ENGLISCHE PHILOLOGIE

‘Poure thy selfe into thy selfe’
Drama and Theatre in the Later English Reformation

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Introduction

> The Queen's Majesty doth straightly forbid all manner Interludes to be played, either openly or privately, except the same be notified beforehand and licensed within any city or town corporate by the Mayor or other chief officers [… and] that they permit none to be played, wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the Commonwealth shall be handled, or treated: being no meet matters to be written or treated upon by men of authority, learning or wisdom, nor be handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons.[1]

A few months after parliament had commanded the closing of the playhouses in September 1642, *The Actors' Remonstrance, or Complaint for the Silencing of their Profession* pleaded the case of the players, who were now 'Oppressed with many calamities and languishing to death under the burden of a long and (for ought we know) an everlasting restraint'.[2] To recommend themselves and their case to their puritan adversaries, the actors declared that

> wee have purged our Stages from all obscene and scurrilous jests; such as might either be guilty of corrupting the manners, or defaming the persons of any men of note in the City or Kingdome, and that 'wee have endeavoured […] to instruct one another in the true and genuine Art of acting, to represse bawling and railing, formerly in great request.

These measures allowed them to claim - 'and to our praise be it spoken' – that 'we were for the most part very well reformed' (3).

The petition, 'presented in the names and behalfes of all London Comedians', makes good this claim of self-reformation by refuting allegations that had been levelled at the theatre ever since it had become permanently established in London in the 1570s. It seeks to dissociate the theatre of the 1630s from its past as an in every sense 'common' entertainment, a past in which stage-playing had been broad and unsophisticated ('bawling and railing', like Herod in a Nativity play) or sharply satirical ('defaming'). Caroline stage players, so the author, were perfectly loyal to the existing authorities ('to which wee in all humility submit') and perfectly civilised, morally responsible citizens, who would never incite any spectator to riot or debauchery. In view of these 'conformities and reformations' they regard it as an unjust punishment to have been 'restrained from the practice of [their] Profession' (4).

The anonymous author thus offers a brief contrast of what the theatre had been in the past and what it was at the present time. He observes a refinement for which he chooses the term 'reformation', a purification that should make the theatre more acceptable to the establishment. This choice of term was deliberate and, as will appear in a moment, satirical. It purports to assuage the powerful enemies of

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[1] 'The Queen's Proclamation Against Plays, 16 May 1559,' quoted in Glynne Wickham, Herbert Berry, William Ingram, eds., *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, Cambridge, 2000, 51.

[2] *The Actors' Remonstrance, or Complaint for the Silencing of their Profession*, London, 1643, 3.

the theatre, the puritan magistrates and ministers who had by that time laboured for the best part of a century to reform the English people in religion and manners. By disavowing 'all obscene and scurrilous jests; such as might […] be guilty of corrupting the manners', the *Remonstrance* positions the theatre on the 'reformed' side of the social and cultural divide that had sprung up between respectable, godly leisure activities and uncouth, vulgar pastimes in the course of what Philip Stubbes called the 'reformation of manners'.[3] By further affirming that the players had no idea of 'defaming the persons of any men of note in the City or Kingdome', the petition signals political conformity with the secular civic authorities and with the Protestant establishment's measures of comprehensive social control.

The satirical audaciousness of the piece appears in the address: 'presented,' it says on the title page, 'to the great God Phoebus-Apollo, and the nine Heliconian Sisters, on the top of Pernassus'. This is not a genuine petition. It is a parody of a petition that ends with the ironic promise to desist in future from anti-puritan jibes:

> we shall hereafter so demeane our selves as none shall esteeme us of the ungodly, or have cause to repine at our action or interludes: we will not entertaine any Comedian that shall speake his part in a tone, as if hee did it in derision of some of the pious, but reforme all our disorders […] so prosper us Phoebus and the nine Muses, and be propitious to this our complaint. (8)[4]

To anti-theatrical puritans – among them William Prynne, author of the one-thousand-page monstrosity *Histrio-Mastix*, published in 1633 - this evocation of mythological figures would have qualified as idolatry. Prynne, who inherited his arguments against the 'idolatrous stage' from Elizabethan hacks like Stephen Gosson, Anthony Munday and John Rankins, would have denied outright that the theatre was even capable of reformation since 'all Theatricall Playes, or Enterludes, had their Originall birth from the very Devill himselfe, who invented them for his owne honour, and Worship, to detaine men captive by them'.[5] Magistrates and ministers, who must have felt that reforming stiff-necked non-conformists and the ignorant multitude was like chopping off the heads of a Hydra, censured it as in one breath because from their point of view it had been a hotbed of political riot, festive romp, and idolatry. Both – these allegations against the theatre and their ironic, extremely self-aware appropriation by playwrights and players – form the double strand of interest running through the chapters of the following study.

Taking my cue from *The Actors' Remonstrance*, I will pursue the question of how the theatre 'reformed' itself in response to these pressures, and how it reflected on its uncertain status in a secularising and social polarising society. Literary critics have considered the theatre in every conceivable cultural

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[3] Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1582), M7r.

[4] Cf. the genuine petition *To the Supreame Authoritie, the Parliament of the Common-wealth of England* by 'diverse poor and distressed men, heretofore the Actors of Black-Friers and the Cockpit', in *Commonwealth Tracts, 1625-50*, ed. Arthur Freeman, New York, 1974.

[5] William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix* (1633), 10.

context – gender, class, nationalism, ethnicity, colonialism and so forth – but until 'the religious turn' in the mid-1990s, they have almost completely neglected the principal context in which friends and enemies of the theatre considered it at the time. Religion has been called 'the idiom in which [early modern England] conversed with itself',[6] yet it would be more accurate to say that the Reformation provided early modern England with the idioms - the terms, the discourses, the habits of thought - in which it conversed with itself. I work on the assumption that the Protestant self-consciousness displayed by the author of this short piece of Caroline satire also characterised Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. The argumentative framework of the following chapter rests on the contention that Elizabethan and Jacobean Englishmen (and very occasionally –women) discussed the political and socio-cultural functions and the nature of theatrical representation in terms of Reformation controversies about commoner participation in politics, about traditional festive culture, and about religious idolatry.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: RIOT, ROMP, IDOLATRY

The Anglican episcopate, puritan iconoclasts and city magistrates attacked the theatre with such vehemence not so much because it *represented* radical political ideas, holiday customs and idolatrous rites, but because the interaction between the actors-in-character and the audience turned it into a political, festive or religious event at which riot, romp and idolatry actually *happened*. The role of the audience is crucial in this enactment of society. For instance, when the apprentices in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* get up in arms to defend the city against intruding gentlemen, this is on one level a representation of animosities rife in the streets of London. But there were apprentices and gentlemen at the Rose, too, notorious for their scuffles to claim the 'common' space of the playhouse. The groundlings crowding in the yard in front of the stage would have caught the high spirits from their fictional counterparts, and the momentary possibility of riotous violence would have threatened not only young Hammon in the play but also the gentlemen, law students and gentlemen's servants in the playhouse. As the shoemaker apprentices in Simon Eyre's London assume political responsibility for their urban commonwealth and go on to celebrate it in a feast, the playgoers in their turn have to negotiate the modes and the degree of their political and festive participation in the theatrical event.

Before they engage with the fiction, however, the playgoers have to *imagine the fictional scene*. Inadequate playgoers sometimes fail to participate in the spiritual experience of 'presencing' the scene; others lose sight of the illusory nature of the presentation and express a desire to merge with it: 'Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. / Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!'[7] Marlowe's

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[6] Patrick Collinson, quoted (without reference) by Claire McEachern in her introduction to *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, Cambridge, 1997, 1.

[7] *Doctor Faustus, A- and B-Texts (1604 and 1616) by Christopher Marlowe and his Collaborators and Revisers*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, Manchester, 1993, 5.2.96-7 (B-text).

comment on the bewitching, indeed, diabolic effect of theatrical impersonation takes us straight back to idolatry, the incapacity (or unwillingness) to distinguish between the means of representation and the represented deity. Audience involvement in explorations of the stage fiction's imagined/imaginary reality is thus best described by a term borrowed from religious worship: it is a kind of *mystical* participation.

Supplying paying customers with the experiences of political, festive and mystical participation was, however, a curiously awkward undertaking. There is little doubt that the Elizabethan theatre rose to popularity on the back of the religious rites and seasonal festivals that had been suppressed by the reformers as ungodly, immoral and disorderly. Keith Thomas observed thirty years ago that after the reformation of religion 'a variety of magical agencies continued to offer their services to those for whom the Protestant notion of self-help was too arduous'.[8] Cultural historians have suggested that the theatre might also have provided help: 'A thoroughly engaging and deeply satisfying collective experience was to be had by going to the theatre to see a play'.[9]

The suggestion that the commercial theatre to some extent compensated people for the loss of traditional religious rites and festive customs receives some support from the development – or rather, the lack of development – of popular theatrical tastes. In the late 1580s Londoners flocked to the Rose, the Swan or the Curtain to enjoy the stage spectacle, uncomplicated emotion and rousing communal appeal of what might loosely be called English and exotic history, the 'drum-and-trumpet' plays soon derided in satires staged at the more exclusive 'private' playhouses. In the 1630s, the grandchildren of those who had witnessed the first performance of *Tamburlaine*, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* were, for the most part, perfectly satisfied with watching the umpteenth revival of these old Elizabethan favourites.[10] The 'common' taste had undergone the slightest possible shift, the minimum of adjustment, from traditional religious festivals to commercial leisure commodities. This shift had occurred some time around 1590 and had not been followed by any others. Playwrights for the more fashionable playhouses complained about their audience's demand for novelty, but the patrons of the Red Bull playhouse did not want novelty, they wanted the reassuring repetitiveness of ritual.[11]

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[8] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Harmondsworth, 1971, 764.

[9] Louis A. Montrose, 'The Purpose of Playing: Reflections on a Shakespearean Anthropology,' *Helios* 7 (1980), 51-74, 60.

[10] See Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632 – 1642*, Cambridge, 1984, esp. chap. 8: 'The Survival of the Popular Tradition'.

[11] This, in effect, is what the Scrivener says in *Bartholomew Fair* means: 'Hee that will sweare, *Jeronimo*, or *Andronicus* are the best playes, yet, shall passe unexcepted at, here, as a man whose Judgement shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these five and twenty, or thirtie yeeres. Though it be an Ignorance, it is a vertuous and stay'd ignorance; and next to truth, a confirm'd errour does well,' *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. P. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. Oxford, 1952-63, vol. 6, Ind. 106-111. Quotations from Jonson's plays, except those from *A Tale of a Tub*, are taken from this edition.

THE 'SECOND' REFORMATION

A study that argues that Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights discussed the role and the nature of theatre in terms of the political, cultural and religious changes wrought by the Reformation, may be expected to offer a confident answer to the question as to how 'Protestant' Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights and playgoers actually were. Such an answer would be helpful, and no-one would be more interested to hear it than historians of the Reformation. As Patrick Collinson – with a rather sly air of disinterestedness – put it in a recent book review: 'two rival armies, led by A. G. Dickens and Christopher Haigh, have fought vicious Balkan wars over the events and processes we know as the English Reformation: from above or from below, early or late, success or failure?'[12] A final statement has been deferred and a momentary truce achieved on the basis of close and detailed regional studies[13] that cannot be expected to add up to a neat and coherent whole. 'He is a Protestant, as it is called; that means a mixture of a number of religions; in doctrine he is Calvinistic, but not so in politics and in police.'[14] When Nicolo Molin of the Venetian embassy described King James I to his senate, he was also giving a fair assessment of the ideological muddle - the transitional state, historians have more soberly called it - of England during its century of Reformation. If a general assessment of the English Reformation were to be attempted, however, it would probably resemble Robert Whiting's view of developments in the southwest:

> For the majority of the region's inhabitants, […] acquiescence or co-operation in the assault upon traditional religion was motivated by essentially non-spiritual considerations. Protestant conviction was less important than a sense of duty, xenophobia, a desire for moral freedom, financial calculation, or even physical fear.[15]

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[12] Patrick Collinson, 'And Cabbages Too: *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603* by Susan Brigden, *London Review of Books* 22 March 2001, 31-33, 33. - A. G. Dickens has argued for a fast spreading of Reformation ideas in *The English Reformation*, London, 1964, but currently most historians are more persuaded of the resilience and the social homogeneity of 'traditional religion' and argue for a slow Reformation, see Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants. The Church in English Society, 1559-1625*, Oxford, 1982; and Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England. Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, London, 1988. Helpful assessments of the field are Christopher Haigh, 'The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation' *Reformation to Revolution. Politics and Religion in Early Modern England*, ed. Margo Todd, London, 1995, 13-32, and in the same volume A. G. Dickens's concise reply to criticism of his position, 'The Early Expansion of Protestantism in England, 1520-1558,' 157-78, further the introduction to *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640*, ed. Peter Marshall, London, 1997, 1-11.

[13] For an overview over local studies, see Ronald Hutton, 'The Local Impact of the Reformations,' *The English Reformation Revised*, ed. Christopher Haigh, Cambridge, 1987, 114-38.

[14] Calendar of Venetian State Papers, vol. 10: 1603-1607, 510-11.

[15] Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People. Popular Religion and the English Reformation*, Cambridge, 1989, 259. - 'There is much evidence for the strength of belief and observance in English towns in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and indeed of the popularity of advanced Protestant ideas, while always accepting that traditional and conservative views persisted in probably all communities,' Vanessa Harding, 'Reformation and Culture, 1540-177,' *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. Peter Clark, vol. 2: '1540-1840', Cambridge, 2000, 263-88, 275.

Eamon Duffy's influence has been crucial in teaching readers of early modern English drama to think of it as the product of a cultural trauma:

> for most of the first Elizabethan adult generation, Reformation was a stripping away of familiar and beloved observances, the destruction of a vast and resonant world of symbols which, despite the denials of the proponents of the new Gospel, they both understood and controlled. The people of Tudor England […] knew themselves to be mercenary, worldly, weak, and they looked to religion, the old or the new, to pardon these vices, not to reform them.[16]

Historians of literature and the theatre have picked up his cue: 'In what ways,' asks Huston Diehl in her might the tragedies of the English Renaissance stage rehearse the drama – and the trauma – of reform?'[17] If it really was a trauma – and for some people or communities it must have been, not for others, we must still remember that the playwrights who worked for the established commercial theatre in London, and the playgoers who went there for entertainment and edification, no longer belonged to the first Elizabethan adult generation but to the second or third. When William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd started writing plays for the 'ten thousand spectators at least'[18] who flocked to Shoreditch and Southwark every week to spend an afternoon at the playhouses, the question was no longer whether England should adopt the tenets and doctrines that had been imported from Wittenberg, Strasbourg and Geneva. By the 1580s the Protestant Reformation was an irreversible fact, and it was time to take stock and consider where England had arrived and where to go from there. Duffy concedes that

> By the end of the 1570s, whatever the instincts and nostalgia of their seniors, a generation was growing up which had known nothing else, which believed the Pope to be Antichrist, the Mass a mummery, which did not look back to the Catholic past as their own, but as another country, another world.[19]

This assessment is shared by others. 'Whichever way one looked at it,' Margaret Aston states in her study of sixteenth-century iconoclasm,

> English men and women born after the middle of the century belonged to a different world and were in the main educated to think so. […] Theory as well as iconoclastic practice was on the side of the purifiers […;] iconomachy and iconoclasm were by 1600 an accepted part of English orthodoxy.[20]

In the last quarter of the sixteenth century Protestant teachings had sunk in, or been hammered in, deeply enough into the collective consciousness of the English to effect not merely slight repercussions but a noticeable shift away from late medieval beliefs and traditions. The long process of Protestant acculturation – the dissemination of orthodox and conformist Protestantism from the socio-political

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[16] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-1580*, New Haven, 1992, 591. For an even more vehemently sceptical view, see J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, Oxford, 1984.

[17] Huston Diehl. *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage. Protestantism and Popular Theatre in Early Modern England*, Ithaca, 1997, 3.

[18] Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, vol. 1, London, 1910, 192.

[19] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 593.

[20] Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, vol. 1: 'Laws Against Images,' Oxford, 1988, 354.

centre to the peripheries of the realm and from the top of society to the bottom – had set in. Historians speak of the 'second' phase of the English Reformation, the second half of Queen Elizabeth's reign, when the new Protestant established had 'settled' into its authority. Patrick Collinson has called 1580 the year of 'the moral and cultural watershed' that marked the effective erosion of traditional religion and culture and their replacement by reformed customs and sensibilities. It occurred 'not between the last generation of traditional Catholicism and the first generation of Protestantism but between the first and second generations of Protestants. It divided the first and the second Reformations'.[21]

It should be noted that much of what has been claimed for the 'reformed-ness' of Shakespeare's contemporaries went mainly for London, the other large towns and the South East of England. The role that the inhabitants of London have played in the course of English history is very difficult to assess, but it was much sooner than the second quarter of the sixteenth century that rulers found that 'London is a mighty arme and instrument to bring any great desire to effect, if it may be woon to a mans devotion: whereof also there want to examples in the English Historie'.[22] The reformers found this, too, and Susan Brigden states that 'the religious inclinations of Londoners may […] have had an impact upon the direction taken in national religious policy […,] their pent-up zeal was at some times a powerful impetus to reform, and at others a deterrent'.[23] Many of those who went to see plays in London had not been born there but in the country, perhaps in provincial strongholds of the old religion and the old festive customs. Once arrived in the capital city, they would soon become acquainted with, if not converted to, radical Protestantism. The sixteenth-century Reformation was a largely urban phenomenon, precipitated by zealous Protestants who may have been few in number, but well organised. They were also highly determined, noisy, visible and often very influential in their parishes or neighbourhoods. And they wrote and published a great deal. Much the greatest part of Elizabethan and Jacobean printed material comes within the genres of religious propaganda or religious education, most of which was written by authors whose views – in fact, whose very application – position them at the 'puritan' wing of English Protestantism.[24] The citizens and inhabitants of London may not all have been English Calvinists, but they had by far the best access – avid readers and cravers of novelty that they were - to tracts, treatises, pamphlets and printed sermons that had been written by English Calvinists.

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[21] Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation*. Reading, 1986, 8.

[22] *An Apologie of the Cittie of London*, in John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, 2 vols., Oxford, 1908, vol. 2, 206.

[23] Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation*. Oxford, 1989,425-6.

[24] The term 'puritan', useful as it was to connote a more than average religious zeal, is of dubious value as a precise label of religio-political extremism. The majority of English Protestants, even those who desired further ecclesiastical and liturgical reforms, shared the same essentially Calvinist doctrines. Far smaller were the groups of nonconformist separatists who actually posed some sort of serious opposition to the established Church and government. See e.g. Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyteriansim and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker*, London, 1988.

PART ONE: RIOT, OR THE PROTESTING CLOWN

In July 1591 – the Marprelate crisis barely over - one William Hacket climbed onto a grocery cart in Cheapside and announced that the Holy Ghost intended him to replace the queen and reform the commonwealth along egalitarian lines. Since Hacket was quite evidently deranged and had failed to muster more than a few supporters, there was little reason for those in power to fear for their lives. Yet Richard Bancroft, working his way towards becoming Bishop of London, jumped at the opportunity to elaborate in detail upon the ills of *Daungerous Positions and Proceedings, Published and Practised Within this Iland of Brytaine, under Pretence of Reformation*, and others with equally vested interests followed him. Not all observers at the time were convinced, however, that London was about to be plunged into Anabaptist anarchy. A level-headed and trenchant comment on the incident and its ideological usefulness to the government is preserved in an anonymous letter:

> Men talk of it and resemble it to that matter of John of Leyden [...] and think this mad fool plotted some such kingdom as these prophets might have assembled; others take them to be mere fanatics, which is very likely, but the enemies to the Puritans take great advantage against them, as these prophets have been great followers of that sort of preachers, and have solicited all those that they knew affected to their sect [... There are] others who pitied their folly, which is like to cost them their lives. [...] meanwhile she [i.e. the queen] is more troubled with it than it is worth, and the Chancellor and Bishop, in the eye of some flattering fools, seem to bear a great burden.[25]

The ruling elite polemically interlinked radical social Protestantism and popular protest of a kind more noteworthy than Hacket's in order to demonstrate that they required the severest suppression. This nameless commentator obviously did not require new historicists or cultural materialists to alert him to the way in which political establishments inflate the importance of minor deviancies in order to buttress and justify their own authority. This was the political and ideological climate that prevailed in London when the Queen's Men staged the Protestant estate satires of Robert Wilson, clown and playwright, in the late 1580s.

In the first part of this chapter I explore the ways in which Wilson, like the presbyterian non-conformists who wrote under the pseudonym 'Martin Marprelate', employed the Protestant traditions of prophecy and clowning in order to criticise the appropriation of the Reformation and Protestantism by the established authorities. Both the Marprelate tracts and Wilson's plays were part of the 'tradition of intelligent, historically conscious, reformism carried within popular culture itself' discussed by Annabel Patterson, who further argues that a 'return to origins […] was integral to the popular conception of *how* to protest, as well as providing theoretical grounds for the 'demands".[26]

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[25] Quoted in Brents Stirling, *The Populace in Shakespeare*, New York, 1949, 119, also 102-3 and 117-19. The Hacket-incident lingered in the popular imagination for quite some time: William Jaggard in his *View of All the Lord Mayors of London* (1601) devotes three-and-a half of his ten lines about Sir John Allat to 'Hacket [who] this year was executed in Cheapside for many traitorous usages of the Queenes picture [etc.]'. Jonson devised for Sir Epicure Mammon a Shylock- or Malvolio-like exit, including the announcement that 'I will mount a turnip cart, and preach / The end o' the world' (*The Alchemist* 5.5.81-2).

[26] Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, Cambridge, 1989, 38-41.

> When Elizabeth came to the throne, convinced Protestants were certainly in a minority in England, let alone Wales, and to create a godly Protestant realm was an enormous task which the authorities had to undertake in partnership with unofficial enthusiasts. The partnership was not always comfortable: Protestants were accustomed to being an innovative, destructive, and often persecuted force, and they took time to adjust to being pillars of the establishment. Many long-standing outlets of popular Protestantism such as propaganda plays and ballads were gradually sanitized and silenced by the authorities, as the regime felt itself more secure against popish superstition.[27]

Three Ladies of London has the dubious honour of being one of the very few plays named by Stephen Gosson in his *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*.[28] Since Gosson rarely betrays in his anti-theatrical invective the first-hand experience of playgoing he most certainly possessed, his remarks testify to the extraordinary success of Wilson's plays. As a popular actor and established playwright, Wilson was a figure of considerable stature when the young upstarts Marlowe, Kyd and Shakespeare arrived in London to make their mark. His plays allow some insight into the ways in which the older generation of playwrights - whose moralities and estate satires had invariably dealt critically with the on-going reformation of church, state and manners - responded to the royal dictum that the Reformation was over and that the theatre should now keep well away from religio-political issues. His plays also show how the older generation of playwrights grappled with a London audience hungry for novelty, escapism and dissipation, ravishment and wonder:

> The amazing changes which took place [...] in 1588, look like a belated response by the impresarios and poets to the new demands the London venues had stimulated. There was certainly no stock of old plays already in existence before the 1580s which could have satisfied the tastes revealing themselves in 1588.[29]

In rejecting established dramatic conventions like the cumbersome lines of fourteeners and the 'medley' style in which almost all of the surviving Queen's Men's plays were written, the up-and-coming playwrights also rejected the political causes to which this drama had been harnessed. A reading of Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy* as a pre-text for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* substantiates the suggestion that Shakespeare re-wrote – and in the process transformed dramatically and ideologically - not only a number of the Queen's Men's chronicle plays but also at least one of their comedies.

Robert Wilson, I go on to argue, prepared the way for the Jacobean genre of city comedy as it was developed by Jonson, Marston and Middleton. 'Such dramatic precursors of City Comedy as *The Three Ladies of London* […] owe much to the interwoven non-dramatic literary lineage of Satire and

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[27] Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Change of Religion', *The Sixteenth Century, 1485-1603*, ed. Patrick Collinson, Oxford, 2002, 83-112, 104.

[28] Gosson must have seen the play in an extended version, probably by the actors' improvisation, in which Love and Conscience gave their opinions on stage plays, Love disapproving, Conscience approving of them (*Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, 1582, D1v-D2v). Gosson criticises the playwright for his deviousness in presenting these opinions and mentions a now lost reply, *London Against the Three Ladies* – the fact of which reply adds to the impression that Wilson was a major figure in the theatrical scene of the 1580s.

[29] Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, Cambridge, 1987, 115.

religious Complaint invective'[30] – invective which had had a Protestant bias for decades and which, by the 1580s, directed itself more against the new Protestant establishment than against the popish enemy. In few Elizabethan plays is the call for commoner participation in civic culture and politics - and, correlatively, for a truly 'popular' theatre - more comprehensively dramatised than in *The Three Lords and the Three Ladies of London*.

PART TWO: ROMP, OR THE REPRESENTATION OF URBAN FESTIVITY

The focus on London as the centre and in many ways bulwark of the Protestant Reformation is carried over into the second chapter, in which I consider the potential of city comedy to be a kind of local community theatre. The question is whether city comedy could (indeed, would) re-create a moment of civic festivity, at a time when traditional festive culture was being either suppressed or reformed, and cultural differentiation gave rise to social snobbery, especially in the urban environment.

Traditional sports and pastimes declined earlier in the metropolitan environment in London than anywhere else. New forms of sociability would evolve, but this was largely a phenomenon of post-Restoration England. At the end of the sixteenth century, the dominant cultural process was one of attrition, not of new growth. At the time the commercial theatre became a flourishing branch of entertainment and a popular 'sport and pastime', it was seeking to fill a gap perceived by its attackers and its defenders alike.

> [P]ublic theatre and bear baitings, which loomed prominently in the leisure activities of Londoners, united spectators from a broad cross-section of society and contributed to interpenetration between elite and popular values. But they were very much more anonymous forms of recreation than the parochially based activities of the pre-Reformation period, and allowed for little direct face-to-face social bonding.[31]

The fundamental difference between the two 'spectator sports' of playgoing and animal baiting - and this difference was perhaps most significant in the case of plays about contemporary London itself - is that playgoers were reduced to watching an enactment of social and civic rituals in which they or their forbears had used to participate. The shift from experience to representation, from participating to watching, will be seen to be central to the 'reformation' of urban manners – in the streets and in the theatre.

Observers of London life held the Reformation directly responsible for the decline in communal culture which they registered and regretted. John Stow, whose *Survey of London* (1598) provides the focus of the first part of the chapter, did not require his readers to do much reading between the lines to gather that he was altogether disenchanted with the Reformation and the way it had been used by the civic elite to undermine venerable civic traditions. John Manningham reports in his diary a

[30] Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy. A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston and Middleton*, London, 1980, 21.

[31] Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability. Social Relations in Elizabethan London*, Cambridge, 1991, 94.

conversation that seems to show that he, Stow, was criticised by his first readers for neglecting to note and describe the memorials of recent civic potentates, but that this criticism evoked only defiance:

> He sayth of it, as Pilat sayd, 'What I have written, I have written.' [...] He gave me this good reason why in his Survey he omittes manies newe monuments: because those men have bin the defacers of the monuments of others, and soe thinks them worthy to be deprived of that memory whereof they have injuriously robbed others'.[32]

Stow repays what one might call civic iconoclasm, the violation of citizens' memory and the denigration of their worthy deeds, with a disdainful refusal to set a historiographical memorial to 'those men', by which he mainly means recent lord mayors of the city.[33]

Religious sensitivities, social polarisations and the subsequent cultural differentiation of collective pastimes into a spectrum of leisure activities of varying respectability have been cited as the principal reasons for the decline of traditional communal culture that Stow laments in his *Survey*. Stow, I go on to suggest, disapproved of the theatre and playgoing – however, he did not do so on religious grounds but in the context of an almost sociological kind of cultural pessimism. He regarded the commercial theatre as one of the newfangled, commercialised, privatised pastimes that had sprung up as result of the urban Reformation. The measures of the city fathers, the polemics of radical Protestant preachers, and people's general sluggishness had led to a demise of traditional, more communal activities. The tensions and ambivalences inherent in what I call 'festive city comedy' – the interplay of romance and satire, participation and consumption, communal vision and social division, collective rites and private leisure, celebration and commerce – provide the focus for close readings of William Haughton's *Englishmen for my Money*, Marston's *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. It will appear that these playwrights were more concerned to negotiate the delicate and sensitive balance between nostalgic merry-making and civilised politeness than to examine its contradictions and its implications for the socio-cultural role of the fashionable theatre in reformed London.

The nostalgic re-creation of the lost culture of 'Merry England' was an equivocal undertaking. The countryside and rural life were, at the end of the sixteenth century, precisely the space and culture from which self-conscious urbanites sought to dissociate themselves. They wanted to preserve forms but not functions; they staged the motions of misrule, but not the spirit. Holiday was emasculated: 'harmless mirth' indeed. Understanding the nostalgic impulse that manifested itself in the *Survey of London*, in civic calendars, city maps, customals and record-keeping as well as in a number of comedies set in the (sub)urban environment as an impulse towards *musealisation* is not merely a gratuitous introduction of cultural theory. It offers an answer to the question whether Elizabethan dramatists

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[32] *The Diary of John Manningham*, ed. John Bruce, New York, 1868, 103.

[33] On the urban Reformation in England, see esp. Robert Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England. Politics and Culture, c. 1540-1640*, Oxford, 1998, and the essays in *The Reformation of English Towns, 1500-1640*, ed. Patrick Collinson and John Craig, London, 1998. Steven E. Ozment's work on German towns in the Reformation is stimulating but can, of course, not be applied to England without closer study of individual towns, see *The Reformation in the Cities. The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland*, New Haven, 1975.

staged popular culture in order to privilege it or in order to denigrate it by arguing that the intention, paradoxically, was to do both. Writers of city and citizen comedies had to find a way in which to fulfil the audience's expectation of experiencing some kind of civic community, however conditional, while at the same time carefully negotiating with the audience the terms on which this revelling and levelling is to be achieved.

In the second part of the chapter I read Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* and *A Tale of a Tub* as assessments of the process and success of the Reformation in London. The writers of London comedy had to accommodate not only the genre's past in traditional festive customs that were now attached with the opprobrium of papism and vulgarity, but also – as seen in Robert Wilson's *London*-plays – its original concern with conflicts of the urban Reformation and, further back still, with its roots in civic religious drama. Puritan satire was a staple of London comedies, but Ben Jonson seems to have been the only playwright who bothered to focus on the changes wrought by the Reformation on urban communal life. *Bartholomew Fair* celebrates the resistance of the festive spirit to godly or ministerial spoilsports. Twenty years later in *A Tale of a Tub*, he condenses a decade of urban Reformation into one (holi)day and shows how puritan sensibilities, bureaucratic authority, civic historiography and bourgeois pride combined to produce the world - and the theatre - Caroline playgoers knew.

PART THREE: IDOLATRY, OR FROM PROPAGANDA TO META-THEATRE

In a recent review of a collection of essays on *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, the reviewer candidly confesses that she has shared the modern critic's biased view onto the Renaissance:

> I am sure I'm not the only scholar of Renaissance English culture who, while searching through microfilm for a projectors' [*sic*] pamphlet on the Virginia colony, or a marital advice book, or a treatise on usury, has found herself scrolling past pages and pages of stuff on transubstantiation, predestination, or the proper decoration of the communion table.[34]

Just over a decade ago in the introduction to *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, Debora Shuger drew attention to the distorting effects of modern historians' 'almost total neglect of society's religious aspects in favor of political ones'. She continued that 'Religion during this period supplies the primary language of analysis. It is the cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic: kingship, selfhood, rationality, language, marriage, ethics, and so forth.'[35] And so forth, for example theatrical representation. Stage playing was not a topic of overriding general concern, but when it became a subject for concerted attack and defence, the whole spectrum of Protestant writing on iconoclasm and idolatry were available for reference:

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[34] Elizabeth Hanson, '*Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger,' *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999), 266-72, 266.

[35] Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thoughts in the English Renaissance. Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture*. Berkeley, 1990, 5 and 6.

> Obsessed with the dangers of this sin [i.e. idolatry], the teachers did not care how exhausted was the soil they turned over again and again. Yet, repetitious and dogmatic though it was, there was some indicative changes of direction in this tide of words. […] Did idolatry begin with the image or in the mind, with the image-maker, or the beholder? It was ultimately a philosophical and aesthetic enquiry as much as, or more than, a theological one. […] The prohibitive or negative approach that started with imaging God moved out of church to affect people's views of other art forms.[36]

The worst kind of idolatry was ignorant or wrongful participation in holy communion. In tract after tract, the Protestant Lord's Supper is contrasted with the 'idolatrous popish Mass'. Taking up Margaret Aston's impression that the persistent warnings against idolatry affected people's views of other art forms, I undertake in this last chapter a reading of plays mainly Shakespearean in the light of Protestant sacramental theology.

As Debora Shuger goes on to show in her chapter on the 'boundaries of reason', the relations between 'mind, sign, and signifier' were centrally important and rarely left implicit in early modern religious writing.[37] There can be little doubt that moderately educated readers, churchgoers and playgoers had a grasp of what we now call structuralist semiotics that was considerably in excess of anything to be expected from their modern equivalents.

The controversy about the nature of theatrical representation – whether it was 'demonic' or merely 'artful', in some way 'magical' or securely semiotic' – was part of the more comprehensive controversy about religious images, and finally of the Protestant reformers' struggle to 'disenchant' people's notions of the sign and representation and to teach them to perceive an absolute and unbridgeable difference between the material means of representation and the thing that is represented. Any confusion of the signifier with the signified sooner or later resulted in idolatry, which is most fruitfully defined in this context as a kind of erotically charged gazing, a desire on the part of the beholder to merge with the representation. Idolatrous worship mistook the 'shadow' for the 'substance' and so led the beholder to crave a sort of mystical participation in what was really mere show.

The centre-piece of Protestant theology was the reformed, 'demystified' doctrine of the eucharist. In order to receive the divine grace that was conveyed with the sacraments, the Protestant communicant was required to have grasped the notion that the material means of representation do not in any real or essential way partake of the nature of the thing that is represented or have any power to influence or affect it: 'Christ spake these words [i.e. 'This is my body'] figuratively, not meaning that the bread was his body by substance, but by signification'. Once this is understood, the communicants will not make the mistake of mistaking the breaking of the bread for a real sacrifice: 'all bloudie offerings and sacrifices were come to an end, which were but signes, figures, and shadowes of him, being the true and alone acceptable sacrifice'.[38] The celebration of the eucharist is not a enactment of Christ's sacrifice

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[36] Aston, *Iconoclasts*, 445, 436 and 447.

[37] Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, 19.

[38] Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Masse* (1637), 192 and 60.

but a 'Commemoration, Representation, and Remembrance'.[39] While the traditional mass was a ritual in that it effectually repeated the original sacrifice, the Lord's Supper is by definition a kind of history play that recalls and represents events of the past but does not repeat them:

> But before all other things, this we must bee sure of especially, that this Supper be in such wise done and ministred, as our Lord and Saviour did, and commanded to bee done, as his holy Apostles used it, and the good fathers in the Primitive Church frequented it.[40]

The analogies with the theatre seem evident and suggest that playwrights drew upon the Reformation controversy about the eucharist in order to discuss the relations between physical signifier and immaterial signified, the perplexing status of 'actions' that a man might 'play' on the stage of a playhouse and on the stage of the world, and the kind of reality created by 'raising' or 'resurrecting' the 'ghosts' of dead heroes on the playhouse stage.

To date, there are no more than a handful of articles that focus on drama and the eucharistic controversy, about all of which the politely disapproving reviewer might say that they are 'riveting' but 'unpersuasive'.[41] Considering the intriguing similarities between the challenge of representing God and of representing (historical) fictions, the scarcity of valid studies in this field is a curiosity that would be scanned. My own view is that sacramental theology will either very soon turn into a 'hot' topic, or it will turn out to be no more than a footnote in the history of the early modern theatre.[42]

There are several distinct ways in which the interplay of sacramental theology and the theatre can be approached. My reading of *Titus Andronicus* in the light of the abolishment of traditional Easter rites and votive masses supports the anthropological suggestion that the theatre offered compensation in kind for the religious rites and ceremonies abolished by the reformers. A more playful, meta-theatrical self-consciousness manifests itself in parodic and satiric allusions to the 'miracle' of transubstantiation at a Roman Catholic Mass. Anti-Catholic scenes of this kind can be found in polemical Reformation interludes like *Jack Juggler* and they still provide much of the spectacle in Elizabethan plays about magic, like *Dr Faustus*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bunday* and *The Old Wife's Tale*.

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[39] Thomas Morton, *Of the Institution of the Sacrament* (1631), 38.

[40] *An Homilie of the Worthy Receiving and Reverend Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* (1563), 198.

[41] As does Hanson about Robert Watson's essay on *Othello*, see chap. 3 below.

[42] The topic will no doubt gain in popularity after the publication, in the spring of this year, of a Cambridge University Press collection on *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, which includes an essay on theatre and the eucharistic controversy. Unfortunately I have not been able to consult either this volume nor the collection published even later, *Practising New Historicism*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Steven Greenblatt, in which Greenblatt writes on *Hamlet* and the eucharistic debate.

Part One

Protestant Clowning: The Plays of Robert Wilson

> So long as they played lyes and sange baudy songes, blasphemed God, and corrupted men's consciences, ye never blamed them, but were verye well contented. But sens they persuaded the people to worship theyr Lorde God aright, according to his holie lawe and not yours, and to Achnoledge Jesus Chryst for teir onely redeemer and Saviour without your lowsie legerdemains, ye never were pleased with them.[1]

> "they practise a strange order, for most commonly the wise man is the fool."[2]

G. R. Elton's distinction between a 'religious' and a 'political' Reformation is useful insofar as it alerts us to the inherent paradox of a 'protesting' movement that is adopted by a 'Protestant' establishment.[3] To say that it was never more than a small number of people who preferred being burnt alive to recanting their semiotic understanding of the sacraments is not saying very much about popular sympathies for a movement that began by reiterating medieval complaints about ecclesiastical wealth and priestly worldliness and initially offered itself as a religious rationale to people who were dissatisfied with their lot. 'The Reformation' was really an interplay of various reformations – religious, political, socio-economic that were not all crowned with the same success. The Protestant cause was taken up by those who desired liberation from inflexible and outdated ecclesiastical, socio-political and economic structures that suppressed the natural-seeming development of their ideals and impulses. Protestantism was attractive to 'people who felt pushed around and bullied by either local or distant authority - whether a struggling guild by an autocratic city council or a prosperous city or village by a powerful prince or lord - tended to see in the Protestant movement an ally'.[4] On the one hand, this applied to local potentates, among them the king of England, who felt 'pushed around' by their imperial or papal overlords; but on the other hand it also applied to what early modern conservatives liked to call the many-headed multitude. 'God keep us from such visitation as Knox have attempted in Scotland,' Archbishop Parker prayed, 'the people to be orderers of things.'[5] For most of the sixteenth century the specific intents and purposes of the 'magisterial' or 'official' Reformation and the 'social' or 'popular' Reformation in England were quite distinct, even in conflict.[6]

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[1] John Bale, *Epistele Exhoratatorye of an Ingylishe Christian* (1544), quoted in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 1, 242.

