for both individual believers and
the Protestant community, as well as the beginnings of doctrinal fissures between the
English Calvinist majority and early anti-Calvinists.⁴ Shot through with the language of

³ While there is no extended critical discussion of reprobation and election in Measure for Measure, there are
a number of excellent studies on related issues in the play. For a discussion of Measure’s engagement with
questions of conscience see Melvin Seiden, Measure for Measure: Casuistry and Artistry (Washington, DC:
Catholic University of America Press, 1990); see also Claire Griffiths-Osborne, “‘The Terms for Common
Justice’: Performing and Reforming Confession in Measure for Measure,” Shakespeare 5, no. 1 (April 2009):
36–51. For a discussion of the play’s engagement with puritan agendas of social reform see Peter Lake with
Michael Questier, The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 621–700. Lake briefly identifies Angelo as a puritan with
pretensions to election, and suggests the play’s treatment of human justice may have anti-Calvinist implications,
656–8, 669–76. See also Martha Widmayer, who, in passing, connects Angelo’s persecution of sexual crime to
the desire of the godly to distinguish themselves from reprobates. Her focus, however, is on the play’s
representation of the godly magistrate’s response to sexual sin, whereas mine is on the intersections in the play
between the psychological and social ramifications of the doctrine of predestination. Martha Widmayer, “‘To
Sin in Loving Virtue’: Angelo of Measure for Measure,” Texas Studies in Literature and Language 49, no. 2

⁴ See Dewey D. Wallace, Puritans and Predestination: Grace and English Protestant Theology, 1525–1629
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Bryan D. Spinks, Two Faces of Elizabethan
Anglican Theology: Sacraments and Salvation in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker
(Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1999). Both Wallace and Spinks rightly observe that the use of the term
“Calvinist” to describe the theological orientation of the English Church is problematic since Calvin was only
one of a number of Reformed theologians whose works were widely read and influential in English Protestant
thought. Many of the godly, moreover, would have considered self-identification as a “Calvinist” rather than as
a “Christian” or a “Protestant” or as “Reformed” to be a form of idolatry, setting the things of man before God’s
grace and reprobation, *Measure for Measure* dramatizes a range of Calvinist affective responses to the doctrine of predestination.

Previous chapters have suggested ways that the working conditions of the theater industry facilitate exchanges—sometimes hostile, sometimes exploratory—between confessional groups; in this final chapter I look at how one play by Shakespeare stages and generates affective diversity within Calvinist doctrinal consensus on one particular issue: reprobation. Admittedly, the distinction between inter- and intra-confessional diversity can be a tenuous one since many English people, whether they realized it or not, fell between clear confessional groups. Drawing sharp distinctions between Protestants and puritans is particularly difficult and sometimes pointless since these differences tend to be of degree not kind. Godly Protestants handled the doctrine with different emphases and affective styles of piety than their more “prayer-book” cousins; however, unlike ceremonial practices like wearing the surplice or ecclesiological questions such as whether or not there ought to be bishops, predestination was not a wedge issue between conformist and hot Protestants.

Yet even within this doctrinal consensus there appear a variety of Calvinist imaginative negotiations of, and affective responses to, predestination. In this chapter I will argue that *Measure for Measure*, through the godly magistrate Angelo’s moral crisis, explores the possibility that even the seemingly holiest individuals might be secret reprobates, but does not treat the difficulties of self-interpretation and social judgment scriptures. Nevertheless, because the term is widely used in this context, I have retained it for convenience. See also Peter White, who argues for a “spectrum” of Calvinist treatments of predestination, rather than a consensus, *Predestination, Policy, and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Because, *pace* White, there was wide consensus on predestination within the English Church until the rise of Arminianism in the mid-1620s, I refer, throughout the chapter, to works on predestination published after the play’s first performance in 1604, as well as those published before.
attendant on predestination as an exclusively puritan concern. The play offers Angelo as a figure of identification for puritan theatergoers who would be particularly familiar with the specter of unconscious spiritual hypocrisy. But it also presents apprehension over the predestined condition of one’s soul as a problem shared by Calvinists across a broad spectrum. In other words, in this play, anxiety about reprobation is where puritan/Protestant identification and cross-identification become blurred.

Angst is not the only response to predestination put forward in the play. The drunk prisoner Barnadine’s sangfroid toward his potential reprobation provides an emotional counterpoint to Angelo’s anxious self-examination. Barnadine, a minor character, is presented as a walking emblem of reprobation, in terms that would be familiar to audiences from sermons and devotional literature. But Barnadine’s cautionary religious function is at odds with the cheekiness of his dramatic presence. Audience members might either recognize Barnadine as an edifying negative example and/or feel inclined to celebrate—laugh along with—his irreverent attitude toward his impending death and implied damnation. Angelo and Barnadine, then, are both potential reprobates with whom theatergoers might identify, but for opposite reasons: Angelo because he scours himself for signs of damnation and Barnadine because he doesn’t care.

*Measure for Measure* recognizes the radical illegibility of the predestined condition of souls as not only a private, spiritual quandary, but also as a social problem. The play gives a sense of the Sisyphean difficulty of dispensing justice in a world overrun with sin. If everyone guilty were punished according to their deserts there would be few subjects left to govern. The law, too, is repeatedly shown to fail to distinguish good individuals from the multitude of intransigent sinners. *Measure for Measure’s* central plot twist—
that the outwardly holy Angelo, the man so pure his “urine is congealed ice,” turns out to
be a lecherous, corrupt official—is an object lesson in the way misperception of the inner
man can create a political problem (3.2.106–7). In the play’s closing scene, the Duke
reverses his opening command to rigidly enforce the law and extends mercy to all the
guilty characters. This, I will argue, models for the audience yet another emotional
position toward predestination: a careful, “benefit-of-the-doubt” deferral of human
judgment. That is, the play begins with the challenge of administrating law to a
population of sinners and ends with a sense of the necessarily provisional nature of such a
project when everyone’s case has already been determined, and no one can be sure of his
or her sentence.

*Measure for Measure* presents audiences with a variety of psychological and social
responses to this uncertainty—from Angelo’s initial godly confidence to his despair and
doubt, to Barnadine’s nonchalance toward the state of his soul, to the Duke’s shift from a
punitive approach to governing the wicked to a careful reservation of judgment. By
modeling these multiple stances toward predestination the play offers audiences an
opportunity to experiment emotionally with contrasting positions toward a difficult, yet
culturally pervasive, doctrine. Angelo, I will argue, provides puritan theatergoers with a
potential figure of identification, a complex character wrestling with spiritual problems
that were of particular concern for the godly. But because predestination was a doctrine
shared across the Calvinist spectrum, theatergoers who did not identify as godly may also
have found the puritan Angelo to articulate some of their own anxieties. Moreover,
theatergoers, I want to keep insisting, do not attend plays simply to feel concentrated and
aestheticized versions of things they already feel in their daily lives, but also to
experience emotions and subject positions that are unfamiliar. In other words, in its early modern performance context, *Measure for Measure* lets both the “wicked” pleasure-seekers in the theater fret over the possibility of reprobation with Angelo, and the earnest puritans laugh along with Barnadine’s casual irreligion.

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“We assert,” writes John Calvin in the *Institutes*, “that by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once and for all determined, both whom he would admit to salvation, and whom he would condemn to destruction.” Calvin insists that God’s double decree of salvation and damnation is not based on God’s foreknowledge of future sin or virtue, but proceeds from God’s will alone. That is, the elect are not chosen because God foresees they will be good, nor the reprobate rejected because God foresees they will be wicked; such an assertion would make salvation the result of works not grace. Rather, the saved are saved and the damned are dammed because God is God.

The “precise” Angelo, as scholars have long acknowledged, would have been recognizable to early modern audiences as a puritan, one of the godly. He is also introduced in terms that suggest he is, or is perceived to be, among the elect. Both the Duke and Escalus recognize Angelo’s “worth” and “virtue” (1.1.22–31). His modest reluctance to assume the Duke’s office seems to validate the confidence placed in him.

Alongside overt praise of his moral character, and the obvious connotations of the name

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*Angelo*, he is twice in the opening scene addressed in language that evokes election. Within the first twenty lines of the play and only two lines after we hear Angelo first named, the Duke announces, “For you must know, we have with special soul / Elected him our absence to supply” (1.1.17–18). Although this statement literally means simply, *I have with special care and all the faculties of mind chosen him to fill my place*, the phrase “special soul / Elected” in a conversation about a man of conspicuous piety might alert listeners to a theological subtext. This resonates a few lines later when the Duke declares to Angelo, “We have with a leaven’d and prepared choice / Proceeded to you” (1.1.50–1). Describing the precise Angelo as the “leaven’d . . . choice” invokes a familiar metaphor used to describe the relationship between true Christians and Christians in name only. It was a commonplace of puritan culture that the Church of England was validated as a true Church by the presence of a godly minority among the unredeemed, imperfectly reformed majority of English Christians, a “saving remnant” often referred to as “the leaven that leavens the lump.”7 To introduce Angelo to the audience in these terms establishes not only his perceived virtue, but also the presumption of his election.

For Calvinists, however, the elect are few while the reprobate are many. “Those, who truly belong to Christ,” continues Calvin glossing Paul, “are called ‘a remnant;’ for experience proves, that of a great multitude the most part fall away and disappear, so that often only a small portion remains.”8 English Calvinists made various guesses as to the


relative size of the elect few and reprobate multitude.\(^9\) Under the chapter heading “The Visible Church Is a Mixt Company, Compounded of Christians, True and False: The Greatest Part Being the Worst,” John Darrell suggests that the ratio of saved to damned souls varies between Churches at different historical moments; it may be that one in four is saved, or one in ten, or one in twenty.\(^{10}\) Less optimistically, the godly minister Thomas Shepard lamented, “it is a thousand to one if ever thou be one of that small number whom God hath picked out to escape this wrath to come.”\(^{11}\) Arthur Dent, the nonconformist preacher whose *Plaine Mans Pathway to Heaven. Wherein Every Man May Clearly See Whether He Shall Be Saved or Damned*, which went through twenty-five editions between 1601 and 1640, making it one of the most frequently reprinted books of the period, writes:

> who seeth not, who knoweth not, that thousand thousands are caried headlong to destruction . . . the number of Gods Elect vpon the face of the earth, are very few in comparison . . . I suppose, wee should not need the Arte of Arithmetike to number them. For I thinke, there would bee very few in euery Uillage, Towne, and Citie; . . . they would walke very thinly in the streets: so as a man might easily tell them as they goe.\(^{12}\)

In other words, when the “prophane multitude” are swept away the saints will be few enough to count on one’s fingers; far fewer, that is, than bought copies of Dent’s book.


Measure for Measure too develops a sense of a world divided between a godly minority and a multitude of impenitent sinners. The Justices Escalus and Angelo are intent on enforcing the laws of Vienna along the lines prescribed by Scripture, on the model of Calvin’s theocratic Geneva, or the moral reforms proposed by puritans early in James’ reign. Escalus on the bench asks Pompey, a bawd brought before him, “How would you live, Pompey? By being a bawd? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? It is a lawful trade?” (2.1.220–2). The judge is not simply reminding the prisoner that there is a statute against procuring, but pressing Pompey to reflect on the morality of his profession. In this context the term “lawful” evokes intra-Protestant, especially puritan discussions of what is permitted in Scripture, what is forbidden, and what things are indifferent, dependent merely on custom and subject to historical change. The remainder of the exchange, in which Pompey retorts, “If the law would allow it, sir” and Escalus replies, “But the law will not allow it, Pompey; nor shall it not be allowe...” (2.1.224–6), reinforces the split between Pompey’s worldly concerns—if Vienna’s statutes were changed then procuring would be fine—and Escalus’ underlying assumption that Vienna’s laws are predicated on God’s and should be enforced as such.

But, as many characters in the play observe, the laws of sexual morality are continually broken by nearly everyone. Pompey asks facetiously of the strict enforcement of the morality statutes, “Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?” (2.1.227–8, italics mine). He jokes, “If you head and hang all that offend that way . . . you’ll be glad to give out a commission for more heads: if this law hold in Vienna ten year, I’ll rent the fairest house in it after three pence a bay” (2.1.235–

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13 See Lake, Antichrist’s Lewd Hat, 621–700.
9). In other words, if everyone guilty of vice were actually punished Vienna would be so depopulated that real estate prices would plummet; here, as for Dent, if all the wicked were removed the city would be empty. Lucio too presents sexual crime as endemic. As he says to the disguised Duke, “Yes, in good sooth, the vice is of great kindred . . . it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down” (3.2.97–9). For Pompey the bawd and the whoremonger Lucio, the ubiquity of lechery makes it essentially no crime, or at least a crime so ordinary it is absurd to prosecute. Even upright characters maintain that the prevalence of vice should mitigate its punishment. “Who is it that hath died for this offense?” asks Isabella of Angelo, pleading for her brother’s life, “There’s many have committed it” (2.2.89–90). Indeed, the bed trick through which the Duke saves Claudio’s life repeats the crime for which Claudio was sentenced to execution: premarital sex. The basic scenario of the play—a judge is charged with applying the law to a city full of sinners, himself included—raises a question specific to Calvinist culture: what is the place of justice or mercy in governing a population the majority of which is already irrevocably damned?14

There was a widespread tendency to equate the godly with the elect and the wicked with the reprobate. Doctrinally, as I will discuss below, English Calvinists were taught that the appearance of sanctity could be deceiving. It was therefore dangerous and uncharitable to presume that the godly (those who appeared holy, specifically puritans) and the elect (those whom God has actually chosen to save) or the wicked (people who

sin) and reprobates (people going to Hell) were coterminous groups. Nevertheless, despite warnings against it, the terms godly/elect and wicked/reprobate were often used interchangeably. “Wicked and reprobate” commonly appear as hendiadys, making them essentially synonymous. Lancelot Andrewes, for example, exorts his readers to pray, “that we suffer not like the wicked and reprobate thief who blasphemed Christ.” An anonymous 1601 pamphlet detailing the “devilish practices” of six German witches describes the “shamefull end of such malafactors,” as a “griefe to the godly, and a terrour to the wicked and reprobate people.” In a collection of sententiae Francis Meres warns that God is not careless of men’s actions, “albeit wicked and reprobate men think him so.” For the quasi-nonconformist clergyman John Moore, “the reprobate and wicked are as barrels full of poyson.” The frequency with which these terms were paired suggests a strong associative link between worldly and eternal status.

Sermons and pamphlets that specifically address the relationship between the wicked and the reprobate could contain both disclaimers that distinguish one group from the other, and more heady statements conflating the two. In the egregiously mistitled sermon, “The Poor Man’s Hope,” for example, John Gore asks “whether none of the

Righteous seed [i.e. the elect] ever did come, or ever shall come to beggary?"\(^{19}\) Gore’s answer is a qualified no. “Though it do not seem to hold . . . in all particular,” he writes, “yet . . . for the most part, it is a rare unusuall thing to see a righteous body come to beggary. **David** in all his time never saw it, and I beleive the oldest man alive cannot point out many instances.” Not only is it extremely rare for one of the elect to be poor, but, Gore asserts, when they are poor it is only for a short time: “So hee that belongs to God, cannot, shall not begge his bread, so as to make a trade and profession of beggary, God will surely raise them up some friends or meanes to sustaine them.”\(^{20}\) He concludes:

> What then is to be thought of our common beggers? are they all ungodly? are they all unrighteous? are they all the seed of Reprobates? I dare not say so; there may be some that belong to the election of grace among them, else God forbid. Wee reade in the Gospel, that some were called in out of the High-ways, and from under Hedges…which is doubtlesse meant of beggers that lay lurking thereabouts; and [Jesus said] …**compell them to come in**; they came not in alone but by compulsion; and so may our common beggers by compulsion perhaps be brought to goodnesse …by correction and feare… never of their owne accord. But generally as they are suffered and [I]et alone, they are the very filth and vermine of the Common wealth… [who] rather chuse to wander up and downe the country, and spend their dayes in a most base ungodly course of life; they are indeed the very **Sodomites** of the land, children of **Beliall**, without God, without Magistrate, without Minister; dissolute, disobedient, and reprobate to every good work.\(^{21}\)

The opening series of rhetorical questions—*are they all ungodly? all unrighteous? all Reprobates*?—signals an awareness that categorical claims about the souls of others are unreliable. But the small exceptions Gore makes confirm the general rule: destitution is a sign of damnation. Allowing the possibility that “there *may be some* that belong to . . .