[2] Donald Lupton, *London and the Countrey Carbonadoed* (1632), quoted in John Dover Wilson, *Life in Shakespeares's England*, Harmondsworth, 1944, 210.

[3] G. R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation, England, 1509-1558*, London, 1977.

[4] Steven Ozment, *Protestants. The Birth of a Revolution*, London, 1992, 20.

[5] Matthew Parker to Sir William Cecil, in *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, ed. John Bruce, Cambridge, 1853, 105.

[6] The terms *Obrigkeitsreformation* and *Volksreformation* are translated from Richard van Dülmen, *Reformation als Revolution. Soziale Bewegung und religiöser Radikalismus in der deutschen Reformation*, München,

Amateur and professional players had been involved in Protestant polemics from the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in England. The changing evaluations of stage playing in Reformation England have been pinpointed by Patrick Collinson in a paragraph on 'the changing history of the three Ps'. The Bishop of Winchester's complaints about being ridiculed in stage plays provoked John Foxe

> to spin an alliterative phrase: 'Printers, Players and Preachers trouble Winchester'. Thirty years later, Gosson launched a vicious attack on 'poets, Pypers and Players'. In 1610 William Crashaw rang a less felicitous variation when he defined the three great enemies of religion as 'the devil, Papists and Players'.[7]

In slightly more than half a century, stage playing had slid all the way down the scale of praiseworthiness. Foxe counted it among the popular media of advancing the Protestant cause and praised it for enhancing the feelings of solidarity among adherents of the 'new custom'; and indeed 'Protestant religious interludes continued to provide much of the dramatic fare well into the 1570s'.[8] Particularly in the urban environment, oppositional popular culture had in the course of the mid-Tudor decades become 'protestantised' to an extent, and the advocates of reform in state and church had been quick to recognise the propagandistic usefulness of ballads, broadsheets, mock-sermons, -liturgies and -processions, parodic songs, and stage plays. But when 'magisterial' Protestantism had been successfully established in state and church, 'popular' Protestant protest directed itself against the new rulers, who perceived the necessity to burn the ladder with which they had ascended the seats of authority.[9] Protestant popular culture had been one of its sturdier rungs and thus required the most forceful and vehement measures of control.[10]

Elizabethan England, however, was not the place envisioned by the earlier Tudor reformers, who had demanded ecclesiastical as well as socio-economic reforms. Queen Elizabeth and William Cecil intended to avoid the mistakes of leniency and populist concessions made by King Edward's privy

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1977, 60. -

[7] Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia. The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation*, Reading, 1986, 15. - William Crashaw engaged in acrimonious bickering with Paul's boys in the early years of the seventeenth century; John Selden would later say that Crashaw was one of the two people he ever converted 'from writing against playes, by telling him a way how to understand that place (of putting on womans apparel) [i.e. *Deuteronomy* 12.5],' *Table Talk of John Selden*, 95-6. The other person Selden converted was Ben Jonson.

[8] White, *Theatre and Reformation*, 5.

[9] Patrick Collinson distinguishes the 'youth' of Protestantism as a movement of protest and social as well as religious reform from its 'middle age', when it was appropriated by the ruling elites, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England. Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, New York, 1988, 56-7. - The terms *Obrigkeitsreformation* and *Volksreformation* are translated from Richard van Dülmen, *Reformation als Revolution. Soziale Bewegung und religiöser Radikalismus in der deutschen Reformation*, München, 1977, 60.

[10] The term 'popular', as seen by its use by early modern Englishmen, can have various associations, from 'communal, collective' to 'vulgar'. Cultural historians have revised the concept of a 'polarisation' of 'high' and 'low' culture at this period and now speak of a cultural 'differentiation' and stress regional as well as class differences, see the essays in Tim Harris, *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, London, 1995.

council; they had enough trouble silencing the various clamours of native reformers who wanted further purification of worship, of the Pope who promised to recognise the queen provided she return to the fold, of continental Roman Catholic rulers who looked for solidarity against the upstart Protestants, and of the English gentry and aristocracy who would rather risk hell than return their cheaply acquired land and property to the Roman church. Magisterial Protestantism had shed its hempen home-spun habiliments and settled into established prosperity in velvet and fur:

> in some sense English Protestantism regressed, becoming less, not more popular in character as we proceed from the mid-sixteenth century to the early seventeenth, and from a time when the Reformation was associated with novelty, youth, insubordination and iconoclasm (when indeed it was still a *protest*) to the period of its middle age, when it was more obviously associated with the maintenance of the *status quo* than with subversion.[11]

The very term 'reformation' began to be used by Protestants in office to signify revolt and rebellion. Professional playwrights and actors during the 1580s and 1590s had to negotiate the thin line between severing their roots in polemical Reformation drama (often sponsored by Protestant noblemen) and politically savvy satire on the one hand, and maintaining enough contact with popular politics to keep the customers satisfied.

The clown in his persona as the archetypal common man – uneducated, always hungry, suspicious of self-serving potentates but loyal to the queen – figures largely in the 'commonwealth plays' presented by the Queen's Men in the 1580s. His concerns, apart from his stomach, are his powerlessness in his own home (he is often hen-pecked by a shrewish wife, harking back to the double-act of Noah and his spouse in mystery play cycles) and the mismanagement of the commonwealth.

> 'The pre-modern clown made no attempt to interpret or to motivate the action by which he was defined. This clown is not a character, but functions as an institution of corporeality. This pure corporeality is based on a long-standing popular tradition deeply rooted in culture: that of singing, dancing, drinking, and overblown physicality (often blatant violence). His words need no consideration of originality, evidenced by the many repetitions of [set phrases].'

The clown of English Reformation drama is a more energetic, more dangerous figure – a representative of the common man who breaks rules and will be heard: 'the Elizabethan clown's performance rested on the assumption, or illusion, that the audience are active participants, necessary helpers in the creation of theatre'.[12]

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[11] Collinson, *Iconophobia*, 4.

[12] Lori M. Culwell, ‚The Role of the Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/shaksper/files/ROLE%20CLOWN.txt, accessed 16 April 2001.

1.1 The Earl and the Clowns

In the early days of September 1588 the English theatre lost two men who had been highly influential in giving it shape and direction. Having inspected the camp at Tilbury with Queen Elizabeth in August, the Earl of Leicester – royal favourite, privy councillor, military commander and advocate of puritan interests – proceeded towards his house at Cornbury in Oxfordshire and died there on 4 September of 'a continual fever, as 'twas said'. Only hours earlier (or later, accounts differ) the actor Richard Tarlton had died at the home of his mistress in Shoreditch, London.[13]

According to popular report, the noble and notorious Dudley and the former swineherd from Shropshire had been connected in patronage since some time in the 1560s when Leicester is said to have introduced Tarlton at court as a 'clown' – a jester and a country bumpkin – to amuse the young queen. It says something about the licence of the fool and about Tarlton's personal fecklessness that his long-standing connection with Leicester did not prevent him from using his precarious position as unofficial court jester to chaff his patron in the royal presence. A well-known anecdote of Tarlton at court relates how he picked on Raleigh, was reprimanded, but

> going on with the same liberty, he reflected on the over-great power and riches of the Earl of Leicester, which was so universally applauded by all that were present, that she [i.e. the queen] thought fit for the present to bear these reflections with a seeming unconcernedness. But yet she was so offended, that she forbad Tarlton, and all her jesters from coming near her table.[14]

In the form of patronage, Leicester's 'over-great power' extended into the publishing business, the arts and the theatre.[15] He was the privy councillor most involved in the contemporary theatrical scene. His own servants, Leicester's Men, were the principal touring company during the 1560s and 70s. His patronage was a crucial factor in James Burbage's decision to take the financial risk of building the Theatre in Shoreditch in 1576 as a permanent London playhouse for the various troupes of players; so 'to some degree Leicester can be seen as the noble who enabled the playing companies to get their first real foothold "at home" in London.'[16] When Sir Francis Walsingham, a man who preferred to work behind the scenes and who has not gone down in history as a lover of the theatre, was charged by the Privy Council in 1583 to form a royal company of players, he delegated the process of selection to Edmund Tilney and may well have consulted with his close confederate Leicester on points of

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[13] Apart from the entries on Leicester and on Tarlton in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, see also on Tarlton Edwin Nungezer, A Dictionary of Actors and of Other Persons Associated with the Public Representation of Plays in England Before 1642, New York, 1968, 347-65. Tarlton's biography is mainly reconstructed from anecdotes and thus unreliable.

[14] Quoted in Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, 351.

[15] We have knowledge of close to one hundred religious, historical, literary or special-interest publications that were dedicated to him between 1558 and 1588, the vast majority of which explicitly written to further the Protestant cause, see Eleanor Rosenberg, *Leicester. Patron of Letters*, New York, 1955, esp. chap. 6: 'Puritans and their Works' and chap. 7: 'Anti-Catholic Propaganda', and

[16] Gurr, *Playing Companies*, 185.

organisation and policies. Leicester, having used his own players to similar purpose, would have had ample experience to share on the employment of an acting troupe to disseminate political messages. He was by no means blind to the influence that a politician could indirectly wield through his household players wherever they obtained permission to play. At least three of Leicester's Men were recruited for the Queen's Men; and there is plenty of evidence to suggest 'that Leicester maintained a mentoring link with the new troupe, previewing some of their performances and encouraging their tour'.[17]

Richard Tarlton, the mentor of William Kemp, Robert Armin and a host of less well-known Elizabethan clowns, was the most popular actor-entertainer before theatrical fashion turned and favoured the tragedians Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage. He retained his imaginative hold on playgoers until long after his death; but what people remembered so fondly was not so much the distinctness of his comic routines as his variety of native wit and his practical jokes, which went back to the devils, vices and fools of medieval culture, and which was similarly found in other fools of European folklore. His Rabelaisian earthiness appealed to public audiences both in London and in the many provincial towns visited by the Queen's Men on tour; his country-yokel gullibility made him a butt for metropolitan sophisticates, while those who had not quite found their feet in London rejoiced at his knack of turning imminent humiliation at the hands of urban scoffers into triumph. His success with the notoriously sensitive queen attests to his verbal quickness and intelligence and, even more crucially, to an ability to assess moods, register tensions in the courtly atmosphere and to measure his own performance in response. Each of the main socio-cultural groups – city, country, court – was allowed to feel that Tarlton was their own cultural property. His was a kind of 'popularity' that lent itself, as Alexandra Halasz puts it, to 'constructing a nostalgic image of national identity' because it relied on a gesture of comprehensive social inclusiveness.[18]

Without a doubt the mid-Elizabethan drama and theatre would not have taken shape, indeed, would not have flourished as they did, without the enormous impact of Leicester and Tarlton; and yet the two men died just in time to make a glorious exit. Leicester, his energies depleted after the war that he had so long urged against opposition at home, would have found himself increasingly isolated in a Privy Council that shortly after his death lost three more puritan sympathisers and advocates of Protestant interventionism in his brother Warwick, Walsingham and Sir Walter Mildmay; his nephew Sir Philip had been dead for two years. Lord Burghley was using the queen's displeasure at Leicester's

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[17] McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 24. On Leicester's politics of theatrical patronage, see 18-36. – Gurr, *Playing Companies*, 185-217, suggests that the moving force behind the formation of the Queen's Men was Charles Howard, later Lord Admiral. Gurr does not discuss the political or ideological slant of the companies he describes, but Howard would side with Burghley and the anti-interventionists in the Privy Council, against Leicester and Walsingham.

[18] Alexandra Halasz, "So beloved that men use his picture for their signs': Richard Tarlton and the Uses of Sixteenth-Century Celebrity,' *Shakespeare Studies* 23 (1995), 19-38, 35. – Robert Weimann was the first to pay serious attention to the clown figure, see *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre. Studies in Social Dimension of the Dramatic Forma nd Function*, Baltimore, 1987, here 186.

grandseigneurial capers in the Low Countries to strengthen his own line of domestic pragmatism. Sir Christopher Hatton, as conservative in religious feeling as the queen, had ousted him from royal favour; and Archbishop Whitgift, the first cleric to sit on the Privy Council, was enforcing rigorously suppressive measures against the puritan left, with which Leicester had increasingly associated himself. Since preaching was the prime concern of all interested Protestants, moderate as well as extreme, and Leicester was known to have been 'more responsible than any of his colleagues for the favour which the privy council almost habitually showed to puritan preachers in the fifteen-seventies and early fifteen-eighties',[19] his status as the unrivalled figurehead of puritan patronage at court cannot be in doubt. In the late 180s, however, the balance of power in the church and at court was tipping towards religious conformism and political consolidation. 'Leicester's death had been preceded by the slow attrition of his political influence, to the advantage of enemies who were diametrically opposed to Elizabeth's old favourite in their religious policy.'[20] None of the men who now had the queen's ear would exert himself to realise the idea of a Protestant England shining in chivalric valour and godliness as a defender of the true faith on the stage of European power politics.

The traditional clown, too, was being up-staged by new developments:

> In one sense Tarlton was old-fashioned even in the 1580s. He based his act on direct address to the audience and exploited the gap between the player and his play-role at a time when plays were generally moving towards the more illusionistic mode of the self-contained play.[21]

As an assessment of new plays, this is accurate. The real-life acting space was swallowed by the make-believe world of the fiction, and with it the clown who had occupied it. However, leaving the question of dramatic innovation out of the reckoning and observing merely the quantity of plays on offer, it could also be argued that although Tarlton's kind of theatre went out of *fashion*, it never quite its *popularity*: it survived in the revivals of old favourites, in inserted improvisations that do not appear in print, and in the playhouses north and west of the city, the Red Bull and the Cockpit, when 'popular' had fully taken on the meaning of 'base and common'. Christopher Marlowe's gibe in the Prologue to *Tamburlaine* is often quoted as heralding a new dramatic era, but it was *also* a grudging acknowledgement of the continuing popularity of 'jigging veins of rhyming mother wits' and the 'conceits' that 'clownage keeps in pay'.[22] Jigs – satirical after-pieces starring the clown in song, dance and impromptu back-chat with the audience – were perennially condemned by the virtuous and orderly, but not officially

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[19] Patrick Collinson, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Wood, Puritan, 1566-77*, London, 1960, xxvi.

[20] See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, London, 1967, 386. – Simon Adams suggests that Burghley 'employed Leicester's absence [in the Low Countries] to strengthen his own position' by appointing 'new anti-interventionist councillors at the beginning of 1586 (Archbishop Whitgift, Buckhurst and Lord Cobham)', *Leicester and the Court*, 33-4.

[21] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 127.

[22] Christopher Marlowe, *1 Tamburlaine the Great*, Prologue, 1-2. Quoted from *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. J. B. Steane, Harmondsworth, 1973.

prohibited until 1612. And no matter what Marlowe announced in the Prologue, his play's performance did in fact include 'fond and frivolous gestures digressing (and in my poor opinion) far unmeet for the matter', which were 'of some vain conceited fondlings greatly gaped at'.[23] The play's printer expurgated them – in all probability these 'gestures' had been ad-libbed anyway – but they had been part of the playgoers' experience of *Tamburlaine*.

Just as the history of mid-Tudor theatre is usually presented as a survey of its demise, so the history of the Tudor clown is typically written as an obituary, or if not quite that, at least in the style of a tribute to an ageing star of stage or screen who receives an award for his life's work: everyone displays a fondness for him; but in truth the newcomers define themselves much more in contradistinction to his by now vaguely embarrassing manner(isms) than in emulation. Those of a nostalgic cast admit to having admired him when they were young and impressionable, but to more acerbic minds he is merely an object of parody and ridicule. It is not only due to the cultural capital invested in 'Shakespeare' and 'Hamlet' that the most famous comment on the Tudor clown is a vilification: 'And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; […] That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.38-45). But 'pitiful' is the assessment of an author with an agenda; and 'ambition' is a serious claim to being heard. The civilisation – or as I will more often call it in the context of this study, the 'reformation' – of the Elizabethan theatre and of the 'Tarltonising' clown was neither fast nor absolute. In plays of the 1580s and early 1590s, the clown's ambition typically still involved 'reformation', too, but it was a reformation of the commonwealth fuelled by the socio-economic and political idea(l)s of earlier Protestant propaganda. This Protestant commoner-clown, this protean puritan who lent Martin Marprelate his voice , now came under attack from the censors led by Archbishop Whitgift and from the younger generation of poet-playwrights, who were inexorably leading the theatre away from jigs and banter with the audience towards artistic self-consciousness and heroic or psychological individualism.

After the upheavals of the Marprelate controversy in 1588/9, which muffled puritan activists in word and print, and the plague epidemic that stopped playing in London with few intermissions from August 1592 to June 1594, the drama of the 1580s was very much yesteryear's fashion. The *acuteness* of political reflection in the theatre was not blunted. But the *politics* of political drama had changed. After the early 90s, the common man would never again speak on stage of his grievances, criticise the mighty for their misgovernment and flex his muscles in rebellion – and if he did, it was with the palpable disapproval of the playwright: 'Those [late Elizabethan and Jacobean] plays that do show economic distress with some sympathy also voice the fear that any revolt will lead to anarchy and plunder.'[24] Chronicle plays and social moralities of the mid-Elizabethan years, however, show economic distress

[23] The printer Richard Jones in the preface of his 1590 edition of *Tamburlaine*, *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Steane, 587.

[24] Heinemann, 'Political Drama', 204.

with unequivocal sympathy, and revolt is seen as the downtrodden commoners' last – and rightful – means of redress. Their populist politics seem 'extraordinarily bold and direct compared with what came later. Raw nationalism, warlike monarchism, anticlericalism, fear of Catholic invasion and plotting, already present in the popular audience, are appealed to and emotionally reinforced'.[25] This was the kind of theatre that the Earl of Leicester fostered and in which Richard Tarlton attained celebrity status. In the late summer of the year 1588, when the earl and the clown died, this theatre lost its two most influential figureheads.

ROBERT WILSON: PLAYWRIGHT AND CLOWN

I propose to explore the points of intersection between the Earl of Leicester and Richard Tarlton – one a champion of militant Protestantism who was increasingly at odds with the queen, her archbishop and her Privy Council, the other a figure of anarchy who was admitted at court as an allowed fool but rejected as 'common' by the young professional literati – by way of triangulation and introduce a third figure: Robert Wilson, playwright and clown.

Although Wilson's date of birth is not known, his childhood and/or his youth must have coincided with the political and religious wrangling during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, and his young adulthood with the phase of intense Protestant propaganda after Queen Elizabeth's accession, when many Edwardian works were revised, reprinted and/or re-staged in order to exert pressure on the new government in its religio-political formation. Wilson's signature appears on a letter to Leicester, in which his players beg reassurance in view of a recent proclamation that endangered their touring in the country; very probably this was a reaction to the Statute of 1572, the Act for the Punishing of Vagabonds. Wilson is also named in the royal patent that Leicester obtained for his players two years later, the first patron to do so. We can only assume that Wilson remained with Leicester's Men until early in 1583, when he was among the players that were culled from the existing companies to form the Queen's Men. This new affiliation notwithstanding, his connection with Leicester seems to have continued, for he was employed by the earl in the Netherlands in 1586, presumably to help with the triumphal shows there. Wilson is the only Queen's Man who appears in Leicester's household accounts for that period. Whatever the reason for his presence in Holland, Will Kempe's prominent place in Leicester's own company of players and in the earl's household books of this period obviates the suggestion that Leicester wanted a clown; and it appears that Wilson's services were not restricted to the theatrical: we know that he was paid both by the Privy Counsel and by Leicester himself for carrying letters from (and possibly to) Whitehall. Wilson seems to have settled with his family in St

[25] Heinemann, 'Political Drama', 173.

Botolph-without-Bishopsgate in the late 70s; in November 1600 one 'Robert Wylson, yoman (a player)' was buried in St Giles Cripplegate.[26]

Although Wilson's few surviving plays, collaborations and attributed plays show him to have been a skilful, if not brilliant, dramatist and a keen socio-political satirist with puritan leanings, he has been much undervalued because history went against him and seemed to prove him deficient both politically and dramatically.[27] His early plays, however, were among the most popular and widely-known stage plays of the 1580s: *The Three Ladies of London* (first staged 1581,[28] not registered, printed 1584, reprinted 1592) and its sequel, *The Three Lords and the Three Ladies of London* (first staged late 1588 or early 1589, registered 31 July 1590, printed 1590), *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (staged at court January 1588(?), registered 8 June 1594, printed 1594) and, with some reservations, *The Peddler's Prophecy* (first staged 1561-3(?)[29], registered 13 May 1594, printed 1595). After the suspensions of stage-playing due to the plague, Wilson re-appears in the mid-1590s as a collaborator in some dozen-odd plays listed by Philip Henslowe in his diary, of which the only one extant is *Sir John Oldcastle*, the Admiral's Men's highly Reformation-conscious response to Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays.[30] He appears to have adapted to the new fashion for English history plays only reluctantly and in collaboration, and to the fashion for exotic adventure not at all. It may be evidence of stubbornness or of inadequacy that he continued to pen the same kind of plot into the late 1590s, by this time in the form of comic subplots in the Admiral's Men's plays about English civil conflict.[31]

Robert Wilson has gone down in the history of early modern drama as a minor pre-Shakespearean playwright with two or three plays to his name and a few further attributions. Even

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[26] See the introduction to Mithal's edition, Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors* and *The Oxford Dictionary of National Bibliography* for further biographical information. – Incidentally, St Giles also houses the remains of two prominent puritans, John Foxe (d. 1587) and Robert Crowley (d.1588).

[27] Richard Dutton admits in a review of Cameron's monograph on Wilson (see fn. below) that although the book is 'a prodigious misdirection of energies, […] it does at least convince me that Robert Wilson himself, apparently a Puritan of the earl of Leicester's faction, is worth pursuing further', 'Shakespeare's Life, Times and Stage', *Shakespeare Survey* 39 (1986), 223.

[28] Stephen Gosson's *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, in which he vilifies *Three Ladies*, was registered on 6 April 1582.

[29] This is the date given in *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, ed. Alfred Harbage and Samuel Schoenbaum, 3rd ed. rev. Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim, London, 1964.G. L. Kittredge has detailed his suggestion that the play was written in the early years of the queen's reign, 'The Date of *The Pedlers Prophecie*,' *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 16 (1934), 97. – Not all critics attribute *The Peddler's Prophecy* to Wilson. Mithal does, but presents both sides of the argument, 'Introduction,' xxxvii-xliii. I believe that *Peddler* is an Edwardian or early Elizabethan play that was adapted (possibly by the Queen's Men, arguably by Wilson) around 1590 as a poignant parody on prophesying and the government's paranoia about sedition and treason, maybe to be performed in conjunction with or in response to *Thomas of Woodstock*.

[30] Both Henning Standish in his introduction to *Fair Em* (New York, 1980, 63-4 and 70-72) and A. D. Wraight, *Christopher Marlowe and Edward Alleyn*, Chichester, 1993, 190-3, discount the suggestion that the Wilson who wrote *Three Lords and Three Ladies* also authored *Fair Em* and the pamphlet *Martin Mar-Sixtus*. Mithal, 'Introduction', argues that he probably wrote both.

[31] Andrew Gurr seems to accept that the 'Wilson' listed and paid by Henslowe was 'Robert Wilson', although he does not comment on Wilson's earlier work. See *Shakespeare's Opposites. The Admiral's Company, 1594-1625*, Cambridge, 2009.

those modern readers who appreciate the formality of allegorical drama and the charm of the 'medley' style that varies between prose, blank verse, rhyme royal and fourteeners tend to be put off by the plays' violent xenophobia. General studies of the subject generally ignore him.[32] Wilson's theatrical rivals, however, found neither his dramaturgy nor his populism so easy to dismiss. Not only was he one of the most influential playwrights of the 1580s – and as such a challenge *per se* to ambitious youngsters newly arrived in London to make their way in the professional theatre business. He was also the most popular stage clown next to Richard Tarlton, and as such one of the principal players of the decade. As early as 1579 Gabriel Harvey relates in a letter that he was publicly put on the spot to prove his skills of improvisation, 'to make tryall of my extemporall faculty, and to play Wylsons or Tarltons parte'.[33] This shows that Wilson already was a byword for stage clowning when he wrote *Three Ladies of London*, which in turn might explain the vitriol that Stephen Gosson pours on the play in his anti-theatrical pamphlet *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582).[34] Thomas Heywood's remark in *An Apology for Actors* (1612) about famous actors of the previous generation has been taken as evidence that Wilson gave up acting in the late 1580s: '[S]ince I never saw them, as being before my time, I cannot (as an eyewitnesse of their desert) give them that applause, which they no doubt worthily merit'.[35] This is somewhat contradicted by Francis Meres' references to Wilson in his compendium of ancient and modern wisdom, *Palladis Tamia* (1598). He mentions Wilson twice; first in a list comprising 'the best for Comedy amongst us', in which Wilson appears in the company of the Earl of Oxford, Shakespeare, Nashe, Munday, John Lyly and others. Neither Wilson nor Shakespeare is here singled out for special praise. Wilson occurs a second time in the section on poets 'famous for extemporal verse'. Meres here praises Tarlton for his rapport with the playgoers and goes on to imply that Wilson took Tarlton's part/place after his death: '[a]nd so is now our wittie Wilson, who for learning and extemporall witte in this facultie, is without compare or compeere, as, to his great and eternall commendations he

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[32] Exceptions are M. C. Bradbrook, *The Common Player*, London, 1962, chap. 8 and passim, and David Bevington *Tudor Drama and Politics. A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning*, Cambridge/MA., 1968. More recent appreciations of the plays can be found in the introduction to Mithal's edition; Margot Heinemann, 'Political Drama,' *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, Cambridge, 1990, 161-206, esp. 173-6; Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels. The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama*, London, 1991, esp. 65-73; Lloyd Edward Kermode, 'The Playwright's Prophecy: Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* and the 'Alienation' of the English,' *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 11 (1999), 60- 87; and Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition. Innovation in the English Drama before 1595*, Manchester, 2002, esp. 28-34 and 164-5. Dutton and Lunney refer to a monograph by G. M. Cameron, *Robert Wilson and the Plays of Shakespeare*, Riverton, NZ, 1982, which I have not been able to consult. They criticise Cameron for over-ingeniously attributing *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, *Fair Em*, *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *Mucedorus* to Wilson, see Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 257 n. 61 and Lunney, *Marlowe*, 193 n. 24.

[33] *Letter-Book of Gabriel Harvey*, ed. E. J. L. Scott, Camden Soc. 33 (1884), 67, quoted in David Kathman's entry on Wilson in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. These quotations are also collected in Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, 394-5.

[34] Significantly, Gosson objects to the play's pro-theatre ending in *Plays Confuted*, a scene that does not occur in the printed version, Mithal 'Introduction', xxi-xxii.

[35] Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, E2v.

manifested in his challenge at the Swanne on the Bank side'. If Meres is here relating up-to-date information, it would seem that Wilson was still active as a player into the middle of the 1590s, upholding the Tarltonesque tradition of clowning, including the direct verbal exchange with the audience.[36]

Wilson's education must have greatly augmented both the poignancy of his clownish figures and the challenge that he posed to rival and up-and-coming playwrights. It seems remarkable that most of the contemporary references to Wilson associate him with 'learning' – or perhaps it is not so remarkable at all, for the majority of playwrights in Tudor England had at least one degree and worked as schoolmaster, chaplains or university lecturers.[37] Unfortunately, the player-playwright cannot be matched with any of the men of that name in the university matriculation registers, unless he is the Robert Wilson who matriculated at King's College in 1548.[38] Although it was quite possible for a student to leave no record at all, especially before 1600, we cannot securely attribute the player Wilson's 'learning' to university study.[39]. Meres explicitly praises him 'for learning and extemporall witte in this facultie'. Tarlton is never recommended for his 'learning' (although he, too, had written at least one play and some poetry); and although 'facultie' can simply mean 'capacity' or, here, 'genre or mode', it also denotes 'one of the departments of learning at university' and might even suggest an ennoblement of comic playacting into an 'art'. In 1615 Edmond Howes added an entry about the formation of the Queen's Men to John Stow's *Annales* and singled out Tarlton and Wilson for subtly distinct praise: the former showed 'a wondrous plentifull pleasant extemporall wit', the latter a 'quicke, delicate, refined, extemporall witt' – 'delicate' and 'refined' again suggesting the kind of sophistication that might result from the player's academic education.[40] There is, in addition to these unreliable adjectives, a more

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[36] Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury*, preface by Arthur Freeman, New York, 1973, 284 and 286. To say in the mid-1590s that 'so is *now* our wittie Wilson' (emphasis added) would make no sense if Wilson had long before stopped acting. Meres is usually trusted by scholars trying to establish the chronology of Shakespeare's plays, and he seems to be relating accurate information when he writes that 'Michael Drayton is now penning in English verse a Poem called Polu-olbion [*sic*]' (*Palladis Tamia*, 281); the first part of the *Poly-Olbion* eventually appeared in 1612.

[37] White, *Theatre and Reformation*, 67: 'Most dramatists of the Reformation era were ordained ministers or schoolmasters (or both), a few were courtiers or lawyers.'

[38] Mithal errs in speculating that the player is identical with the Robert Wilson who matriculated at St John's, Cambridge, in 1557/8 (lxviii). He omits to mention that Venn identifies this man with the cleric who held the vicarage at Walsall, Staffs from 1575 to 1609 and was buried there.

[39] Venn notes that a considerable number of students registered with their colleges but failed to matriculate with the university. The earliest college registers commence only after the player Wilson would have studied there, and university matriculation records were by no means scrupulously kept (Venn v-vi). – If our man were the Robert Wilson at King's in the late 1540s, he would have been in his mid- to late 40s when he started a family, and about fifty when he wrote *Three Ladies* and was recruited into the Queen's Men to tour the country. While this is not impossible (John Stow was 73 when the first edition of his *Survey of London* was published, and he continued to wander around the city to gather additional information for the enlarged edition in 1603), it is perhaps not very likely. On the other hand, the Robert Wilson at King's does not seem to have graduated; an apparent lack of application most likely either in a nobleman or in a poor scholar who is hot for a career for which he needs no degree. No Robert Wilson appears in *Records of English Drama: Cambridge*, 2 vols., ed. Alan H. Nelson, Toronto, 1989; but only 25 cast lists survive (946).

[40] John Stow, *Annales*, extended by Edmond Howes in 1615, 697. The extract is printed in Wickham, Berry and

conclusive piece of contemporary evidence. In a refutation of Gosson's *School of Abuse* (1579), Thomas Lodge attacks Gosson's attempt at drama, *Catiline's Conspiracy*, and goes on to say that

> I should preferr Wilsons. [*sic*] shorte and sweete if I were judge, a peece surely worthy prayse, the practice of a good scholler, would the wiser would overlooke that, they may perhaps cull some wisdome out, of a player's toye.[41]

Whatever the nature of Wilson's 'peece', its author is both a player and a scholar. A graduate of Oxford University himself, Lodge would hardly bestow academic praise on a man who sprinkled his writing with second-hand Latin tags – this, in fact, is precisely of what he accuses Gosson. We may assume, then, that Robert Wilson had visited a grammar school and may or may not have gone on to Cambridge or Oxford. As a playwright-clown with a solid academic education, renowned in both professional capacities with provincial and London theatregoers from the early 1570s into the early 1590s and longer, Robert Wilson was a unique and, even more interestingly, an incongruous figure in the Elizabethan theatre.[42]

Wilson's connection with Richard Tarlton appeared in the similarity of their theatrical acts, which seem to have been subtly adjusted so as not to clash or compete; Tilney after all recommended both for inclusion among the twelve Queen's Men. Tarlton must have perfected 'the common touch', while Wilson was the 'learned' clown, the successful playwright.[43] If Tarlton's background was indeed the alehouse culture with which he is so often associated in anecdotes, and Wilson – we are allowed to speculate – started acting as a schoolboy, or perhaps even at university, the basis of this difference lay in their biographies, but it must have made good sense to a company to have at least two clowns. Although it was Tarlton who was remembered in parts like Dericke in *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and Simplicity in *Three Ladies of London*, no doubt the Queen's Men's clowns would stand in for each other on stage (if not at the queen's table, where Tarlton was privileged to deliver his one-man act). This became impossible after Tarlton's death, and Simplicity in *Three Lords of London*, very probably

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Ingram, ed., *English Professional Theatre*, 208.

41 Thomas Lodge, *A Reply to Gosson's Schoole of Abuse*, 1579, 43. Quoted in Mithal, 'Introduction', lxvi. – Ironically, Wilson went on to write a play called *Catiline's Conspiracy* himself: Henslowe notes payments to Wilson and Henry Chettle 'in August 1598, see Gurr, *Admiral's Men*, 239.

42 The title page of *The Cobbler's Prophesy* says 'Written by Robert Wilson. Gent.' This *might* be a formal acknowledgement of university education, which would promote a man to 'gentleman' irrespective of his parentage. *The Wounds of Civil War*, also printed by John Danter in 1594 (although not, like *Cobbler*, for Cuthbert Burby at the Royal Exchange), correctly identifies Thomas Lodge as 'Gent.'. Gurr (*Playgoing*, 257 n. 12), while (erroneously) listing Wilson among the playwrights who were never called 'Gent.' on the title pages of their plays, makes very clear how rare an honour this was. Note that Mr William Shakespeare, for all his buying of arms and property, was not called 'Gent.' on the title page of the First Folio.

43 One ought not count it as reliable evidence, but in *Three Ladies* there is a double act between Simplicity (Tarlton) and his cousin Sincerity (Wilson?), a poor clergyman looking for employment with Lady Conscience. Sincerity complains that preachers of God's Word are not much in demand because people are so dissipated – a monologue straight out of Philip Stubbes. One humorous touch is Simplicity's insistence 'I can reade' (564) – Tarlton made much of his lack of formal education. Sincerity, on the other hand, says that 'I came from Oxford: but in Cambridge I studied late' (573). In the context, this is unnecessary, and unnecessarily precise, information, and it is just possible that it alludes to the actor.

played by Wilson himself, delivers a moving and defiant dramatic obituary for a dead friend and a besieged kind of theatre.

As a popular clown who was also a playwright, Wilson is not only something of an anomaly among his fellows[44] but also a challenge to the received opinion among theatre historians that the *extempore* bonding between clown and playgoers challenged the superior prestige of the playwright's art:

> The professional clown competes with the authorial voice for attention and control, producing a dialogic text in place of the monological scripted play. The formal unity that could be achieved only by subordinating subplot to main plot, commoners to aristocrats, comedy to history, by imposing, that is, the same hierarchies of privilege and power that exist in the state upon the play, is ruptured by the clown's refusal to be subordinated to the serious plot.[45]

In Robert Wilson's case, clown and author are one and the same. In other words – and this paradoxical little chiasm pinpoints the polemical rhetoric and the intellectual appeal of much of Tudor Reformation satire – the author of these plays is a clown, and the clown in these plays is an author, an authority, the origin of the text's truth and meaning. A playwright-clown in the later 1580s could have gone a long way towards 'reforming' the clown-figure single-handedly, using the authority of his pen to hush the clown's voice on the stage to make him 'roar as gently as any sucking dove […], an 'twere any nightingale' (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.2.77-8). But Robert Wilson's clowns refuse to be 'subordinated to the serious plot', and this refusal is a central feature of his dramaturgy and of the general political point of his plays. His commoners are subordinated to aristocrats only insofar as political prudence and dramatic convention demanded it. While Christopher Marlowe was imagining overreaching megalomaniacs like Tamburlaine or Doctor Faustus, Thomas Kyd was adapting Seneca to develop the genre of revenge tragedy, and William Shakespeare was wrestling with a multitude of French and English knights and nobles, Robert Wilson – probably about a decade older even than Kyd – was defending and modifying the traditions of native political drama by writing (and probably acting) Raph the Cobbler in *The Cobbler's Prophesy* and Simplicity, the commoner-clown in *Three Lords of London*: '[H]is achievement supplemented that of the great clown [i.e. Tarlton], for he was the *literary* creator of the clown's part'.[46]

This achievement – the literary creation of the clown's part – will be a central focus of this chapter. Wilson's plays deserve fuller attention precisely because they mark the efforts of a journeyman-player with, as will be seen, a radical socio-political agenda, to salvage the Tarltonesque clown for a traditional political theatre that was being discredited and suppressed. Other satirists at this

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[44] Other instances of a clown authoring his own play are Tarlton's *The Seven Deadly Sins*, which he wrote for the Queen's Men in 1585 and in which he also starred (see Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, 349-50 and 'On the Underrated Genius of Dick Tarlton', in *Speeding up Shakespeare*, London, 1937, 17-38, 35-7) and possibly Robert Armin's *The Valiant Welshman*.

[45] David Scott Kastan, "Clownes shoulde speake disorderlye': Mongrel Tragicomedy and the Unitary State,' paper read at a meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America (1989), quoted in Helgerson, *Nationhood*, 226.

[46] Bradbrook, *Common Player*, 178.

time were adapting – not to say 'appropriating' – the clown's discourse for their literary purposes, among them the university wit Thomas Nashe; but they did what they could to shed the clown's association with popular (that is, uneducated, unrefined) culture and with radical politics. Wilson must have realised that the type of his stage persona was under attack from various corners: it was beginning to evoke the hostility of magistrates, the mockery of gentleman-poets and the disgust of fastidious playgoers. Wilson showed his professional acumen in strengthening the position of the Tarltonesque clown in the contest for prestige and box office that had sprung up between the Queen's Men and their detractors. He integrated the clown into the political vision of his plays and turned him into an authorial – authoritative – spokesman for a popular political theatre and for an *oppositional* Protestant drama propagating a *social* (as much as a religious) Reformation. His plays are to be read and understood within the context of Tudor Reformation literature, both dramatic and non-dramatic; and his literary and political commitments link him with early Protestant dramatists like John Rastell and John Bale, Edwardian 'commonwealth men' like Robert Crowley and Luke Shepherd, the mostly anonymous playwrights who pressed for further socio-political reforms after the accession of the young queen, and with Martin Marprelate. They also link him, not only officially and legally but also ideologically, with the Earl of Leicester.