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21 Ibid., 21–2.
“election” gives Gore the license to stress that most beggars are damned. Similarly, his selective reference to the Gospels misrepresents Christ’s dealings with the poor as a relationship of necessary coercion. Moreover, Christ’s “compulsion” of beggars provides a legitimating model for the early modern statutes and practices that criminalized poverty; “so may our common beggers by compulsion perhaps be brought to goodnesse . . . by correction and feare . . . never of their owne accord.” Gore’s attack is directed at the poor understood as a criminal underclass, sturdy beggars not widows and orphans. The mark of reprobation is not simply reduced economic circumstances but habitual begging, tantamount under the Poor Laws to a life of crime, or, in Gore’s terms, “a most base ungodly course of life.” Gore’s underlying assumption is not simply that there is a link between poverty and reprobation but that there is more generally a correlation between reprobation and any sustained criminal activity or sin.

The magistrate, according to Calvin, is charged with handling the “wicked and reprobate.” He writes, “excommunication…rooteth out the wicked and reprobate for a time, why should not the godly Magistrates exercise the sword against the wicked, so oft as neede shall require?”

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.


25 A sense that occasional lapses and habitual sin are significantly different spiritual indicators perhaps underpins Isabella’s angry words to her brother when he asks her to sleep with Angelo in exchange for his life, “O fie, fie, fie! / Thy sin’s not accidental but a trade / Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd; / ’Tis best that thou diest quickly” (3.1.148–51).

Church serve analogous or overlapping functions. This returns to the question of how far
the wicked and reprobate are assumed to be coterminous groups. The same ambiguity
appears, for example, in Robert Welstead’s 1630 tract, *The Cure of a Hard-Heart*. He
writes, “God sets before us the examples of reprobats, (as Magistrates hang vp
malefactors in chaines . . . ).”  

Technically, the “as” makes this a simile, but
“malefactors” here seem more like “examples” of “reprobats” than their figurative
replacement. The point is that beliefs about reprobation impacted early modern ideas of,
and responses to, criminality. In this sense, predestination is political.

Calvin himself acknowledges that the idea that the great mass of humanity is marked
for destruction is hard to accept, referring to predestination as an “irreproachable yet
incomprehensible judgment.”

He warns against the dangers of prying too curiously into
the secret wisdom of God regarding this doctrine, “where the careless and confident
intruder will obtain no satisfaction to his curiosity, but will enter a labyrinth from which
he will find no way to depart.”

But Calvin also criticizes those who “would have every
mention of predestination . . . buried [and] teach men to avoid every question concerning it
as they would a precipice.”

Despite the general theological consensus on predestination
in the English Church there remained a division between those who, like Calvin, insisted
that because God’s double decree was revealed in Scripture it must be taught and those
who would bury the doctrine.

Both Elizabeth and James regarded pastoral emphasis on predestination as a potential

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28 Calvin, *Institutes*, bk. 3, chp. 21, p. 149.
29 Ibid., bk. 3, chp. 21, p. 142.
30 Ibid., bk. 3, chp. 21, pp. 142–3.
threat to law and order. Their concern was that individuals convinced they were already irrevocably damned might fall into despair and commit egregious sins, or, alternatively, that those who believed they were saved might turn to antinomianism and likewise commit egregious sins, since it was understood that the elect could not fall from grace. In practical terms this translated into a careful reticence concerning reprobation in key Church documents and an emphasis on election. For example, the 1563 version of Article XVII of the Elizabethan Church removes the reference to “Decrees”—plural—of predestination and focuses on God’s deliverance of the “chosen in Christ.” Catechisms from the period rarely include extended discussions of predestination. Alexander Nowell’s Catechism, the unofficial Elizabethan standard text of the genre, discusses election and justification in passing but does not devote a separate section to the doctrine.

Without challenging the theological validity of God’s double decrees, Elizabeth sought to limit the Church’s official position on the principle. In 1595 a pulpit war at Cambridge between the Calvinist Heads of the College and a budding anti-Calvinist undergraduate, William Barrett, prompted Archbishop Whitgift to confer with the Heads, producing the Lambeth Articles, an orthodox Calvinist clarification of the Church’s position on predestination. Elizabeth rebuked the Archbishop for allowing the doctrine

31 Spinks, Two Faces, 13.
32 Ibid., 15–6.
33 The degree to which the Lambeth Articles represent an orthodox Calvinist position on predestination is a matter of some debate. H.C. Porter suggests in Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 365–75, that the Lambeth Articles constitute a middle way or compromise between the Calvinist position of the Heads and Barrett’s anti-Calvinism. Peter Lake, however, argues convincingly that Whitgift’s modifications to the Calvinist Heads proposal were minor, and intended primarily to demonstrate the Archbishop’s authority rather than indicate substantive theological differences. Patrick Collinson sides with Porter, pointing to Whitgift’s claim that “the doctrine of the Church of England doth in no respect depend upon Calvin, Beza, or Peter Martyr”; quoted in Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan
to be so openly debated and for legitimating the Lambeth Articles with the authority of his office without her permission. As Robert Cecil informed Archbishop Whitgift, “[the Queen] mislikes much that any allowance hath been given by your Grace and the rest of any point to be disputed of predestination being a matter tender and dangerous to weak ignorant minds.”

As Peter Lake points out, the fact that “Whitgift could risk so much [by arrogating the power to define Church doctrine] without realizing the full implications of his own actions was in itself a telling tribute to the depth of his assumption of an abiding doctrinal consensus [on predestination] in the Church.”

When, almost a decade later at the Hampton Court Conference, in 1604, the year of the play’s first performance, the puritan spokesman John Reynolds proposed attaching the Lambeth Articles to the Thirty-nine Articles, the conformist Calvinist Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, warned King James, “how very many in these daies, neglecting holiness of life, presumed too much of persisting of grace, laying all their religion upon predestination, If I shall be saved, I shall be saved; which he termed a desperate doctrine.”

James agreed, rejecting both changes to the wording of Article XVII as well the addition of the Lambeth Articles, saying he “wished that the doctrine of predestination might be very tenderly handled, and with great discretion, lest on the one side, God’s omnipotence might be called into question, by impeaching the doctrine of his eternal predestination, or on the other, a desperate presumption might be arreared, by

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Lake, Moderate Puritans, 221.

Cecil to Whitgift quoted in Peter Lake, Moderate Puritans, 228.

Ibid., 227.

inferring the necessary certainty of standing and persisting in grace.”37 The wary response of both monarchs to the Lambeth Articles indicates that although predestination was considered sound doctrine it was also seen to have the potential, if mishandled, to bring the souls of the nation to a state of despair. And desperate souls make unquiet subjects.38

In contrast to this cautious, official treatment of the doctrine, many English divines agreed with Calvin that predestination must be taught since God has revealed it to all in Scripture. Chastising those who “suppose themselves right in maintaining that . . . predestination, although it be true, ought not to be preached to the people,” Calvin insists, “But it must by all means be preached, that he who has ears to hear may hear.”39 In his treatise A Golden Chaine Containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation, the prominent puritan William Perkins writes explicitly and at length of the signs of both election and reprobation.40 Theodore Beza’s Treasure of Trueth announces its intent to show “That the question of God his everlasting Predestination is neither curious, nor unneedfull in the Churche of God.”41 Beza’s book is extremely reader-friendly. It gives thirty-eight “aphorisms” or short statements clarifying aspects of the

37 Ibid., 181.
39 Calvin, Institutes, bk. 3, chp. 23.
41 Theodore Beza, Treasure of Trueth (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1576), B1r.
doctrine each followed by a list of supporting Biblical passages. Appended to Beza’s
own text is a treatise by John Foxe on predestination “so plainely set foorth, as the verie
simplest may easily understand it, and reape great profit thereby.”42 Indeed, there is
material evidence that Beza’s Treasure was directed toward a broad audience; the book
was printed in octavo, making it both more affordable and small enough to carry around
for easy reference.43

The doctrine of double predestination was perhaps most widely and authoritatively
disseminated to the English public through the marginal commentary of the Geneva
Bible. Clearly influenced by the theological climate of Calvin’s Geneva, two of the
Marian exiles responsible for the Bible translation, William Whittingham and Anthony
Gilby, published treatises on predestination.44 The Geneva’s marginalia continually
differentiates between the “godly” and the “wicked,” and predestinatory assumptions
underpin many of the comments on hypocrisy and despair. The annotations explicitly
identify several typological figures of reprobation. For example, when Esau sells his
birthright for “pottage” the note reads, “The reprobate esteeme not Gods benefits.”45 In
Exodus when Pharaoh rejects the plea of Moses for his people, the margin declares “God
hardeneth the hearts of the reprobat, that his glorie thereby might be the more set
forthe.”46 Passages of the New Testament too were given a predestinatory gloss. Romans

42 Ibid., A1r.
44 Wallace, Puritans and Predestination, 24–7; Anthony Gilby, A Briefe Treatise of Election and Reprobacion
wythe Certane Answers to the Obiections of the Aduersaries of this Doctrine (Geneva: James Poullain and
Reny Houdouyn, 1556).
45 Geneva Bible, Gen. 15:32.
46 Ibid., Exod. 11:9.
9:15, “I will have mercie on whome I wil shewe mercie; and I wil have compassion on him, on whome I wil have compassion,” was a frequently cited verse in sermons on the doctrine. Interestingly, the marginal comment, “As the onlie wil & purpose of God is the chief cause of election and reprobation: so his fre mercie in Christ is an inferior cause of salvation & the hardening of the heart, an inferior cause of damnation,” addresses the double decrees while the verse speaks only of “mercie.” This suggests the degree to which the doctrine in its entirety worked as an interpretive filter.

In spite of attempts, then, to limit the teaching of double predestination, it saturated foundational English Protestant texts like the Geneva Bible and circulated in popular pastoral guides by seminal Calvinist thinkers like Perkins and Beza. It also motivated sermons by prominent divines like the puritan Laurence Chaderton. In An Excellent and Godly Sermon preached outdoors at Paul’s Cross in late October, 1578, Chaderton warns his listeners, perhaps as many as 5,000, to be watchful:

Now seeing how farre sinners and ungodly men may resemble the dear children of God & yet be voyde of the graces of regeneration…we had neede with all care and studie to trye and examine the very bottome of our heartes, and rippe up all the inward and secret corners of our consciences [to know] whether we have truly tasted the gift of God in Christ, or no. But if we do content ourselves with the shadowes of inwarde godlinesse…with lippe service, and such external kind of profession…we deceive our owne heartes…and walke, as fast as can be, towards the place of darknesse and endlesse destruction.47

Chaderton identifies the crux of the problem of predestination for individual Calvinists: how do I know if I am saved or damned? While Chaderton advocates the kind of introspection long recognized as a—if not the—formative practice of Protestant subjectivity, he acknowledges that such self-examination produces ambiguous signs. The

47 Laurence Chaderton, An Excellent and Godly Sermon (London: Christopher Barker, 1578), G5r–v, E6v–E7r. For further examples of Paul’s Cross sermons on predestination see Millar Maclure, The Paul’s Cross Sermons, 1534–1642 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 200–56.
elect and the reprobate “resemble” each other so nearly that it is possible even to deceive oneself, for even the most diligent, devout searcher of the “secret corners of [the] conscience” to be an unwitting spiritual hypocrite.

Although doctrinally English Calvinists were instructed that it was indeed possible for individuals while still living in this world to attain assurance of their salvation, this certainty eluded many of the faithful. The search for signs of election could produce both comfort and anxiety. As Nehemiah Wallington writes:

I was troubled againe for I thought I had binne a reprobate…and going over the marces alone by the riverside and looking upon the grasse my consince tolde me my sinnes were more in number than the speares of grasse upon the earth. With that Satan tempted me the eleventh time, and that was to leape into the river and drown myselfe[.] with that I fell out a weeping[.] And my God of his wanted mercies put into my mind that his mercies were more in number then my sinnes and if I have grace to repent for them, the Lords Name be praised for evermore.

Wallington moves from reprobation to grace, from suicide to consolation, within the space of a short paragraph. Whereas many contemporary historical accounts of the psychology of predestination tend to emphasize either the spiritual consolation or the despair produced by the doctrine, for Wallington doubt and assurance are entangled. One triggers the other. This spiritual vacillation proceeds in part from the fact that, as

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48 Indeed, William Barrett’s claim in his 1595 sermon at Cambridge that no one could be certain of his or her salvation was one of the key points which William Whittaker and the other Calvinist Heads of the college found objectionable. Lake, Moderate Puritans, 210. For Barrett’s subsequent retraction see Thomas Fuller, History of the University of Cambridge from the Conquest to the Year 1634, ed. Marmaduke Prickett and Thomas Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1840), 283.


50 For a discussion of the potential of the doctrine of predestination to induce suicidal despair in the faithful, see John Stachniewski, The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). While richly documented, Stachniewski’s book is perhaps imbalanced in the emphasis it places on despair to the exclusion of other affective states generated by the search for signs of election. For example, he focuses on Wallington’s suicidal tendencies, rather than his vacillation between despair and comfort (50).
described in tracts like Perkins’s and Dent’s, the signs of salvation and damnation could be nearly identical. The kind of abject awareness of sin Wallington describes above could either be a mark of reprobation, as he initially suspects, or the precondition for receiving saving grace. Conversely, a firm persuasion of God’s love and mercy could either be what it seems, evidence of election, or its doppelganger, false faith.

The children of God can chart their regeneration through the stages of the _ordo salutis_, the order of salvation: election, calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification.\(^{51}\) But the children of wrath can be for a time deluded by the simulacrum of these spiritual conditions. As Perkins writes:

The acknowledgement of Gods calling is, whereby the Reprobate for a time, doe subject themselves to the calling of God, which calling is wrought by the preaching of the worde. Mat. 22.14. *For many are called, but fewe are chosen.* And of this calling there are fiue other degrees… The first is, an enlightning of their mindes, whereby they are instructed of the holy Ghost to the vnderstanding and knoweldge of the word… The second, is a certaine penitencie, whereby the Reprobate… doth acknowledge his sinne… [and] Desireth to be saued…. The third degree is, a temporarie faith, whereby the reprobate doth confusedly beleueue the promises of God, made in Christ… The fourth is, a tasting of heauenly gifts: as of Iustification, and of Sanctification, and of the vertues of the world to come. This tasting is verely a sense in the hearts of the Reprobates, whereby they doe perceiue and feele the excellencie of Gods benefits, notwithstanding they doe not enioy the same. For it is one thing to tast of dainties at a banquet, and another thing to feede and to be nourished thereby… The fifth degree is, the outward holines of life for a time, ynder which, is comprehended a zeale in the profession of religion, a reuerence and feare towards Gods ministers, and amendment of li

In other words, one could embrace Christ’s word, repent, feel spiritual blessings, live an outwardly holy life—and still be damned. It was possible, for a time, to delude oneself with the false signs of sanctity, to “taste” of God’s banquet without “feed[ing].”

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\(^{51}\) Of these five stages only the middle three unfold during an individual’s life on earth. Election is determined from eternity, outside human time, and glorification happens after death, when the elect soul is taken to Heaven.

\(^{52}\) Perkins, _A Golden Chaine_, 164–5.
Ultimately, it was understood, the reprobate would return to sin and despair. This distinction, however, was complicated by the belief that even the sanctified elect, while they could not finally or totally fall from grace, might continue to struggle with sin and doubt. Indeed, in many pious circles an arduous struggle with anxiety was a mark of intense spirituality, God’s fierce workings in the heart. Remarking on the high instance of religious despair among future preachers, Stachniewski writes, “Passage through a period of torment seemed to bestow a certificate of profound spirituality . . . [a] preacher’s authority could therefore be enhanced if his own passage into the faith had been a dramatic tussle.”

Experientially, the marks of theologically opposite states—false presumption of salvation and saving faith, pious doubt and the despair of the damned—could be practically indistinguishable.

For puritans the hermeneutics of double predestination posed a particular problem. Puritans, more or less definitionally, tended toward heightened self-scrutiny and were, therefore, more likely to be painfully aware that both the inner movements of piety and the outward signs of a holy life could be misleading. The godly were also more invested, as a group, in maintaining a visible distinction between themselves and the ungodly, but were at the same time uncomfortably conscious of the fact that the godly and the elect were not coterminous groups. As Lake puts it, “if the doctrine of

53 Stachniewski, The Persecutory Imagination, 44.


55 Lake, Moderate Puritans, 116–68; Martha Widmayer argues that “[Angelo’s] conduct can be explained largely by the great “fever on goodness” afflicting many in Shakespeare’s age—a fever caused primarily, perhaps, by the determination of the godly and respectable sorts to set themselves apart from reprobates” but pursues her argument primarily in terms of distinguishing respectable from disreputable social conduct rather than with attention to the theological division understood to underpin these behaviors. Widmayer, “‘To Sin in Loving Virtue,’” 155–80.
predestination provided objective roots for the divide between the godly and the wicked, it also ensured puritan attitudes toward that divide could be nothing if not ambiguous.