1.2 The Queen's Men and the Theatre of the 1580s

As a member of Leicester's Men in the 1570s and of the Queen's Men in the 1580s, Wilson was an actor and, more importantly, a playwright with a Protestant brief. Theatre historians used to believe, and preferred to believe, that early modern playing companies and playwrights operated largely independently of their civic, noble or royal patrons and patronesses. Now it is thought that this independence was qualified by their obligation not only to figure as status symbols with noble neighbours and at court but to present plays that tallied with the religious and political interests of the illustrious personages with whose names they gained admission to town halls and country seats.[47] It was by no means incidental that with the most prominent patrons of stage playing in the mid-Tudor period, these interests were left-of-centre Protestant. Reformation propaganda – or, less pointedly, dramatised religious education – had been sanctioned and fostered by the Henrician government from the very first, when Thomas Cromwell encouraged John Bale and his troupe to tour the country with fiercely anti-papal, iconoclastic plays. As late as 1564 an adherent of the old faith concluded that 'Ministrelles and players [are] the chief ministres in publishing the newe ghospell';[48] and the Spanish observers of the

[47] White, *Reformation and Theatre*, 42-3. Suzanne Westfall has suggested that in the earlier Tudor period playscripts were in effect sold by the writer to his patron, who then handed it over in some sort to his troupe of players: 'for the patron, a tour of his scripts could ensure that his political, economic and artistic prominence was vividly represented throughout the land', *Patrons and Performance. Early Tudor Household Revels*, Oxford, 1990, 122.

[48] White, *Reformation and Theatre*, 45. White quotes Thomas Dorman's *A Proufe of Certeyne Articles* (1564).

English theatrical scene were quick to suspect that the queen's proclamation against plays 'wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonwealth shall be handled'[49] was little more than a sop to still their complaints about the shamelessness with which they and their religion were being attacked on stage. In fact, the queen was no more keen on Protestant controversies being publicly discussed than she was on popular expressions that would antagonise France, Spain and Rome. But the proclamations allowed everyone – except the Spanish – to have their cake and eat it: the queen had apparently taken a stand and could claim to be blameless if the mayors, shire lieutenants and noble patrons who were charged to see the proclamation enforced did not proceed with the thoroughness that seemed necessary. That they did not, we can see by the plays that survived and by the testimonies that many of them left: a considerable number of magistrates were 'progressive Protestants themselves interested in advancing the cause of religious reform'.[50] And even those who had no strong religious feelings might, as Suzanne Westfall puts it,

> have been perplexed indeed at his responsibility for enforcement of the regulations. Should he tolerate a local noble's troupe at the risk of offending the sovereign who may, with luck, never hear of the transgression? […] Although the arm of the sovereign was long, the arm of a troupe's patron might be closer and, in certain circumstances, more dangerous or helpful to the community.[51]

The queen might proclaim, but this did not necessarily mean that her proclamations were enforced with any efficacy.

Many of the Henrician and Edwardian families whose wealth had been increased by church property, their influence extending into the power vacuum left by the Roman Catholic clergy, were still staunch supporters of the Protestant cause at the end of the century. Leicester is not the only nobleman whose politics of patronage have been shown to follow a wide but purposefully Protestant agenda, but he was the most powerful member of the Sidney-Herbert-Dudley clan. He won as many followers by his support of 'the godly' as by his great family and position in society, and although his enemies maligned his piety as opportunism, there is no doubt that he was widely regarded as a figurehead of militant Protestantism.[52] Paul White has argued that both Wilson's moralities and anonymous plays like *New Custom*, which acknowledges the traumata of religious upheaval while taking a moderately puritan position on doctrine, were representative of the repertoire that Leicester's Men offered in London and

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[49] The text of the proclamation is quoted from Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, 51.

[50] White, *Reformation and Theatre*, 59-60.

[51] Westfall, *Patrons and Performance*, 137.

[52] Simon Adams discusses the manifestations and the genuineness of Leicester's puritan convictions in 'A Godly Peer? Leicester and the Puritans' and 'A Puritan Crusade? The Composition of the Earl of Leicester's Expedition to the Netherlands, 1585-86' (chapters 9 and 11 in *Leicester and the Court*) He concludes that the overwhelming evidence is of an extensive and consistent patronage of advanced Protestant men and projects, give or take a few expedient exceptions. - Collinson also remarks on Leicester's swing to the religious left: always friendly 'to those best described as Grindelians, in his later years [he] moved closer to the more extreme, presbyterian fringe' (*Elizabethan Movement*, 386)

in the provinces (though not at court).[53] Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, in their exemplary study of the Queen's Men, support and extend this opinion. Both companies – influential in the capital, but even more so as touring companies – were formed to disseminate an ideology of nationalist Protestantism, to carry out into the ranks of urban society and into the provinces the word about the Protestant commonwealth, Albion reformed and triumphant. They were set up to dramatise Protestant politics, to stage plays that conveyed orthodox religious and conformist political messages, to check radical Protestantism in London and the south-eastern areas and to propagate established Protestantism in the still unreformed backwaters of the country.

As the servants of the queen's nobles and privy councillors, the Queen's Men played a part in the process of reformation 'from above', the Reformation that was directed by the Elizabethan court and magistrates. But in the not so recent past, they had been 'rogues and vagabonds', and neither Leicester nor the official authorities were able to fully assess and control what the players got up to, in London and even more on tour. They may have been harnessed to the establishment's wagon, but stage playing was still 'base, common and popular' in its appeal, not only as regards their dramatic style but also in their politics. Comic or tragic romances and chronicle plays, the main fare of the Queen's Men, remained popular in the 1590s. Whatever dramatic shortcomings one sees in their plays, they were not short on 'the drums, swordplay and noise […] the battle displays [and] militant repertoire' or on the zany satire or the moralistic pathos with which the stage began to capitalise on 'current affairs', the scandals, wonders, gossip, domestic drama that now fill glossy magazines.[54] Superficially, Wilson was still very much 'with it' in the late 1580s. Both The Cobbler's Prophecy and Three Lords of London contain battle scenes and exciting visual displays, satirical nudges and jibes at the court and at London's civic elite. Yet, ultimately, his plays failed, if imitation is a mark of success; and a major reason for this failure is that while the general political climate changed, Robert Wilson did not change the politics of his plays.

In their book-length study of the Queen's Men, McMillin and MacLean decide to stress the stylistic differences between the Queen's Men's repertoire and the experiments conducted by Marlowe, Kyd, Shakespeare, Burbage and Alleyn. If the early 1590s were a revolutionary phase for English drama, 'the basis of this revolution was primarily rhetorical': the development of blank verse. The 'medley' style – variations between prose and blank verse, rhyme royal and blank verse, fourteeners and blank verse – suits the company's 'literalist theatre' because 'it does not establish a dominant language, but rather creates a feeling for the impromptu. […] This is the basic style of the Tudor interludes

[53] White, 'Patronage, Protestantism and Stage Propaganda', 50-2. The queen 'who by this point [the late 1570s and early 80s] found religious polemics tiresome and distasteful' was entertained with plays on classical and romantic themes, 49.

[54] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 132 and 141.

carried into the 1580s and 1590s.'[55] It lends itself to the staging of pageants and revue-like set-pieces, but what is 'missing almost entirely from the plays of the Queen's Men [is] poetry capable of expressing the pressures of realistic psychological experience.'[56] Yet McMillin and MacLean acknowledge that the Queen's Men's inability to participate in 'the blank-verse revolution' may also at least in part be an unwillingness. They were politically opposed to individualist aspiration, because it endangers the harmony of the commonwealth. There is a limit to the theatrical and dramatic excitement one can wring from plays that do not focus on individual endeavour or psychological conflict; one cannot write against megalomaniac overreachers without portraying them, and whatever the moral of the story, the audience will respond most keenly to the characters who show most dramatic agency. As John Milton (a fervent Protestant critical of monarchical power), found, one cannot portray evil without making it to some extent fascinating, and if it is impossible in epic poetry, it is doubly impossible in the theatre. The Queen's Men's literalist theatre does not lure playgoers into the fiction, it does not tempt them to identify emotionally and psychologically with the characters. It never suggests that they imagine what it might be like to *be* Henry V or King John or Selimus.

The four plays under close scrutiny here have more in common than that they use the old rhyming fourteeners and that the clowns take centre-stage. *The Cobbler's Prophecy* and *The Peddler's Prophecy* can obviously be paired by their use of the highly charged Reformation topic (and dramatic convention) of divinely inspired speech. *Peddler*'s mid-Tudor provenance is betrayed by its 'dialogue' structure: the presentation of social types in debate about issues of current interest shaping itself into a pageant-like sequence of encounters. The Peddler introduces himself and in turn engages in manipulative exchanges exposing the half-hidden desires, anxieties and prejudices of a family and of representatives of occupational groups (sailor, merchant, artisan, landlord), who disappear from the play before he encounters the clergyman, the magistrate and the judge. The play's purpose is thus one of exposition rather than of clothing religious education in dramatic narrative. It challenges the audience to take part in the intellectual exercise of detecting hypocrisy and bad faith in contemporary ideologies of state and to decode the rhetorical strategies of propaganda.

The Cobbler's Prophecy brings the realm close to political and moral ruin: in the human sphere the unscrupulous Courtier plots against the good Duke, while in the divine sphere Venus has been corrupted by Contempt and proceeds to corrupt Mars in her turn. Enemy forces are closing in. In a variety of the medieval debate on how to counsel the monarch, the play thrusts upon Raph the cobbler the tasks of rousing Mars and warning the Duke. The honest Soldier gains victory in the field while Raph's wife Zelota stabs the Courtier in a fit of madness induced by Mercury, and thus ensures

[55] McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 144.

[56] McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 145.

domestic peace. Both *Cobbler* and *Peddler* parody elements of humanist learning - Greek mythology and neo-platonic astrology respectively - in a combined attempt to deflect the censor's attention, educate the illiterate and satirise the classical-mythological cast of elite culture.

The Cobbler's Prophecy could also be paired with *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* as examples of mid-Elizabethan war plays. In a stylised sequence of encounters the London lords court the ladies, defeat the Spanish lords, repel the claims of three Lincolnshire suitors and celebrate civic harmony in a spectacular procession. *Three Lords* was designed as a sequel to *Three Ladies of London*, one of the most popular plays of the early 1580s.[57] Wilson's generic identification of *Three Ladies* as 'A pithie and pleasant Comedie' must be assumed to be ironic, even if 'comedy' subsumed 'satire': Hospitality falls victim to Usury, Sir Nicholas Nemo (i.e. Nobody) convicts the three ladies Lucre, Love and Conscience, who are confined to a purgatory-like prison as punishment for their corruption, and the Vices blend into the metropolitan crowd. The play does what satire about urban life and commerce had done since Roman times: attack avarice, greed and unscrupulousness, warn of the destructive effect of selfishness and decadence on the individual and the community, lament the decay of communal values like charity and hospitality. It differs, however, from other late interludes like William Wager's *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, *Hickscorner*, *Jack Juggler*, or *The Tide Tarrieth No Man* in that vaguely urban settings and allegorical characters are becoming distinctly and quite precisely located in London. It is also remarkable in that no vision of social harmony is granted at the end: Dissimulation transforms himself into a citizen, Usury into a merchant on the Exchange and Simony into clergyman at Paul's (1850-8).

Seven-odd years later, *Three Ladies and Three Lords of London* was the first Elizabethan play about contemporary London politics, a satire about London's oligarchic rulers that is structured like a chronicle play, but which has no character above the rank of a gentrified alderman.[58] At the same time it shows a more differentiated interest in its own nature and status as a stage play than Wilson's other plays. This combination of civic pageantry and meta-theatre allows Wilson to implicate London's governors in his satirical drama. He explores civic ideology on display (and civic policies *of* display) and exposes the hypocrisy of the city fathers, who sought to suppress public stage-playing while resorting in their turn to increasingly theatrical devices of propaganda.

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[57] Alan Dessen stresses the importance of *Three Ladies of London* as one of the few surviving plays of the first years after the building of the Theatre and the Curtain, *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Play*, Lincoln/Nebr., 1986, 8. - *Three Ladies* is one of the very few plays named by Stephen Gosson in *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). He must have seen it in an extended version, probably by the actors' improvisation, in which Love and Conscience gave their opinions on stage plays, Love disapproving, Conscience approving of them (D1v-D2v). Gosson criticises the playwright for his deviousness in presenting these opinions and mentions a now lost reply, *London Against the Three Ladies*. Since Gosson rarely betrays first-hand experience of playgoing, these remarks testify to the extraordinary success of Wilson's play.

[58] The novelty of Wilson's depiction of London society *sans nobility* becomes clearer when seen as prefiguring John Stow's similar procedure in his *Survey of London*: 'the *Survey* constructs for London its own hierarchy, with a small mercantile and governing elite at the top. A large group of middling shopkeepers and their families comprise the urban middling sort, and beneath them is another substantial group of apprentices, servants, laborers, and poor', Bonahue, 'Citizen History', 69.

Three Ladies and *Three Lords* thus prepare the way for the later Elizabethan genre of city (or citizen) comedy as it was developed by Dekker, Jonson, Marston, Chapman and Middleton. Their plays like Wilson's were peopled by social types or semi-allegorical characters, their main theme the ethical and social degeneration of urbanites in the jungle of commercialism. The monarch and the nobility rarely if ever appear, and the governing civic elite of merchant-magistrates is either eyed with suspicion or straightforwardly satirised. But the voice of the Protestant social reformer that is audible in Wilson's *London* plays is absent from city comedy proper.

1.3 The Prophet-Clown

Prophetic speech and the figure of the commoner-clown were two well-established features of popular Reformation literature. Prophets and clowns not only advocated but also embodied commoner, if not communal, participation in government, and they carried the issue of participation into the commercial playhouses. But as Protestantism became established in the Elizabethan church and state, the Reformation was - to the intents and purposes of those whom the poet and pamphleteer Robert Crowley called 'possessioners as wel of Clergie as of the Laitie'[59] - complete. Protestant magistrates had no intention of condoning 'prophets' who would upset the socio-political order; and the up-and-coming playwrights - too young to remember Marian England or the hopes and frustrations of the first Elizabethan years - would not lumber themselves with 'clowns' who claimed the public stage as a part of carnivalesque popular culture and a forum for oppositional political debate.

The fear of prophecy was a fear of popular action, of revolution - as Archbishop Parker put it, of 'the people to be orderers of things'.[60] One focus of this fear was the figure of the itinerant soothsayer, the popular polemicist. In Wilson's *The Peddler's Prophecy*, the other characters' opinions about the Peddler's reported slanders vary: 'Who would any sentence regard, / Spoken of such a runnagate as this is' (710-11), but on the other hand, 'Such fellows going abroad the country, / Make many simple folkes them to beleeve' (774-5). Early modern governments shared the latter view and passed harsh laws against 'prophecies' - rumours, libels, critiques, indeed, any sort of popular debate about political or religious issues.[61] Not all the queen's subjects were prepared to acquiesce in the new *status quo*. 'Propaganda,' Arthur Ferguson has observed about popular political culture in the sixteenth century, 'was a double-edged weapon. Opinion, once aroused, tended to become articulate in some form or

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[59] Robert Crowley, *An Information and Peticion agaynst the Oppressours of the Pore Commons of this Realms*, London, 1548, A2r.

[60] Matthew Parker to Sir William Cecil, *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, ed. John Bruce, Cambridge, 1853, 105.

[61] See e.g. Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime*, Oxford, 1979, 389-94, and Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, 151-73 and chap. 13: 'Ancient Prophecies,' esp. 470-75. Cf. Alastair Bellany, "Raylinge Rymes and Vaunting Verse': Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603-1628,' *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, London, 1994, 285-310, who does not, however, connect libel and prophecy.

other.'[62] At issue were not so much matters of doctrine as the socio-economic reformation of the commonwealth. Overtaken by popular initiative much like John Wyclif had been in 1381 and Martin Luther in 1524/5, Henrician and Edwardian reformers were not prepared for the likelihood that

> religious radicalism would become confused with a general antagonism to the ruling orders; that with the new contention between the faiths an extra dimension would be added to the tension between the rich and the poor; that some might use the Gospel to preach a socially egalitarian message.[63]

Prophesy - showing with the aid of Scripture or other visionary texts that what has happened was ordained to have happened and that the future can by the same authority be predicted - was the mode in which popular complaints about socio-political and economic abuses were most characteristically expressed by millenarian Tudor gospellers:

> Think you it doth not grieve us at the harts?
> To have a Tinker of a Cobler to minister to us:
> Yea, and the lewdest fellows in all our parts,
> Taketh upon him matters of gravitie to discuss. (1338-41)

Most influentially, perhaps, it was the mode of John Foxe's apocalyptic tomes tracing the fate of the True Church through the centuries leading up to the English Reformation and beyond to the Day of Judgement, on which Truth will out and suffering will be rewarded.[64] Foxe, that goldmine of incidents and themes such as later Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights would profitably bring on stage, had had a more comprehensive view of social issues than merely telling tales of individual martyrdom, more often of commoners than nobles.[65] Among the polemical works he reprints is Simon Fishe's *Supplication of Beggars* from around 1527, a tract so provocative in its demand to set the sturdy monks to work and to distribute their wealth among the poor that it was blacklisted. To many readers of the *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe's inclusion of this tract would have suggested that the Protestant reformers had intended to effect radical *socio-economic* reforms as well as doctrinal and ecclesiastical ones in their efforts to work towards a truly godly commonwealth.[66]

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[62] Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance*, Durham/N.C., 1965, 137. See also *Table Talk of John Selden* (collected up to his death in 1654): 'And as in Athens the philosophers made the people knowing and therefore they thought themselves wise enough to governe, so does preaching with us, and that makes us effect a Democracy,' *Table Talk of John Selden*, ed. Frederick Pollock, London, 1927, 71.

[63] Brigden, London and the Reformation, 268-9. - Helen C. White, *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century*, New York, 1944, and King, *English Reformation Literature*, collect and discuss ample evidence that this extension of religious radicalism into political extremism was exactly what did happen. Robert Wilson's late morality plays are foothills at the mountain range of this political-religious-literary tradition.

[64] See Andrew Penny, 'John Foxe, the *Acts and Monuments* and the Development of Prophetic Interpretation,' *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades, Aldershot, 1997, 252-70.

[65] Foxe makes a point of the fact that the majority of those burnt in Marian England for their Protestant beliefs were artisans and agricultural labourers; see also Dickens, *English Reformation*, 266-7.

[66] *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Stephen Reed Cattley, London, 1841, vol. 4, 657-67. Foxe mentions that Fishe had been involved in a play attacking Cardinal Wolsey, staged at Gray's Inn, and he makes a point of the king's friendly reception of Fishe from his exile. It was emphatically not Henry VIII (after all, the grandfather of the queen of whom Foxe expected so much), who banned the *Supplication*, Tyndale's New Testament and other Protestant works, but the bishops.

The prophets and clowns in Wilson's plays leave no doubt as to the policies they would like to see the government pursue. One, Protestant militancy, was in the 1580s still a rather elitist idea of national identity that was currently taking its most sublime literary shape in Edmund Spenser's national Protestant epic, *The Fairie Queene*. Anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish prejudice had seeped into every veinlet of the English body politic, but a war on the continent initially found little favour either with the queen or with the populace.[67] The second demand, the rectification of socio-economic and legal injustice, was a popular one that had been levelled at feudal overlords long before the Protestant reformers made it their own in the 1530s; if the Elizabethan magistracy was ever inclined to shrug off these demands, the London riots in the 1590s about food supplies and legal grievances doubled their alertness. The third demand, connected with the second, was drastic action against foreigners and immigrants. Violent xenophobia is, to modern readers, the most unattractive feature of Wilson's plays. Invectives against cut-throat landlords and rapacious merchants are repeated virtually *verbatim* in play after play, along with the most vicious attacks on 'aliens', whom Elizabethan Londoners blamed for the high prices and rents and the unemployment under which they began to suffer in the last decades of the century. This hostility is unalleviated by any solidarity with continental Protestant refugees, and it is thus a specific issue on which Wilson evidently and unmistakeably disagreed with his royal patroness.

All of Wilson's major themes - war with Spain, the rectification of common grievances and the expulsion of foreigners - were hotly disputed at the time.[68] His plays fit very well into the repertoire of a company 'deliberately political [...] in origin'. However, the conclusion that 'one finds no conflict or disturbance that is not settled in the interests of Tudor conservatism' does not really do the Queen's Men's repertoire justice.[69] It is helpful to be reminded by Margot Heinemann of the unruliness of much of Elizabethan drama: 'plays in the London theatres in the 1580s or 1590s show a good deal of relative freedom if we compare them with those of slightly later times when control was tightened up'.[70] Wilson's militant plays may be assumed to harbour more reservations about the Elizabethan establishment than mere irritation at the queen's procrastinating stance towards the Spaniards.

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[67] See R. B. Wernham, *After the Armada. Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe*, 1588-1595, Oxford, 1984.

[68] See e.g. the view of a conservative historian of 'state': G. R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, London, 1962, contends that 'On the whole the war lacked clear purpose or incisive action [… The queen] hated war […,] neither she nor Burghley – unrepentant civilians – ever fully grasped the realities of military action' (358). On the subject of foreigners, see Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts. Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640*, Oxford, 1988, 196-7: many Londoners appeared to think that foreigners were preferred in law suits against Englishmen because they - the foreigners - enjoyed the special protection of the crown. Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and 'The Book of Sir Thomas More,'* Ithaca, 1987, 67-9, gives a succinct account of the players' involvement in the anti-alien riots in 1592/3. - Cf. on the other hand King James VI, who advised his son to 'take example by England, how it hath flourished both in wealth and policie, since the strangers Craftes-men came in among them: Therefore not onely permit, but allure strangers to come heere also,' *Basilikon Doron* (1599), 164.

[69] McMillin, *Sir Thomas More*, 59.

[70] Heinemann, 'Political Drama,' 167.

Budding nationalism and religio-political prophecy advocating social egalitarianism do not go well together. It is small wonder that they clashed so violently in the 1580s, a decade of war. Like his biblical forbears the Tudor prophet necessarily took a stance outside the social and economic order, and in opposition to the spiritual order. He was the thorn in the side of patriotic pride: 'the prophetic mode was judgmental, inward-searching, and self-critical, not at all triumphalist [...] Far from promising future greatness, the preachers predicted only imminent ruin'.[71] The first generation of Protestant English propagandists, among them John Bale and John Foxe, had seen England not in splendid isolation but as part of a reformed Europe: with regard to Edwardian England 'it is proper to speak of *an* Elect Nation, but not of *the* Elect Nation'.[72] Playwrights in the 1580s, however, who wanted to fill playhouses with paying customers, not heaven with the souls of the elect, put England centre-stage. Yet even when the prophetic appeal addressed itself exclusively to English Protestants, it 'envisaged an active, willing response. [...] prophetic discourse spoke of what a nation could do to help itself.'[73] While those in opposition to the existing government appealed to a form of commonwealth that was yet to be achieved, those who spoke for the government were of course more likely to enlarge upon the form of nationhood that had already been brought into existence by the present rulers. Magisterial Protestants no longer needed to, indeed no longer credibly could, address the people in a mode of speech characteristic of an outsider accusing the establishment of moral slackness and social abuses: 'The self-contradiction of the English reformation rested on the fact that this new order, itself created by voices of prophetic dissent against bankrupt and centralized authority, had to suppress all prophetic challenges to its own legitimacy.'[74] The official line on national identity had diversified into many forms, mainly pageantry, sermons, tracts, and plays; but none of these would not forward the suggestion that the nation was in need of help or, even worse, that it might have to take measures to help itself.[75]

1.3.1 'Marke but the prophet': *The Peddler's Prophecy*

A witness - usually uncalled - in the case of historians like Christopher Haigh, who have argued for a 'slow' Reformation, Wilson expresses doubt in all four of his earlier plays that Protestant beliefs had properly taken root yet in mid-Elizabethan England. His plays lament that the new Protestant elite was

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[71] Collinson, 'Biblical Rhetoric,' 24.

[72] David Loades, 'The Origins of English Protestant Nationalism,' *Religion and National Identity*, ed. Stuart Mews, Oxford, 1982, 297-307, 304 (Loades' italics).

[73] Collinson, *Birthpangs*, 18.'

[74] Howard Dobin, *Merlin's Disciples. Prophets, Poetry and Power in Renaissance England*, Stanford, 1990, 47.

[75] The antithesis of the prophetic call for moral and political reformation is the dramatic set-piece of the monarch contemplating the ills of office (e.g. in *Selimus*, *3 Henry VI*, *Henry V*). By allowing the audience to sympathise with the monarch-as-individual, their sense of obligation to the monarch-as-nation is (ideally) strengthened. The monarch embodies the nation and suggests to the audience what they as subjects could do to help it/him.

betraying both the earlier 'protestant' ideals, the people who had believed the promises made to them by magistrates in need of poplar support, and finally the country as a whole. The main accusation Wilson levels at Peter Pleaseman the parson in *Three Ladies of London* is not only that he is greedy, lecherous and ill-qualified ('I have studied two or three places of Divinitie', 932-3) but that he is a time-server. Simony has to prompt him in his job interview like a curate prompts a child in its catechism:

> Simonie. [...] but of what religion are you can ye tell?
> Peter. Mary sir of all religions, I know not my selfe very well.
> Simonie. You are a Protestant now, and I thinke to that you will graunt.
> Peter. Indeede I have bene a Catholicke, mary nowe for the most part a Protestant. (935-9)

With clergymen like these, simple folk cannot be expected to have grasped the comprehensive shift in religious doctrine and worship that they were supposed to have followed. *The Peddler's Prophecy* shows the process of reformation as the majority of people must have experienced it. The Peddler arrives in an unspecified neighbourhood - the passages that seem to have been added around 1590 suggest an urban setting - and is invited to dinner by a hospitable family. In the manner of an *agent provocateur* he gains the mother's confidence:

> At the first she made him much of her counsell,
> And shewed him certaine Images which she did keepe,
> I wisse quoth she, I love these better then the new Gospell,
> And for pure love unto them, she began to weepe:
> The false knave [i.e. the Peddler] stood still and naught did say,
> A paire of beades under her Apearne she had:
> On these quoth she, I say our Ladies Salter every day,
> And at them the Pedler railed as he had bene mad.[76]

Official measures like sermons or largely inaccessible printed matter were less effective as media of religious reformation than word-of-mouth, rumours or tales carried from village to village. The itinerant occupations - 'the peasant attending a local market or urban fair, the hawker and pedlar, the local official, [...] carriers, merchants, colporteurs, wandering artisans or journeymen [...], travellers and wandering preachers'[77] - were uniquely suited to act as multipliers of any sort of news (and customarily suspected of heresy anyway). Places for religious debate were the private dinner table to which strangers were invited, as much as the work-place, ale-houses, taverns, marketplaces and streets. But Wilson also captures the sense of insecurity, confusion and mistrust these debates seem to have evoked.[78] In the accounts of persecution, heresy trials and torture in the *Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe

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[76] Robert Wilson, *The Pedlar's Prophecy*, Malone Society Reprints, Oxford, 1914, 619-26. - The Edwardian Injunctions of 1547 expressly prohibited the veneration or 'kissing or licking' of religious images and the use of beads, Bridgen, *London and the Reformation*, 428. – Wilson may be reminding the audience of the incident that was generally held to have sparked off the Prayer Book rebellion in Devon in 1549: Walter Ralegh (Sir Walter's father) berated an old woman on her way to mass for praying upon her rosary beads. She shared her outrage with the congregation, Mr Ralegh was set upon, and the situation escalated, Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 467-8.

[77] Robert Scribner, 'Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas,' in his *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*, London, 1987, 49-69, 64-5.

[78] Cf. *New Custom* for a scene of conversion that dramatises another, but equally discomfiting, aspect of the unrest

indicates more than once how families and neighbourhoods were disrupted by religious differences, and Wilson's Peddler is sinister enough to remind audiences of tales of pursuivants who winkled out compromising confessions from actual or potential Roman Catholic collaborators.[79]

The Peddler's Prophecy expresses decided views not only on the tardiness of the English in reforming their beliefs and their worship but also, more politically charged, on the interrelating processes of reformation from 'above' and from 'below'. In *The Peddler's Prophecy* the Interpreter (i.e. a clergyman of the established church) and the Justice agree that the Reformation must be conducted from above even if they disagree about the means. The Justice is told that 'To withstand Gods word you have set your face: / So drowned ye are in rustie superstition' (1225-6) and retaliates:

> You may preach, teach, crie out and yell,
> The hearing thereof, many men do give,
> But whether you speake of heaven or hell,
> Not one among a thousand do you believe.
> I will laie twentie pound, I wil do more with one word
> Then you shall do with twentie Sermons truly.[80]

The magistrate, not surprisingly, insists that people will sooner be bullied than preached into conformity. The Protestant settlement must be enforced by law; the state cannot afford to wait until the populace has been converted by good words.

The proponent of reformation from below, and consequently the mouthpiece for radical Protestant criticism of the new Protestant establishment, is the prophesying Peddler. His prophetic credentials seem slightly dubious, possibly to increase the entertainment facztor of the play, possibly in order to cover the playwright and the actors against accusations of trouble-making. The Prologue distinguishes with tongue-in-cheek earnestness between sanctified prophecy and culpable divination,

> Peromansie, Heromansie, Hydromansie, Geomansie,
> Phystonomy, Metapostopy, Spatulmansie, Gheromansie, [*etc.*]
> Contrary to Gods word, and Christs erudition,
> Confounded be those children of perdicion. (40 and 47-9)

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brought into communities by the Reformation: Perverse Doctrine is cornered in the open street by Light of the Gospel and New Custom: 'Let us inclose him, that he may not fly, / Else will he be gone, when he doth us espy'. The victim evinces fear: 'I think you have pretended some harm me to do. / Help, help, I say, let me be gone at once'. After having been thoroughly grilled, he gives in: 'I wholly yield myself to you: use me after your mind,' *Early English Dramatists. Anonymous Plays*, ed. John S. Farmer, vol. 3, New York, 1966, 3.1.

[79] See e.g. John Bradford's letter to 'a certain godly Gentlewoman, troubled and afflicted by her Friends for not coming to the Mass,' *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 7, 256-7, or in the same volume the letter of Nicholas Sheterden, who reproves his brother for urging their uncle to bestow an inheritance on Nicholas if he recants his Protestant faith (314), or a 'godly poor woman' from Exeter, who was made to come to mass by her family but 'began to grown in contempt of her husband and children', left them to wander about as a needlewoman and went back home only to be accused by her neighbours and burnt (vol. 8, 497-503). - The most recent study of Catholic and anti-Catholic espionage in Elizabethan England is John Bossy's *Under the Molehill. An Elizabethan Spy Story*, London, 2000.

[80] *The Pedlar's Prophecy*, Malone Society Reprint, Oxford, 1914, 1240-5 (references are to lines).

The Peddler enters lugging his backpack, complains that he has not had a drink since 'Fourteen myle beyond the Scottish banke', threatens to desert to the enemy side and 'buy all my ware in Spain' (88-90) and entertains the audience with a yarn about a magic stone of truth he has brought back from his interstellar travels (132-7).

Wilson's Peddler seems to be one of those 'lazy hedge-creepers' denounced by Winter in Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, which was staged at about the same time as *Peddler*, probably as part of Archbishop Whitgift's Christmas frolics in 1590 or 1591. Winter disparages poor scholars who 'Told fortunes, juggled, nicknamed all the stars', 'word-warriors, lazy star-gazers' who 'plotted how to make their poverty / Better esteem'd of than high sovereignty'. Wilson's Peddler certainly seems to deserve Winter's stricture that these 'innumerable monstrous practices' are brought forth by 'loitering contemplation' and that 'there is no vice, / Which learning and vild [i.e. unauthorised, uncontrolled] knowledge brought not in'. Winter's long list of offenders insidiously associates popular learning with heterodoxy and revolt, and Wilson's Peddler corresponds to this image when he begins to utter the familiar diatribes against

> bankrouts, pyrats, and usurers,
> Ingrosers, filthie farmers, and sacrilegers,
> Burglaries, lease-mongers, promoters, false Mariners

seemingly affirming Winter's conclusion that

> Blest is that government where no art thrives,
> Vox populi, vox Dei: [...]
> Yet Tully saith: Non est consilium in vulgo, non ratio,
> Non discrimen, non differentia.[81]

The Peddler's Prophecy and *Summer's Will and Testament* illustrate two very different dramatic renderings of the same political issue at the same time; the one by an actor-playwright who purported to speak for the people, the other by a poet who spoke for the new caste of professional writers.

The crushing statement about commoners too ignorant to know what is good for them is appropriately expressed in high-flown Latin. But the populists fought back. Classical and Roman Catholic traditions of learning are parodied in *The Peddler's Prophecy* on several levels, most obviously by the Peddler's mock-earnest references to Greek mythology as a source of authority.[82] He further

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[81] Thomas Nashe, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, vol. 3, London, 1910, 274-77. Marie Caxton's allegorical reading of Summer as King Henry VIII who fends off Sol's and Orion's attacks on the Moon (i.e. Cynthia, one of Queen Elizabeth's many mythological *personae*), lends colour to a reading of anti-Protestant - in the sense of 'anti-populist' - allusions in the play, *'Summer's Last Will and Testament*: Revels' End,' *The Reign of Elizabeth I. Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy, Cambridge, 1995, 258-73, 270.

[82] This is not to imply that classical education, and classical models of dramaturgy, could not be harmonised with a Protestant message: Martin Bucer had written on the uses of biblical drama in educating youths, and when he came to Cambridge in 1549 he moved that tragedies should be written exclusively on biblical themes, see Murray Roston, *Biblical Drama in England. From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, London, 1968, 78-86 on 'The Greek and Latin Plays'. Wilson would have benefited from this tradition if he was at Cambridge in the late 1550s.

pretends to be merely reporting the slanderous opinions he disseminates, claiming to have read them 'in a booke of latin of late I did finde' (680) and adds, 'That unhappie writer, writeth unreverently, / All that I said I spake but in sport' (704-5). The users of Latin - papists and classically educated civil servants - are the real detractors of the commonwealth, not the commoners who wish their counsel to be heard. This parodic use of Latin and high-flown 'courtly' language by lowly characters is one of the major strategies of Tudor political satire and links up with the parodic perversion of 'Latinised English' or 'Englished Latin' in Protestant mock-liturgies.[83] To similarly sardonic effect, the Peddler's apocalyptic vision is not one of Christian Armageddon but of Ovidian transformation:

> You [i.e. the Landlord] are like to plaie Acteons part,
> For you shall be turned to a wilde hart.
> And the dogs which to keep you were wont,
> With most cruel death shall you hunt.
> What will your raised rents helpe? (1147-53)
> The Pedler saith that all preachers and priests
> Shalbe turned into Swallowes the next yeare,
> And the new unlearned Ministers, into Robin Redbrests,
> They shall keep the wood, and sing no more in the quere. (1314-17)

The mock-belittlement of rack-renters, hoarders and coin-debasers reflects on the classical discourse in whose terms their fate is envisioned; ironic pastiche of the gospelling discourse protects the writer from prosecution. In comparison with Acteon's gruesome death, the transformation into a robin is comparatively pleasant, but both seem harmless when seen against the apocalyptic scenarios painted by biblical prophets, the true gospeller's eternal frame of reference, which remains implicit in this play.

The Peddler's Prophecy may well have been revised in response to or in tandem with another Queen's Men's play, Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene's *A Looking Glasse for London and England*, probably written after *1 Tamburlaine* and the execution of Mary Stuart and before the Armada (that is, in late 1587 or early 1588).[84] Lodge and Greene seem to cash in on the recent *vogue* for the Asian ambience by presenting the decadent Ninivian court and city in biblical times. They throw in two prophets, Jonas (Jonah) whom one would expect, and Oseas (Hosea), who Chorus-like sits and comments on the action. To avoid even a shade of interpretative leeway, the playwrights cast the play in the medieval *speculum*-tradition alluded to in the title. Unlike *Peddler*, the play offers exotic costumes, stage effects, angels, devils and clowns, lust and corruption, and also unlike *Peddler* it leaves the audience with absolutely nothing to interpret. The two prophets are precisely the kind of normative presenter-figures which one seeks in vain in *Peddler*. 'Looke London, look,' Oseas raises his homilectic finger after each scene,

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[83] See e.g. Strumbo in *Locrine*, Tom Miller in *Jack Straw* or Jack Cade in *2 Henry VI*. For dog-Latin in Protestant mock-liturgies, see e.g. Luke Shepherd's *The Upcheringe of the Messe*: 'She [i.e. mass] may no longer stare / Nor here with you regnare / But trudge ad altra mare / And after habitare / In regno plutonico […] / Et cantu diabolico,' quoted in Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 438.

[84] Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene, *A Looking Glasse for London and England*, ed. George Alan Clugston, New York, 1980, 'Introduction,' 71.

> What lessons the events do here unfold.
> Sinne growne to pride, to misery is thrall,
> The warning bel is rung, beware to fall.
> Ye worldly men whom wealth doth lift on hie,
> Beware and feare, for worldly men must die. (206)

And so forth, until Jonas sums up the warning to London, in whom 'more sinnes then Ninive containes':

> Contempt of God, dispight of reverend age,
> Neglect of law, desire to wrong the poore,
> Corruption, whordome, drunkennesse, and pride. (231-2)

By 1592 *A Looking Glasse* had passed into Henslowe's hands, whose records show that it was 'a respectable but not sensational property'.[85] It nevertheless seemed viable to have it printed two years later, together with the majority of the (former) Queen's Men's plays. *The Peddler's Prophecy* was printed in 1595, and although there is no record of its being performed in the early nineties, the printers and publishers would hardly have spent money on an unpopular play. As drama, even as religious education, *Peddler* must be judged the superior of the two plays, but as theatre an Elizabethan audience craving spectacle and sensationalism may have found it wanting. The ambiguity and multivocality of the shady prophet veil the playwright's polemics in a way that may blunt their impact on the audience because they require more strenuous interpretation than straightforward diatribes like *A Looking Glasse for London*. But it also served to protect him from the unpleasant clashes with authority that might have ensued, had he been more specific in his attack on individuals in positions of authority.