For it was not permissible simply to transfer the division between the elect and the reprobate to contemporary social reality. Only God knew the identity of the elect and to anticipate the final revelation of his will would have been a heinous offense against sovereign liberty.56 The godly, then, were faced with the impossible charge of shunning the wicked without knowing for certain whether or not that group included the whore in the pub down the road, the parish priest, family and friends, or even oneself.

A number of puritan texts dwell on the problem of spiritual hypocrisy.57 For example, in *The Mystery of Sefie-Deceiving*, published in eleven editions between 1614 and 1642, Daniel Dyke writes of those who possess only a temporary, not saving, faith:

> These men we see go very far, so that, as the Apostle speaketh, they are in some sort, *made partakers of the holy Ghost*, they *taste of the powers of the world to come* & expresse their inward grace by outward obedience, bringing forth fruit very speedily, far sooner than others, as the stonie ground is more quick & forward than other soiles. And yet for all this these also, being rotten at heart, are to be ranked in the number of *selfe-deceivers*, as falsely judging themselves to be in a state of grace.58

Even the godliest individual, whose inner life is touched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit,


who leads an outwardly holy life, indeed even an exceptionally virtuous life, might one day learn to his or her dismay that they are, as Calvin puts it, “not at all superior to devils.”

Shakespeare explores the possibility of radically misreading the signs of election in the figure of Angelo, whose outward signs of virtue deceive himself as well as others, creating both a private and a social crisis. Angelo, I will show, agonizes over the condition of his soul. While he asks for death without mercy when his sins are discovered in act 5, his basic problem is not so much despair as it is radical uncertainty: “what art thou, Angelo?” (2.2.172). Moreover, the play does not present Angelo’s angst as a dismissible, exclusively puritan neurosis, but rather as the condensed version of a broader Calvinist anxiety diffused throughout Measure for Measure: the opacity of the self to the self. The soul cannot be changed or known. As Claudio pleads to Isabella the night before his execution, “Ay, but to die, and go we know not where” (3.1.117). The doctrine of predestination creates an auto-epistemological crisis for individual Calvinists, making Angelo’s reprobation anxiety a potential site of audience identification. That is to say, the play’s most prominent puritan does not appear simply as the “other” against which a conforming Church of England identity is solidified, but rather may serve as an emotional placeholder for the spiritual difficulties of godly and non-godly theatergoers alike.

The play also presents the hermeneutics of predestination as a social problem. What if the magistrate is a reprobate in godly clothing? What if the criminal is among the

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chosen? Angelo is an object lesson in the impossibility of equating the godly with the elect or the wicked with the reprobate, even though, as shown above, slippage between these terms was rampant. While most English Calvinists would have agreed that there was some relationship between the fate of a soul after death and the fortune of an individual while living, the problem was that, as with signs of spiritual virtue, worldly prosperity and hardship could both signal either election or reprobation. God afflicts mankind with two kinds of punishment, in Chaderton’s terms, “judiciary” for the reprobate, to give them a foretaste of damnation, and “castigatory” for the elect, to correct them and bring them closer to God. As Lake observes, “The difference in God’s intentions in chastising the righteous and the wicked was paralleled by the very different subjective experience of those two groups to the experience of affliction. By their sufferings the godly were genuinely brought to God . . . The wicked, on the other hand . . . remained trapped in a carnal security.” If treated with leniency the damned simply became presumptuous. Theologically, then, the rulings of human judges produced arbitrary effects. The true impact of any legal decision depended on the unalterable nature of the soul of the person sentenced, not on the sentence itself. Measure for Measure begins with the challenge of imposing God’s law on a majority of irredeemable sinners. It ends with a sense of human law as a necessarily imperfect rehearsal of divine judgments that have already been made in secret.

Angelo exhibits a number of the stock traits of anti-puritan satire, chief among them a hypocritical piety masking fleshy appetites. The Duke’s lines at the end of act one,

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61 For discussion of the “prenzie” crux—the debate over whether or not “prenzie” in the original text is a printer’s misreading of “precise” in the manuscript—see Anthony S.G. Edwards and Anthony W. Jenkins
scene three, teach the audience to monitor Angelo for signs of puritan hypocrisy. As he
don's his monastic disguise, the Duke announces his intention to surveil his deputy, “Lord
Angelo is precise . . . scarce confesses / That his blood flows; or that his appetite / is more
to bread than stone. Hence we shall see / . . . what our seemers be” (1.3.50–4). While
many theatergoers might already expect puritans onstage to be duplicitous, this turn is
nevertheless surprising coming from the Duke who, a mere forty lines earlier in the same
scene praises Angelo as “a man of stricture and firm abstinence” (1.3.12). The Duke’s
sudden suspicion of Angelo for his extraordinary purity of life, the very quality that made
him fit to rule, highlights the difficulty of reading virtuous behavior as a sign of actual
virtue.

As Angelo’s hidden sexual vice is revealed, characters denounce him in ways that
rhetorically foreground his hypocrisy. The Duke closes his account of how the deputy
jilted his fiancée when her dowry was lost with the phrase “this well-seeming Angelo”
(3.1.223). The moniker serves as an ironic punch-line to the cumulative list of Mariana’s
misfortunes. Referring to Angelo’s fraudulent reputation for sexual purity the Duke
moralizes, “That we were all, as some would seem to be, / From our faults, as faults from
seeming, free!” (3.2.37–8). The rhyming couplet here, like the one above (“see / . . .
what seemers be”), strikes the ear and gives the comment the authority of an adage.
Similarly, the Duke’s twenty-four-line rhyming speech denouncing Angelo’s hypocrisy
in such couplets as “O, what may man within him hide! / Though angel on the outward

‘‘Prenzie’: Measure for Measure, III.i,” Shakespeare Quarterly 27, no. 3 (Summer 1976): 333–4; Paul N.
discussion of the association between puritans, hypocrisy, and fleshly appetite, see Kristen Poole, Radical
Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England (Cambridge:
side” is written in octosyllables (3.2.264–5). The audible break from pentameter formally sets the speech apart from the play’s main action, making it more distinctive as moral commentary. When chaste Isabella finally realizes that Angelo’s proposition is not merely a hypothetical case, but that he is in fact demanding that she sleep with him to save her brother’s life, she cries, “Ha? Little honour to be much believ’d / And most pernicious purpose! Seeming, Seeming!” (2.4.147–8). Despite Isabella’s own intense commitment to sexual purity her shock is directed first at Angelo’s hypocrisy, rather than his lust. That is, her immediate reaction is “Seeming, seeming!” not “Lecher, lecher!” Indeed, the tension of the final scene comes primarily from Angelo’s hypocrisy, the fact that he has hidden his crimes, more than the crimes themselves. Simply put, the cliffhanger question is not whether Angelo will coerce a woman to have sex with him but whether or not he will be exposed.

When Isabella reveals Angelo’s obscene proposal to her imprisoned brother Claudio she describes his duplicity in terms that indicate the instability of the relationship between the inner and outer man. Referring to him as an “outward-sainted deputy” who is “yet a devil,” she declares, “His filth within being cast he would appear / A pond as deep as hell” (3.1.88). The image plays with a number of binary oppositions: between the saintly and demonic, the external and internal, the visible and obscure. Angelo is both an outward-saint and devil. “Cast,” meaning to vomit up, as well as the throw of a sounding-line for plumbing depth, makes his filth something both expelled from himself and deep inside. He would “appear . . . as deep as hell,” that is, be made as visible as a place of proverbial darkness. She continues, “O ‘tis the cunning livery of hell / The damnedst body to invest and cover / In precise guards” (3.1.94–6). The metaphor treats
Angelo’s religiosity, his precisionist convictions, as clothes covering a damned body. If the actor playing Angelo was costumed as a puritan, the visual would reinforce Isabella’s accusation. Similar images appear throughout the final scene in which Isabella publicly denounces Angelo. She begs the Duke to “Unfold the evil which is here wrapp’d up / In countenance,” playing on the two senses of countenance: feigned appearance and face (5.1.120–1; italics mine). With the stress on the latter meaning, the line imagines Angelo’s face itself as a kind of curtain that might be pulled back.

However, unlike other stage puritans, such as Zeal-of-the-land Busy in Bartholomew Fair, whom we see primarily striving to appear holy to others, Angelo’s hypocrisy is, at least initially, self-deception. While Malvolio in Twelfth Night privately indulges in social-climbing/erotic fantasies, Angelo is surprised to discover in himself a wicked and carnal desire. Although audiences familiar with the conventions of anti-puritan satire may suspect from the beginning that the pious Angelo is not all that he seems, Angelo himself is not aware he is a fraud until act two.

Angelo is caught off-guard by his own lust for Isabella. “What’s this? What’s this?” he asks, bewildered, after their first meeting where she appeals to him to spare her brother (2.2.163). He continues:

Is this her fault or mine?  
The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most, ha?  
Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I  
That, lying by the violet in the sun,  
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,  
Corrupt with virtuous season. (2.2.163–8)

Victoria Hayne convincingly argues that Angelo would have been costumed as a puritan. She points to a description of puritan dress from the 1602 Thomas Heywood play to suggest what dressing like a puritan might have entailed in 1604: “My shoes were sharpe toed, and my band was plain / Close to my thigh my metamorphis’d breech: / My cloake was narrow Capte, my hair cut shorter.” How a Man May Chuse a Good Wife from a Bad (London: John Windet for Mathew Law, 1602), G3; quoted in Victoria Hayne, “Performing Social Practice: Measure for Measure” Shakespeare Quarterly 44, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 19–20.
The quick succession of questions and the extra-metrical exclamation (“ha”) establish Angelo’s agitation. At the end of the soliloquy we learn the encounter is indeed his first experience of sexual temptation, “Ever till now / When men were fond, I smil’d, and wonder’d how” (2.2.186–7). These unregenerate stirrings cause Angelo immediately to suspect he is damned. The image of the carrion and the flower was commonly used in Calvinist religious tracts to explain why God is not to blame for the sins of reprobates.63 For example, William Barton’s *Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer* explains the metaphor in the following exchange:

Q. How else can you prove that God is the author of the action, and not of the corruption that is in it?
A. By the very light of nature & common reason. For, the Sunne shineth upon carrion, and it stinketh more than it did before. It shineth also upon flowers, and they smell more sweete than they did before, the Sunne is the cause of their smelling more then they did: but not of the stinking of the one, nor of the sweetness of the other, for the cause of that is in the nature of the things themselves. So may God be the author of an action and not of the corruption of the action.64

Gervase Babington, future Bishop of Worcester, gives the image a nearly identical gloss:

Concerning...how God may bee the author of the action, and yet not of the evill any way in the action, see by these similitudes. The Sunne lighting with his hote beames upon a dead carcasse causeth a strong and loathsome savour yet is not the Sunne either unsweete it selfe, or the cause of that unsweeteness, but the carion itself. For if the Sunne were the cause, ever the like cause, the like effect, but we see it is not so, but contrary, when it lighteth upon sweete hearbes and odoriferous flowers, it draweth out of them great sweetness and pleaunta smels...[As when] the pure worde of the Lorde is reached or read, and one savoreth and gathereth to life, and other to death and destruction, is now [the] word cause of those severall effects, or the creatures themselves blessed or not blessed with Gods holy Spirit[?].65

63 Claire Griffiths-Osborne suggests that the flower and flesh in this passage correspond to the elect and reprobate in Calvinist theology, but presents this as her own observation without demonstrating that the metaphor was used in this way in the period. Griffiths-Osborne, “‘The Terms for Common Justice,’” 42.

Like Babington and Barton, Angelo frames the flower/carcass image as an explanation of why the cause of the action (Isabella) is not to blame for the evil in the action (his desire). The close similarity between the terms of these texts suggest the flower-elect/carcass-reprobate metaphor was a commonplace that would have been recognizable to early modern theatergoers.  

Angelo’s first soliloquy, then, presents his moral crisis in the specific language of reprobation. This is reinforced a few lines later when Angelo, horrified at his own desires, asks himself “What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?” (2.2.172). Coming just three lines after the image of the reprobate carcass, the move from “dost” to “art” shows chillingly swift predestinatory logic. It indicates a shift from thinking of his lust as an isolated sinful impulse to considering it evidence of what he “is”: damned. Angelo’s crisis is also earlier framed in the language of predestination when Isabella, pleading with him to spare Claudio, asks him to remember the mercy he himself hopes to receive from God: “O think on that, / And mercy then will breathe within your lips, / Like man new made” (2.2.77–9). The phrase “man new made” is part of a Calvinist vocabulary of salvation. Specifically, it invokes the process of “regeneration” also called “vocation,” the second stage of the ordo salutis, in which the Holy Spirit works on the soul of the elect, producing a spiritual rebirth.  


66 See also Enoch Clapham, “The unregeneration of our nature . . . is unclean and as a polluted carrion: but it can no more defile the gifts and operations of the Holy-ghost in a new-man, then a stinking carrion can defile the glorious rayes or beames of the Sun shining thereon.” Clapham, Three Parts of Salomon his Song of Songs, Expounded (London: Valentine Sims for Edmund Mutton, 1603), 173.

67 Spinks, Two Faces, 65; Wallace, Puritans and Predestination, 7.
needfull that we be regenerated & made new men by the Spirite of God.”  

Isabella’s reference to the passage in Genesis in which God brings Adam to life by breathing into his nostrils reinforces this Calvinist sense of “man new made,” since regeneration was understood as the beginning of purification from Adam’s sin. Bishop John Bridges, for example, draws a common distinction between those who are still “of the corrupted and damned stocke of Adam” and those who are “regenerate in Christe.”  By presenting Isabella’s appeal in this language, the play subtly establishes Angelo’s response as a test of his soul’s election. Obviously, this is a test Angelo fails. Indeed, his declaration when he gives way to temptation, “Blood, thou art blood” (2.4.15), suggests the kind of entrapment in the flesh associated with the old, unregenerate Adam.

Soliloquizing, Angelo laments, “O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint, / with saints dost bait thy hook!” (2.2.180–1). While J.W. Lever glosses the lines as a reference to the temptation of desert hermits like St. Jerome with visions of virtuous women, in the context of the “precise” Angelo’s reprobation anxiety the more immediate sense of “saint” would be its use as a term of godly self-identification. The line continues, “Most dangerous / Is that temptation that doth goad us on / To sin in loving virtue” (2.2.181–3). Together these lines connect the sexual temptation presented by the chaste Isabella to a more abstract sense in which the love of virtue can pose a spiritual threat, the danger of self-complacency. Later, Angelo speaks of his “gravity / Wherein—let no man hear me—I take pride” (2.4. 9–10). Following Angelo’s morally rigid condemnation of Claudio’s indiscretion, Escalus observes, “Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall”

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(2.1.38), a comment given weight as a sententia by italics in the Folio. Cumulatively these lines present Angelo’s failing as a form of unhealthy, prideful cultivation of things that are in themselves good. This is precisely the deceptive self-assurance that men like Chaderton and Dyke sought to expose. It is not the kind of sin likely to keep “lukewarm” Protestants up at night. The fear that one’s own pursuit of virtue is actually a mark of spiritual hypocrisy is fairly rarefied, the type of anxiety most likely to haunt theatergoers who took their self-examination for signs of election or reprobation very seriously—that is, a worry that would perhaps resonate particularly strongly with puritan playgoers. It is also, however, a form of anxiety with which the “lukewarm,” those who did not, in daily life, work out their salvation in fear and trembling, might emotionally experiment in the suspended reality of performance.

Contemporary criticism tends to speak of Angelo in unsympathetic terms and focus on the elements of anti-puritan satire in his characterization. While Angelo is indeed a nasty piece of work—attempting to extort sex from a devout virgin, then using his office to cover his crime by ordering her brother’s execution for a relatively minor sexual transgression,—nevertheless, to treat him simply as a satirical figure occludes the ways he functions as an object of identification for at least some segments of the audience. Angelo is a caricature with tragic subjectivity. As Hayne observes, “Angelo’s hypocrisy differs in quality, though not in kind, from more superficial portraits of puritan hypocrites because it is an attempt to imagine—and to portray—what they feel.”70 Recognizing Angelo as a character that produces strong interiority effects that speak to the internal struggles of many Calvinist theatergoers, particularly the godly, calls into question the

pervasive, yet usually unspoken, assumption that puritans, when they did attend the
theater, did so in spite of their religious convictions. Here, the play unfolds a subjectivity
through which puritan and prayer-book audience members alike might engage with
shared spiritual quandaries.