Prophecy as a mode and model for dramatic speech could not compete in the late 1580s and early 1590s with the attractions of heroic romance in pagan settings. Nor could it compete with historiography, man's account of his own actions in this world. 'Man supposes, and God disposes' both in prophetic and in chronicle versions of human history, but their underlying structures and the moving forces behind them are fundamentally different.[86] Like prophetic visions, sixteenth-century historiography was invariably teleological. But while the master-mind of prophetic history was God, chronicle history evolved (or, at any rate, was narrated as to seem to evolve) towards the political and dynastic *status quo*. The difference had political reverberations: gospelling prophets, sixteenth-century rebels, and Wilson's prophet-clowns envision class-based conflicts, usually the punishment and overthrow of ungodly ministers and magistrates by the combined forces of irate godhead and discontented populace. Shakespeare's dying noblemen likewise see death and destruction come over the land, but in their visions, royal mismanagement and aristocratic factiousness are punished by the

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[85] Lodge and Greene, *A Looking Glasse*, 'Introduction,' 75.

[86] Different, but not, in sixteenth-century writing, always clearly distinct, see Tom Betteridge, 'From Prophetic to Apocalyptic: John Foxe and the Writing of History,' *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades, Aldershot, 1997, 210-232.

impersonal hand of history, not by an accountable human force. In John of Gaunt's famous dying speech it is 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England' (*Richard II*, 2.1.50) that is shamefully bled dry by means of Richard's blank charters. In the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* (c. 1591),[87] which does without prophetic speech altogether, the victims of royal mismanagement are the people living in this England:

> From every province are the people come
> With open mouths exclaiming on the wrongs
> Thou and these upstarts have imposed on them.
> Shame is deciphered on thy palace gate,
> Confusion hangeth o'er thy wretched head,
> Mischief is coming and in storms must fall:
> Th'oppression of the poor to heaven doth call. (43-9)

Distinct both from prophecy and providence, this is primarily a view of human history as an interplay of human agents, who may change its course if they change their ways. King Richard in *Thomas of Woodstock* might have called his uncle's words 'prophecies', but he does not: 'Well, well, good uncle, these your bitter *taunts* / Against my friends and me will one day cease' (50-1, italics added). Like any martyr, Woodstock brings his fate upon himself by persisting in his opposition to the powers that be. After relying heavily on prophecy in the earlier Reformation decades, writers with a strong socio-political agenda discarded the mode for a more secular exploration not of divine Providence but of secondary causes, of human-made history.[88] *Woodstock* is, for its time, unique, not only in its sympathetic presentation of the commoners, who are shown to be tyrannously treated by their king and magistrates and resort to rebellion out of a strict and respectable adherence to the principles of ancient common law and medieval contract theory, but also in the scope it gives them on stage.[89]

As dramatic art, Wilson's two plays about prophecy, *The Peddler's Prophecy* and *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, are superior to *A Looking Glasse for London and England*, but they fall far behind *Woodstock*. Yet both *Looking Glasse* and *Woodstock* may supply a context for the Queen's Men's decision to stage Wilson's plays, perhaps even to commission him to update the old Edwardian play that is now called

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[87] The play's editor A. P. Rossiter conjectures that *2 Henry VI* had already been written but that the temporal relation between its off-shoots *Edward II* and *Woodstock* are impossible to determine, *Woodstock*, London, 1946, 'Preface,' 71-2.

[88] Writers with a *religio*-political agenda, be it added, cultivated the mode. Helen White observed that the 'absorption of the social issue into the religious is thoroughly typical of the later Piers literature,' *Social Criticism*, 39; and Patrick Collinson has argued that the prophetic stance of the outsider castigating those in power became increasingly politicised in the seventeenth century, 'Biblical Rhetoric,' *passim*.

[89] See Alzada J. Tipton, "The meanest man ... shall be permitted freely to accuse': The Commoners in *Woodstock*,' *Comparative Drama* 32 (1998), 117-45. - There is no social Protestant ideology in *Woodstock*. The playwright(s) make(s) nothing of the fact that at the same time as Thomas Woodstock was fashioning himself into 'plain Thomas,' John Wyclif was teaching his students to reject the doctrine of transubstantiation, his king to cut himself off from Rome, and (unintentionally, this) the peasant rebels how to argue their case of egalitarian revolution.

The Peddler's Prophecy. All these plays deal with expressions of popular discontent and with the fear of informers and spies at a time of intense political tension:

> The atmosphere was claustrophobic in the 1590s since the late-Elizabethan establishment felt itself increasingly beleaguered. It perceived the enemy within to be even more dangerous than the enemy abroad. [...] Even where conspiracy did not exist, it had to be invented.[90]

Woodstock reflects this political atmosphere most acutely: Nimble, who is described in the *dramatis personae* as 'a lawyer's devil', bullies a group of simple artisans into paying money into the royal exchequer and keeps his ears close to the ground for sounds of murmuring at King Richard's extortions. In an entirely realistic exchange between a Schoolmaster and a Serving-man the traditional art of libel-writing is expounded: 'if they [i.e. his verses] were well searched they're little better than libels,' admits the Schoolmaster, 'But the carriage of a thing is all, sir: I have covered them rarely.' He sings several verses against the charters and the king's corrupt advisors and reassures his worried interlocutor: 'Nay, look ye sir, there can be no exception taken, for this last line helps all, wherein with a kind of equivocation I say, 'God bless my lord Tresilian" (183-5). Ironic praise is intended to damn the noble councillor but also to protect the ballad-maker. Nimble barges in: 'Mine ears have heard your examinations, wherein you uttered most shameful treason, for ye said, 'God bless my lord Tresilian'.' The Schoolmaster innocently avers, 'I hope there's no treason in that, sir,' but he - and a passer-by who unwittingly whistles the tune to which the schoolmaster had rhymed his libel - are taken away to be hanged. Late Elizabethan magistrates did not have to be reminded that 'Though some make slight of Libells, yet you may see by them how the wind sitts […]. More solid things doe not shew the Complexion of the times so well as Ballads and libels.'[91]

In *Peddler* the theme of libel and slander is handled more lightly, more farcically, but it is fundamental to the Peddler's rhetorical contortions. Having insisted that his scathing condemnation of overseas merchant is a mere report from a 'booke of latin', he protests that

> I speake not of this Realme, you take me amisse,
> All my talke is of the noble Citie of Tyre,
> There shall not be left a man against the wall to pisse. (836-8)

The Interpreter and the Justice, who do not realise that he is the notorious libeller they are looking for, fairly urge him to repeat what the peddler is rumoured to have said. He pretends to be reluctant:

> I say no more, but God amend all that is amisse,
> I thought here more to have said:
> My words they be not, but they be his,
> Which to utter truly, I am afraid.

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[90] John Guy, 'The 1590s: The Second Reign of Elizabeth I?,' *The Reign of Elizabeth I. Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy, Cambridge, 1995, 1-19, 18-19.

[91] *Table Talk of John Selden*, 72.

A stage direction follows: '*Let the Pedler be going out*' (1297-1301). 'Tarry Priest, tarry,' the Justice rushes in, 'I pray thee heartily, / To take them for thy words, no man is so unwise', and the Interpreter assures him that both he and the Justice will hold their hands over an informer:

> The worshipfull Justice, will take none advantage
> Of any thing rehearsed of another mans saying:
> And as for me, I intend to bring you into no bondage,
> For a lewde foolish fellowes pratling bewraying. (1310-13)

'Go to then,' sighs the Peddler, no doubt with a wink and a nudge to the audience, and embarks on his polemical work. His epilogue concludes the play with dark hints at insurrection:

> I had none other way but this, my matters to open:
> Henceforth I intend to be no medler,
> But let them marke well what I have spoken.
> See and foresee, looke within, and looke without:
> Though it be farre off, yet it will come:
> See the third time and looke about,
> Not without, but within, see ye, see some. (1578-84)[92]

As an old-style interlude *The Peddler's Prophecy* is much less historically specific than *Woodstock* and may therefore be directly taken to refer to present times; it would by no means have alleviated magisterial suspicions of smouldering unrest and subterranean activism. Estate satires did not channel their socio-political criticism through a figure of the gentry or aristocracy, like the populist chronicle plays later produced by Strange's Men and the Lord Admiral's Men, but through commoners.[93] They did not explicitly include members of the upper ranks of society among those who are discontented with the *status quo*; their political criticism was not 'contained' by being uttered by a member of the ruling classes. John of Gaunt's scathing condemnation of the king's misgovernment in Shakespeare's *Richard II* does not just carry weight because it is expressed with beautiful eloquence and with the breath of a dying man, but because this dying man is the king's uncle, a son of King Edward III, the most powerful nobleman in the realm. Neither the dramaturgy nor the politics of Shakespeare's play would allow a gardener to burst into the chamber of presence and deliver a similarly impassioned diatribe. Gardeners stay where they belong and muse ponderously and chorically about the necessity of trimming wild shoots. In Shakespearean English history, kings and clowns do not mix.

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[92] Shakespeare parodies darkly prophetic phrases like the Peddler's in *Love's Labour's Lost*: 'Well,' sighs Costard the clown when he is led off to prison for flirting, 'if ever I do see the merry days of desolation that I have seen, some shall see.' - 'What shall some see?' - 'Nay, nothing, Master Moth, but what they look upon. It is not for prisoners to be too silent in their words, and therefore I will say nothing' (1.2.159-64). In terms of the play's plot, his foreboding remarks seem apt: the four lordlings will damn themselves by falling in love.

[93] Cf. *A Knack to Know a Knave* (printed 1594), for which Wilson has been suggested as an author. The main themes in this odd mixture of morality and history, as in Wilson's prophecy-plays, are the problems of how to counsel a king and how to expose hoarders, rack-renters and monopolists. The figure of Wilson's prophet-clown is here replaced by the more acceptable figure of a king – but of a king disguised as a commoner, scouring the land with the help of Honesty and St Dunstan.

1.3.2 'Methought I saw God Shebiter': *The Cobbler's Prophecy*

In *The Peddler's Prophecy* the figure of the admonishing prophet is made more complex and more attractive than, for instance, Lodge and Greene's Jonas and Oseas, by being merged with the trickster, the con-man familiar from the more entertaining variety of earlier Tudor drama. Diccon in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (early 1550s) is a prankster half-way between vice and clown. He pretends to be dim-witted but really pulls all the strings in a plot that sets the neighbourhood at loggerheads about his mistress's sewing equipment. Like the Peddler he manipulates people by working on their weaknesses and superstitions. His *pièce-de-résistance* is a satanic exercise in which he literally induces the Hodge to kiss his backside and makes him believe he had conjured the devil.[94] Diccon does not deal in commonwealth matters, nor does he 'prophesy' or voice any seditious or rebellious provocations; but Martin Marprelate would acknowledge *Gammer Gurton's Needle* in his very first tract as 'a proper Enterlude [...] which sheweth the author to have had some witte and invention in him'.[95] Trickster figures like these were used to elucidate points of reformed doctrine and to throw a satiric light on official efforts to reform the people's religious sensibilities and to make them conform to the new Protestant order.

In *The Cobbler's Prophecy* Wilson enlivens the prophet-figure not by merging him with the trickster but with the clown.[96] Before Raph the cobbler is singled out by Mercury for the post of divine messenger, he enters like half a dozen other clowns in Tudor interludes: pursued by his shrewish wife. At once he solicits the audience's compassion and their complicity. He hides and stage-whispers aside: 'O no bodie tell her I am under the stoole' (76). But then Raph is upstaged by Mercury, who puts a spell of madness onto Zelota, 'for thy former dealings to thy husband hath bin bad' (86). The play is structured by Raph's episodic encounters with the Soldier, Mars and the Duke, to whom he delivers his prophecies of defeat in war and popular rioting; its violent culmination is Zelota's stabbing of the treacherous Courtier. At the end of the play Raph and Zelota relinquish their privileged positions of prophet and assassin with a sigh of relief:

> Faith then farewell the Court;
> For now Ile not run and ride, nor no more abide,
> But since my mad wife, has changde her mad life,
> Ile even leave to be Prophet speaker,
> Take clouting leather and naule, and fall to my old trade of the gentle craft the Cobler.

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[94] *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, ed. Charles Whitworth, London, 1997, 2.1.68-112.

[95] *The Epistle to the Terrible Priests of the Confocation House*, 11. See also *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, xv-xvi, for a discussion of Martin Marprelate's remarks about the play.

[96] Skura quotes the Italian director Dario Fo, who has used the figure of the clown for political satire: 'clowns always speak of the same thing, they speak of hunger: hunger for food, hunger for sex, but also hunger for dignity, hunger for identity, hunger for power. In fact they introduce questions about who commands, who protests,' *Shakespeare the Actor* , 60.

'I Raph,' agrees his wife, 'that will be fittest for us' (1672-8). This settles the Duke in his new-found authority; yet in the two hours before the commoners' demure withdrawal, the playgoers heard revolution prophesied and saw a 'zealous' political assassination carried out.

For the first three-quarters of the play, Raph and the soldier Sateros are set against all other forces in the realm. To enlist mighty help against the enemy, Mercury had intoned to Raph the oracle he was to convey to the effeminate Mars: his 'hen', Venus, is going to be 'tread' by a 'dunghill Cocke', Contempt:

> And she by him shall hatch a Chicke,
> this Countrey to decay.
> And for this pretie Pullets name
> thou shalt the better learne:
> When thou shalt onely letters five
> within one name discerne,
> Three vowels and two consonants,
> which vowels if thou scan,
> Doth sound that which to everie pace
> conducteth everie man. (140-59)

After the wicked Courtier's assassination of the Duke has been narrowly averted by Raph's intervention, and Mars has been roused to arm himself, Venus' offspring is presented by its godmothers, and the oracle is fulfilled. Mercury solves the riddle he had put earlier:

> Ruina otherwise called Ruine the child,
> Contempt the father, Venus alias lust the mother,
> Ru and Ina the godmothers,
> Ingratitude the Oodfather [*sic*] and grandfather,
> And Securitie the nurse,
> Heeres a brood that all Booetia shall curse. (12558-63)

But as in *Peddler* and the *Piers Plowman* tradition, prophecies are not only conveyed through the mouth of the poor and down-trodden, they also directly demand a greater consideration of the poor by the rulers and even greater commoner participation in the government of the commonwealth. Had it been proclaimed from a cart in Cheapside instead of from the stage of a licensed playing company, this challenge in ballad form would have furrowed any Elizabethan magistrate's brow:

> The babes in streete that lies,
> The bitter sweate and paine
> That tenants poore sustaine,
> Will turne to your bane I tell ye plaine,
> When burning fire shall raine,
> And fill with botch and blaine
> The sinew and each vaine.
> Then these poore that crie,
> Being lifted up on hie,
> When you are all forlorne,
> Shall laugh you lowd to scorne (325-35)

The Cobbler's Prophecy is by no means a dull or incompetent piece of drama, and it seems unlikely - for all the changing fashions in theatre - that there was no longer an audience for plays in which governors humbly admit that

> Now see I that this simple witted man,
> This poore plaine Cobler truly did divine,
> The Gods when we refuse the common meanes
> Sent by their oracles and learned priests,
> Raise up some man contemptible and vile,
> In whom they breath [*sic*] the purenes of theyr spirits,
> And make him bolde to speake and prophesie. (1385-91)

At the bottom of this rather cloyingly populist remark lies the same concept of a contract between ruler and people as the one that is expressed a few years later in *Woodstock* and *Jack Straw*: if the rulers violate divine law - a term that could be stretched to include English common law - the people have a right to revolt. Raph happily withdraws into obscurity as every clown must, but there is a veiled threat in the conditionality of this retreat. After the victory both Mars and Raph's erstwhile companion the Soldier feel irritated by his 'termes' and 'jestes' and care not to be reminded that irreligious rulers risk and deserve punishment:

> Raph. [Are] yee bemembred since ye told him, if ye set your selfe against the Gods they would drive you out of heaven[?]
> Mars. Well what of that?
> Raph. Faith at that time the world might well have affoorded you a Cart to ride in.
> Sateros. Go too Raph, cease.
> Raph. I, I, and great folke doo amisse,
> Poore folke must hold their peace. (1653-1661)

Every play must have its end, and at the play's end, poor folk must hold their peace. It is impossible to decide how contemporary audiences would have weighted the potentially seditious, subversive plot of a play against its conformist ending.

The wars in *Cobbler* and *Three Lords* fit into the symbolic scheme of dualistic confrontation between good and evil - Protestant and papist - which is pervasive in early modern English literature, and in which there always lurked an implicit reproach to monarchs who did not defend the godly realm with the uncompromising determination expected of them by their more militant subjects. In the scene of public thanksgiving at the end of *Cobbler*, in which the patriotic party is directed to '*compasse the stage, from one part let a smoke arise: at which place they all stay*' (1564-6), then to kneel down for prayer, then at the news of victory to '*rise and cast incense into the fire*' (1589), Queen Elizabeth herself is implicitly attacked. The scene is satisfyingly spectacular, yet wonderfully ambiguous: it combines pagan and Roman Catholic elements of worship - the fire, the kneeling, the incense-throwing - and thus seems to cast a popish shadow on the Duke and his supporters. Boeotia/England is a dangerously divided country that only in the nick of time and by divine intervention manages to unite against the enemy, and that still practices obviously Roman Catholic rituals of worship and thanksgiving.

Wilson's implication that England's elite - or parts of it - was still stuck in the old religion links up with the question whether the Duke represents Leicester or Elizabeth. It has been conjectured that *Cobbler* was the anti-Spanish play over which Queen Elizabeth fell out with Leicester, as was reported by the Spanish ambassador de Vega in January 1588.[97] But could the queen object to having a performance by her own company of players arranged for her entertainment? And who would think evil of it if these plays occasionally, indeed, perhaps on carefully chosen occasions, expressed a political outlook that did not correspond entirely to her majesty's declared opinions or intentions? Leicester's Men were only once invited to play before the queen after 1583, so if Leicester wanted to lobby Elizabeth by way of a play, he was obliged to use the Queen's Men.[98] Leicester's advocacy of interventionist policies is not equally reflected in all of the plays offered by the Queen's players. Their pro-war bias is far stronger in Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy* and *Three Lords* than, for instance, in the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V* or *Locrine*, and it lodges Wilson's plays firmly on Leicester's side in government conflicts about the degree and extent of English Protestant militancy, especially with regard to the Spanish.

If *Cobbler* was indeed staged at court at Christmas in 1587, it was actually written to *advocate* the war, not to dramatise it after the event, like *Three Lords*. The plot of the play supports this conjecture. It is a call to arms, an exhortation addressed mainly to the court to leave effeminate and slothful ways and face the national enemy. Heinemann observes that 'Considered as a patriotic entertainment to honour the Armada victory and the national unity that won it, [the play] is remarkable for the emotional power with which it represents a national *disunity* that almost allows foreign invasion to succeed'.[99] Thus badgered by her militant favourite both inside and outside the Privy Council, Elizabeth had every reason to feel vexed, even if part of her anger may have been a show for the benefit of her Spanish audience.[100] The Duke is the highest-ranking person in the play; the assassination plotted by the corrupt

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97 Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 69.

98 It is not unlikely that Walsingham and Leicester were perfectly aware of this from the outset. Simon Adam points out that much of the correspondence among courtiers and privy councillors had the purpose of concerting their efforts at obtaining audience 'and then to hammer away at her', *Leicester and the Court*, 40. Leicester was of course by no means the only courtier to use plays, masques and pageants to suggest specific policies or lines of action the queen, see Bevington, *Tudor Drama*, 8-11. Since the object of these suggestions was usually either marriage, the question of succession, or warfare, the queen was less and less amused by these shows.

99 Heinemann, 'Political Drama,' 175, Heinemann's italics. - The sharp opposition of martial purity and monarchical lechery was by no means new, but Wilson attaches to it an opposition of social ranks, almost of classes. The play anticipates a whole line of populist, militaristic drama during the next decades, up to the parliamentarian polemics in the civil war, in which a bourgeois New Model army defeated the forces of the *ancien régime*.

100 Patrick Collinson reminds us of the disjointed ways in which policies were being formed and implemented, the queen obstreperous when she felt bullied (usually to take military action), the privy counsellors exasperated at her irregular and erratic consultation with them (*Elizabethan Essays*, London, 1994, 41-2). In this atmosphere of cross-purposes and misinformation, a well-placed rumour – such as the one in 1577 that reported Leicester practically on the way to Holland with an army of 10,000 – might, with any luck, congeal into fact. Even if Leicester, who had been Lord Steward of the royal household since 1570, did not arrange for a pro-war play to be staged as part of the Twelfth Night revels in 1588, the queen was evidently quick to assume that he was the person to blame.

Courtier would seem to link him with the queen, who had recently had Mary Stuart executed because of her involvement in a plot on Elizabeth's life.[101] But the Duke is, emphatically, only a duke, and his war-like stance and excellent connections with patriotic soldiers and Protestant commoners allude to Leicester rather than the queen, while the queen's personal religious beliefs were more traditional than hardliners like Archbishop Grindel, not to mention Thomas Cartwright and other puritans, could approve.[102] The point Wilson may have been making in the scene of thanksgiving - and Elizabeth would not have missed this rather ungentle prod - is that the queen ought to 'reform' herself and be more like Leicester, in religious as well as national politics: 'if repentant soules may purchase grace,' the Duke concludes, 'We crave it humbly, and intend to live, / Hereafter more reformed than wee have done' (1574-6).

In dramatic technique and as a religio-political comment on current affairs, *The Cobbler's Prophecy* prefigures later militant Protestant plays, most obviously Thomas Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon* (1605).[103] It is characteristic of modern critics' neglect of Wilson that he is rarely, if ever, mentioned in this context. Dekker did not have to go as far back in dramatic history as John Bale and the Edwardian reformers for apocalyptic Protestant historiography. Wilson had juggled the presences of monarch and favourite in *Cobbler* much as Dekker would seventeen years later, when Leicester's place as Protestant champion had been taken by Essex. Julia Gasper detects a double-bind in the idealisation of Elizabeth as Titania, queen of the fairies:

> Where Titania differs from the historical Elizabeth, this is because she approaches more closely to the ideal monarch the militant Protestants would have liked to see. And Essex, the Protestant champion, who appears to be absent from the play, is there as a posthumous presence. The stance that the play takes on specific issues is closer to that of Essex than to that of Queen Elizabeth and her closest advisors, the Cecils.[104]

Among these specific issues are the country's foreign policy and the queen's views on war. Wilson presents a nobleman, arguably Leicester, who acts the way the queen ought to; Dekker inverts this technique and presents a queen who acts the way Essex would have done - with the added twist that this militant Protestant queen is an unsubtle reproach to the peaceable King James. It would have been impossible for Wilson to bring the queen onto the stage *in propria persona*, but the form and content of his criticism effectively foreshadow Dekker's in the line of oppositional Protestant drama on the

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[101] Note that both Heywood in *2 If You Know Not Me* and Dekker in *The Whore of Babylon* include attempts on Queen Elizabeth's life in plays about the Armada.

[102] See e.g. Aston, *Iconoclasts*, 298, on the repeated protests against the crucifix Elizabeth preserved in her private chapel.

[103] The tradition of distinctly Protestant criticism of the monarch is discussed e.g. in Judith Spikes, 'The Jacobean History Play and the Myth of the Elect Nation,' *Renaissance Drama* 8 (1977), 117-49; Julia Gasper, 'The Reformation Plays on the Public Stage,' *Theatre and Government under the Early Stuarts*, ed. J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Cambridge, 1993, 190-216, and Gasper's monograph on Dekker's plays, *The Dragon and the Dove*, Oxford, 1990. But these plays use the Reformation as a motif or discourse for political commentary; their primary polemical purpose is not to advocate a redistribution of wealth.

[104] Gasper, *Dragon and Dove*, 81, see also 96-108. Gasper does not discuss Wilson's plays at all.

Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. For the first time in history it was possible for an Englishman to feel that he was being more patriotic than his monarch; not because the monarch had never been perceived to be in the wrong (Elizabethan playgoers were reminded of *Edward II* and *Richard II),* but because the previous decades of political and religious labour pains had given birth to a sense of national identity and national pride that was to some extent independent of the figure of the monarch.

When satire was combined with prophecy, the theatre audience was addressed with an urgency and an immediacy that most resembled a radical reformer's sermon. The fact that after about 1590 the prophetic mode flourished in the pulpits but disappeared from the playhouses may in part be attributed to the fact that it does not lend itself to the kind of drama that began to be in demand. Vocational prophets become rare on the stage, and their dangerous potential is lost or undermined. The services of Peter the prophet in interpreting the apparition of the five moons in Shakespeare's *The Troublesome Reign of King John* are commanded by the king, and even though Peter foresees not only England's emancipation from Rome but also John's fall, he is no rebel figure. Joan of Arc's prophecies of England's defeat in *1 Henry VI* are initially proven wrong (but eventually accurate); like Peter the prophet's words in *The Troublesome Reign* her divinations are denounced as witchcraft by those who feel threatened by them. The oracle in *2 Henry VI* is presented as a confidence trick from the start and later exposed as such. Interestingly, Shakespeare frequently uses pagan or human prophecies as an underlying *structural* function, for instance in the Yorkist and Lancastrian tetralogies, in *Macbeth* and *Othello* and in all of the late romances except *The Tempest*. The focus of the prophecies, however, like the focus of the plays, shifts from the nation to the individual and/or the family, and from doom to salvation.

SHAKESPEARE'S DREAM: THE WEAVER'S PROPHESY

Having read Wilson's prophecy-plays next to similar plays written at the same time, and before going on to look at his prophet-clowns in the context of the Marprelate controversy, I would briefly like to rub *The Cobbler's Prophecy* against a touchstone of dramatic excellence and consider it in relation to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The dramatic, theatrical or, indeed, political interrelations between Wilson's and Shakespeare's plays have not received much attention; too dissimilar are the authors and their plays. The youngster Shakespeare wrote English history plays and romantic comedies, genres the old hand Wilson eschewed. Wilson generally adheres to the native forms and traditions of mid-Tudor moralities and pushes the commoner-clown centre-stage; Shakespeare is more interested in exploring the political and psychological conditions of power and government and turns away from popular protest(ant) culture and the ways in which its traditions were used to maintain a coherent and purposeful sense of solidarity among the lower sort, the commoners.[105]

[105] On Shakespeare's presentation of popular revolt, see Helgerson, *Nationhood*, chap. 5: 'In departing from a popular

It has been suggested that before Shakespeare joined the Chamberlain's Men he was a member of the Queen's Men from around 1587, and that he collaborated in their early history plays, notably *The Troublesome Reign*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, *King Leir* and *The Famous Victories.*[106] No matter whether he had an active hand in these plays, he had certainly seen them performed and evidently saw room for improvement. This improvement in dramatic (yet not necessarily theatrical) quality could be evaluated in terms of cash and prestige:

> by producing his own versions of four of their plays, he was helping to write the most prestigious company of the 1580s into eventual obscurity at the same time as he was helping to make the Chamberlain's Men, where he can be placed from 1594 on, the premier organization of the 1590s.[107]

Robert Wilson's standing and authority would have provoked the ambitious newcomer from Warwick to defy the playwright-clown and to offer a response both to his plays and their politics. Shakespeare's re-working of the Queen's Men's historical and comic material looks greatly like the kind of 'literary imperialism' Robert Watson has attested Ben Jonson: 'Beneath the surface action of the plays is the ruthless and resourceful struggle of a new kind of drama [...] for a place in the Renaissance constellation of genres.'[108] If Shakespeare was engaged in a contest to oust and supplant Wilson and the theatre he advocated, *The Cobbler's Prophecy* would have offered itself more readily to a re-working than the 'gospelling' *Peddler's Prophecy* or the quite innovatively urban *London*-plays, which inaugurate a genre in which Shakespeare would never work.

Insofar as the *Dream* is a revision of *Cobbler*, Shakespeare, inventing new modes and forging a new kind of relationship with the audience, cancels out the Protestant political polemics in Wilson's play by devising a comedy whose raw material would have furnished a masque at the Stuart court. In the course of the seventeenth century, seasonal customs like Maying would become associated with the functional, communal society pre-Reformation England was imagined to have been. Native folk-lore and seasonal rites that had been vilified by the Protestant reformers as pagan and/or popish, came to be regarded by conservatives – including King James and later King Charles - as elements of traditional festival culture that could be fashioned into a kind of royalist religion.[109] In switching from Wilson's Roman gods to English fairies, Shakespeare preserves a layer of religious allegory (via *The Fairie Queene*),

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representation of English history Shakespeare was also departing from a popular theatrical institution' (240). Although Helgerson's view may hold in general, his study of rebellion in the early histories is at times rather schematic. Cf. the much more balanced article by Ellen C. Caldwell, 'Jack Cade and Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 2*,' *Studies in Philology* 92 (1995), 18-79.

[106] The most voluble proponent of this theory is Eric Sams, *The Real Shakespeare. Retrieving the Early Years, 1564-1594*, New Haven, 1995, esp. 58-9 and chaps. 26 and 27.

[107] McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 165.

[108] Robert N. Watson, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy. Literary Imperialism in the Comedies*, Cambridge/MA., 1987, 7.

[109] See e.g. Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*, 24, and Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth. Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes*, Chicago, 1986, *passim*.

and a layer of political allegory (via England's own fairy queen, Elizabeth I) while being disarmingly and deceptively 'folksy'.

Both plays derive much of their interest from the intercourse of human and supernatural characters. Elizabethan audiences were familiar with plays in which the action is conducted not only in two plot strands but also on different levels of reality. Thomas Kyd had used it in *The Spanish Tragedy*, although his conceit was the ghost's inability to effect the revenge of his own murder; Greene and Lodge cast biblical prophets as the onstage audience; Greene's *James IV* introduced Oberon to Elizabethan playgoers. Wilson's device of assembling half a dozen Roman gods and goddesses, whose irresponsible wrangling triggers the action and who proceed to interfere in human concerns, would to an educated playgoer in the late 1580s have recalled Olympian wranglings. The Protestant reformer adapts the classical design in order to allegorically present the state of England. On the human level, socially subordinated characters are dramatically set over and against their superiors: the Cobbler and the Soldier guide the audience through the play. The Duke and the Courtier come to the fore only at the end. In Shakespeare's version of this two-level plot, the human sphere, too, is peopled by a Duke and his subjects, but the Athenian comic artisans do not stand up to anyone.

With their general set-ups and their *dramatis personae* so similar, a comparison of the two plays' plot structure reveals how fundamentally they diverge, not only in their dramaturgy but also in their politics. Had Shakespeare kept to Wilson's scenic sequence, he would have started the play with Titania and Oberon, then brought on the mechanicals, then had Puck light on Bottom as a suitable tool to effect Titania's chastisement, then introduced the lovers, and only *then* entered Theseus. Bottom would have been the most important human character, a tool of the fairies, but with a significant public task to complete. In both plays the human sphere has been disturbed, indeed endangered, by the supernaturals' irresponsible vanities, in *Cobbler* by Venus's and Mars's voluptuousness and by Venus's carryings-on with Contempt, in Shakespeare by the fairy king's and queen's quarrel about possession of the Indian boy. The result is danger of enemy invasion in *Cobbler* and harvest-destroying natural catastrophes in *Dream*.

Over-familiar from stage and television, the political topicality of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is often underestimated. At the time of its first performance in 1594 or 1595, it was as politically topical as *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, although it is much more covert about this. The shift from external danger to internal crisis corresponds to the fact that in the mid-1590s, magistrates at court and in the city were more worried about the harvest failure and food riots than about the Spanish. Roger Manning has pointed out that '[b]etween 1581 and 1602, the city was disturbed by no fewer than 35 outbreaks of disorder'; this is one-third of all the insurrections, riots and unlawful assemblies recorded from 1517 to 1640.[110] On 6 June 1595 a silk-weaver had been committed to Bedlam hospital because he had made a

[110] Manning, *Village Revolts*, 187.

nuisance of himself by proclaiming 'hard speeches in dispraise of the government' in front of the lord mayor's house.[111] Other members of the worshipful company of Weavers had then circulated a pamphlet expressing discontent not only with the food prices and the number of foreigners in London but also with the way the city fathers were failing to manage this economic crisis. This suggests that the protester in front of the mayor's house was not so much deranged as reckless. His activism sparked a succession of riots, in the course of which prisons were broken open and a gibbet erected in front of the mayor's house. The only ones who were strung up, however, were the ringleaders of the revolt.

Shakespeare does not stage an urban riot, but there is a volatile weaver among his subplot characters: Bottom's impersonation of the ranting tyrant -

> The raging rocks
> And shivering shocks
> Shall break the locks
> Of prison gates. (31-4)

- is a credible impression of rioting artisans attempting to free those of their number who had been imprisoned for their protests. Even Bottom's eagerness to 'play the lion too' associates him with popular unrest, for 'roarer' was a synonym for 'rioter': 'I will roar, that I will make the Duke say, 'Let him roar again; let him roar again" (71-3).[112] However, Shakespeare insists, this weaver's roaring is the very opposite of rebellious, it is pleasing and gentle 'as any sucking dove' (82-3).[113] Still, his fellows are very aware of the danger of ending their lives on the scaffold like the ringleaders in the June of 1595, for 'if you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us' (79-81).[114]

The timing of these London riots reverberates in Shakespeare's comedy: while Jacobean apprentices usually went on the rampage on Shrove Tuesday, Elizabethan apprentices had shown 'a clear preference for midsummer rioting'.[115] Four years earlier, the city fathers had closed the playhouses, imposed a curfew and mounted a double watch when they were informed of disturbances planned for Midsummer Eve; these tightened policing measures at midsummer remained in existence for some time. Raph is a member of the gentle craft of shoemakers, who figure so numerously as

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111 Manning, *Village Revolts*, 209. See also Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, 1-17.

112 Cf. *The Tempest*, 1.1.16-17: 'What cares these roarers for the name of king?'

113 Bottom's 'sucking dove' may even echo the pidgeons or doves Williamson the carpenter in *Sir Thomas More* buys in Cheapside before they are taken from him by a Lombard - the incident that pushes the artisans over the edge of violent action.

114 Thomas Deloney, author of *The Gentle Craft* and other tales glorifying artisans and their craft, wrote a ballad in 1596, now lost, in which he envisioned the Queen discussing the recent oppressive dearth of food with the London people, and for which the bailiffs were sent after him, Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, Ithaca, 1935, 424. It is unlikely that Deloney's was the only partisan response to the riots by a writer of popular literature.

115 Manning, *Village Revolts*, 192. See also Williams, *Tudor Regime*, 329: 'The Privy Council, apprehensive of further outbreaks, ordered that all servants be kept indoors on Midsummer Eve and Midsummer Night, and that no plays or public pastimes be allowed which might 'draw together the baser sort of people'.

commoner-heroes in popular Elizabethan literature.[116] His status as an opponent to the current regime resembles that of real-life rebels against the English crown, be it Jack Straw, Jack Cade or Martin Marprelate, even William Hacket, who, like Raph, claimed to be carrying out a divine mission. Singled out by God as his spokesman, how can he be accused of rebellion against the worldly rulers?

Against the backdrop of midsummer rioting in London, the structural analogies in Wilson's and Shakespeare's plays become expressive of differing political views. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does, in fact, begin with a very serious revolt, that of a child against her parent. Even before that, Theseus had 'won' his Amazon bride by defeating her in war; and the fairy queen Titania defies her lord and master by setting bonds of female friendship above the claims of a husband. The violent overthrow of the rich and mighty envisioned by Raph in *Cobbler* –

> Then these poore that crie,
> Being lifted up on hie,
> When you are all forelorne,
> Shall laugh you lowd to scorne. (332-5)

- finds an echo in the sexual overthrow of Titania, the tale of which will be disseminated in ballad form: 'I have had a most rare vision. [...] I will get Peter Quince to write a ballet of this dream' (4.1.4-15). On the face of it, revolt and rebellion are much more dangerous to the state than a Rabelaisian romp, and Shakespeare might be said to have drawn the teeth of Wilson's prophet-clown. But the transfer of political tensions of class conflicts into the sphere of sexual relations was one of the most frequently used displacements in early modern drama; a dramatic strategy that comes into its own in Jacobean love tragedy, most salaciously in the plays by Beaumont and Fletcher. As Louis Montrose has pointed out on behalf of Simon Forman and all heterosexual Elizabethan males, the violation of social boundaries and courtly decorum in the match between Titania and Bottom is no more shocking than the erotic enthrallment of the 'fairy queen', whose real-life counterpart obliged her favourites and advisers to play the courtiers in the amorous as well as the political sense.[117]

Set-pieces with dance and music appealed to audiences in 1595 as much as in 1588. The love scene between Venus and Mars, who is mistaken by Raph 'for a morris dauncer you are so trim', his 'bodie lapt in soft silke which was wont to bee clad in hard steele, and [his] head so childishlie laid on a

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[116] Cobblers/shoemakers had a reputation for hedge-preaching, cf. Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, in *Works*, 192: 'Such sermons I meane as our sectaries preach in ditches [...] when they leape from the Coblers stal to their pulpits' (marginal note). See Steve Sohmer, *Shakespeare's Mystery Play. The Opening of the Globe Theatre, 1599*, Manchester, 1999, 106-7 on the Elizabethan view of St Paul as a leatherworker, i.e. cobbler. Millers were another occupation associated with revolt. In *Three Ladies* Simplicity had entered 'lyke a Miller all mealy with a wande in his hand' (59-60) and thus obliquely associated himself with social upheaval and even heresy. Much was made of mills as metaphoric and metonymic images of revolution in the 1381 uprising led by Wat Tyler and Jack Straw, when the rebels asked for support to turn the mill of right, might, skill and will, see Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia*, 102-3. - For the miller-as-clown see Tom Miller in *Jack Straw* and in Robert Armin's description of Jack Miller in *Foole Upon Foole*, in *The Collected Works of Robert Armin*, intr. J. P. Feather, 2 vols., vol.1, New York, 1964 D3v.

[117] Louis Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture,' *Representations* 2 (1983), 61-94.

womans lap' (877 and 880-1), is transformed into by Shakespeare into Titania and Bottom in the fairy bower. With music provided by her servants Folly, Niceness, Newfangle, Dalliance and Jealousy, Venus sings Mars to sleep and transfers his head to Folly's knee (1015-9) in order to pursue her affair with Contempt. The fairy-like vicelings dance about the sleeping god and make horns at him. Shakespeare's audience derives pleasure, primarily, perhaps, misogynist pleasure, at the sight of Titania billing and cooing with an ass-eared Bottom, but the scene cannot be said to advance the plot in any significant way. Wilson's dramaturgy is more stringent at this point. Unlike Bottom, Mars is furious when he awakes, and unlike Mark Antony in a similar predicament, he arms himself against wantonness and wins the war. Dalliance, although it is pleasing to watch and a constant temptation to the mighty, is set in purposeful contrast to martial readiness.