Angelo, when alone, wrestles with his conscience in speeches full of fitful
exclamations, “Oh fie, fie, fie!” (2.2.172). In a soliloquy in act four, caesuras mark
abrupt flashes of remorse: “|| He should have lived” (4.4.26), “ || Would yet he had lived”
(4.4.30). However, Angelo does not consider his troubled conscience to be the beginning
of repentance that might lead back to God. Rather, awareness of his own guilt only
confirms Angelo’s worst suspicions of his spiritual state. It is, for him, evidence of
“backsliding,” the disappearance of false or temporary grace.71 The speech’s closing
lines, “Alack, when once our grace we have forgot, / Nothing goes right; we would, and
we would not,” make this explicit (4.4.31–2). It was considered impossible for the truly
elect fully to fall from grace, a concept referred to as the “perseverance of the saints.”
This was a familiar doctrinal point. Theatergoers would have recognized Angelo’s
implicit logic: the elect cannot fall from grace; I have, therefore I am a reprobate.

The degree to which Christians should pity the damned was a subject of debate. Some
ministers forbade their congregations from praying for reprobates. For example, in “A
Breif Treatise of Prayer: Wherein Is Declared . . . Whether It Be Lawful To Pray for the
Salvation of a Reprobate or No,” the preacher William Burton compares praying for the
reprobate to praying for devils. He rebukes those in his parish who would do so, stating

71 Backsliding is a sixteenth-century neologism which refers specifically to lapses of faith to which the truly
elect are not subject. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “backsliding,” OED Online,
unequivocally, “nay we ought not to pray for all, because all shall not be saved.”

Angelo’s tortured soliloquies give theatergoers a place to extend sympathy toward a damned soul, an emotional exercise that was, for many, prohibited in their real-world religious lives.

My point, however, is not to recuperate Angelo as a moral being or “sympathetic” character; rather, to suggest that his uncertainty, sin, and despair may have presented members of the audience with a vivid example of a condition that they might recognize as a spiritual possibility for themselves. Stachniewski presents several suggestive case studies of devout individuals becoming distraught, even suicidal, from reading accounts of the lives of reprobates, particularly those who had formerly enjoyed a reputation for holiness, most famously Francis Spira. He records an exchange between two young puritan women comparing evidence of their reprobation in what he calls “an edifying contest in ultimate one-downsmanship.” I would suggest that very thing that alienates modern audiences from Angelo, his slide into increasingly unforgivable sin, may have been precisely the thing that made him a compelling figure of negative identification for godly individuals attuned to the perils of spiritual hypocrisy. However, identification with Angelo would not only be available to puritans in the playhouse. Angelo’s four soliloquies invite an intimacy between the performer and audience members across a broad spectrum of belief.

But Angelo is not Measure for Measure’s only reprobate. That is, the play does not

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74 Ibid., 40–1.
treat the troubling uncertainties of predestination as merely the paranoid obsession of overwrought puritans. The Provost who oversees the prison refers to Barnadine the Bohemian as “this reprobate.” The word appears only four times in extant Shakespeare, and only once, here, as a noun referring to a person.75 An entirely superfluous character in terms of plot, Barnadine literalizes a set of metaphors that describe reprobation as a drunken sleep from which one wakes to die. Imprisoned nine years awaiting execution for murder, Barnadine stays alive in jail by staying drunk: “Drunk many times a day, if not many days entirely drunk” (4.2.147–8). Before he appears he is described by the Provost as “A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless, and fearless of what’s past, present or to come: insensible of mortality and desperately mortal” (4.2.140–3). This account of Barnadine builds on the common injunction in sermons and devotional texts to be watchful Christians, to await Christ’s return attentively like the wise virgins of the parable and unlike the unregenerate “[who] slept in sinne, being drowned in the pleasures of this life, not minding God nor their owne saluation.”76

Initially, the Provost and Duke plan to execute Barnadine in order to send his head to Angelo in place of Claudio’s. Pompey summons him, “Master Barnadine! You must rise and be hanged, Master Barnadine!”(4.3.22–3). He replies, “Away, you rogue away; I am sleepy,” and “I have been drinking all night; I am not fitted for it” (4.3.29, 42–3). This


exchange literalizes a set of tropes that describe the reprobate on the day of Judgment as sleepers waking to death. For example, as the Scottish minister Robert Rollock writes, “the bodie of the elect shall rise, to euerlasting glorie, the body of the wicked to eternall death and damnation . . . It is a black wakning . . . the body of the reprobate is not said to sleep, as it is, to ly dead; for, the rising of it is but to death: death in the graue, rising to death, and ay deing, and neuer making an end of death.”

Edwin Sandys, Archbishop of York, also speaks of the unregenerate as sleepers who will only wake to their destruction, “As for the reprobate they still shal sleepe on in their errours and sinnes vnto their eternall death and confusion... [They] are so hard and fast a sleepe, that they will neuer stirre, vntill fire out of heauen flee about their eares to waken them. So were the Sodomites wakened and consumed.”

In the Welsh minister Robert Holland’s godly ballad, “The Parable of the Watchful Servant,” the “evil servant” who “still with drunkards drink[s] and eat[s]” will “weepe and gnash for wo, / His teeth that he applyed so.” The listener is warned to watch for Christ “with th’elected sort . . . least sleeping then / You with the reprobates decay.”

Sleepy, drunk, spiritually unprepared, and called to death, Barnadine is a walking emblem of reprobation, but one which might prompt both pious audience responses and more irreverent reactions.


Barnadine is forgiven in the play, not destroyed. The disguised Duke reasons that to execute Barnadine in such a mental state “were damnable” (4.3.65–7). The Provost proposes to “omit / this reprobate till he were well inclined” and instead use the head of the dead pirate Ragozine as a decoy (4.3.72–3). The irony, of course, is that “well inclined” reprobates are still reprobates, still damned. Barnadine is a disturbing figure, blasé toward his own mortality, as the Duke puts it, “Unfit to live or die! O gravel heart” (4.3.63). But he is also extremely funny, pleading a hangover to get out of hanging, causally chatting up the executioner, “How now, Abhorson? What’s the news with you?” (4.3.39). Barnadine, the man too drunk to die, might be popular with pleasure-seeking theatergoers.

Audience engagement with Barnadine may have been complicated by way the theater space itself was identified, in anti-theatrical discourse, as a place of wickedness. In the seminal anti-theatrical pamphlet *The School of Abuse*, Stephen Gosson denounces the playhouse as a link on a chain of sin in terms similar to those used to describe Barnadine the sleepy reprobate, “from play to pleasure, from pleasure to slouth, from slouth too sleepe, from sleepe too sinne, from sinne to death, from death to the deuill.”80 Watching this scene, theatergoers may have been aware that they themselves were participating in a form of leisure that some contemporaries would have considered comparable to Barnadine’s irreligious drunkenness. Although, indeed, this might as equally enhance an audience’s sense of irreverent pleasure as induce a flash of moral reflection.

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Measure for Measure repeatedly frames the difficulty of judging the inner man by the outer man as both a spiritual and political problem. In the comic trial scene, Pompey the bawd tries to get Froth the john acquitted for whatever obscene act was attempted on Elbow’s wife. He beseeches Escalus, “Look in this gentleman’s face . . . Look . . . Doth your honour mark his face? . . . I beseech you mark it well . . . Doth your honour see any harm in his face?” (2.1.145–51). Pompey’s spurious defense of Froth is a reductio ad absurdum of one of the play’s recurring problems: the inability of the law to judge internality by appearances.

Early in Measure for Measure, the ribald courtier Lucio jokes with several gentlemen:

Lucio: Grace is grace, despite of all controversy; as for example thou art thyself a wicked villain, despite of all grace.
1 Gent: Well, there went but a pair of shears between us.
Lucio: I grant: as there may between the lists and the velvet. Thou art the list.
1 Gent: And thou the velvet; thou art good velvet; thou’rt a three-piled piece, I warrant thee: I had as leif be a list of an English kersey, as be piled, as thou art piled, for a French velvet. Do I speak feelingly now?
Lucio: I think thou dost: and indeed, with most painful feeling of thy speech. I will, out of thine own confession, learn to begin thy health; but whilst I live, forget to drink after thee.
1 Gent: I think I have done myself wrong, have I not?
2 Gent: Yes, that thou hast; whether thou art tainted or free. (1.2.24–40)

The opening line moves swiftly from a reference to the role of grace in theological debates between Catholics and Protestants ("Grace is grace, despite of all controversy"), to a discussion particular to Calvinist culture in which grace distinguishes the saved from the damned ("thou art thyself a wicked villain despite of all grace"). In the repartee that follows, the distinction between the wicked and the good is conflated with more visible differences of social class. The Gentleman refuses to be separated into the category of
the wicked. “There went but a pair of shears between us,” he retorts. The casual proverb encapsulates the play’s running preoccupation with the difficulty—perhaps impossibility—of distinguishing the elect from reprobates. Lucio plays on the metaphor to reassert the spiritual divide in terms of class difference. The split between the regenerate and the wicked is made analogous to the cut that separates “the lists from the velvet,” that is, those rich enough to buy luxury fabrics from those who can only afford cheap cloth.

A similar comparison appears in *Othello*, when Michael Cassio, drunk, lets slips some unguarded remarks on the pecking order of predestination:

*Cassio:* Well, God’s above all; and there be souls that must be saved and there be souls must not be saved . . . For my own part—no offense to the General, nor any man of quality—I hope to be saved.

*Iago:* And so do I, Lieutenant.

*Cassio:* Ay; but, by your leave, not before me; the lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient. Let’s have no more of this . . . God forgive us our sins!  

For Cassio, election follows rank. Generals and men of quality are saved before lieutenants; lieutenants are saved before ancients. His sudden wish to change the subject suggests an awareness that he has said something wrong. As in Gore’s “Poor Man’s Hope,” discussed above, Cassio uses a benign, inclusive platitude (“God forgive us our sins!”) to palliate the impropriety of so directly equating spiritual value with class identity. Overall, the effect is that Cassio has rudely blurted out an assumption that usually goes unspoken.

*Measure for Measure* persistently complicates the relationship between social and spiritual identity. The latter half of the exchange between Lucio and the Gentlemen, quoted above, compares speculation into the state of souls to guessing who might have

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venereal disease, “whether thou art tainted or free.” As the scene continues, the
distinction between respectable and disreputable individuals becomes blurred. Mistress
Overdone appears lamenting Claudio’s imprisonment: “There’s one yonder’s arrested
and carried to prison, was worth five thousand of you all” (1.2.56–7). “Worth” in this
context is double-sided. The expression “worth five thousand of you all” normally
indicates merit or virtue. However, because Mistress Overdone is a madam, addressing a
group of gallants who have just been joking about venereal disease, “worth” also refers to
the financial profit Mistress Overdone would make if Claudio could continue as her
client. In this sense, “worth five thousand of you all” implies that Claudio spends large
amounts of money on prostitutes. But by the end of the scene, the image of Claudio as a
profligate whoremaster is overturned. We learn that Claudio’s crime is not paying for
sex with multiple women, but only sleeping with his handfasted fiancée; a practice that,
while fiercely condemned by some, was common and generally tolerated. Claudio goes
from being described as a frequenter of prostitutes to a man who has semi-legitimate sex
with one woman who is, more or less, already his wife, in the space of a single scene.
During the same conversation, Pompey reports that while all the brothels in the suburbs
are to be torn down, those in the city will remain untouched because “some wise burgher
put in for them” (1.2.92). In other words, disreputable whorehouses are maintained by
respectable citizens.

In itself, the scene is morally disorienting. In the sequence of the play’s action, an
opening scene in which a grave Duke discusses how best to enforce the city’s strict sex
laws with two godly magistrates, is immediately followed by a scene in which profligate

gentlemen flout the morality laws in friendly banter with a madam and a convict in chains. Presenting these two groups of characters back-to-back creates the expectation of a visible divide between the godly and the wicked. The main action of the play, the discovery of godly Angelo’s hypocrisy and potential reprobation, as well as much of the play’s imaginative language, challenges this expectation. In Measure for Measure souls cannot be slotted into social categories. The godly magistrate may be a reprobate, and the convict in chains a man with a well-ordered conscience.

Measure for Measure insists on the opacity of souls, even Angelo’s. While the deputy is implied to be a secret reprobate for most of the first four acts, in the final scene Angelo’s spiritual condition is left ambiguous. When his crimes are discovered, Angelo asks for death not mercy:

O my dread lord,
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness
To think I can be undiscernible,
When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,
Hath looked upon all my passes. Then, good prince,
No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death
Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.364–72)

Clearly, the speech establishes a parallel between the Duke’s clandestine surveillance of his crimes and God’s total knowledge of his soul. The closing phrase “death is all the grace I beg” is, theologically, a contradiction in terms. Angelo’s desire to die is a sign of despair, a state into which the elect, those with grace, cannot fall. When Escalus expresses pity that such a man should sin so grossly, Angelo responds, “I am sorry that such sorrow I procure / And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart / That I crave death more willingly than mercy” (5.1.472–4). While Angelo is still suicidal, these lines
suggest another possible spiritual condition, the sincere repentance of a soul not lost to
God. In one sense, the Duke’s reprieve invites audiences to presume that God extends
Angelo the same mercy. But the Duke’s lines, “By this Lord Angelo perceives he’s safe;
/ Methinks I see a quickening in his eye. / Well, Angelo, your evil quits you well,”
complicate this assumption. On one hand, the remark implies that Angelo’s penitence
was simply another holy pretense. On the other hand, “quickening” may suggest
regeneration, a sign of the “new man.” Indeed, “quit” in the sentence above might mean
either “your evil serves you well,” or “your evil leaves you well.” That is, the play
reveals Angelo’s secret sins only to leave his real spiritual state illegible. The point is not
that godly hypocrites can be exposed, but rather that, to use Isabella’s words, “Man [is]
. . . most ignorant of what he’s most assur’d— his glassy essence” (2.2.118–21).

Barnadine the reprobate is also given a reprieve in the play’s closing scene. The Duke
addresses the prisoner:

Sirrah, thou art said to have a stubborn soul
That apprehends no further than this world,
And squar’st thy life according. Thou’rt condemn’d;
But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all,
And pray thee take this mercy to provide
For better times to come. Friar, advise him;
I leave him to your hand. (5.1.478–83)

The Duke’s speech distinguishes between the failings of Barnadine’s “stubborn soul” and
his “earthly faults.” The phrasing implies that Barnadine is condemned for more than
falls under the Duke’s purview to “quit.” While the scene as a whole establishes a
parallel between the Duke’s judgment and God’s—“your Grace, like power divine / hath
looked upon all my passes”—this closing acknowledgment of sins beyond the Duke’s
power to forgive suggests a view of human judgments as, at best, provisional and
imperfect rehearsals of those already made by God. The play’s opening imagines a rigid system of justice operating in a world where the saved can be distinguished from the wicked; its ending, an extended deferral to the ultimate Judge.

*Throughout, Measure for Measure models a range of affective responses to predestination, a foundational doctrine of English Calvinism with complex and far-reaching social and psychological ramifications. The play presents a variety of affective positions toward the doctrine that evolve over the course of the play, encouraging theatergoers to flexibly shift their sympathies. Audience members may take winding and divergent paths through Measure for Measure. A godly citizen may begin watching the play aligned in sympathies with Angelo and the Duke’s reform agenda, experience an identificatory moment of reprobation anxiety when Angelo begins to suspect himself a secret hypocrite, find himself laughing unexpectedly with a drunk reprobate, and leave with a slightly more subdued sense of the distinction between the godly and the wicked. A lukewarm Calvinist, perhaps one of the many prostitutes soliciting clients during the performance, may start the play identifying with the sex workers and their “wicked” clients, be startled by the complex interiority effects of Angelo’s soliloquies into sympathizing with a puritan, and experience Barnadine as a disquieting memento mori, a fellow member of the ungodly, a morbid reminder of the danger, both spiritual and physical, attendant on her own position in the pleasure business. These are, of course, hypothetical performance responses; there are countless others possible. The commercial theaters offered their audiences a place of emotional experimentation in which the polyvocal materials of post-Reformation culture could be negotiated and imaginatively reconfigured.

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