A comparison of the two plays hinges on the figure of the clownish artisan. Raph the cobbler prefigures Bottom, the stage-hogging weaver and prophet from fairyland. Raph and Bottom are, in their respective plays, the characters who have most intercourse - sexual or otherwise - with the supernaturals, and who are, in fact, somewhat roguishly singled out by them for privileged contact with their world. Neither saves the day on his own initiative; neither, in fact, fully grasps the nature and extent of the situation that is thrust upon him. But both are instrumental in persuading the erring supernaturals to resume their proper identity and thus help to set the world right.

In view of the two plays' structural and thematic similarities it is perfectly possible that Shakespeare intended a recognisable, even polemic parody of Wilson's comedy. Bottom, who fancies himself as the Herod from a Nativity play and (mis)quotes Scripture, is clearly a descendant of Wilson's gospelling prophet-clowns. Discussions of the character cannot but mention his tentative recollection of his dream experience by echoing (and jumbling) 1 Corinthians 2:8:

> I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about t'expound this dream. Methought I was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had – but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. (5.1.204-14)

This does not sound inappropriate for a man who has just emerged from an ecstatic experience on a different level of reality. But the preceding verses from Corinthians are in fact illuminating for their *political* resonance:

> Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak of the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: […] But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit […] (1 Corinthians 2.6-10)

Louis Montrose comments that this biblical passage gives 'that abstract moral opposition [i.e. between profane and sacred] a political edge by proposing an inverse relationship between the temporal

hierarchy of wealth and power and the spiritual hierarchy of wisdom and virtue'.[118] Montrose is somewhat at a loss, however, about what to make of Bottom's garbled rendering of a scriptural passage about the failure of worldly rulers to comprehend the mystery of God. Kings may not understand God, but Bottom certainly does not understand him either – he cannot even accurately reproduce a couple of verses he must have heard somewhere else.

Heard where, in fact? In the streets, I would suggest, rather than at church. A London playwright in 1594 or 1595 could hardly devise (or a London audience watch) a play set at midsummer featuring a weaver who leads a group of artisans in clandestine action – in Athens or any other capital city - without recalling of the extraordinarily concerted and vengeful outbreaks of disorder in that and in previous summers of that decade. Annabel Patterson has argued that Bottom, the ass/arse, is Bakhtin's lower stratum of the physical body and the body politic; 'an idea of social play that could cross class boundaries without obscuring them, and by those crossings imagine the social body whole again.'[119] This is a most rare vision of Shakespearean reconciliation, although I share Patterson's sense that whatever echo there is of divinely inspired rebellion against worldly authority, Shakespeare has deliberately dulled it. But it is probably only by comparing Bottom to Raph the cobbler that the reader can fully appreciate the origin of this echo and the political and dramatic significance of Shakespeare's refusal to allow Bottom to share his vision of sexual domination of a queen with his fellows. Were Bottom to 'discourse wonders' (5.2.29), this might turn him into a prophet – by Tudor expectations a *religio-political* prophet, possibly a demnoagogue *manqué* like poor mad William Hacket on his cart in Cheapside in 1591.[120]

1.3.3 Protean Puritans: Religion in a Fool's Coat

Robert Wilson's outspoken social Protestant polemics have led some critics to call him a puritan and to misjudge his view of theatre-as-entertainment. Bevington couples Wilson with Stephen Gosson, claiming that they shared a suspicion of any kind of theatre that was not used for homilectic purposes: they 'refused to countenance sensationalism and mere entertainment'.[121] Apart from the fact that historians doubt that Gosson, a paid hack who had been commissioned by the London aldermen to write anti-theatrical pamphlets, was expressing his personal opinion, this view of Elizabethan puritanism as identical with religious nonconformity, socio-political sedition and an anti-theatrical persuasion is outdated. Yet whereas Gosson took to anti-theatrical invective, Wilson continued to

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[118] Montrose, 'Kingdom of Shadows,' 84.

[119] Patterson, *Popular Voice*, 69.

[120] See Alexander Walsham, "Frantick Hacket': Prophecy, Sorcery, Insanity and the Elizabethan Puritan Movement', *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), 27-66.

[121] Bevington, *Tudor Drama*, 140.

express his views about theatre *in* the theatre. The prejudice that radical Protestants were inveterate enemies of the theatre rests on an imperfect appreciation of the lively - albeit waning - influence of the traditions of mid-Tudor literature on late sixteenth-century popular culture and thus also on the early commercial drama.

The puritans' objective, the further reformation of the English church, was a continuation of the work of earlier Protestant activists, both in England and on the continent. Not surprisingly, therefore, the means and media they chose to make themselves heard were also those used by earlier Protestant activists. Those of a sober cast of mind preferred persuasion by rational and learned argument, both in writing and in speech, the measured procedures of parliamentary debate and disputations before the monarch as arbiter. More reckless natures, who did not trust that the governors would listen to reason and scripture, decided that 'It is the multitude and people that must bring the discipline to pass which we desire.'[122] How to incite the people to support them? By popular means: the satirical exaggeration of the enemy's errors in ballads, broadsides, stage plays and pamphlets.

Modern critics' difficulties in assessing the tone – and thus the direction and intention – of religious satire can be briefly illustrated by the commentaries on *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. Frederick Boas, writing before the First World War, notes that 'the atmosphere [the anonymous playwright] creates throughout is that of an isolated village in the pre-Reformation period'.[123] Because the oaths and phrases used by the characters are to him 'the typical utterance[s] of an era of orthodoxy', he cannot 'account for the religious atmosphere of the play, combined with the reference to arrest "in the king's name"'. Surely a play so emphatically and rustically Roman Catholic would not have been written at a time of intense reformation 'from above'? Postmodern readers, accustomed to parodic textual strategies and the omnipresence of irony in their cultural climate, decode this apparent discrepancy as intentional:

> The play's glib irreverence towards saints, oaths and relics, and the unmistakable satirical relish with which the parish clergy is caricatured in the person of the pompous, dim-witted, bibulous Doctor Rat the curate, make Mary's reign (mid-1553-8) seem rather less likely than the latter years of her half-brother Edward's, or possibly the first years of her half-sister Elizabeth's.[124]

And yet, again somewhat ironically, today's readers may underestimate the sincerity at the core of early modern parody. Martin Marprelate, the vituperative anti-episcopalian pamphleteer, praised *Gammer Gurton's Needle* as 'a proper Enterlude' that 'sheweth the author to have had some witte and invention in him' (*The Epistle*, 1588, B2v), which provokes a modern editor of the play to express his astonishment: 'It is curious enough that the arch-Puritan should allow that a play, and such a 'trifle' as this, might

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[122] Thus John Field, quoted in Brigden, *Lost Worlds, New Worlds*, 328.

[123] Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age*, Oxford, 1914, 72

[124] Whitworth, 'Introduction', *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, xvii.

boast these admirable literary qualities.'[125] Once again, the moderns are worsted by Elizabethan 'mingle-mangle'. Into the seventeenth-century, even up to the Civil War, religion and Rabelaisian invective did mix, and more specifically, so did puritanism and aestheticism – Marprelate's 'admirable literary qualities':

> Edwardian literature contradicts the stereotype that Protestant radicals were intrinsically hostile to images and art. [...] Early Protestants approved of the arts so long as they conformed to their ideals of religious truth [...], they rejected any substitution of artifice for truth.[126]

At its most tedious, earlier Reformation drama had been little more than a catechismal double act between a right-thinking Protestant and a papist; but devised by better hands it could be spectacular and exciting theatre. John Bale and his fellow playwright-polemicists had worked with the media and the forms of popular culture - theatre, lampoons, songs, processions - in order to ridicule Roman Catholic potentates, doctrines and rituals. They had daringly exploited the theatre's seductive potential to illustrate the wiles and guises of the Anti-Christ, always in danger of pulling the rug out from under their own ideological line by granting too much allure to Satan and the Whore of Babylon. As the Reformation progressed, this variety of religious education and propaganda was officially discouraged. While the Henrician and Edwardian reformers had turned the tables on Roman Catholic ceremonial by parodying and undermining it, the only kind of tables the iconophobes of the 'second Reformation' would allow was the decalogue. Ironic praise was suddenly deemed too complicated to decode, parody's inherent homage to the pre-text became intolerable; and the carnivalesque, although it *inverted* hierarchies or images without necessarily *subverting* them, was not the mode in which the new rulers cared to be represented. The theatre was demonised and set up as a rival, not a complement, of the pulpit.

So Robert Wilson is misrepresented by the epithet 'puritan', unless it is added that he was a puritan in the way John Bale, Thomas Churchyard, Luke Shepherd, William Baldwin, Robert Crowley and 'Martin Marprelate' were puritans, all of whom 'refused to participate in the attack on poetry and fiction that was often associated with the Puritan faction'.[127] Riddles, mocking rhymes, puns, epigrams, comic alliteration, parody and pastiche were the stylistic devices of a native English literature that sympathised with the hopes of popular reformers and contested the pretentious verbiage of socially and artistically elitist writers and sometimes also the power of their noble patrons. And just as parody, irony and stylistic playfulness were among the characteristics of fictional writing that were frowned upon by late Elizabethan puritans, so was impersonation. The ambiguous tensions between an author and his fictional persona were put to many uses by earlier Tudor gospellers, both didactic and self-protective. In a time of political turmoil that saw frequent changes of monarch and thus of religious

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[125] Whitworth, 'Introduction', *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, xv.

[126] King, *English Reformation Literature*, 14-5.

[127] King, *English Reformation Literature*, 319, on Crowley.

policies, partisan writers were well-advised not to become too outspoken about their personal views. The traditional mouthpieces of satire were the fool or clown, to whom we will return, and the dyed-in-the-wool conformist, who condemns himself and his views by his own pronouncements. Protestant satire naturally made use of these satiric modes of discourse and fashioned it to its specific purposes.

The Edwardian reformer Luke Shepherd was a protean puritan whose influence is felt in all of Wilson's early plays, most of all in *Peddler* and *Cobbler*, as well as in the Martinist tracts.[128] There is an anecdotal parallel linking Luke Shepherd and Martin Marprelate with regard to the popularity of banned books in high circles: when Shepherd was imprisoned in Marian London for authorship of the anti-Catholic *John Bon and Mast Person*, his publisher John Day gave a copy to the then Lord Mayor, John Gresham, assuring him that 'ther is many off them in the courte'. 170 years later John Strype attributed to this work of Protestant propaganda the ubiquity Martin Marprelate would claim for himself: Shepherd's book, writes Strype, 'took much at the Court, and the Courtiers wore it in their pockets'.[129] Martin would likewise boast that 'I have been entertained at the Court […] Every man talks of my Worship. Many would gladly receive my books, if they could tell where to find them'. This corresponds with the anecdotal gem of how the Earl of Essex impishly produced a Martinist tract from underneath his coat in the presence of the queen and her bishops, who were debating how to put a stop to these seditious printings.[130]

Unlike their anti-theatrical brethren, protean puritans like Luke Shepherd or, indeed, Martin Marprelate, hid behind the fictive speakers of their pamphlets, tracts or plays. Shepherd's pieces are narrated by the enemies of the new faith, the recalcitrant Roman Catholic, the dim-witted peasant, the avaricious merchant, the power-hungry clergyman. Thus they demand 'the strenuous participation of any reader who wishes to avoid misinterpetation [...,] and implicitly rais[e] the epistemological problem inherent in Protestant faith'[131] - and, one might add, the practical difficulty of dealing with the reams of propagandistic material that descended upon the English from the middle decades of the century onwards. Like Shepherd's satires, *The Peddler's Prophecy* is a fairly demanding challenge to the audience to decode irony and ambiguity. Protean puritans integrated the hypocrisy and double-dealing of their adversaries into the multivocal, ironic mode of their satire. This rhetorical strategy was at least as old as the medieval performances of saturnalian sermons, liturgies, and other official ceremonies at carnival time: dominant ideologies are reproduced, but the satiric frame in which they are contained allows the

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[128] On Shepherd, see King, *English Reformation Literature*, 252-70, and Janice Devereux, ed. *Luke Shepherd's Satires*,Tempe, Ariz. If there were any indication that Shepherd not only wrote dramatic monologues but also stage plays, he would be a strong candidate for the original authorship of *The Peddler's Prophecy*.

[129] King, *English Reformation Literature*, 253-4.

[130] See Kendall, *Drama of Dissent*, 173. – I suspect a *topos* here. Foxe similarly reports that when Simon Fishe's *Supplication* was distributed in London and the Cardinal came to court to warn the king, Henry pulled a copy out of his doublet.

[131] King on Shepherd, *English Reformation Literature*, 257.

audience to see ridicule as well as affirmation. The wicked characters in the more mature Elizabethan and Jacobean drama also condemn themselves through their own words, but – as descendants of the Vice – they are fully aware of their wickedness and delight in it. The 'papist' in earlier Tudor religious satire was permitted to condemn himself through his own words.[132]

Tudor complaints and satires in the *Piers Plowman* tradition had represented the common man as the plain, uncorrupted believer who envisioned a Christian commonwealth with an almost child-like combination of innocence and resolution, often divinely inspired. One of the major works by an Edwardian reformer, Robert Crowley's edition of *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* (1550), included his own interpretative glosses of Langland's epic. Editing and glossing turned the poem into Crowley's vision of a 'protesting' tradition reaching back to the Middle Ages rather than Langland's vision of a peaceful social and ecclesiastical reform. The original poem shows the failure of social reform and seems to suggest that individual spiritual improvement is preferable, but Crowley's interpretation was made to serve the turn of the Protestant reformers:

> Originally an exemplary figure representing the simplicity of Christ and the Christian life, the devout medieval plowman had undergone by Crowley's time a metamorphosis into a harsh anticlerical spokesman. Sixteenth-century reformers mistakenly identified the *Piers Plowman* tradition with the Wyclifite movement, reinterpreting these medieval appeals for reform as Protestant propaganda.[133]

In the hands of Protestant propagandists the Plowman merged with the Fool, who was wise in being foolish, his very 'simplicity' associated with the Protestant 'plain style' and the Apostolic state of grace to which the reformers aspired. Indeed, the figure of the simple husbandman undercutting learned pretensions and hypocrisy with his dogged, seemingly *ingenue* enquiries is not so very far removed from the idea of Socratic irony in the Tarltonesque clown, who shows up society's faults and lies by pretending that he is too stupid to understand their conventional rationalisation. Like the prophet, the clown stood to some extent outside the established order, both of the society represented in the play and of the play itself. Popular theatre could potentially turn into radical political theatre when the plowman-figure, the representative of the exploited populace, was merged with the clown, a traditional figure of misrule and anarchic contrariness. The mid-Elizabethan stage clown was a renegade figure whose generic and political roots reach back not only to the saturnalian lords of misrule, Piers Plowman and Erasmus's Folly, but the unknown and uncounted libelling rhymsters and balladeers all

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[132] Sander L. Gilman, *The Parodic Sermon in European Perspective. Aspects of Liturgical Parody from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, Wiesbaden, 1974, 34; see the whole of chap. 3: 'The Parodic Sermon in the Service of the Reformation'.

[133] King, *English Reformation Literature*, 323, and *passim* on Crowley. King notes that *The Vision of Piers Plowman* was reprinted in 1561 as part of the re-edition of Edwardian propaganda in the first years of Elizabeth. Wilson would almost certainly have read it then; later in London he may even have been personally acquainted with Crowley, who had written extensively in the native Protestant vein also adopted by Wilson. - On the *Piers Plowman* tradition, see also White, *Social Criticism*, 1-40.

over sixteenth-century England, hammering out lampoons of the local parson or landlord over a pot of ale or two to express their grievances about judicial enormities and doctrinal absurdities.

To precise Protestants and city fathers, clowning - that is, improvised, unauthorised, uncensored speech on the public stage - was one of the most worrying elements in a recent cultural institution that was a nuisance at the best of times and a hotbed of sedition at the worst. Yet there is no doubt that the Elizabethan theatre assumed a more civilised, more conformist shape not only in response to outside pressure from magistrates and patrons, but also as a result of strenuous efforts to reform itself from within, probably as much to educate audience tastes as to pander to them. In the commercial theatre of the 1590s, the whole gamut of folk-play elements - improvisation, backchat with the audience, popular satiric songs, jigs at the end of a performance - were phased out of the 'authors' theatre' along with the figure of the traditional Tarltonesque clown.[134] Multiple perspectives, perhaps deconstruction and subversion, the whole playful cornucopia of disguise, wordplay and improvisation, were anathema not only to the earnest Protestant striving to establish God's truth, man's vocation and woman's essence, but also to learned and ambitious playwrights wrestling with shareholders, actors and audiences to have their scripts embodied and understood in the manner they intended:

> The professional clown competes with the authorial voice for attention and control, producing a dialogic text in place of the monological scripted play. The formal unity that could be achieved only by subordinating subplot to main plot, commoners to aristocrats, comedy to history, by imposing, that is, the same hierarchies of privilege and power that exist in the state upon the play, is ruptured by the clown's refusal to be subordinated to the serious plot.[135]

Kastan's argument is very neat and describes the general position of the clown-figure around 1590; but it is directly contradicted by Robert Wilson's play *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*, in which the clown was almost certainly played by the playwright himself.[136] In this case there is no - indeed, *can* be no - competition between clown and playwright of the sort Hamlet has observed and is anxious to prevent. Wilson's clown is thwarted and ridiculed, but this happens within the plot devised beforehand by the man who acts the clown. So although the London lords exert social and political control over the clown/author, the author/clown finally exerts dramatic control over them. In all of his plays, most

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[134] Jigs were in fact officially suppressed in 1612 because they were seen as a particular cause of violence and unrest at the playhouses, see Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 340-41. - The development of the figure of the clown is traced in Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool*, Brighton, 1984, and Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown. Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*, Cambridge, 1987. Helgerson, *Nationhood*, has a subchapter on 'Carnival and Clowns,' 215-28, and Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, on the clown and the epilogue as 'proud beggars', 57-63. The change of critical opinion can be assessed by comparing Olive Mary Busby, *Studies in the Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama*, London, 1923, who observes, for instance, that in *Sir Thomas More* [...] the clown has the most unsuitable rôle of rebel' (31).

[135] David Scott Kastan, "Clownes shoulde speake disorderlye': Mongrel Tragicomedy and the Unitary State,' paper read at a meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America (1989), quoted in Helgerson, *Nationhood*, 226.

[136] See Mithal, 'Introduction,' lxxii. The other pretender to the part of Simplicity in *Three Lords* is John Laneham, who is several times mentioned in the anti-Martinist pieces.

notably in *Three Lords*, Robert Wilson was most authorially using the figure of the clown (in fact, as we will see, the figure of *the* clown, Richard Tarlton) to speak for himself as playwright.

Playwrights were not the only ones who sought to harness the stage clown to the cart of their own advancement. Comparing Tarlton's fame to twentieth-century celebrities like Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, Alexandra Halasz has discussed the significance of 'Tarlton' as a multivalent icon in late Elizabethan culture:

> Tarlton's death makes his name available as a signifier for the activities in which he once supposedly engaged. The representation of Tarlton or the use of his name is imbued with a nostalgia for his performance at the same time as that representation becomes the means of advancing other interests.

'Other interests' in Halasz's argument means mainly the book trade; printed forms of entertainment competed with enacted entertainment by appropriating the name and figure of the master performer.[137] But these were not the only bids made for Tarlton (or 'Tarlton'). Within a few weeks of his death, probably before the first Martinist tract appeared, Tarlton was resurrected in image and character before the eyes of the audience of *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* by his friend and colleague, Robert Wilson.[138] Simplicity the clown, acted by Wilson himself, holds up an illustrated ballad to the audience on stage and in the playhouse:

> Simplicity. [...] this is Tarltons picture: didst thou never know Tarlton? [...] What was he: a prentice in his youth of this honorable city, God be with him: when he was yoong he was leaning to the trade that my wife useth nowe, and I have used, vide lice shirt [i.e. videlicet], water-bearing. [...] O it was a fine fellow as ere was borne, there will never come his like while the earth can corne: O passing fine Tarlton I would thou hadst lived yet. (350-67)

If 'Tarlton' was to some extent a cultural token as Halasz suggests, his meaning depended on the context in which he was employed. Wilson realised this sooner than most and acted promptly. No better time to stake a claim than directly after Tarlton's death when his work and his stature were being reassessed by London's community of playgoers mourning his loss. Wilson's dramatised obituary is not just an act of friendship, it is a bid in the cultural contest for appropriation of the figure of the Tarltonesque clown as a figurehead by the audience for which Wilson wrote his plays and by the tradition of Protestant satire that still upheld the demand for commoner participation in governing the

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[137] Halasz, 'Tarlton,' 22. '[By] textualizing the practices for which he was known, and by making him into a representational icon, pamphlets advertise their capacity to provide the kind of experience associated with Tarlton's performance' (30).

[138] It is not actually clear how long Wilson remained with the Queen's Men and when he switched to LordStrange's or the Admiral's Men. Doubt arises because Wilson's name is missing from a record dated 30 June 1588 which lists members of the royal household who have failed to pay their subsidies: 'The Players, viz. Richarde Tarleton, viii.s. iiiid. [seven other actors are named],' *The Malone Society Collections*, vol. 2, part 3, Oxford, 1911, 354-5. The fact that Gurr, discussing the membership of the company, does not offer an explanation suggests that there is no satisfactory one (*Playing Companies*, 202). McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, do not discuss the difficulty at all. The evidence of this list must be weighed against the fact that one 'R.W.' wrote *Three Lords*, without a doubt a Queen's Men's play, some time in September/October 1588, and that he very probably also acted in it. See also *'The Three Ladies of London' and 'The Three Lords and the Three Ladies of London'*, ed. H. S. D. Mithal, New York, 1988, 'Introduction,' lxxxii-xciv.

commonwealth. Another player in this cultural contest for the voice of the clown were 'Martin Marprelate' and his detractors, the 'Anti-Martinists'.

MARPELATE AND THE QUEEN'S MEN

Patrick Collinson calls the last Elizabethan decade 'the nasty nineties' and reminds us not to overlook, for all the processes of 'stabilization, routinization and even secularization', that this was 'not only or especially a decade of sweetness and light, of incipient Puritan piety and mellowing Anglicanism, but a rather ugly decade, when the going got tough and unpleasant for all parties'.[139] The nastiness Collinson observes manifested itself in underhand methods as much as in an exchange of open blows. One manifestation of it (and reaction to it) was the flourishing of political and religious satire in print and on the stage, which provoked unprecedented measures of censorship. The 1590s, the period of the most energetic development of the national theatre, was also a time of repression of puritanism and religious radicalism under Archbishop Whitgift, 'whose proceedings against nonconforming ministers were likened by Burghley to those of the Spanish Inquisition.'[140] The first flurry of satirical activity followed hard on the heels of the self-satisfied celebrations after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Elizabethan satire is in many ways the obverse side of the coin of Elizabethan chauvinism.

In the months and years after the Armada, the most notorious protean puritan - a radical Protestant who spoke with the voice of a clown - was Martin Marprelate, the satiric persona of a group of presbyterian polemicists around Robert Waldegrave, John Penry and Job Throckmorton. In October 1588 Londoners were treated to the anonymous *Epistle to the Terrible Priests of the Confocation House*, 'printed [...] at the cost and charges of M Marprelate gentleman', in which the episcopalian constitution of the established church in general and the faults and failings of leading churchmen in particular were subjected to burlesque but acid ridicule. By the end of 1589 six more tracts had appeared, and when the Martinists' printing-press was confiscated in 1590, the sheets of a 'beefed-up', annotated version of the mid-Tudor *I Playne Piers* were still damp. Their vicious invective was an 'in-yer-face' reaction to Archbishop Whitgift having tightened his control over all publications on religious or ecclesiastical matters: 'Puritans had long considered the Church hierarchy a corrupt holdover from the Catholic church, but their resentment of the clerics intensified when the Anglican institution became the chief persecutors of the reform movement.'[141]

The authors of the Marprelate tracts did not invent their persona out of thin air. It is a misjudgement of the state of Elizabethan popular culture to assume that 'Up to that moment, nothing

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[139] Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical Vitriol,' 153. - Elton, *England under the Tudors*, chap. 16: 'The Last Years', contrasts the expenses of the war in Europe, harvest failures, high prices, plague, vagrancy and an ageing monarch on the political side with the Church's 'consolidation and mounting triumph' (456-7).

[140] Heinemann, 'Political Drama', 169.

[141] Dorothy Auchter, *Dictionary of Literary and Dramatic Censorship in Tudor and Stuart England*, Westport, CT., 2001, 227.

in the battle between Anglican and Puritan had quite prepared the court and country for [Marprelate's] exercises in calumnious wit'.[142] Martin's earthy but dexterous verbosity and his use of the motifs of public humiliation familiar from carnival and theatre proclaim him to be a 'clown' - and not only that, but a Protestant clown. He combines a lord of misrule's bellow of irreverent wit with the righteous voice of Piers Plowman as they had spoken through the Edwardian reformers. The strategies of self-condemnation and ironic ventriloquism as employed by earlier anti-clerical satirists survived not only in the plays of Robert Wilson - who may have been on stage as Simplicity/Tarlton in *Three Lords and Three Ladies* when the first Martinist tract appeared - but also in the rhetorical stance assumed by 'Martin' himself denouncing ecclesiastical politics.

The Queen's players, true to their official brief as proponents of the Protestant establishment, had reacted promptly, by making Martin a common laughingstock in jigs and playlets.[143] In order to assess the indubitably self-conscious relations between the Queen's Men, in particular Wilson's Protestant prophet-clowns, and the presbyterian pamphleteers and their satiric persona 'Marprelate', it would be helpful if we had any means of determining the quality and intention of the pamphleteers' stylistic parody of the clown's lingo. I am inclined to believe that by the end of 1588 not only *Three Ladies* but also *Cobbler* and *Three Lords* had been staged, probably *Peddler* too. Wilson's stage clowns above all others must have been an example to the Martinists, who cast the Elizabethan bishops as Roman Catholic Vices from a Protestant morality play and generally show a great affinity to Tudor Reformation drama. But did 'Martin Marprelate', in assuming the masks of the nonconformist soothsayer, the ironic eulogist and the vulgar flyter, pay homage to the Queen's Men's plays and the Tarltonesque clown, or did he intend to ridicule them and him, 'as though [their] mode of theatrical pleasure was now sufficiently shopworn as to be exaggerated into a virtual parody of itself'?[144]

The pamphleteers' adoption of a clownish persona and 'Martin's' being 'wormd and launced', 'made a jest of', 'made a May game'[145] by the players on stage and by the Anti-Martinists in print is a contest to determine the political and cultural significance of the figure of the clown. The Marprelate controversy thus exemplifies the conflicts between radical and established Protestants in Elizabeth's England, and it shows how the theatre was involved, not to say implicated, in these conflicts. My own

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142 Kendall, *Drama of Dissent*, 173. Apart from this misjudgement, Kendall's chapter on Martin Marprelate is illuminating.

143 On the controversy as a whole, see Leland H. Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, Gentleman*, San Marino, 1981, and Collinson, *Puritan Movement*, 391-404; the Queen's Men's part is summarised by McMillian and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 53-5 and 168-9.

144 McMillin and MacLean opt for the latter version of events, *Queen's Men*, 53. They add that 'Martin had already mastered their style and extended it into the excesses of bad taste' (54). - Edward Arber, editing *An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy, 1588-1590* out of strong sympathies with the movement to disestablish the Church of Ireland, saw nothing reproachable in the Martinists' adopting 'the 'extemporizing' style of Richard Tarleton the actor, to ridicule and affront a proud hierarchy endowed with large legal means of doing mischief,' (New York, 1972, 11).

145 From *Martins Months Minde*, quoted in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 230.

view of the dispute is that the Martinist pamphleteers intended to integrate themselves in the tradition of popular Protestant invective, but that they were rejected and caricatured by the players, who were in the process of shedding that tradition.

For the young cultural institution of the theatre, much was at stake in these months of the Marprelate controversy. The players' employment of carnivalesque and clownesque stage devices to harry Martin was theatrically effective but politically detrimental to their main project at the time, which was precisely to purge the theatre of its damaging associations with religio-political protest. Andrew Gurr explains the demise of the Tarltonesque clown by arguing that the playgoers' dramatic tastes were changing: 'The religious and folk rituals of Easter and Maygames were a distant memory, and the transitional didacticism of 'morality' plays was also going fast.'[146] The Anti-Martinist, speaking with Martin's voice, seems to affirm this: '[The common people are] now wearie of our state mirth, that for a penie, may have farre better by oddes at the Theater and Curtaine'.[147] Weariness of 'state mirth', that is, of estate satire, may imply that Elizabethan playgoers were tiring of the Queen's Men's political theatre, and that they preferred strutting tyrant-warriors and romantic lovers. Yet the immediate relish with which the players jumped at the chance to ridicule Martin Marprelate on stage by subjecting him to all kinds of popular rites of humiliation throws some doubt on any mono-causal explanation for the 'de-clownisation' of the theatre, and it certainly throws some doubt on the suggestion that playgoers had tired of rough holiday humour in the theatre. In fact, the more immediate danger in 1588/89 seems to have been that the theatre might backslide into one of its former shapes as a forum for radical political debate.

The Marprelate controversy was a timely opportunity for the players to demonstrate to the authorities how docile and domesticated their medium had become, but the spur of this ambition pricked the sides of their intent rather too hard and o'erleapt itself. Even if they really did intend to dissociate themselves from Martin and his alleged aim 'to encourage the Commons against the chiefe of the Clergie, to make a generall revolt from the government so wel established, so wisely maintained, and so long prospering',[148] they clearly also intended to wring every drop of theatricality and publicity out of the hubbub that had arisen. Here lay the players' dilemma: to surpass Martin in his own foolery was a precariously scurrilous and not very respectable ambition. John Lyly, one of the writers against Martin, is fully conscious of this: 'I seldome use to write, and yet never writ anie thing, that in speech might seeme undecent, or in sense unhonest; [...] whatsoever shall seeme lavish in this Pamphlet, let it be thought borrowed of Martins language,'[149] Sir Francis Bacon's oft-quoted comment on 'this

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146 Gurr, *Playgoing*, 117.

147 *Martins Months Minde*, quoted in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 230.

148 *Pappe With an Hatchet*, in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols., Oxford, 1902, vol. 3, 573-588, 408, 38-41.

149 Lyly, *Pappe With an Hatchet*, 396, 25-9.

immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the style of the stage' was also echoed by Lyly, who observed that 'Martin writes merely, because (hee sayes) people are carried away sooner with jest than earnest. I, but Martin, never put Religion into a fooles coate; there is great oddes betweene a Gospeller, and a libeller'.[150] Seen against the background of 'protean puritan literature' in Tudor England, these affirmations by members of the late Elizabethan establishment are palpably spurious. Religion, that is, efforts to reform the hierarchies of the church and the practices of worship, had precisely been obliged to put on 'a fool's coat' to escape prosecution, and libelling against the old authorities had been condoned before the Protestants themselves assumed the power in the state. A mere glance at Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* shows this, as do the low-humour passages in the mystery plays, earlier Reformation rhymes, ballads, lampoons and morality and estate satires; and both Martinists and Anti-Martinists knew this well enough. But matters of religion were to be no longer 'handled in the style of the stage'. Within weeks of the first tract's dissemination, the Privy Council commanded the Archbishop of Canterbury, London's Council of Aldermen and the Master of the Revels to concert their efforts to censor stage plays and to ban the anti-Martinist jigs and playlets at the Curtain and the Theatre.

By this time the contestants' major rhetorical strategies had become public knowledge. Both sides in the controversy as it was conducted between the pamphleteers and the players used the theatrical devices of the clown, and both sides sought to muster prominent entertainers from the public stage. Next to figures of respectability like Thomas Cartwright and Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, one of the well-known Protestant sympathisers mobilised by Martin in his first attack was Richard Tarlton:

> What if I should report abroad that cleargie men come unto their promotions by Simonie? have not you given me juste cause? I thinke Simonie be the bishops lacky. Tarleton tooke him not long since in Don John of Londons cellar.[151]

Tarlton - or Tarlton's clownish persona - is almost incidentally presented as a Protestant activist as well as a noted imbiber. The topical joke refers to Wilson's *London*-plays, both of which feature Simony as one of the Vices. In *Three Lords*, which in late October 1588 had been staged 'not long since' as a fervent homage to Richard Tarlton, we even find a scene resembling a citizen's arrest when Fraud is taken by Simplicity the clown. The main thrust of this remark, however, relies less on familiarity with a popular stage play than on familiarity with Tarlton's reputation as a popular anti-clerical voice.

Far from rejecting clownish discourse in their counter-invective, John Lyly, Thomas Nashe and the other Anti-Martinists sought to rehabilitate the clown and his 'foolerie' and to rescue him from the band of 'Mar-state', 'Mar-magistrate', 'Mar-church', 'Mar-religion' and 'Mar-commonwealth' into which he had been pressed.[152] In *A Whip for an Ape*, probably the first counter-attack in pamphlet form,

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[150] Quoted by Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 229; *Pappe with an Hatchet*, 412.

[151] Martin Marprelate, *Epistle to the Terrible Priests of the Confocation House* (1589), 19.

[152] The terms are taken from Thomas Cooper's *Admonition to the People of England* and Martin's *Hay Any Worke For*

Martin's self-presentation as a stage clown is directly affirmed: 'A Dizard late skipt out upon our Stage...'.[153] His 'fleering, leering, jarring fooles bopeepe' (25), his 'rangings, ragings, revelings, roysters ray' (28) are made to resemble the wild chatter of a monkey but describe as accurately the (mis)behaviour of the traditional clown or saturnalian fool. Martin is advised to leave state and church matters well alone and to spend his excess energy in unpolitical, unseditious exercise on the common stage: 'Now Tarleton's dead the Consort lacks a vice: / For knave and foole thou mayst bear pricke and price' (53-4). The same implication about the political impeccability of stageplaying is expressed in *Pappe with an Hatchet*: 'If thy vain bee so pleasant, and thy wit so nimble [...]; pen some playe for the Theater'.[154] There he would do no harm, for the theatre was licensed and so under a modicum of official control. Like London's apprentices, Lyly implies, the players may at times have been volatile and rather full of themselves, but in times of crisis they could be relied upon to assist the authorities in securing trouble-makers: 'Would those Comedies might be allowed to be playd that are pend, and then I am sure he would be decyphered, and so perhaps discouraged'. Staging the detection of Martin in the playhouses would inevitably lead to the staging of his execution in the streets of London: 'we hope to see him stride from Aldgate to Ludgate, and looke over all the Citie at London Bridge' - from the vantage-point of the end of a pike, that is.[155]

The Anti-Martinists continued to make strong bids for saving the conformist reputation of ballad-makers and stage clowns. Early in 1590 an unidentified writer dedicated *An Almond for a Parrat* to Will Kemp or, 'If thou wilt not accept of it in regard of the envy of some Citizens, that can not away with argument, Ile preferre it to the soule of Dick Tarlton, who, I know, will entertaine it with thankes.[156] The author adopts the persona of 'Cuthbert Curry-knave', who sends word to his friend Kemp that on his travels in Italy he met an admirer of Kemp's, who told him that the Italians were celebrating

> a famous Schismatike, one Martin, newe sprung up in England, who by his bookes, libels, and writings, had brought that to passe which neither the Pope by his Seminaries, Philip by his power, nor all the holy League by their underhand practices and policies could at any time effect. (342)

The Italian, implausibly critical of the Pope and the King of Spain, is presented as an admirer of anti-ecclesiastical English clowning. The author's prime concern, however, does not seem to be invasion but the protean puritans' besmirching the business of time-honoured satire: 'for, now a dayes, a man can not have a bout with a Balletter, or write *Midas habet aures asinias* in great Romaine letters, but hee

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Cooper, see Stirling, *Populace*, 113-4.

153 John Lyly, *A Whip for an Ape* (April 1589), in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols., Oxford, 1902, vol. 3, 417-22, 418.

154 Lyly, *Pappe with an Hatchet*, 412, 22-3.

155 Lyly, *Pappe with an Hatchet*, 408, 18-20 and 36-7.

156 [Nashe], *An Almond for a Parrat*, in *Works*, vol. 3, 341.

shall bee in daunger of a further displeasure' (341-2). Style and content, the poet urges, should not be irrevocably interlinked; the pamphleteers' seditious politics are damnable, but their politics should not be allowed to cast a disloyal light on their popular, highly entertaining style. Nor are the clowns, whose tricks of the trade Martin had adopted and who had been involved in the attack on him in the playhouses, to be considered to be as bad as he: 'Therefore we must not measure of Martin as he is allied to Elderton or tongd like Will Tony, as he was attired like an Ape on the Stage [...] but as he is Mar-prelat of England' (354). *A Whip for an Ape* suggests that the players are well able to take care of renegades within their own ranks without interference from the authorities: 'Leave Apes to dogges to baite, their skins to crowes, / And let old Lanam lash him with his rimes' (135-6). John Laneham was, after Tarlton's death, one of the leading members of the Queen's Men. To 'my good friend Lanam; and his consort', Martin - according to the Anti-Martinist - bequeathes 'all [his] foolerie', because 'of [him he] first had it'.[157] 'Allowed' fooling in the queen's theatre is to be distinguished from the scurrilous anti-clerical, anti-establishment invective of the traditional clown, who is made to speak for those who are dissatisfied with the ways in which the new, Protestant rulers are ordering the church and the commonwealth. Martin Marprelate appropriated for his revolutionary project a 'stile' and 'rime' that had been in the process of being domesticated by the players on stage, but which he was dragging back into the mire of popular protest(ant) culture.

Thomas Nashe had more reason than Robert Greene or John Lyly to make voluble claims for defining the terms of clownesque anarchy. He was going to appropriate the Tarltonising manner and style in his own prose satires. His first printed publication, *An Anatomie of Absurditie*, appeared in September 1588, only weeks before the first Martinist tract. In the course of arguing that 'the acts of the ventrous, and the praise of the virtuous' were to be the prerogatives of the classically educated poet, to be denied the 'stitcher, Weaver, spendthrift, or Fidler [who] hath shuffled or slubberd up a few ragged Rimes', he denounces both hedgepriest and stage clown in one breath: 'some dreaming dunce whose bald affected eloquence making his function odious, better beseeming a privie then a pulpit, a misterming Clowne in a Comedy, then a chosen man in the Ministerie'.[158] Not only religion but also satire was to be taken from the populist speaker. There is no mention of Richard Tarlton, let alone praise. Only after Martin Marprelate had mustered the late clown among his Protestant sympathisers did Nashe begin to boost Tarlton's authority and to foreground his common interests with Tarlton. The clown makes an odd fourth party among the tragedians John Bentley, William Knell and Edward Alleyn, whom Nashe/Pierce Penniless promises to commemorate in print.[159] He is an even odder third

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[157] *Martins Months Minde*, quoted in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 230.

[158] Nashe, *An Anatomie of Absurditie*, in *Works*, vol. 1, 24 and 27.

[159] Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, 215. – The fact that Nashe became known as a champion of the theatre appears some fifty years later by John Taylor's satire of William Prynne, *Crop-Eare Curried, or Tom Nash His Ghost*, in which Nashe's ghost exhorts Taylor to take on Prynne as he took on Martin Marprelate.

party among the university wits: in responding to Gabriel Harvey's accusation of plagiarism, Nashe ostensibly rejects (yet thus acknowledges) the influences of tradition on his own writing: 'Is my stile like Greenes, or my jeasts like Tarltons? [... I call] no man father in England but my selfe, neyther Euphues, nor Tarlton, nor Greene.'[160] Later in his crusade against Harvey, who had taken exception to both the Martinists and the Anti-Martinists, Nashe cites Tarlton again as an authority supporting his own judgement: 'The whole Universitie hyst at him [i.e. Harvey's brother Richard], Tarlton at the Theater made jests of him, and Elderton consumd his ale-crammed nose to nothing, in beare-bayting him with whole bundles of ballets.'[161] Nashe's self-fashioning as a professional and/or nobly patronised satirist - a defiant enterprise at the best of times - relied heavily on both popular and learned traditions. Turning Richard Tarlton, of whom even his friends said that he lacked formal education, into an honorary member of the circle of university wits makes sense in the context of Nashe's project of self-invention; his influences, such as he acknowledges, are of course excellent men. As far as Tarlton's posthumous reputation is concerned, however, it is a counter-measure against Martin Marprelate's simultaneous appropriation of the clown in general and Tarlton in particular as a radical Protestant sympathiser.

Not all Anti-Martinists played down the stage clown's politically populist appeal in order to keep or bring him within the compass of the licenced theatre. The writer of *Mar-Martin* (probably neither Lyly nor Nashe) compares the pamphleteers' *Epistle* to *Tarlton's Jests*: 'Th'unsavorie snuffes first jesting booke, though clownish, knavish was', and although the comparison is unfavourable, the 'folk' element, indeed, the *Plowman* tradition, is understood to have informed both clowns' work:

> These tinkers termes, and barbers jestes first Tarleton on the stage,
> Then Martin in his bookes of lies, hath put in every page:
> The common sort of simple swads, I can their state but pitie:
> That will vouchsafe, or deygne to laugh, at libelles so unwittie.[162]

Unwitty they may be, but libels they are nevertheless, and what is more, libels out of the pen of common artisans. Martin's terms and jests were really upgraded varieties of the ephemeral or improvised libels that had been used among the lower levels of society for centuries to express discontent with overlords and to exert unofficial social control in the communities. 'Some libels, while basically political or religious in intention, resorted to personal abuse to maximise the comic effect and to puncture the pretensions of authority by probing its weakest spots.'[163] This is Martin exactly; the Elizabethan establishment is attacked through its figureheads. Although there is little personalised satire in what is extant of Tarlton's work - most of it would have occurred in the jigs he ad-libbed after the

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[160] Nashe, *Foure Letters Confuted*, in *Works*, vol. 1, 319. - Harvey also made frequent use of Tarlton as a signifier of commercialised popular entertainment, see Halasz, 'Tarlton,' 36, n. 7 and 37, n. 8.

[161] Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, 197.

[162] [Lyly], *Mar-Martin*, in *Works*, vol. 3, 423-6, 106-7.

[163] Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England', *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay, London, 1988, 166-97, 184, see also 178-86.

play - this does not mean that there was none. John Manningham, for instance, notes that 'Tarlton called Burley house gate in the Strand towardes the Savoy, the Lord Treasurers Almes gate, because it was seldom or never opened'.[164] According to the Anti-Martinist, these libels must not be countenanced. If they cannot be suppressed, they belong into alehouses and marketplaces, not into the theatre, which was after all an extension of noble or royal households, and they certainly ought not to be graced by being printed. Again the Anti-Martinist speaks for the Anglican establishment and against political puritan invective. Tarlton and Martin - and Robert Wilson and his prophet-clowns - gave greater currency to forms and contents of oppositional popular culture at a point at which the authorities, seeking to augment their rule over a newly Protestant kingdom, were striving to achieve a greater control over them.

The Marprelate pamphlets and the alacrity with which the players responded to the challenge and reacted against Martin's anti-episcopalian attacks by ridiculing him on stage prompted the Privy Council for the first time to intervene explicitly in the theatre business. The council ordered that all play-scripts were to be read prior to performance by a commission consisting of the Master of the Revels, a deputy of the Lord Mayor and a deputy of the Archbishop of Canterbury, 'and thereuppon to stryke out or reforme such partes and matters as they shall fynde unfytt and undecent to be handleed in playes, bothe for Divinitie and State'.[165] However, this commission, whose purpose was the prevention of public mayhem resulting from 'the relatively open allegorical treatment of state and religious affairs that we have observed in Lyly and Wilson' was never set up.[166] The licensing fees trickling steadily into Edmund Tilney's pockets seem to have disinclined him to lend his support to the Lord Mayor's attempts to have public stage-playing banned altogether. The Archbishop, to whom London's magistrates then turned, was sympathetic but not very helpful, either, and in the end it was the plague that moved the Privy Council to close down the playhouses in the winter of 1592/3. The 1580s did not see the large-scale clamp-down on the playhouses and playing companies for which London's city fathers were petitioning. The Marprelate jigs and *Sir Thomas More* are among the very few instances upon record official suppression.[167] But all the same there was a perceptible tightening of the reins, of which writers for all media and audiences were conscious and to which they responded implicitly. Direct and explicit censorship was no major factor in the development of drama and theatre in the

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164 Manningham,' *Diary*, 17.

165 Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels. The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama*, London, 1991, 77.

166 Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 78.

167 Yet even in these cases, official action was by no means as rigorous as it might have been: the players were reprimanded for having staged unlicensed playlets about 'Martin', but their playhouses were not closed, nor, as far as we know, did they have to pay any fines. (Dutton speculates that their involvement in the Marprelate affair may have damaged the Children of St Paul's, who seem to have been dissolved in 1589, but he makes no definite claim.) A few years later Tilney demanded cuts and changes to *Sir Thomas More*, but he did not withhold the license altogether or, worse, report the writers for libel or sedition.

1580s; the general political climate and the various forms of dramatic and theatrical self-censorship, however, were.

RICHARD TARLTON : A PROTESTAN CLOWN?

The view expressed by Joseph Bryant fifty years ago that 'Tarlton was never the champion of any particular religious group'[168] now seems questionable. Even if the story of his introduction at court as a protégé of the Earl of Leicester should be apocryphal, it evidently bore the mark of inherent probability: Tarlton seems to have been treated as a valuable supporter of their cause by the militantly Protestant faction at court. We know of at least one occasion on which Tarlton, already with the Queen's Men, received a present of two pounds from Leicester (as did Robert Wilson for services rendered Leicester in the Low Countries in 1586); Sir Philip Sidney stood godfather to Tarlton's son Philip, born in 1582. When Tarlton was dying and involved in unpleasant family wrangles, he wrote to Walsingham, not only a powerful Privy Counsellor but Sidney's father-in-law, to ask for protection of his rightful heir.[169] The queen's jester and the people's clown had close connections with the Protestant counsellors who were known to advocate an aggressive foreign policy and a Calvinist version of faith and worship.

Moreover, the Marprelate tracts were not the only bid made for Tarlton by radical Protestants who were unhappy with the achievements of the official Reformation. At least as early as Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* (1581), Tarlton had been cast as a commoner vigilant guarding the commonwealth against disruptive and anti-social forces. At the beginning of the play, five travellers – Fraud, Dissimulation, Simony, Usury and Simplicity – meet on the way into London to seek preferment with one of the London ladies. Simplicity (the clown, presumably presented by Tarlton) recognises Fraud in his disguise as a farmer and wrathfully assaults him. It was customary for morality clowns to be manhandled by the Vices, but for a clown to actually recognise, expose and assault a Vice is rare, possibly unique, and would have been noted by the audience with alacrity. Dissimulation parts the combatants and calms Fraud by belittling his attacker: "Tis Simplicitie that patch, he knoweth not good from bad' (109). This cue prepares the audience for the fact that Simplicity will be responsible for the rest of this play and its sequel for doing just that: knowing good from bad and exposing deceit and double-dealing, mostly without being heeded by the authorities.

Knowing good from bad is, in a nutshell, the central challenge in dramatic, poetic or narrative texts of the English Reformation. Mastering this challenge is the most pressing problem and the most

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[168] Joseph Allen Bryant, 'Shakespeare's Falstaff and the Mantle of Dick Tarlton,' *Studies in Philology* 51 (1954), 149-62, 156.

[169] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 122, McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 20 and 25. See also the entry on Tarlton in the ODNB. Presumably Tarlton might also have written to Leicester, Sidney's uncle, and arguably more closely linked with the players than Walsingham; but apart from anything else, Tarlton knew Leicester to be encamped for a war which he, should the Spanish have landed, might not have survived.

ennobling achievement. Protagonists and readers or playgoers are equally challenged to discriminate between Una and Duessa in *The Faerie Queene*, to decide with Hamlet whether the spirit he has seen is a true ghost or a deceiving devil, or to expose the Black Bishop in Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*. Shakespeare increasingly psychologises the question: whore or saint, liar or honest man, scoffer or lover; which of you shall we say doth love us most? But in the late eighties and early nineties, Shakespeare was experimenting with romantic love and national history, and the task of telling truth from falsehood was a matter of religious and political, and thus of national, importance. Simplicity's achievement at the beginning of *Three Ladies* is made the underlying theme of *Three Lords*, which is transformed from an estate satire into an exercise in Protestant sign-reading that focuses on theatre and civic pageantry, and thence on civic pageantry *as* theatre.

Lord Nemo 'deciphers' Falsehood and Double Dealing, who seek to capture the London ladies recently released from prison (1004-33). Fraud complains that in London 'Fraud, Dissimulation and Simony are disciphered, and being disciphered are also dispised' (1425-35). This power of deciphering is shown by Simplicity (e.g. 1404-13 and 2262-5) as well as by the lords, who seem to consider the Spaniards' disguises their greatest offence and their own ability to expose them their greatest feat (1861-73). When the Spanish herald construes the meaning of the Spanish pages and scutcheons, Policy provides a running commentary: Modesty is really Shame, Action is Ambition, Government is Tyranny. Disguise and dissimulation are employed by the external enemy, the Spaniards, by the internal enemy, the Vices, who are foreign by birth and treacherous by nature - and, arguably, even by the English lords. The detection of double dealing is the prime task of the guardians of the commonweal; vigilance thus becomes specifically Protestant. Robert Wilson grants the Tarltonesque clown (played by Tarlton himself in *Three Ladies* and by Wilson in memory of Tarlton in *Three Lords*) the wisdom and the insight to master this task and thus buttresses the clown's role as a spokesman both for popular political and socio-economic protest and for popular Protestantism.

Robert Wilson and Martin Marprelate were not the only ones who claimed the late great clown for anti-Catholic and/or socially reformist causes. A number of *Tarlton's Jests* are mildly anti-Catholic and anti-clerical, but whoever collected them either did not intend to enter the bidding war for Tarlton's ideological appropriation, or he did so by stressing the generally buffoonish, the non-specific and unpolitical of Tarlton's exploits. The tales adapted anonymously to be published as *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* (registered June 1590), however, are rather more pointedly Protestant. Among the tales related by Tarlton's ghost are four *novelle* from Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, none of them included in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, and two of them among the most strongly anti-clerical in Boccaccio's collection.[170] While Boccaccio's tales conveniently entertain and educate English readers by reminding

[170] *'The Cobler of Caunterburie'* and *'Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie'*, ed. Geoffrey Creigh and Jane Belfield, Leiden, 1987,

them of medieval Roman Catholic Italy and the inherent culpability of its clergy, there are native English tales in *Tarlton's Newes* that rehearse the happy reformation of the English church:

> I know you are not ignorant [Tarlton's ghost says to the dreaming narrator], how in king Edward the sixts dayes all popery and superstition was banished, and the light of the Gospell puld from under the Bushell where it was covered [...] so that all his reliques were abolished, and his idols puld downe, and the Church as neere as they could, cleansed from the dregs of such an Antichrist: whereupon the Painters that livde with such trash, as trimming of shrines and roodes, altars and Saints [cried out], having so little worke that they almost forgot their occupation. (170)

The tale relates how a painter in Doncaster made a rood for the local church when Queen Mary had revoked the Edwardian injunctions against religious images, but that its Christ looked so ghoulish that the parishioners refused to pay the craftsman. The hero of this tale is the Protestant mayor, who advises them to set a pair of horns upon the Christ figure's head and use it as a devil.[171]

Most interesting, however, in view of the cultural tug-of-war for possession of the icon of 'Tarlton', is the narrative frame of *Tarltons Newes*. The narrator introduces his conventional 'news-out-of-hell' tale with a lament about the sad state of the theatre:

> Sorrowing as most men doe for the death of Richard Tarlton, [the] wonted desire to see playes left me, in that although I sawe as rare showes, and heard as loftly verse, yet I injoyed not those woonted sports that flowed from him as from a fountain, of pleasing and merry conceits. (144)

This modern kind of theatre is boycotted:

> after his [i.e. Tarlton's] death I mourned in conceit, and absented myself from all playes, as wanting that merrie Roscius of Players [...,] yet at last, as the longest Sommers day hath his night, so this dumpe had an ende: and forsooth upon whitson monday last I would needes to the Theatre to see a play. (145)

But, and this passage has often been quoted before, the unruly crowd at the Theatre deters him and he falls asleep under a tree. In his dream, a clownish figure appears to him, which he identifies with a start as 'the very ghost of Richard Tarlton'. Real affection for his late friend seems to be expressed by the author when he describes the ghost's response: 'which [i.e. the dreamer's fright] he perceiving, with his woonted countenance full of smiles began to comfort me thus. What olde acquaintance, a man or a mouse?' (145). But gentle mockery does not reassure the narrator, and like a good Protestant he suspects the ghost of being a demonic spirit: 'Ghost thou art none, but a very divel (for the soules of them which are departed [...] never returne into the world againe till the generall resurrection'. Tarlton reassures him by pretending to defend the doctrine of purgatory on the grounds that 'many Popes and

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[171] Protestant mockery of the doctrine of transubstantiation is incorporated into the tale about Pope Boniface. - Belfield discusses the likeliest authors of *Tarltons Newes* (Robert Greene, Robert Armin, Thomas Nashe, even Shakespeare), and briefly considers Robert Wilson. The title-page gives the pseudonym 'Robin Goodfellow' and states that the author is an 'old Companion' of Tarlton, both of which clues might fit Robert Wilson. Belfield decides against Wilson, however, on account of his allegorical stage plays, but it should be noted that Wilson was a versatile writer: Thomas Lodge commended him for a poem or play on Catiline, 'shorte and sweete if I were judge, a peece surely worthy prayse, the practise of a good scholler, would the wiser would overlooke [i.e. peruse] that, they may perhaps cull some wisdome out, of a players toye,' quoted in Mithal, ed. *'Three Ladies' and 'Three Lords'*, lxvi-lxviii.

holy Bishops of Rome, whose Cannons cannot erre, have taught us what this Purgatorie is' (145-6). If Tarlton seemed a suitable mouthpiece for this kind of Reformation satire, it was presumably both because his mode of 'music-hall' routine could not be popular without also being to some extent Protestant and because there were those - like the anonymous author - who had an interest in claiming him for their Edwardian brand of radical Protestantism.

This reappearance of Tarlton in a dream, be it noted, happens at Whitsun, the holiday that commemorates the Gift of the Tongues after Christ's resurrection. The narrator has an apostolic vocation; he is infused with the spirit of Tarlton to spread 'his word' and, significantly, to set it down in writing.[172] The term 'prophecy' is not mentioned, but the genre is clearly suggested. In this case, however, the institution in the hands of detractors is not the commonwealth, however, but the theatre. The niggling remark about 'lofty verse' may not be the only jibe at new-fangled plays. Tarlton's purgatory looks suspiciously like the Theatre playhouse:

> At the first you shall come into a very sumptuous hall, richelie hanged with tapistrie, so fine and so curious, that the most cutthroate Broaker in England would take the worst of the hangings for a sufficient pawne: In this hall shall you see an infinite number of seates, formed and seated like an Amphitheatre: wherein are royally, nay more then royally placed all the Popes. (147)

The Theatre was no hall, but precisely an amphitheatre hung with tapestry. By satiric implication, then, the playgoers attending performances at the Theatre, presumably by a company other than the Queen's Men now bereft of Tarlton (who from 1589 were more often on tour than in London), are attending an event that is, implicitly, at odds with the aims envisaged by the popular English reformers, if not directly adverse to them. To any reader who was moderately informed about the stakes involved in the contemporary theatre's struggle for respectability, this would be an easily recognisable broadside in the battles about this theatre's social, cultural and political allegiances. By contrast with Tarlton's tales, the theatre after his death has become a place that no longer disseminates anti-clerical satire and no longer bothers to teach audiences to beware of idolatrous practices and to understand the new doctrine of the Lord's Supper. In this new kind of theatre, 'popes' and papists can once more expect to be entertained.

Henry Chettle's *Kind-Heart's Dream*, published two years later, lacks the meta-theatrical layer of application, but it resembles *Tarltons Newes* in that the narrator falls asleep (in his case from drink) and five figures of public renown appear to him, Tarlton among them. Tarlton's ghost complains that he has been forgotten in a time dominated by puritan money-makers: 'I see hypocrisie hath the upper

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[172] Apparently Whit Sunday was the most popular date for attending holy communion in Jacobean London, so the incident reverberates in the context of clerics' complaints that the stage drew a greater audience than the pulpit. Jeremy Boulton has found that in the Southwark parish of St Saviour's almost twice as many people attended services on Whit Sunday and Trinity Sunday than on Easter Sunday itself ('The Limits of Formal Religion: The Administration of Holy Communion in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart London,' *London Journal* 10 (1984), 135-154, 147-8). The re-appearance of Tarlton thus directly competes with the (commemoration of the) re-appearance of Christ.

hand, and her spirit raignes in this profitable generation'.[173] With sardonic irony he argues that playhouses should, indeed, be closed down because they prevent people from frequenting bowling-alleys, dicing-houses and brothels: 'its pitie players should hinder their takings a peny'. Like Lyly in *Pappe With an Hatchet*, Chettle's Tarlton points out the theatre's potential to *maintain* law and order in the city in that it 'opens', that is, exposes cony-catching tricks and other abuses of the time in order to warn people of them. True to his vocation of 'honest mirth', Tarlton regrets the brawls and fights that often break out at playhouses. In this he is entirely on the side of the city fathers and emphatically defends the theatre's place in the urban social order: 'In a place so civill as this cittie is esteemed, it is more than barbarously rude to see the shamefull disorder and routes that sometime in such publicke meetings are used.' *A propos* the anti-theatrical civic elite 'that maligne our moderate merriments, and thinke there is no felicitie but in excessive possession of wealth', Kind-Heart adds his own outrage at unconscionable landlords. Here the communal ideals of the social reformer are still clearly audible in the attack upon established Protestants:

> Pitie it is such wolves are not shakte out of sheep's cloathing. Elder times detested such extremitie. The gospel's liberty (howsoever some libertines abuse it) gives no such licence: by their avarice religion is slandered, lewdnes is bolstered

In 'elder times', Kind-Heart nostalgically remembers, clergymen and wealthy citizens supported the poor instead of bleeding them still further. 'O charitable love, happy tenants of so kinde a landlady! I warrant ye this usurie is within the statute'. Kind-Heart's complaints are so similar to Wilson's agenda that it seems warranted to argue that Chettle chose Tarlton as a mouthpiece against anti-theatrical city magistrates and rack-renting because the clown had been closely associated with the populist politics also expressed in Wilson's plays. At the same time, however, the theatre's - and thus the clown's - essential conformity is heavily stressed. Suspicion falls on the moral probity of 'possessioners', not on that of the players.

These are some examples of the ways in which the figure of Richard Tarlton was recruited after his death by those partisan forces who were ready to pick a quarrel with the Elizabethan church and government because they had betrayed the hopes of the social reformers and the common people, because they had not carried the Reformation far enough or had misused popular enthusiasm for change to further their own selfish causes. Tarlton was an asset to his 'friends' not only because he was a great comedian but because he embodied a tradition of native feistiness that had been anti-establishment in the days when the establishment had been Roman Catholic and that was at least potentially anti-establishment now that the establishment was officially and magisterially Protestant. Radical Protestants and adherents to the native traditions of popular protest culture were likely to miss

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[173] Henry Chettle, *Kind-Heart's Dream Containing Five Apparitions With Their Invectives Against Abuses Reigning*, in *Early English Poetry, Ballads, and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward F. Rimbault, 5 vols., vol. 5, New York, 1841, 35-43. Nashe had put forward the same argument in *Pierce Penilesse*, published in August 1592.

Tarlton not only for his extemporising virtuosity but for his authority in the political forum of public theatre. I do not mean to argue that Richard Tarlton was a Protestant partisan. Too little reliable information about him has survived, and on the whole it seems unlikely. But there is some evidence that interested parties cast him in this role, most forcefully after his death, when his image was to some extent available for appropriation from various sides.

1.4 Reformed London on Stage: *The Three Lords and the Three Ladies of London*

> Your mind is tossing on the ocean,
> There where your argosies with portly sail
> Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,
> Or as it were the pageants of the sea,
> Do overpeer the petty traffickers,
> That cur'sy to them, do them reverence,
> As they fly by them with their woven wings.[174]

Robert Wilson's *London*-plays - although they did not win him the dramatic and cultural contest against Marlowe and Shakespeare - mark a significant stage in the development of one of the major genres of Elizabethan drama. By focusing his enquiry about the state of the Reformation on London, Wilson brought traditional urban satire into the commercial playhouses and thus laid the foundations for late Elizabethan city/citizen comedy.[175]

London had responded to the continental Reformation sooner and with more alacrity than any other English town or area. The author of *An Apologie of the Cittie of London* appended by John Stow to his *Survey of London* in 1603 declares that 'the doctrine of God is more fitly delivered, and the discipline thereof more aptly to bee executed, in peopled townes then abroad, by reason of the facilitie of common and often assembling'.[176] Quite apart from its proximity to the royal court and the injunctions issued from there, London was one of the ecclesiastical centres of worship and administration as well as a loadstone that attracted humanist and reformist thinkers. It harboured Protestant refugees from France, the Netherlands and the German principalities; literacy was higher than anywhere else in the kingdom; continental Lutheranism and Calvinism was imported by religious refugees and by trading connections; and its size, commerce and social mobility had rationalised life to an extent unimaginable to a farmer from the North or the West Country. 'No service must God expect of us,' observed Thomas Nashe at the same time as the author of the *Apologie of London* enthused about London's

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[174] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 1.1.8-14.

[175] It makes sense, I believe, to distinguish anti-mercantile, anti-romantic city comedy as presented mainly at the indoor playhouses from the more reconciliatory comedies *about and for* citizens offered at the amphitheatres; but the exceptions to this rule are almost as telling as the rule, see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing*, 147-63. Cf. Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, and Alexander Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*, Toronto, 1973.

[176] Stow, *Survey*, vol. 2, 197.

godliness, 'but a little in Lent, and in sickness and adversity.'[177] Religious indifference was rarely converted into Protestant fervour, but neither did it exert much pressure on friends, neighbours or fellow citizens who felt attracted to the new ideas and chose to worship God in a reformed way. Urban merchant-magistrates found much in the new religion to recommend itself to their secular endeavours and priorities, and much that lent itself to the development of new ideologies of cultural differentiation and social control. London was the main stage on which the conflict of interests between 'popular' or grass-roots Protestantism and the 'magisterial' Protestantism of the civic authorities was enacted: 'if London were reformed,' Patrick Collinson quotes Bishop Cox to Archbishop Parker, 'all the realm would soon follow'.[178] Consequently, the reformation of London's institutions and its inhabitants became a major focus in estate satires that upheld the social values of the Edwardian reformers.

THE THREE LADIES OF LONDON

The Prologue to *The Three Ladies of London* (1583) is very conscious of introducing a new kind of play, and it perfectly hits the tone and point of a score of later prologues to city comedies. Predictably, this urban estate satire dwells on its ties with traditional popular culture only to announce its place in the new, as yet unfamiliar entertainment business. For eleven long lines the Prologue lists what it does *not* offer: no fireworks, no devils, no ghosts, no battles, no milkmaids, hedgers, husbandmen or farmers, not even 'talke of loves delights':

> You marvel then what stuffe we have to furnish out our showe.
> Your patience yet we crave a while, till we have trimd our stall:
> Then young and olde come and behold our wares, and buy them all.
> Then if our wares shall seeme to you, well woven, good and fine,
> We hope we shall your custome have, againe an other time. (Prol. 14-8)

The play addresses playgoers as consumers (and, significantly, also as play*readers*)[179] who reward the players not with their love or their good opinion - offerings that would have contented an acting troupe paid beforehand by the magistrate or noble householder - but with the money they pay. Like vendors of any other sort of goods, the players have to create a name and, if possible, a reliable clientele for themselves in order to survive. This is no carnival, but commerce; not romance, mythology, war or pastoral, but a play about the urban environment.

The topicality and liveliness of Wilson's dramatisation of urban homily is felt in Lady Conscience, who enters singing a song to vend her brooms and then embarks on a little market-place sermon on

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[177] Thomas Nashe, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* (1593), *Works*, ed. McKerrow, vol. 2, 144.

[178] Collinson, *Puritan Movement*, 75.

[179] McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, suggest that one of the major disadvantages of the Queen's Men's plays in competition with Marlowe's and Shakespeare's was that their dramatic style did not lend itself to the medium of print, 155-6. To be read in print was an ambition playwrights for adult companies were only just developing; *Three Ladies* was among the first plays by an adult company to be printed at all, see also *ibid.*, 84-6.

the ills of usury and hard-heartedness (1287-1326). The topical immediacy of London salespeople's 'cries' is combined with a traditional complaint and gives it a fresh impact. A similarly light but poignant urban touch is given to Lady Lucre's preparation of her amorous adventures. She pays Conscience to provide a secluded little love-nest for her:

> decke up thy poore Cottage hansomely:
> And for that purpose I have five thousandes Crownes in store, [...]
> But onely see thy roomes be neat when I shall thither resort:
> With familiar friendes to play and passe the time in sport:
> For the Deputie, Cunstable, and spitefull neighbours doe spy, pry, and eye about my house:
> That I dare not be once merrie within, but still mute like a mouse. (1366-73)[180]

Prying neighbours were (and are) not a specifically urban nuisance, but close surveillance of the kind mentioned by Lucre pretty much was. In Elizabethan London the ward inquest was very active in controlling the conduct of the inhabitants, including heterodoxy and sexual misdemeanours. When zealous citizens developed the ambition to turn London into a godly city, the corruption of morals became the centre of attention.[181] Deputy, constable and neighbour might have felt it their duty as well as their 'spitefull' pleasure to keep tabs on Lucre and report her to the wardmote for loose living and ill behaviour. But Wilson is not writing against proto-bourgeois narrow-mindedness but against Lucre's anti-social activities, and he is rallying the civic authorities at ward and parish level to prosecute them more strictly. This ties with historians' findings that the ward inquest was most active in the crisis decades before the turn of the century, when economic grievances and religious rigidity were intense. Wilson's grasp of the intricate web of exploitation of the poor by the rich appears in Lucre's brazen explanation of her plan:

> Seeing thou hast got a corner fit where few neighbours dwell,
> And they be of the poorest sorte which fits our turne so right:
> Because they dare not speake against our sportes and sweete delight,
> And if they should (alas their wordes) would nought at al be wayd,
> And for to speake before my face, they wil al be afrayd. (1392-6)

These may be the summer-houses so deplored by John Stow, built outside the walls, later in the suburbs near the slums of the out-parishes.[182] Destitution and decadence reside side by side - as, in fact, the poor and the rich did in all twenty-six wards of the city until the end of the seventeenth century - the latter protected by the social prejudices against the former. The destitution of the poor becomes a literal and figurative shelter for those who exploit them and damage the commonwealth; this is

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[180] Jeremy Boulton, 'Neighbourhood Migration in Early Modern London', *Migration and Society in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Clark and David Souden, London, 1987, 107-49, states that people renting cheap and ill-furnished accommodation in the back-street alleys and yards were not sentimentally attached to it: 'the house, particularly for those in the lower social orders [...] was not the most important living place or 'home' that it is today' (126). Lucre's emphasis on interior decoration thus adds insult to injury.

[181] See Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 143-4 and 472.

[182] See Stow, *Survey*, vol. 1, 78. In line 1468 Dissimulation speaks of the 'sommer parlor' to which the wedding guests will be invited.

certainly a more precise and poignant observation than the bland invective against landlords and rack-renting in *Peddler* and *Cobbler*. The play sides with the city fathers in that it regrets that the old municipal institutions were failing to monitor citizen misdemeanours as efficiently as could be wished. But whereas the play advocates closer surveillance of the high and mighty, the magistrates were looking for ways to control paupers and vagrants.

Socio-political and religious satire merge most effectively in the subplot, which is set in Turkey. Mercatore, the Italian merchant working for Lucre, agrees to become a Muslim in order to have his debts remitted by the Turks. The whole subplot leads up to the familiar moralistic lament that 'Jewes seeke to excell in Christianitie, and the Christians in Jewishnes' (1754), but it also exposes greed and deceit as the motives for religious conversion and is thus a satiric jibe against Protestant merchant-magistrates and the ill-effects their rule was having on the general moral spirit.[183] This proto-type of Elizabethan city comedy thus fuses the satiric portrayal of the conditions of urban life with a denunciation of the apparent failure of religious reform. Ecclesiastical mismanagement is directly linked with socio-economic exploitation and moral abuses, and all three are illustrated with a focus on London.

THE THREE LORDS AND THE THREE LADIES OF LONDON

Three Lords is not usually read - if it is read at all[184] - as a satire of the London government, as I propose to do, but in the context of the Armada, nationalism in the public playhouses, and Elizabethan war plays in general. However, if propagandistic journalism had been Wilson's object, he would no doubt have evoked a livelier remembrance of the one major sea battle off Gravelines in August 1588, or have staged the news of the providential storm, as Dekker and Heywood would do in their plays about the Armada. But he hardly mentions the Armada at all, and his heroes are Londoners, not English noblemen.[185]

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[183] There is another topical aspect to the mention of Turkey: in the late 1570s Sir Francis Walsingham had written a treatise on the advantages of trade with Turkey in order to facilitate economic and political transactions with that part of the world. The play's Turkey subplot thus implies a criticism of trade monopolies: 'By the Turkey Company patent of 1581, the Crown granted the whole of the lucrative Middle Eastern market to a single joint-stock company of just twelve merchants,' Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution. Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653*, Cambridge, 1993, 62.

[184] Henning bluntly states in his introduction to *Fair Em* that *Three Ladies* 'is one of the dreariest plays extant' and that *Three Lords* is 'Indistinguishable in quality' (62). Mithal, who edited both plays, approves only of the first part: '*Three Lords* is free from that vein of satire which marks *Three Ladies*. By itself the play lacks individuality of its own,' xxv. Even in accounts of early Elizabethan drama that grant a place to Robert Wilson as a political writer - like Heinemann, 'Political Drama' and Helgerson, *Nationhood* - *Three Lords* receives the least attention, certainly the least appreciation.

[185] Diligence the messenger sounds as if the enemy had already disembarked: 'they come as challengers, [...] / Mounting the seas, and measuring the land / With strong imaginations of successe' (1308-11). - Compare Heywood's treatment of the theme some fifteen years later in *2 If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*, in which a Chorus asks the audience to 'Imagine you now see them under sail, / Swell'd up with many a proud, vaineglorious boast, / And newly enter'd in our English coast' (333). He proceeds to bring the Spaniards' vainglorious boasts on

The contemporary custom of conducting international relations by military means is presented as a tale of chivalry and native romance. The English and the Spanish are to meet as knights in the lists, not as fleets on the Channel. This displacement shows a much surer satiric touch than Wilson's earlier plays. By the mid-Elizabethan years, courtly tilts and tournaments, formerly often lethally dangerous, had become more of a showy sport or a sporting ritual than a ritualised way for kings and noblemen to maim each another.[186] At the same time, London's civic elite had well and truly jumped on the courtly pageant wagon of epic elevation with neo-feudal trappings - 'toys' of contemporary elite culture which Francis Bacon would only reluctantly admit among his 'serious observations' on masques and triumphs.[187] When mid-Tudor court culture withered in the troubles of succession and regency, London's merchant-magistrates assumed a pose of unblemished loyalty to crown and commonwealth and slipped into the courtiers' chivalric habiliments:

> Enabling Londoners to reflect with pride upon the origins of their city and its place in the history of culture, the decor of chivalry legitimized their standing in the realm, masked their novel economic pursuits as traditional loyalty, and provided a pageantic language of parity and reciprocity in which to negotiate their relationships to the crown and aristocracy.[188]

Clothing London's economic ascendancy over the rest of the country as feudal grandeur allowed London's city fathers to amass wealth and power without seeming personally greedy or ambitious - or so official ideology would have it. The basic contradictions, however, between the civic ideal of service of the commonwealth, the chivalric ideal of individual heroism and the blatant materialism of wealthy merchants were becoming more glaring and available for satire as the city fathers' public self-celebrations became more elaborate in the last Elizabethan decades.[189]

As a piece of anti-Spanish propaganda, the play remains tricky. Directly after the danger was past, most pamphlets enlarged upon the Spaniards' superior strength, the size and number of their ships, and thus on the wondrous escape the English were granted by God.[190] Not long afterwards, the polemical

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stage and to describe the Armada in colourful detail (335). Elizabeth, who in fact came to Tilbury after everything was over, appears to march in the vanguard of the English army (337); the sea battle at Gravelines is drawn out into reports by several messengers (339-41), *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*, 6 vols., vol. 1, New York, 1964 (references are to page numbers). - Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon* is more indebted to the traditions of Reformation drama and comes nearer in method to Wilson's play in that it does not go for a realistic portrayal but foregrounds the playwright's interpretation of the Armada in terms of Protestant historiography. Mythological and allegorical figures intermingle, but like Heywood Dekker puts the queen centre-stage at Tilbury and even brings the battle on stage (5.4: '*The sea fight*', and 5.5).

186 See Richard C. McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood. The Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry*, Berkeley, 1989, 21-3.

187 Bacon, 'Of Masques and Triumphs,' *Essays*, ed. John Strachan, Ware, 1997, 105-7, 105.

188 Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 1995, 186, see also 184-5 and 128-30.

189 On Elizabethan civic pageantry, see David M. Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642*, London, 1971, and Manley, *Literature and Culture*, chap. 5.

190 See e.g. Anthony Marten, *An Exhortation to Stirre Up the Mindes of all her Majesty's Faithfull Subjects to Defend Their Countrey in the Dangerous Time From the Invasion of Enemies* (1588): 'What Barbarian, Turke or Tyrant would seeke to conquere his neighbour by fraude; to gayne to his sect, by falshood; to bereeve a Prince of hir kingdome, by villainy; of hir subjects, by disloyaltie; of her life, by treachery; and of all their lives and soules, by hypocrisie?,'

strategy was modified towards a belittling of the Spanish forces - of war and of character - in order to instil in the English people a confidence not only of God's providence but of their own prowess.[191] Wilson, in as much as his play is a piece of anti-Spanish propaganda, follows this second strategy. The threat posed by the Armada is definitely to be taken seriously, but from the start the emphasis lies on the ostentation of their approach as much as on their rapacious violence or their godlessness. They arrive '[i]n braverie and boast' (1254), they 'brave it out in show' (1304), when challenged to fight they 'make show of comming forward and sodainly depart' (1796). As soldiers they present a poor show, but as a show they are first-rate. To a polemicist writing about the Armada, the two motifs of deliverance and effortless superiority presented a difficulty that is also felt in a ballad written about half a century after the event:

> The Spanish Armado
> did England no harm,
> 'Twas but a Bravado
> to give us alarm:
> But with our five frigats,
> we did them bumbast,
> And made them of English Men's
> valour to taste.[192]

If the Spanish are little more than braggarts, the English gain little glory by defeating them. In fact, they *had* gained little glory. The Navy was too ill-equipped to chase the Armada up the North Sea: 'Our parsimony at home hath bereaved us of the famousest victory that ever our nation had at sea', one of the sea captains lamented; and Walsingham had been mortified that the realm was 'so slightly regarded and so carelessly provided for'.[193] If the Spanish had managed to land on English soil, the English army would have been hard put to repel them: 'So our half-doing doth breed dishonour and leaves the disease uncured.'[194] The greatest success of the year 1588 was the *topos* of national unity, not the fact of it.

Three Lords is set far more emphatically in London than any of Wilson's other plays or any other play performed by the Queen's Men, an emphasis that may seem to blur the focus of a dramatisation of the intended invasion of the country by a continental foe. On the face of it, the play celebrates London's dominance over foreign enemies (the Spanish) and domestic rivals (the Lincoln lords who come to

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quoted in Martina Mittag, *Nationale Identitätsbestrebungen und antispanische Polemik im englischen Pamphlet, 1558-1630*, Frankfurt/Main, 1993, 58. - See also Cressy's chapter on 'The Spanish Armada: Anxiety, Deliverance and Commemoration,' *Bonfires and Bells*, 110-29.

191 See Mittag, *Nationale Identitätsbestrebungen*, 63-4, 67 and 78-87.

192 Quoted in John J. McAleer, 'Ballads on the Spanish Armada,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 4 (1963), 602-12, 609.

193 Quoted in Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 111.

194 Quoted in Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 294.

woo the London ladies) as the most obvious and praiseworthy manifestations of its excellence. The tradition of *laudes civitates*, in which a city's beauty, glory, loyalty, religiousness and commercial power were recommended to all the world, was flourishing in late Elizabethan England, and of course London received the bulk of the attention. But since it was both the jewel in the English crown and a thorn in the monarch's (and the whole country's) side, the praise lavished on the city was usually and increasingly intermingled with anxiety or disapproval. Its glory could be seen as arrogance, its economic activities exploited the provincial towns and the country, and its size and secularisation encouraged a worldly, irreligious life-style.[195]

Accordingly, the London lords are deeply ambiguous, hybrid creatures. Policy, Pomp and Pleasure may be English aristocrats, possibly alluding to the English generals Effingham, Leicester and Hunsdon, who were confronted by three less fortunate Spanish lords, Parma, Medina and Guyse.[196] But they may also be gentrified London aldermen, members of the civic elite who imitate their social superiors in manner and bearing. The question is answered in the play:

> Simplicity. I forgot to aske you whither your three Lords of London be courtiers or Cittiners?
> Wit. Citizens borne and courtiers brought up: Is this all? Farewell. *Exit.*
> Simplicity. Citizens borne and Courtiers brought up, I thinke so, for they that be borne in London are halfe Courtiers before they see the Court, for finesse and mannerlinesse oh passing, my manners and misbehaviour is mended halfe in halfe since I gave over being a meal-man and came to dwell in London. (460-8)

Citizens born and courtiers brought up: the dream of any family of rich London merchants. The play acknowledges the 'civilising' air of the capital city even as it satirises its wealthier citizens' social aspirations, which contain the seeds of betrayal. More frequent in citizen comedy was the inverted situation of 'nobleman born, citizen brought up,' upon which Heywood bases his tale of the four prentices and William Rowley his version of Crispin and Crispianus in *A Shoemaker, a Gentleman*; Dekker adapts it in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. The inherent nobility of urban trade appears in the denouement that reveals the noble birth of valiant and patriotic artisans. The status of Wilson's London lords remains ambiguous and thus satiric rather than romantic.

The title page of *Three Ladies* says that 'it hath beene publiquely played'. Although the title page of the only extant edition of *Three Lords* is cut, we may infer from the stage directions of the last scene that it too was acted on an outdoor stage, that is, either in an innyard or in a public playhouse.[197] The audience of playgoers is addressed as citizen-spectators by being welcomed as to a civic procession:

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[195] See e.g. Manley, *Literature and Culture*, chap, 2: 'London and the Languages of Tudor Complaint' and chap. 3: 'From Matron to Monster: London and the Languages of Description'.

[196] See John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols., New York, 1823, vol. 2, 531 and 533 for contemporary reports on the Armada.

[197] Fraud is tied to one stage post, Simplicity is made to run at the other. See Richard Southern, *The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare*, London, 1973, 547-68. - McMillin and MacLean conclude that 'the Queen's Men did not settle in one London theatre (they seem to have moved among the playing spaces, as though they were on tour even in London),' *Queen's Men*, 6. Gurr specifies the Red Bull (innyard) and the Bell (indoor hall) as well as the Theatre and

> Enter for the Preface, a Lady very richly attyred, representing London, having two Angels before her, and two after her with bright Rapiers in their handes.

The three lords enter with their pages bearing their painted shields, the most stately opening a play could have. There is as yet no irritation, no disturbance as in the opening procession of gods in *Cobbler*, with Mars in fancy finery and Cynthia melancholy. The fact that 'thus' was sufficiently precise to refer to the deliverance from Spanish invasion indicates that the play was indeed performed very soon after Tarlton's death:

> Lo, Gentles, thus the Lord dooth London guard,
> Not for my sake, but for his owne delight. [...]
> This blessing is not my sole benefit,
> All England is, and so preserved hath bene,
> Not by mans strength, his pollicie and wit,
> But by a power and providence unseene. (1-15)

The audience will, in fact, see how Lord Policy, assisted by his page Wit, will lead the English in their encounters with the Spanish – yet the Prologue disclaims the significance of 'mans strength, his pollicie and wit' in winning the recent war. Still, the atmosphere is ceremonious and grave and becomes even more so when the lords hang up their shields and announce their intention to try for London's Lucre, Love and Conscience and to challenge all rivals. So far the allegory romantically presents the work, care and ambition of London's city fathers as chivalric service for the corporate commonwealth, a neo-feudal fantasy that fits in well with the self-image propagated by London's aldermen in narrative and pageantry.

This very gratifying association is progressively undercut, however, as the three lords begin to quarrel and the metaphor is inverted: knights trying for a prize (i.e. the lady/the city) turn into squabbling aldermen posturing as knights.[198] Their boys quarrel about the nobility of their masters' personal emblems and the relative worth of their qualities. Ironically, it is precisely these bragging exchanges that alert the audience to the vagaries of interpretation: Pomp, his page insists, is by no means to be misunderstood as pride, it is magnificence, and Pleasure is not voluptuousness, it is 'kind conceit' (161-6). Only Wit, Policy's boy, is too clever to affirm his master's dark side by denying its existence, but Policy was a fairly well-known morality vice anyway.[199]

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the Curtain, *Playing Companies*, 202.

[198] Pleasure wants Lucre 'To beare the charge of sportes and delightes' (1143), Pomp wants her 'to support the haughty magnificence / And lordly Pomp of Londons excellence' (1144-5), Policy more generally 'As guerdon of my studies and my cares / And high employments in the common wealth' (1150-1). These uses of wealth do not correspond with the exhortations of contemporary moralists like Thomas Rogers, who translated *A Godlie Treatice Concerning the Lawful Use of Ritches* (1578): '[...] to maintain religion [...] to adorne the Commonweales [...to] maintain his houshold [...] to releive the poore,' quoted in White, *Social Criticism*, 263.

[199] At best, policy could be defined as a patriotic kind of dissimulation in the service of queen and country; at worst, it is merely a way to 'get': in William Wager's *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, Covetousness asks his fellows which false name he should assume, Policy or Wit? They reflect that 'without a policy all commodity will slake' and reserve the name Ready Wit for Precipitation, *'The Longer Thou Livest' and 'Enough is as Good as a Feast'*, ed. R. Mark Benbow, Lincoln/Nebr., 1967, line 766. See also *The Tyde Taryeth No Man* (c. 1575), in which Christianity is lumbered with

The generic conventions of allegorical morality undermine a reading of the protagonists as virtuous models of patriotism, and Wilson should be allowed to have intended this effect rather than having ineptly stumbled upon it. It was customary for the Vices, especially in Reformation moralities, to work mischief under an assumed name, often a virtuous inversion of their true essence. Skelton had used this device of the *alias* in his pre-Reformation *Magnyfycence*, Bale had done so in *King Johan*, and Udall's pro-Catholic *Respublica* includes a lengthy comic routine in which Insolence, Oppression and Adulation practice calling each other by their false names, Authority, Reformation and Honesty. As Udall's Prologue puts it: 'by counterfaicte Names hidden their abusion / Do Reigne for a while to comon weales prejudice' (24-5). The Vices' leader, Avarice, exploits the widow Respublica under the guise of Policy, observing with Machiavellian candour a political truth that would have reverberated in Wilson's time: 'The name of policie is of none suspected, / Polycye is ner of any crime detected' (83-4).

In *Three Lords*, Wilson introduces the theme of disguise and interpretation in the context not of religious conflict or war (of course both the Vices and the popish enemy will present themselves under false identities) but of rivalry among the members of the civic elite, among the wealthy and influential livery companies. The transfer of allegorical morality figures to a history-play structure insidiously creates an identification of the London lords with the morality Vices. As a war play, *Three Lords* naturally foregrounds the English heroes, but as a morality play its central, most active characters are the *Vices* in the commonwealth – and the central, most active characters in *Three Lords* are the three lords.[200]

The drama presented by playing companies that were patronised by the Tudor champions of the Protestant cause had distinct aesthetic as well as political objectives. The two were correlated in an ideology that subordinated dazzling images to plain speech, self-indulgent ornament to socially responsible message, individual glorification to public service, tradition to history. This list of priorities characterises the 'Protestant history play' as it was first developed and made popular by the Queen's Men and later developed by Henslowe's Admiral's Men.[201] It should be noted that the Queen's Men's most significant contribution to contemporary drama was simultaneously one of the last manifestations of English Reformation literature as it has been defined by John King: 'a fusion of unbroken and

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the sword of Policy and the shield of Riches, which are at last turned into the sword of God's word and the shield of Faith, and *New Custom* (c. 1565/6), in which the Vice Ignorance comes in the guise of Simplicity.

[200] Note that Martin Marprelate would habitually call Bishop Aylmer by the name of his diocese, e.g. 'And truely, my Lorde of London, I marveile you suffer these men all this while, to trouble the state by their preachings,' *The Just Censure and Reproofe of Martin Junior*, A3v. In Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* (1603), Bishop Bonner is likewise addressed as 'my Lord of London'. - Martin Marprelate calls Aylmer 'metropolitan' when he speculates that the Spaniards might come and 'steale him [...] away' because 'our metropolitans religion and theirs differ not much,' *Epistle*, 25. In *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, Rome is called 'the great Metropolis, / Where sits the Pope in all his holy pompe' (1617-18).

[201] See e.g. Annabel Patterson, 'Sir John Oldcastle as Symbol of Reformation Historiography,' *Religion, Literature and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688*, ed. Donna B Hamilton and Richard Strier, Cambridge, 1996, 6-26; or Helgerson, *Nationhood*, 230-40, on Henslowe's populist history plays.

continuous native traditions with new Protestant ideas'.[202] After all, the company had been 'formed to spread Protestant and royalist propaganda through a divided realm and to close a breach within radical Protestantism. [...] The English history play came to prominence through this motive'.[203]

Robert Wilson experimented with the 'interplay between the lowly and the powerful', 'the lowly and the exalted', 'the lowly and the stately' that was so characteristic of the drama of the 1580s, including the early history plays. His main dramatic achievement is the way in which he transfers this structural device to city comedy and mingles not kings and clowns but gentrified aldermen and poor urban migrants.[204] *Three Lords* is the first Elizabethan play about contemporary London politics, a satire about London's oligarchic rulers that was modelled on the pattern of popular history plays.

Filling the power vacuum left by the Roman Catholic church, Elizabethan and Jacobean civic magistrates found it opportune to adopt the politics of spectacle by which the medieval church had imparted its messages to the community. This pomp of power remained the stuff for social criticism in the playhouses. In William Rowley's *A New Wonder, a Woman Never Vex't* (1611-14), a citizen comedy set in late fifteenth-century London, sheriff Stephen Forster is berated by his brother, whom he has had unjustly imprisoned:

> Get thee from my sight, thou divell in red
> Com'st thou in scarlet pride to tread on thy poor
> Brother in a Jayle[?][205]

In *1 Henry VI*, set at roughly the same time, the 'scarlet hypocrite' is the Bishop of Winchester, thus abused by Good Duke Humphrey of Gloucester (1.3.56). After the breach with Rome, the red of the cardinal's velvet remained a colour of equivocation, now because it was associated with the worldly robes of state.[206]

This historical succession was mirrored on the public stage. In show and splendour - and often in culpability and ambition as well - the strutting monarchs and vain magistrates of the mid-Elizabethan history plays were descended from the popish antagonists in earlier Protestant allegories and estate satires, and ultimately from the Devils and Vices in medieval drama. Marlowe could not but admire these extraordinary and wildly extroverted overreachers. But to the Queen's Men's playwrights, as to

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202 King, *English Reformation Literature*, 14.

203 McMillian and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 33. - University drama had recounted English history decades before professional theatre had been established in London, but within the commercial entertainment business, the Queen's Men were the first who had the resources and the motive to pick up that theme.

204 The novelty of Wilson's depiction of London society *sans* nobility becomes clearer when seen as prefiguring John Stow's similar procedure in his *Survey of London*. The urban society presented there consists of a fairly small mercantile and governing elite at the top, a large group of middling freemen and their families, and a yet much larger group of apprentices, servants, labourers, and paupers. Wilson's lords represent the first group, Simplicity the lowest stratum of the second – he and Penurie are poor, but he is free of the city.

205 William Rowley, *A New Wonder, a Woman Never Vex't* (printed 1632), 72.

206 Note the ambivalence John Crosbie, the Lord Mayor in Heywood's *1 Edward IV*, feels about his 'scarlet gowne', worried that he might 'forget' himself, that is, his lowly birth in a foundling's hospital (57).

Philip Henslowe's playwrights a decade later, the destructive potential of these power-hungry individualists still prevailed over their fascination. Visual excitement emanating from pomp and pageantry was understood to be at least potentially anti-social, manipulative and harmful to the common weal; and Wilson's squabbling, posing, pageanteering London lords would not have reassured the audience that they would maintain an transparent and even-handed rule over the city. Protestant drama assessing the success of the Reformation required the audience to pick up not only parodic echoes of the main plot in the comic subplot but also satiric allusions to the splendour of 'the new papists'[207] in the plays' visually exciting representations of processions, pageantry, jousts and battles.

THE CLOWN IN THE CITY

Steven Ozment has found that 'the basic conflict on which the Reformation thrived is seen to be one *within* the cities themselves, in an opposition between lower and middle strata burghers and increasingly plutocratic and oligarchical local governments'.[208] This conflict took many shapes, primarily the elite's efforts to restrict the commoners' participation in government and to control their leisure activities. Wilson, alone among Elizabethan playwrights, dramatises these on-going conflicts by confronting Simplicity the lowly citizen with the London 'lords' in a series of political and cultural clashes.

The social and political complaints expressed in *Three Ladies* and in *Three Lords* were not new in themselves, but the way in which they are integrated into the experience of living in London manifests the emergence of a new, distinct genre. Elizabethan social criticism to some extent preserved its roots in medieval satire and complaint, but these had been fundamentally transformed in the course of the sixteenth century when the tri-part opposition of court, city and country replaced the putatively mutually supportive activities of praying, fighting and working. City life was no longer mainly a trope for a state of religious perfection or imperfection, but a socio-economic reality for a growing number of people, especially life in London.[209] The 'displaced plowman' in Tudor complaint literature embodied the failure of faith, honesty and loyalty in urban surroundings destructive of these qualities.[210] He is one cultural type that was fused by Richard Tarlton into his persona of the urban clown.
One of Tarlton's obituaries expresses the complex interrelation between art and life:

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[207] Steven Ozment has discussed the spectacular politics of the new Protestant rulers under the heading 'The Reformers as New Papists', *Reformation in the Cities*, 151-66.

[208] Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 121.

[209] Tarlton's immigrant clown is one of the 7,000 to 10,000-odd people who arrived in London each year to make it grow, by the end of the century, to a metropolis in the region of 200,000 inhabitants, see Roger Finlay and Beatrice Shearer, 'Population Growth and Suburban Expansion,' *London 1500-1700. The Making of the Metropolis*, ed. A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay, London, 1986, 37-59.

[210] See Manley, *Literature and Culture*, 98-103.

> Here within this sullen earth
> Lies Dick Tarlton, lord of mirth;
> Who in his grave, still laughing, gapes,
> Syth all clownes since have been his apes.
> Earst he of clownes to learne still sought,
> But now they learne of him they taught;
> By art far past the principall,
> The counterfet is so worth all.[211]

The country bumpkin transplanted into the urban environment had become a recognisable 'character' at least on stage and in popular print media, even to the point of becoming a role model for amateur balladeers. With a great comedian's sensitivity for his audience's dreams and fears, he represents the country (the agricultural past) to the city (the commercial present/future) and supplies provincial folk migrating to London with a comic persona to channel their anxieties and comprehend the vagaries of urban life, while also being an embodiment of metropolitan entertainment fads to be imitated by provincials.[212] The stage directions in *Three Ladies* do not specify this, but he may have exchanged this costume of 'bare black' during the performance for one of his others, 'a foule shirt without a band, and in a blew coat with one sleeve, his stockings out at the heeles, and his head full of straw and feathers': recognisably a down-and-out London serving-man.[213] He was no longer part of the traditional, familiar village community, and he was not yet the witty gallant strolling along the Strand with his pipe and his moll, or preening himself and ogling others in St Paul's. He had one foot in the rural past and one foot in the urban present; his audience derived satisfaction from seeing him totter, and triumph from seeing him recover and crush his opponent with a seemingly *ingénue* retort. The psychological functions of this kind of comic act are evident:

> As a surrogate Lord of Misrule, Tarlton the theatrical clown helped to foster in Londoners a new sense of community, shared values, and active participation in the making of a culture. His comedy cut across barriers of class, proving acceptable both at court and in the tavern, because most people could accept the proposition that beneath every human exterior there lurks a coarse anarchic peasant.[214]

Simplicity and his wife Penurie are no Protestant activists, but they are deftly introduced as inhabitants of 'reformed' London. They have internalised not only the urbanites' dream of the one lucky deal that will make them rich but also the Calvinist doctrine of predestination that could be adapted to justify

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[211] John Davies, *Wits Bedlam*, (1617), quoted in Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, 362.

[212] One of Tarlton's 'Cittie Jests' relates how he 'heard a simple Country fellow in an Ale-house, calling for a Kingstone pot of Ale, stept into him and threatned to accuse him of treason, saying: 'Sirra, I have seene and tasted of a penny pot of Ale, and have found good of the price, but of a Kingstone coine I never heard, therefore it is some counterfeit, and I must know how thou camest by it'. Thus intimidated and confused about London beer, vocabulary and treason, the peasant ran from the tavern in fear of his life, *Tarlton's Jests* (printed 1613), B3v. - For more general observations about the interrelations between 'amateur' lampoons and ballads and professional ones, see Ingram, 'Rough Music,' 180.

[213] Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, 363. Nungezer also quotes Henry Peacham remembering Tarlton playing the prodigal son to a rich merchant father in this garb.

[214] Wiles, Shakespeare's Clown, 23.

socio-economic inequality. When he buys a commodity of fashion accessories from Fraud (who is disguised as a Frenchman), Simplicity exults:

> We 'il have a large shop, and sell all maner of wares, and buy more of these, and get ten pound more, and then ten pound, and ten pound, and twenty pound, then thou shalt have a taffeta hat and a garded gown, and I a gown and a new cap, and a silk doublet, and a faire house. (1121-5)

As fantasies of the career of a Dick Whittington go, this is modest stuff. But their determination to 'save and get, and get and save' (1127) expresses as bluntly as possible what Max Weber called 'the Protestant work ethic', complete with Calvinistic superstructure: 'Wel, a man may see, he that's ordained to be rich, shal be rich' (1132-3).

The middling sort of urban Protestants had a sound sense of their own worth, partly founded on distinctly Protestant achievements. When the London lords' pages ask him what he is selling, Simplicity invites them to 'Read and thou shalt see.'

Will.	I cannot read.
Simplicity.	Not read and brought up in London, wentst thou never to schole?
Will.	Yes, but I would not learn.
Simplicity.	Thou wast the more foole: if thou cannot read Ile tel thee, this is Tarltons picture: didst thou never know Tarlton?
Will.	No: what was that Tarlton? (344-50)[215]

Levels of literacy had always been higher among town-dwellers than among the rural population,[216] but the most immediate connotation of rising levels of literacy in sixteenth-century towns was the Protestant emphasis on Scripture, on reading it as well as hearing it. Literacy was not merely a mark of civilisation but also of godliness. Unlike Nashe in *Summer's Will and Testament*, Wilson does not ridicule 'Simplicity' for his learning. It is Will, the gentleman's servant, who embarrasses himself on these two counts when he admits that he cannot read, while Simplicity proves his civil and religious education.[217] His message, significantly, is not the Word of God but of Tarlton the clown: a popular figure of (licensed) anarchy and an actor in a company staging plays with a strongly Protestant, patriotic bias.

Wilson sets up a strong visual contrast between commoners and lords by arranging their media of self-representation - ballads and scutcheons - literally side by side. When Simplicity enters to the pages guarding their masters' coats of arms in order to vend his goods, he finds that he has been elbowed off his plot:

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[215] Richard Levin points out, by referring to a passage in Robert Armin's *Quips upon Questions*, that is, *extempore* banter with the audience, for which especially Tarlton was famous, that Tarlton's picture may have had a wide currency on the stage after his death, *Notes and Queries*, December 2000, 435-6.

[216] See Jeremy Boulton, 'London, 1540-1700,' *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*. Vol. 2: '1540-1840.' Ed. Peter Clark. Cambridge, 2000, 315-346, 329-30.

[217] Cf. the defence of a mother in Edwardian London whose teenaged son had been thrown out of church for mocking the gestures of the consecrating priest: 'My boy shall be here, and […] he is more worthy to be here than thou, for thou canst not read, and thou art a very drunken and a knave priest,' quoted in Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 442.

Simplicity. Truely Child, I sel Ballades: soft, whose wares are these that are up already? I paid rent for my standing, and other folkes wares shall be placed afore mine, this is wise indeed.
Wit. O, the finenes of the wares (man) deserve to have good place.
Simplicity. They are fine indeed, who sels them, can ye tell? Is he free?
Wit. Our Maisters be, we wait on this ware. (231-6)

The putative contrast between popular ballads and noble escutcheons, popular and elite culture, commercial entertainment and chivalric honour, dissolves into ironic similarity. Both ballads and scutcheons were instruments well suited to propagandistic use, both were fictions the people 'buy' even though they should know they are buying 'nothing': 'Come along and buy nothing: fine Ballades, new Ballades, what lack ye?' (478-9).[218] In subsuming heraldic arms under vendable wares, Wilson stresses their nature as artifacts, indeed, as made-to-order fakes. In *The Cobbler's Prophecy*, a herald complains about the decline of his occupation:

We now are faine to wait who growes to wealth,
And come to beare some office in a towne.
And we for money help them unto Armes,
For what cannot the golden tempter doe? (767-72)[219]

The audience of *Three Lords* may have understood that Pleasure's, Pomp's and Policy's arms were bought, not earned, and that they are now displayed but not for sale any more, 'like ripe plummes upon a rich mans tree that set mens teeth a watering when they be not to bee bought' (291-2). A conventional strategy of devaluation, the clown's likening of arms to plums and 'cushens' (295) betrays his boorishness, but it also downgrades the arms themselves.

Although Wilson's obituary appeals to Tarlton's friends and admirers to unite in mourning as they had been united in mirth, the playwright acknowledges that 'popular' culture is no longer common to all, it is 'common' in that the elite no longer shares it:

Simplicity. [W]elth, wil you buy this picture [i. e. Tarlton's] for your Lord?
Wealth. No, it's too base a Present for *pomp*.
Wit. And *policy* seldom regards such a trifle.
Wil. Come on gaffar, come on, I must be your best chapman,
Ile buy it for *pleasure*, hold, there is a groat. (408-13)

Tarlton was in fact ceasing to be a symbol for collective mirth. Like the author of *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie*, Wilson assessed the evolution of the theatre with fatalistic poignancy: Tarlton is dead; his

[218] Dekker inverts this joke in *The Guls Horn-Booke* (1609), where he says that poets 'barter away that light commodity of words for a lighter ware then words, *Plaudites*,' *The Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 5 vols., vol. 2, New York, 1963, 246. Jonson picks it up in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614): the biggest cheater in the market is he who sells air (i.e. words), and the biggest fools are they who dish out money for it.

[219] This echoes Sir Thomas Smith's equally disdainful view of 'gentlemen' who buy invented arms: (and if need be) a king of Heraulds shal also give him for mony, armes newly made and invented, the title whereof shall pretende to have beene found by the sayd Herauld in perusing and viewing of olde registers, […]or] he will write that for the merittes of that man, and certaine qualities which he doth see in him, and for sundrie noble actes which he hath perfourmed,' *De Republica Anglorum. A Discourse on the Commonwealth of England*, ed. L. Alston, Shannon, 1972, 40.

'follower' is an urban ballad-monger who has migrated to the big city and will end up as the butt of his social superiors, who play at being chivalric heroes.

Working on the conceit that the stage represents the commonwealth, Simplicity the lowly citizen (acted by Robert Wilson the playwright, who was commemorating Richard Tarlton, the master clown) involves the audience in theatre politics just as he himself would be involved in urban politics. The central piece of the first scene between Simplicity and the pages is an extended dig at Paul's boys, an early instance of dramatised rivalry between boy and adult companies.[220] Simplicity and Wit engage in a singing contest after which Simplicity is directed to turn '*to one of his auditory*': 'friend, what say you, which of us sings best?' (337-8). Will's comment - 'To say trueth, ther's but bad choice' - indicates that Wilson the playwright assumed, or trial proved, that the audience would side with him/Simplicity. Very probably there was an amount of ad-libbing involved that is not preserved in the playtext, but the fact remains that the playgoers are appealed to as arbiters in a contest between the boys and the adult actors that requires them to voice their allegiance not only in matters of taste but also of theatre politics: the 'little eyases' cater for the elite, gentrified stratum of Lodon's playgoers and look down on actors and audiences at the 'common stages'. Metonymically standing in for the masters they serve, the pages - who may in time turn into London lords - are here rejected by the audience in favour of the commoner, the clown they recognise as part of 'their' kind of theatre.

Simplicity's involvement in urban politics leads to a clash between popular initiative and magisterial authority. While the lords contend with the Spanish, he seeks retribution for having been cheated by Fraud. As the lords prepare to fight the external enemy, Simplicity resolves to fight the internal enemy:

> I am glad I have found the french man [i. e. Fraud in disguise], now Ile raise the street, but Ile have my wares again, and proove ye as ye were, ever both false knaves. (1414-6)

After his appeal to mourn for Richard Tarlton and to approve his kind of participatory theatre, Simplicity once more appeals to collective action, this time to neighbourhood solidarity in catching a thief. The lords have just embarked on diplomatic exchanges with the Spanish, when Simplicity enters with his force:

> Clubs, clubs, nay come neighbours, come, for here they bee, here I left them, arrant theeves, rogues, cosoners, I charge ye as you wil answere, prehend them, for they have undone me. (1487-9)

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[220] F. G. Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559-1642*, 2 vols., London, 1891, vol. 2, 281, has suggested (perhaps somewhat fancifully) that the emblems of the three lords - a falcon (i.e. a merlin), a tortoise (i.e. a fortress) and a lily - may be an allusion to the names of Wilson's professional rivals, Marlowe, Peele (i.e. a fort) and Lyly. This would create a strong link between London's high society as represented in *Three Lords* and the playwrights pandering to their tastes for escapist romance. Lyly and Peele wrote mainly for the boy companies, the mid-Elizabethan precursors of the later companies at Paul's and Blackfriars; George Peele had devised the Lord Mayor's Show for 1585.

For a precarious moment the Constable even suspects the lords of being the culprits sheltering Fraud. Pleasure haughtily tells them to 'Go seeke els where, for here's no place for such' (1505). Far from welcoming the defensive measures undertaken at grass-roots level, the three lords see the neighbourhood watch merely as a spring of social unrest:

> Pomp. Who rais'd this tumult? speake, what means this stir?
> Simplicity. O I am undone, robb'd, spoil'd of all my stocke, let me see, where
> be they? Keepe every street and doore, samine all that come for *Fraud* that cosoner.
> [...]
> Policy. My friends depart, and qualifie this stir,
> And see peace kept within the walles I charge ye. (1493-1507)[221]

Having been thwarted in his unauthorised attempt to catch the thief, Simplicity tries appealing to the authorities for official action. Before the triumphal procession with which the three lords and the three ladies of London publicly celebrate their marriages and the defeat of the Spanish, he addresses a petition to the London lords to prohibit the 'trades' of scrap and precious metal collecting and of wood chopping - innocent, modest lines of business, it would seem, but Simplicity argues that all three have consequences most dangerous to ordinary citizens and the commonwealth (1971-2041). 'Wel,' says Policy, 'for these three faults the time serves not now to redresse.' - 'No marie,' Simplicity readily agrees, 'for you three must be maried sodainly, and your feast must be drest' (2046-48). The priorities are clear: the elite's ceremonial self-indulgence is more important than the mundane business of rectifying common grievances in the city.

The difficulties of securing legal justice for the common man and of counselling the powerful had been foremost in socio-political criticism since the Middle Ages. Robert Crowley had demanded that 'every true Englishman' should be called upon to guard the commonwealth against sedition and misgovernment: 'Give ear therefore (Oh my countrymen) give ear! And do not disdain to hear the advice of one of the least of your brethren, for the matter requireth every man's counsel'.[222] Similarly, the author of the Edwardian *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England* had argued that 'merchant men, husbandmen, and artificers' should be 'freely suffred yea and provoked to tell their advices' in matters of state, 'for some points in their feats they may disclose that the wisest in a Realm could not'.[223] Indeed, the three lords of London would probably not have detected the connection between scrap metal collecting and rebellion and might, in Simplicity's words, 'do wel to make me one

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[221] When he had acted Dericke in *The Famous Victories*, Tarlton had in fact successfully conducted a citizen's arrest without interference from the authorities. The immediate satire in *The Famous Victories* is at the watch's expense, but later on when Prince Hal owns up to the Thief and lets him go, a layer of satiric comment on the royal truant is added: the clown arrests the Prince's roguish *alter ego*, but the privilege of royalty allows him to go free.

[222] Crowley, *The Way to Wealth*, F2v.

[223] *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England*, quoted in Ferguson, *Articulate Citizen*, 146. See the introduction to Mabel Day's and Robert Steele's edition of *Mum and the Sothsegger*, London, 1936, for the medieval debate about the problem of counselling the monarch, which is presented in this dialogue, as in other pieces on the subject, as a balancing act between saying too much and saying too little, between principled candour and opportunism. This issues appears, decreasingly, in virtually all Elizabethan plays about kingship.

of your counsel' (2043). He advises them to guard themselves against a danger worse than the Armada, that is, civil war, but they do not heed him. As in *Cobbler* and *Woodstock* the commoner agrees to accept the magistrates' rule only on the more or less implicit understanding that they will observe the common(ers') weal: 'remember that I have set ech of yee a fault to mend' (2052-3).

Simplicity chooses to petition for his rights rather than to enforce them by street violence - possibly because this play actually aims to present a realistic view of power politics in contemporary London, not an allegorically romantic acting-out of populist fancies. This corresponds with Ian Archer's contention that in Elizabethan London, riots, libels and petitions were intended not so much as threats of revolt but as 'negotiating strategies' to bring pressure to bear on the city officials. They were not invariably perceived as endangering the civic polity in any fundamental way, because they were generally directed against trouble-makers or marginal groups such as prostitutes or foreigners, and so could have a 'safety-valve'-function for fundamental and irremediable grievances.[224]

Three Lords ends with a concise dramatisation of the clown's frustrated care not only for his own purse but for the commonweal. The torchlight procession after the wedding is interrupted when Simplicity 'deciphers' Fraud and creates a public commotion: 'One that falsest villaine that is in this land, / Let him be laid hold on that he run not away' (2265-6). The mock-punishment of Fraud at the hands of Simplicity is choreographed by the lords as an (unwittingly ironic) echo of their own knight-errantry. The Vice is tied to a stage post, blindfolded Simplicity is made to run at the other, empty post, 'and with thy torch shalt run as it were at tilt, charging thy light against his lips' (2291-2).[225] Dissimulation manages to free Fraud, they slip away. Pleasure reacts philosophically to this failure of the city fathers to fight vice: 'wel, one day he wil pay for all' (2305). Simplicity is deluded into thinking that he has been instrumental in subduing Fraud: 'Verie few ashes if there be any, ye may see what a hot thing anger is, I thinke that the Torch did not waste him so much as my wrath' (2311-13).

Structurally, this last scene - and to an extent the whole play - corresponds to a Tarltonian jest. According to the misrule tradition, the Lord of Misrule was obliged to lose fights against all comers in order to maintain his office. Professional stand-up comedians in the tradition of Richard Tarlton and Robert Wilson still build their acts around their own apparent failure or humiliation. Clownish irony, a variety of the Socratic kind, depends on 'the satirist's playing the fool to make a fool of his

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224 Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 5-9 and *passim*. Yet cf. Mark Thornton Burnett, 'Apprentice Literature and the 'Crisis' of the 1590s', *Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991), 27-38, esp. 34-7, who takes a somewhat severer view of the disputes between the apprentices and the municipal magistrates, which in 1595 led to the enforcement of a state of martial law and several executions.

225 This is a dramatic enactment of the ready justice actually wielded at playhouses. Will Kempe reports how cutpurses taken pilfering during performances were customarily tied to the stage posts, 'for all people to wonder at' (Kempe's *Nine Days Wonder* (1601), B1r). By alluding to this custom, Wilson obliquely presents the playhouse as a sort of law-court, a place where the common people fight to maintain the common weal - and would succeed, were it not for the magistrates who quite literally hinder and misdirect them. With a topicality that borders on recklessness, the play confirms the city fathers' opinion of playhouses as hotbeds of domestic unrest.

antagonist'.[226] Robert Armin considered this routine to be the main difference between a 'natural fool' (that is, a halfwit) and an 'artificial fool' (that is, a stage clown):

> Naturall fooles are prone to selfe conceit,
> Fooles artificiall, with their wits lay waite
> To make themselves fooles, likeing the disgusies, [*sic*]
> To feede their owne mindes and the gazers eyes.[227]

The mock-empowerment of Simplicity at the end of *Three Lords* follows the same pattern. The clown's humiliation - and the three lords' posturing - has certainly fed the eyes of the gazers, but in the end the clown 'feeds his own mind': he is triumphant because he (or rather the playwright who acts him) is the one who has devised the whole play. It is for the gazers to decide whether the London lords are 'prone to selfe conceit' in assuming knightly garb and haviour, or whether they have managed a superbly effective public 'performance' of valour.

THE POMP OF POWER PARODIED

Public theatre in the 1580s was still characterised by the Tudor legacy of the visually-oriented style of acting and presentation. This strong emphasis on spectacle has been called 'literalist' in contradistinction from the psychologically subtler, more verbal drama devised by Kyd, Marlowe and Shakespeare.[228] Pantomime or strongly emblematic stagings, heavily symbolic properties, lavish clothes and big processions were the stuff of Tudor stagecraft (and thus vulnerable to aesthetic condescension), but they were also, still, the 'props' of Elizabethan statecraft - and thus ideal for backhanded praise, parody and socio-political satire.

While the satirical thrust of many late moralities is not in question, historians of early modern drama seem reluctant to grant these stylistically often heavy-handed plays a capacity for intertextual parody and self-reflexive play. McMillan and MacLean carefully venture that 'it is not beyond a group of actors to parody conventions which they have been accustomed to perform straightforwardly'. More usually, critics contend themselves with first impressions: 'In the splendor of its allegorical parades, *The Three Lords and the Three Ladies of London* [...] gives the effect of a continuous Lord Mayor's Show.'[229] But parody and patriotism did not exclude one another, although they were undoubtedly a precarious mixture. Stage plays, like ballads, pamphlets, chapbooks, sermons and gossip, offered a forum for political debate. Ambivalence or dissent may not be immediately evident when they come under the

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[226] Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 52.

[227] Robert Armin, *Foole Upon Foole* (1600), B2r.

[228] McMillan and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 128.

[229] McMillan and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 91; Griffin, *Pageantry on the Shakespearean Stage*, 119, see 20-21, on the entertainment value of 'the big scene' in plays of the 1580s

guise of adulation, but they may have been perceived the more poignantly and trenchantly by those who had ears to hear and eyes to see:

> Elizabethan culture placed a premium on access to privileged news and the deciphering of secrets, rather than the free and open circulation of information. [...] The most valued forms of political discourse were, therefore, those which circulated within restricted networks or were far from transparent.[230]

Three Lords may at first glance be the most unambiguously chauvinistic celebration of Englishness, but it has layers of political urban satire that would have opened up only to those who had the prerequisite information and inclination. To say that the parody and satire in this play is in the mind of the beholder is exactly to sum up the way political satire works in a censored theatre. Robert Wilson was the first playwright to bring London's civic ceremonies on stage *and* to do so with an arguably satiric purpose. This should be appreciated as an innovation in the theatre of the late 1580s, but it also means that the scenes of civic pageantry in *Three Lords of London* are the first in a line that later included the pastiche of a mayoral procession in *Eastward Ho* and the fake funeral procession in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.

Like the new genre of the history play, civic pageantry gave people 'images to think with, and thus reinforce[d] confidence in their own ability to understand and discuss conflicts of state.'[231] An image may suggest or affirm ideological assumptions advantageous to those who have devised (or at least commissioned) the image. It may, to use an Elizabethan pun, 'shadow' the truth not in the sense of representing it but in the sense of disguising or hiding it. Spectacles of state were an exercise absolutely vital to early modern rulers as an immediate form of communication between government and populace.

Their significance in contemporary politics and their visual splendour explain why processions and parades were a staple of Elizabethan history plays. They made exciting theatre, and they represented the dominant official image of the commonwealth to itself, ready to be celebrated or undermined. A society in procession or in emblematic tableau - whether for Corpus Christi, on one's way to the playhouse, at a state funeral, or in triumph after a victory in the field - gives visual and physical expression to its own ideal order. The caveat follows at its heels: the ideal image is always also an idealised image.[232] It was comparatively easy to disrupt this representation of the officially postulated order - which at this time was always related to the organic image of the body - and to draw attention to its contradictions, to the rashes and irritations masked by paint and perfume. Hamlet's inky cloak not only spoils the picture, it is also the court-plaster that alerts the observers to the fact that something is hidden in the state of Denmark. Much has been said about the interrupted duel in the first act of

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230 R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and Power in England, 1585-1685*, London, 1999, 62; and see also 51.

231 Heinemann, 'Political Drama,' 177.

232 Public processions were supposed to be a physical expression of the body politic in its proper hierarchical order, but this does not mean that they were always an image of stability and harmony, see e.g. Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture. Studies in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 1986, chap. 1: 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town'.

Richard II, but there is little doubt that Shakespeare's intention is to show how guilt and double-dealing are gilded with ceremony. Shakespeare partly achieves such a teasingly ambiguous combination of pomp and decadence in *Richard II* because he can build on the success of earlier plays of state that were both parodic and spectacular, indeed, parodic *by being* spectacular. One of the anonymous writers attacking Martin Marprelate would affirm the shades of parody and ridicule inherent in popular and courtly performances of stylised combat: the players made a May game of Martin Marprelate, 'with Pompes, Pagents, Motions, Maskes, Scutchions, Emblems, Impreases'.[233] The Queen's Men's repertoire was strong on visually exciting set-pieces like martial combat, and their artistic and political approach was complex enough to show up the extravagant folly and involuntary self-parody inherent in *shows* of chivalric valour.

McMillin and MacLean concede that *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* - possibly the earliest extant English chronicle play - also contains the earliest extant parody of a battle from English history. In a scene later reworked by Shakespeare into Ancient Pistol's exploits at Agincourt, Derick/Tarlton engages a Frenchman in conversation and tricks him into surrendering his sword.[234] Marlowe and Shakespeare tried to achieve a greater degree of realism in battle scenes by harmonising dialogue and physical action. Wilson also experimented with this highly popular but technically difficult kind of scene. His efforts, however, went into the opposite direction. He undercut the epic weight of the English-Spanish encounter by stylising it, by denying playgoers the expected pleasure of onstage swordplay (indeed, any kind of onstage confrontation between the foes), and by turning battle into ballet.[235]

When the Spanish enemy arrives on the scene - three lords with shields, lances and boys, virtually a replay of the first scene of the play - Policy voices his disdain:

> My Lordes, what meane these gallants to perfourme,
> Come these Castilian Cowardes but to brave?
> Doo all these mountains move to breede a mouse? (1554-6)

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[233] From *The Returne of the Renowned Cavaliero Pasquil of England*, quoted in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 231. - There is a satirical poignancy to the analogy between aldermen who fancy themselves as chivalric heroes and clowns who style themselves 'cavalieros' of misrule. Holiday frolics are, after all, the context in which Policy himself had set the London lords' preparations for war: 'And pleasure, see that plaies be published, / May-games and maskes, with mirth and minstrelsie' (1324-5). 'The phrase 'to make a May game' of somebody,' Barber observed on the subject of the Marprelate controversy, 'implies that one need only bring an antagonist into the field force of May games to make him ridiculous' (*Festive Comedy*, 51-7). By deftly associating the English-Spanish war with holiday exertions, the playwright-clown casts the magistrates as fools; they are led by the playwright to make 'a Maygame upon the stage'.

[234] Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols, London, 1957-75, vol. 4, 336-7, and McMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 129-30.

[235] MacMillin and MacLean, *Queen's Men*, 130, speak of the 'ballet-like battle,' 'the dance-like battle scenes' in *Three Lords*, but without suggesting that this might be parody.

Wilson's English and Spanish lords mirror each other like the good cowboy and the bad cowboy in a Western movie, in all but the colour of their Stetsons.[236] Considering that Policy's advice to the London lords had exactly been to repel the enemy by making a big show of 'careless regard', his advice here might be noted as decidedly disingenuous. No sooner had he heard the news of the Spaniards' approach but Policy had decided on his strategy:

> Lord Pomp, let nothing that's magnificall,
> Or that may tend to Londons graceful state
> Be unperform'd, as showes and solemne feastes,
> Watches in armour, triumphes, Cresset-lightes,
> Bonfiers, belles, and peales of ordinance.
> And pleasure, see that plaies be published,
> Mai-games and maskes, with mirth and minstrelsie,
> Pageants and school-feastes, beares, and pulpit plaies.
> My selfe wil muster upon Mile-end greene,
> As though we saw, and fear'd not to be seene. (1319-28)

All these shows are to be staged with a view to the effect they are going to have on the *enemy*. There is no mention of the patriotic fervour they might instil in the English, and thus no use made of the didactic arguments in defence of stage playing that were levelled at the anti-theatrical faction at this time. Possibly in order to deflect from English incompetence, it was frequently observed in pamphlet polemics that the Spanish had sought to impress with empty show, and that their huge navy was but a shadow without substance.[237] Wilson extends this observation to the English and represents the English-Spanish war as an encounter between walking anachronisms, an exchange of mannered gestures, chivalric postures and a great deal of hot air: satiric distortion to reveal (a version of) the truth.

The sensitive attention with which processions and pageants on stage were perceived by early modern observers appears in Sir Henry Wotton's famous remarks about *All is True* twenty-five years later. The play represented

> some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the Knights of the Order with their Georges and garters, the Guards with their embroidered coats, and the like: sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous.[238]

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[236] Alan Dessen compares the pervasive dramatic influence of the late moralities on the plays by Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights to the influence of the Western in modern cinema, *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays*, 8.

[237] Pamphlets describing the defeat of the Armada purposed 'to make shew unto thee how vayne it is to trust in outward meanes, and then to learne thee to trust in the Lord,' *A True Discourse of the Armie which the King of Spaine Assembled in Lisbon* (1588), quoted in Mittag, *Nationale Identitätsbestrebungen,* 64. Rumours of a Spanish victory had resulted in celebrations in Madrid and Rome, and these are contrasted with the demure reactions to actual victory in England: 'in steed of singing Psalmes and praises unto God, they made fire and sports, and blinde men in open places, pirkt up, upon fishmongers stalls, soong songs, making the people beleeve that they were victors,' *An Answer to the Untruthes, Published and Printed in Spaine, in Glorie of Their Supposed Victorie Atchieved Against Our English Navie*, 1589, quoted Mittag, *Identitätsbestrebungen*, 75.

[238] *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, ed. Logan Pearsall Smith, Oxford, 1907, 32-3. Wotton had as little patience for pageantry in real life as in the theatre, cf. his bored account of the tilting presented on the tenth anniversary of James's accession, which he concludes wryly: 'Of the merits of the rest I will say nothing, my pen being very unfit to speak of lances' (16-7).

No doubt modern readers and audiences are often too self-conscious, too much accustomed to stylistic and emotional understatement, to appreciate the Renaissance's love of ceremony and show. Irony may be detected where none was intended. But, as Wotton's comment indicates, playgoers at the time were fully sensitive to the ways in which form and dignity may collapse into travesty:

> *Pomp.* What braving cowards these Castillians be,
> My Lordes let's hang our Scutchens up againe,
> And shroud our selves but not farre off unseene,
> To proove if that may draw them to some deed,
> Be it but to batter our ymprezed shieldes.
> [...]
>
> *They hang up their shieldes, and step out of sight. The Spaniardes come and flourish their rapiers neer them, but touch them not, and then hang up theirs which the Lords of London perceiving, take their owne and batter theirs: The Spaniards making a litle showe to rescue, do sodenly slippe away and come no more.*
>
> *Policy.* Facing, faint-hearted, proud and insolent,
> That beare no edge within their painted sheaths,
> That durst not strike our sillie patient shieldes. (1797-1810)

Striking 'sillie patient shieldes' *is* a heroic deed, however, when accomplished by *English* knights; and they go to it with measured care: 'My selfe wil onset give on Prides [shield], at your Peacocke sir' (1815).[239]

The popularisation of chivalric romances in the book market supplies another context for Wilson's stage parody. In his compendium of early modern citizen literature, Louis Wright has sketched the social decline of the genre after what he calls 'the middle classes' had become voracious readers (and buyers) of affordable printed material:

> Although lords and ladies and men of letters continued to read the romances to some extent throughout the sixteenth century, the appeal was made more and more to readers of the less favored classes, while academic critics and moralists began to level their darts against the iniquity of romance-reading.

The point at which anyone who could and would take pleasure in reading had heard of Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, and the imported Palmerin and Don Quixote was also the point at which the genre became tainted with vulgarity:

> From the mid-sixteenth century onward, the old-fashioned tales of chivalry were gradually relegated to the more unsophisticated readers, and romances, which had begun as aristocratic works, appeared in cheap quartos and at last reached the nadir of their fame as penny-chapbooks.[240]

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[239] The elevation and humiliation of the Spanish shields is probably not only a ceremonial bit of stage business but a topical allusion to power on display: at a thanksgiving service at St. Paul's on 8 September 1588, 'Eleven of the Spanish ensigns (the once proud badges of their bravery, but now of their vanity) were hung upon the lower battlements of that church' and then stuck upon London Bridge - presumably for want of Spanish heads. David Cressy comments that 'at this time, there was little more to show for the fight in the Channel than a dozen Spanish ensigns. Their display was didactic as well as decorative, with more than a touch of bravado,' *Bonfires and Bells*, 117-18. - These 'ensigns' are also mentioned by Heywood in *2 If You Know Not Me* (343); Nichols, *Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. 2, 537, adds the report of 'one streamer, wherein was an image of our Lady, with her son in her arms; which was held in a man's hand over the pulpit' - the idolatrous image of Madonna and Child returned to Protestant London's foremost place of worship in the form of spoils of war.

Nonetheless, Arthur Ferguson has insisted on 'the deeply emotional appeal' the chivalric tradition still exerted at this time on anyone with even modest aspirations to gentility. 'It could inspire them to deeds no less noble for being at times self-consciously theatrical. It could also impel them to acts of extravagant folly and self-parody.'[241]

As in the later context of Caroline court culture, the political significance of chivalry in mid-Elizabethan times 'lay in the circumstances in which the rhetoric of chivalry was employed, rather than in any specific 'ideology' inhering in the rhetoric itself'.[242] Nothing was as likely to render the chivalric bathetic as its transposition from a courtly to an urban context. Wilson's lords may be 'courtiers brought up', but their fathers had been rich shopkeepers: 'citizens born'. Usually without satiric intent but not always without comic effect, civic corporations from the later Middle Ages onwards initiated tournaments of various sorts in order to recommend the 'civility' of their burghers and to compete with other towns and cities.[243] Wilson focuses on questionable appropriations of the chivalric guise by the metropolitan elite at a time when the Protestant knight – embodied by Sidney, Leicester, Essex and other noblemen who fought abroad – was still the epitome of English glory.

By way of allegorical personification, the triple wedding at the end of *Three Lords* is also set up as a celebration of civic and national harmony. As the visual climax of the play it reflects and parodies most directly the ceremonial climax of London's festive year, the Lord Mayor's Show.

Nemo gives away his wards to the victors, and the bridegrooms-to-be are content:

Policy. By my consent one day shal serve us all,
Which shall be kept for ever festivall.
Pomp. And on that day in honor of these Dames,
these shields in triumph shall be borne about.
Pleasure. With pageants, plaies, and what delights may be
to entertaine the time and companie. (1897-1902)

The marriage between the ladies and the lords in *Three Lords* is as public a spectacle as could be imagined. Three elements central to early modern civic pageantry are mentioned in the bridegrooms' plans for the day: the remembrance and celebration of civic traditions, the triumphal parade of

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240 Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 376. – In *The Contention Betwyxte Churchyeard and Camell, upon David Dycers Dreame*, Thomas Churchyard rhymes: 'Your knowledge is great, your judgment is good / The most of your study hath ben of Robyn hood. / And Bevys of Hampton, and syr Launcelot de lake, / Hath taught you full oft, your verses to make' (A2v).

241 Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*, Washington, 1986, 14.

242 J. S. A. Adamson, 'Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England,' *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake. London, 1994, 161-98, 170.

243 Jacques Heers, *Fêtes des fous et Carnevals*, Paris, 1983. I have used the German translation by Grete Osterwald, *Vom Mummenschanz zum Machttheater. Europäische Festkultur im Mittelalter*, Frankfurt/M., 1986, 247-55. - See also *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*: 'Mile End is a goodly matter; there has been a pitch-field, my child, between the naughty Spaniards and the English men; and the Spaniards ran away, Michael, and the English men followed. My neighbour Coxstone was there, boy and killed them all with a birding piece,' ed. Michael Hattaway, London, 2001, 2.2.71-5.

escutcheons, banners, crests and coats of arms belonging to civic or royal bodies of authority, and the translation of civic ideology into theatrical, even dramatic, forms.

The wedding train echoes the entry of the lords at the beginning of the play. A young girl leads the way, singing and strewing flowers, setting the scene for a royal entry:

> If London list to looke, the streets were nere so cleene,
> Except it was when best it might, in welcome of our Queene:

The directions to the playgoers are clear: they are 'London', and they are to revere the patriotic allegory they are going to see in the same way in which they revered Queen Elizabeth upon her entry into London. This allusion to the queen's entry may simply remind those present of the thirtieth anniversary of an event they were doubly happy to celebrate in 1588, since it followed so conveniently upon the victory over the Spanish. Alternatively, the allusion may be intended to expose the hubris of the civic elite in lending a mythic aura to their festive pageantry, which was really little else than an extravaganza commissioned by rich merchants. Munday's adulation in the Lord Mayor's Show of 1615 is fulsome, but it expresses the spirit that was beginning to make itself felt at the end of the sixteenth century: 'the order of the march appeared the more excellent and commendable, even as if it had been a Royall Maske, prepared for the marriage of an immortall Deitie, as in the like nature we hold the Lord Mayor.'[244]

But the play's central image of civic harmony is marred from the start: Dissimulation and Fraud have disguised themselves as citizens and plan to infiltrate the 'showe': 'thus may we shufle into the showe with the rest, and see and not be seen' (2205-6). Once again Wilson adapts conventions of the allegorical morality play to satiric purposes. His stage direction describing the civic procession in *Three Lords* has to be quoted in full:

> Enter first Diligence with a Truncheon, then a boy with Pollicies Launce and shield, then Pollicie and Love hand in hand: then Fraud in a blew gowne, red cap and red sleeves, with Ambitions Lance and shield, then a boy with Pomps Launce and shield, then Pompe and Lucre hand in hand: then Dissimilation with Prides Launce and shield, then a boy with Pleasures Lance and shield: then Pleasure and Conscience hand in hand: then Simplicitie with Tirannies Lance and shield.

Dissimulation's plan works. The triumphal splendour of the wedding train blinds the citizens to the presence of the caterpillars of the commonwealth. The arms of the defeated foes are carried through the streets like spoils of war, and nobody notices the Vices who have dressed up as porters. Even Nemo is too busy venting a newsreel-comment on the procession in which wedding and triumphal march blend:

> These Lordes and Ladies thus to church are gone,
> An honoured action to solemnize there,
> With greater joy wil they return anone,
> Than Caesar did in Rome his Laurell weare.

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[244] Anthony Munday, *Metropolis Coronata*, London 1615, B4v.

> [...]
> Usury is marked to be knowen,
> Dissimulation like a shadow fleetes,
> And Simony is out of knowledge growen,
> And Fraud unfound in London but by fits.
> Simplicity with painefull penurie sits. (2231-42)

Like a new lord mayor and his guests from St Paul's and dinner at the Guildhall on Lord Mayor's Day, the couples return after dark to proceed once more through the streets: *'Returne as they went, saving that the blew gownes that bare shields, must now beare torches*' (2257-8). The citizen-spectators in the playhouse have to digest the discrepancy between what they have just seen and what official ideology would have had them see. In contrast with earlier morality plays, in which the Vices are defeated, Fraud and Dissimulation have not been banished; they are seen to support Ambition and Pride. Simplicity does not sit with Penury, he is weighed down by Tyranny. Oblivious to the dramatic irony he is creating, Nemo at this point recalls the incidents of Hospitality's murder in the prequel - but he shrugs it off: 'But what meane I, one of the mariage traine, / To mourne for him wil nere be had againe' (2251-2). In other words, faced with these civic extravaganzas, nobody remembers the hospitality customary in days of yore.[245]

The correct interpretation of signs, which is much at issue in this play, is a task that is now transferred to the citizen-spectators. If, on the level of international relations, Ambition's, Pride's and Tyranny's lances and shields are to be understood as the semiotic equivalents of the spoils of a Roman general, they are equivalent on the level of domestic relations to the arms of London's livery companies being paraded through Cheapside at a Lord Mayor's Show. William Smith, haberdasher, has left his description of the mayoral show in 1575:

> And first of all cometh two great standards, one having the arms of the City, and the other the arms of the Lord Mayor's Company; next them two drums and a flute; then an Ensign of the City, and then about seventy or eighty poor men marching two and two, in blue gowns, with red sleeves and caps, everyone bearing a pike and a target, whereon is painted the arms of all those that have been Mayors of the same Company that this new Mayor is of.[246]

The device of the parodic procession could conveniently be adapted to feature any socio-political moral vice a writer might want to stigmatise. Dekker, for instance, replaced the traditional sins by their modern descendants, Politic Bankruptism, Lying, Candlelight, Apishness, Shaving and Cruelty in *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606). In *Greene's Newes both from Heaven and Hell* (1593), a cardinal is placed in his triumphal seat by Ambition and Pride and carried into hell by Ignorance and Obstinacy. Greene is not parodying the Lord Mayor's Show, but like Wilson he employs Ambition and Pride in an emblematic tableau in order to satirise a figure of authority.

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[245] Note that the praise heaped on Nemo himself in this play is not so much regal as mayoral: 'spotlesse Magistrate,' 'Carelesse of bribes, of birth and parentage' (504-7) were commonplace praise (and earnest exhortation) in every mayoral show.

[246] Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, ed., *The London Encyclopaedia*, London, 1983, 483.

In what I take to be the last of his earlier plays, Robert Wilson had learnt to show rather than to tell. Even without a divinely inspired spokesman and without violent tirades on common abuses, he makes sure that the discerning members of the audience may catch the critique of the city governors' parade and their cavalier attitude to the grievances of the middling and lower sort. He shows that, as Ian Archer puts it,

> he tensions [in late Elizabethan London] were contained because the elites were sufficiently responsive [i.e. to pressure from below] to ensure that popular attitudes towards them remained ambiguous. It was recognised that elite action was wanting on some issues, but it was also appreciated that little could be achieved without their support.[247]

The London lords humour the discontented populace as a parent might humour a recalcitrant or over-eager child. They do not make sure that Fraud and Dissimulation are permanently imprisoned. Instead, they fob Simplicity off with a game of blind man's buff, a 'show' of justice, a false enactment of retribution. This level-headed cynicism, over and above the 'jubilation', 'exuberant defiance' and 'hysterical appeal to terror' perceived by David Bevington, is the mood of *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*.[248]

Robert Wilson's early plays are an often neglected link between Edwardian and early Elizabethan Protestant estate satires on the one hand and Jacobean Reformation plays and city (and citizen) comedy on the other hand. The ideological concept of patriotic and militant Protestantism manifests itself as clearly in his plays as in the 'Elect-Nation' plays written a dozen-odd years later, but there are significant differences apart from the obvious fact that he employs allegory to a far greater extent than they. Unlike Dekker, Heywood and Rowley, Wilson did not write history plays, although John Bale had set an early example of this specific mode of Protestant drama with his version of *King Johan*. Wilson did not draw on John Foxe for source material, unless it be in the very general sense of advocating a popular Protestantism that was being neglected by self-styled Protestant magistrates.[249] Historiography in the sense of Protestant hagiography was not his *métier*, perhaps an indication of his more narrowly socio-political interests. If my chronology of his plays is correct, however, it must be acknowledged that he had written three, maybe four of his plays by the end of 1588, when the genre of the history play was still fairly young. In other words, Wilson may have given up writing the sort of play he had written in the 1580s quite soon after it became evident that he was fighting a lost battle.[250]

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[247] Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 260.

[248] Bevington, *Tudor Drama*, 189 and 190.

[249] The exception is, of course, *Sir John Oldcastle*, which he co-authored.

[250] Unless he wrote *Fair Em, or The Miller's Daughter of Manchester* (before Nov. 1590), and assuming he is the Robert Wilson mentioned by Henslowe, he seems to have stopped writing plays altogether for a decade, which may be read as a sign of disenchantment. But the majority of his later collaborations are clearly identifiable as chronicle plays. Did Wilson re-enter the theatre business, possibly out of financial necessity, in order to hack out the kind of play that had driven him out of the theatre ten years before?

Part Two

Watching Citizens:
The Representation of Festive Culture in London Comedy

> [How] much may we Christians (enjoying the benefit of the Gospel) bewail the miseries of these times wherein we see more houses built for these lewd assemblies than for preaching and praying? This age requires other manners, another life.[1]

> [The] build-up of effective Protestant evangelism of that decade [i. e. the 1570s] found itself contending not so much with Catholicism […] as with a way of life and especially a pursuit of pastimes and pleasures […] It was minstrels rather than mass-priests who proved to be the enemy.[2]

The date conventionally given as the beginning of the English Reformation is '1536: Dissolution of the Monasteries'. In fact, monastic culture had been floundering in England anyway, and the disendowment and expropriation – although it created a ruckus in the church and in relations with Rome – did not faze ordinary English Christians very much. For them, the turning of the tide manifested itself in their own immediate religious and festive culture. The Marian churchwardens of a little village in Berkshire fixed the beginning of the English Reformation in 1548: 'the tyme of Scysme when this Realm was devyded from the Catholic Churche' was 'the second yer of Kyng Edward the syxt,' when 'all godly ceremonyes and good usys were taken out of the Church with in this Realme'.[3] When the young king died in 1552, the radical Protestant injunctions and visitation articles enforced by Archbishop Cranmer had banned not only the materials of the old religion, like mass, holy water and holy bread, candles and bells, but also a large number of the seasonal holiday celebrations, like May games, church ales, processions and communal rites at Rogationtide, Hocktide and Whitsuntide. For a majority of people in Tudor England, the Protestant Reformation manifested itself in a fundamental shift in evaluating traditional rites and customs both in the church and on the village green, not in the bare fact that the distant king in Westminster considered himself no longer subject to the pope.

The churchwardens of Stanford in the Berkshire Vale were not the only ones who registered regret about these changes. From the early 1550s also dates the earliest recorded use of the now notorious term 'Merry England'. It was then, in Ronald Hutton's words, that the first 'grumbles were heard that the Protestant Reformation had destroyed a happy society'.[4] The Elizabethan authorities

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[1] Samuel Cox in a letter about stage playing in London, printed in Wickham, Berry and Ingram, *English Professional Theatre*, 168.

[2] Collinson, *Birthpangs*, x.

[3] Duffy, Stripping of the Altars, 462.

[4] Hutton, *Merry England*, 89. Hutton refers to Keith Thomas, *The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England*, London,

officially barred writers from offering their views on political, doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues to the reading or listening public. But towards the end of the century, critical assessments of post-Reformation England began to be expressed in apparently innocuous debates about festive culture and social mores; and over the next decades a strong current of vague but pervasive nostalgia swelled and allowed writers and playwrights to consider what we would call sociological phenomena of the previous half century. The evangelical complaint literature against church ales, May games, public dancing and other traditional forms of sociability was complemented and opposed by nostalgic recollections of former 'sports and pastimes' and by conservative apologies for the communal culture attacked and suppressed by Protestant ministers and magistrates.

Laments for 'the good old days' are, of course, as old as history and perhaps an inevitable attitude of the ageing generation. The 'radical nostalgia' of medieval rebels and early modern reformers, for instance the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, harked back to some vague and mystical state of commonwealth, to privileges the people were sure they had once enjoyed and wished restored.[5] Although these visions of the world that had been lost were often one-sided and inaccurate, 'Elizabethan nostalgia' became a coherent code of political and socio-cultural debate in Jacobean and Caroline England.[6] Some of the 'mirrors' held up to magistrates and citizens by puritans and Presbyterians imagined a utopian City of God, an England ideally and theocratically ruled by divine dispensation. Others now showed, on stage and in print, idealised versions of England's own past, representations of the manifest virtues that had made it great and good and would ensure social harmony and political stability in the future. Fictions of England's glorious past had, of course, been popular at least since the 1580s; but these fictions had been suffused with the Protestant ideology of England as God's Elect Nation. In contrast, many Jacobean and Caroline writers about 'Merry Old England' held the Protestant Reformation directly responsible for the perceived decline of communal culture and social cohesion.

This chapter takes its cue from the fact that most of the writers who rallied to defend old-style merry-making and traditional festivals were Londoners. While provincial gentry and ministers were for the most part still fighting to root out the old pagan and papist 'abuses', London-born writers like Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton and John Webster began, with a similar cultural self-

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1983.

[5] Justine Rydzeski applies the term 'radical nostalgia' to the socially conservative reformers in *Radical Nostalgia*, 5 and *passim*. In this sense the term is really only another term for the 're-formation' as a restitution of ancient rights and a purification of social and ecclesiastical structures as it had been demanded in medieval polemics and complaints, harking back to some past, unfocussed ideal of commonwealth.

[6] See e. g. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, chap. 8: 'Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory,' and Curtis Perry, 'The Citizen Politics of Nostalgia: Queen Elizabeth in Early Jacobean London,' *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 23 (1993), 89-111. Perry traces the development of a relatively objective comparison of the late queen and the new king in the first years of the Stuart rein into a 'conventional mode for the expression of dissatisfaction with the [Stuart] government' (91).

consciousness, to conceive and develop a new genre of stage plays about the recent and on-going transformations of their city. Their dramatic re-creations of pre-Reformation London and of traditional communal culture are characterised by a strong sense of ambivalence; and it has not always been recognised that this ambivalence is not limited to issues of social rank and social in- or exclusiveness, but also to their evaluation of the effects of the Protestant Reformation.

2.1 History and the City: *Stow's Survey of London*

Post-Reformation nostalgia for 'the good old days' was more than the meandering sentimentality of old men. There is no doubt that very real, specific and pervasive losses had been sustained, especially by communities within comparatively easy reach of London and the ecclesiastical visitors enforcing Edwardian and Elizabethan injunctions. A dying breed among those voicing their grievances about social mores and cultural customs were those who had personal experience of pre- *and* post-Reformation society, those who lived through the Edwardian and Marian regimes and could assess the transformations precipitated in the mid-Elizabethan decades. The generation born south of the Humber and east of the Severn in the 1570s or later would have been almost too young to be able to remember religious practices and seasonal customs as they had been celebrated by their parents and grandparents. But many older members of the audiences at the commercial London playhouses, especially the majority who had not grown up in London but in the provinces, still had some personal experience of wakes, wassails and Whitsuntide, May games, midsummer and Michaelmas festivities, of religious rites that had already been discontinued in London. The 'reformation of manners' was a disparately chronological process carried out by 'the godly' in English cities and towns, but it was also a sudden shift for those many thousands who left their towns and villages to try their luck in London, where traditional communcal celebrations had been largely phased out or been turned into 'hobbies'. In many ways the accounts of cultural loss and social dislocation presented by writers like Thomas Dekker, Nicholas Breton, Michael Drayton, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick and the poets contributing to the *Annalia Dubrensia* celebrating the Cotswold games take as their focus the experience of the older generation and of migrants new to London.

As a call for communal celebrations, the nostalgic idealisation of the past was complicated by the rift that had sprung up between 'the better sort' and 'the rude multitude'. The reformation of manners was instrumental in deepening the divide between social ranks that would within the next two hundred years ring into being the basic structure of the English class system. Traditional culture had been determined by local affiliations and geography; it had been 'popular' in that it had been common to all. After a century of reformation, 'popular' culture was 'common' in that it was 'base':

> The spread of popular literature and the progress of the Reformation had opened up new cultural horizons to a section of the common people. Yet they had also brought about a widening fissure between polite and plebeian culture, the informed and the ignorant, respectability and the profane multitude.

Wrightson adds that the surviving manifestations of traditional culture 'were discountenanced by respectable society and participation in them was largely confined to the vulgar'. As such, they became an object for study by those who were in a position to survey and analyse historical change: 'in the mid and late seventeenth century popular beliefs and practices began to arouse the curiosity of antiquarian gentlemen'.[7] Nostalgia, social history and social snobbishness – these are the ingredients a professional playwright in London had to cook into plays about contemporary England and, more specifically, about contemporary London, and they did not necessarily go well together. London comedy combines both romantic and satiric elements to varying degrees, but even the most acerbic satire of urban vices and follies acknowledges that cut-throat avarice and dog-eat-dog individualism are features of *contemporary* London. City satire sneers at romantic visions of an urban 'common-wealth' as hopelessly sentimental, unrealistic (given the essentially selfish nature of man) and dramatically out of date. In comedies set in London's medieval past, on the other hand, a romantically inclusive spirit tends to prevail. The question I wish to pursue in this chapter is twofold: how did London comedies reflect on the transformations of communal sociability and collective identity brought about by the urban Reformation, and how did they accommodate the fact that they were filling the place and taking over the functions of older, more inclusive forms of civic celebration?

Playwrights had two essentially opposing discourses available to work into their dramatisations of communal life: the increasing number of studies published by historians, and the royalist instrumentalisation of traditional communal customs epitomised in the Jacobean *Book of Sports*.

The idealisation of the past to some extent fed on the fruits produced by antiquarianism and historiography, pursuits that repeatedly (and with some justification) came under royal censure for their usually implicit criticism of the prevailing political and cultural conditions.[8] John Selden's wry remark that 'There was never a merry world since the ffairyes left dancing, and the parson left conjuring,' is followed by a pungent jibe at modern means of social control: 'The opinion of the latter kept theeves in awe, and did as much good in a Country as a Justice of Peace.'[9] By the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign the costs of the Reformation to what were in hindsight perceived to have been functional communities impressed themselves on conservatives, and in the Jacobean years the increase in historiographical writing sharpened the eyes of the discontented. For the first time in modern history, the loss of cultural practices was described and analysed in something approaching a sociological consciousness.

But the nostalgic wish to frolic in the traditional way was also instrumentalised by the monarchy. It is one of the ironies of the English Reformation that as the people grew more Protestant – even to

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[7] Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680*, London, 1982, 220.

[8] See e.g. Graham Parry, *The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1603-1700*, London, 1989, chap. 7: 'Antiquarianism: The Relevance of the Past'.

[9] *Table Talk of John Selden*, 91.

the point of beginning to perceive themselves as a Protestant *nation* - the royal court became less so.[10] Early modern rulers all relied upon ceremony and spectacle to impress the people with their authority. Indeed, the Protestant champion Elizabeth had staged herself to the common view far more shrewdly and effectively than her successors. But King James institutionalised the commingling of royalist ideology and popular sport by *ordering* local ministers and magistrates in *The Book of Sports* (1618) not to 'disturb, let, or discourage' the people's 'lawful recreations'.[11] The Stuart kings' strategic endorsement of dancing, archery, leaping and vaulting, May games and Morris dances had pragmatic aspects:

> this prohibition [i.e. Puritan opposition to popular pastimes] barreth the common and meaner sort of people from using such exercises as may make their bodies more able for war, when We, or Our Successors shall have occasion to use them and in place thereof sets up filthy tipplings and drunkenness […] in their alehouses. (514)

But the decaration also worked towards religious (and thus political) conformity by instituting a kind of royalist religion, in which 'pastimes were increasingly perceived as extensions of liturgical worship'.[12] 'We bar from this benefit and liberty,' King James specified, 'all such known Recusants […] as will abstain from coming to Church of Divine Service: being, therefore, unworthy of any lawful recreation' (515). When Charles I re-issued the declaration in 1633 he specified that 'all neighbourhood and freedom, with manlike and lawful exercises be used' (518), and it was understood that the neighbours celebrating their communities would all be conforming members of the English Church and stalwart royalists.

A third factor shaped dramatised reflections on communal life: one that required playwrights to work a layer of meta-theatrical self-reflection into their plays. C. L. Barber was the first to propose that the theatre to some extent compensated for the loss of traditional collective experiences and fulfilled community-enhancing functions similar to traditional festival:

> the holiday occasion and the comedy are parallel manifestations of the same pattern of culture. […] Shakespeare's theater was taking over on a professional and everyday basis functions which until this time had largely been performed by amateurs on holiday.[13]

But the interrelations of communal civic rites and London comedy are not as straightforward as those between seasonal rites and 'Shakespearean' festive comedy. While the connections literary critics have detected between the early modern theatre and traditional festive culture are myriad, it should be noted that far fewer city or citizen comedies than one might expect, of those performed before paying

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[10] Once established in the later Elizabethan decades, the topos of 'Protestant England' became available for manipulation, as in the subliminal rivalry between a Protestant but unwarlike king and Sir Philip Sidney. See e. g. Adamson, 'Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England'.

[11] *The King's Majesty's Declaration to His Subjects, Concerning Lawful Sports to be Used*, in *An English Garner. Ingatherings From Our History and Literature*, ed. Edward Arber, vol. 4, Birmingham, 1882, 515.

[12] Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 5.

[13] Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 6 and 15.

audiences, engage with these vanished or vanishing cultural forms with the explicit purpose of self-exploration.[14]

The Merry Wives of Windsor is probably the closest Shakespeare, otherwise keenly interested in exploring the spirit of festivity, ever came to writing a citizen comedy.[15] It wraps up the presentation of Falstaff - the Lord of Misrule, the Manningtree ox sacrificed to enrich the barren reign of the Plantagenet prunes - with a pagan rite of humiliation. The saturnalian impact of the last part of the Falstaffian trilogy is far less powerful than that of the first two, but these do not directly represent any folk customs. Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is a very well-balanced, in the end reconciliatory play that turns holiday into history and history into holiday and begins to consider what these overlappings might mean for the theatre as a social institution. William Rowley contributed two 'shoemaker-plays' to the fund of dramatic citizen-lore. Their historical accuracy is minimal, and they do not explore the implications of representing civic holidays in public playhouses. *A Shoemaker, a Gentleman* (1607-9) dramatises the installation of Crispin and Crispianus, the cordwainer's own holiday, but it does not stage it: historisation takes the place of actual celebration. *A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vex't* (1611-14) features a medieval procession figuring a pageant of the Virgin Mary to commemorate the foundation of St Mary's Shoreditch by Sir Walter and Rosia Brune. Rowley is franker than Dekker about the fact that stories about London's medieval past implicitly cast the theatre audience as a crowd of Roman Catholic citizen-spectators, but he does not extend this into a critical look at post-Reformation London. *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) is often regarded as Jonson's urban, mercantile response to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*; the relations and contradictions of the fair-as-holiday and the fair-as-business are as central to the play's self-reflexive layer of meaning as the Protestant magistrate's anxieties about both. Marston's *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1600) and Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607-11) do not advertise their holiday settings in their titles, although they engage centrally with the issue of theatre as holiday. The nearest Caroline descendants of Jacobean city comedy and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night* are the polite comedies set in London's new leisure spaces and suburban resorts, like Jonson's *A Tale of a Tub* (1633), or his 'son' Richard Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden* (1632/34) and *The Sparagus Garden* (1635). These show a commercialised suburban environment in which holiday ambience is sold to city-dwellers, and genteel sociability is seen to be assuming the forms it would have after the Restoration. Their satiric comments on current affairs

[14] Court masques engaged more frequently with traditional festive culture, and by the second Stuart decade the crown had appropriated 'lawful recreations' in an amalgamation that could be labelled 'festive nationalism'; see e.g. Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, esp. chap. 3 'The Court Restored to the Country: *The Vision of Delight*, *Christmas His Masque*, and *The Devil is an Ass'*.

[15] Unless one would like to consider *Measure for Measure* as a city comedy, or follow Janette Dillon, *Theatre, Court and City, 1595-1610*, Cambridge, 2000, in reading *Love's Labour's Lost* as a proto-type of the genre, chap. 3: 'From Retreat to Display: *Love's Labour's Lost* and the War of the Theatres'.

in the city – among them the recently developed places of resort[16] – are often acute, but generally they do not offer a historical perspective either on holiday mirth or on the genre of city comedy.[17]

2.1.1 Topical and Topographical: John Stow's *Survey of London* Parodied

It would be difficult to pinpoint the exact moment at which playwrights writing for a London audience began to represent the city to its inhabitants. Some morality plays, among them *Hickscorner, Jack Juggler*, *Enough is as Good as a Feast* and Robert Wilson's *London*-plays, had a recognisably urban setting, but since these plays were designed mainly for touring, they are also *unspecifically* urban. References to London sights, such as Tyburn or Newgate, would presumably be replaced on tour by references to local sights. The first plays to be set at specific London localities were the English chronicle plays. The historical significance of Eastcheap, the Tower, the Temple Gardens, or Cheapside manifests itself in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, Richard III*, *1 Henry V*, *Edward I*, or *Sir Thomas More*.[18] From the late 1590s, however, 'London' as an 'imagined community' was far more frequently and more emphatically evoked on stage than before.[19]

Any community is wary of newcomers and keen to demonstrate the invisible boundaries that separate outsiders from insiders, especially when this community is an urban one and made unstable by

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[16] Another instance of topical allusions in these 1630s London comedies are the references in *The Weeding of Covent Garden* to overseas plantations and the satirical suggestion of founding a new small commonwealth in the developed plot north of the Strand in London (1.1. 255 and 277, or 2.1.83-5), or to projectors in *The Sparagus Garden* (1.1.61-7), ed. Donald S. McClure, New York, 1980.

[17] Some reactions to the re-issue of the *Book of Sports* by Charles I can be felt in the suburban comedies written around 1633, see my discussion of *A Tale of a Tub* below.

[18] *Sir Thomas More* shows a distinctly novel consciousness of the dramatic possibilities of attaching symbolic meaning to London locations. Cheapside, for instance, is the setting of the incident that sparks the anti-alien riot: a Lombard refuses a Londoner the 'doves' the Londoner had bought. Later on Sheriff More decides to stage the executions of the ringleaders not at Newgate but in Cheapside. The implication is, of course, that buying and selling in London's principal thoroughfare would proceed peacefully, were it not for the foreigners; the same space becomes the site for meeting out magisterial justice. The theatre audience - accustomed to being cast as armies in plays about war or as crowds of gazing civilians in scenes showing triumphal processions - are informed that they, in their role as London crowd at an execution, are being restive. This is one of the very few Elizabethan or Jacobean plays that ever dared to stage a public execution of popular rioters.

[19] The theatrical exploration of communal identities is linked with the question of *which* communities the playwrights wished to explore. Benedict Anderson's study of eighteenth-century constructions of nationalism, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983, has stimulated a fresh look at the rhetorical strategies, the myths and images, that were employed to infuse early modern English audiences and readers with some sort of sense of ideological allegiance and obligation. Debora Shuger has written on "Society supernatural': The Imagined Community of Hooker's *Laws*,' in *Religion and Culture*, ed. McEachern and Shuger, 116-41, in the same volume Patrick Collinson explores another sort of imagined community of the faithful in 'Biblical Rhetoric: The English Nation and National Sentiment in the Prophetic Mode,' 15-45. Richard Helgerson has employed the concept in his passages on John Foxe's invisible church of true believers in *Forms of Nationhood*, 226 and *passim*; and Peter Womack uses it on *Henry V* and religious drama in 'Imagining Communities: Theatres and the English Nation in the Sixteenth Century,' *Culture and History, 1350-1600. Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers, London, 1992, 91-146. – Susan Brigden provides a comprehensive chapter on 'Family and Friends' in *New Worlds, Lost Worlds. The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603*, London, 2000, in which she surveys religious communities such as guilds and fraternities, the congregation at holy communion, the Elizabethan Church.

high levels of migration and social mobility. 'Exclusion and inclusion belonged to the same process of boundary drawing, a process that took place in men's minds as well as on the streets. But the boundaries acquired their force by being acted out.'[20] Muriel Bradbrook has argued that, since public plays from the 1580s and 1590s could no longer rely on religious narrative or on household affiliations to provide a common bond between the members of the audience, playwrights united them by identifying and mocking a common 'enemy'. This 'enemy' might be culled from a historical or political context (e.g. foreigners, usurers, corrupt nobility), from a dramatic context (e.g. lovers of old-fashioned or vulgar stage conventions) or from a theatrical context (e.g. boys or adults, groundlings or gallery audience, citizens or courtiers).[21] The average audience at a London comedy staged at the Rose, the Fortune, Blackfriars or Paul's was unlikely to include more than a few foreigners or noblemen, but it almost certainly included visitors from the country and migrants only recently settled in the capital. The readiest way to exclude non-Londoners from the playhouse community of locals was by excluding them from the joint exercise of imagining the fictional scene and thus from sharing the jokes that depended on a comprehensive familiarity with London's streets, alleys and notable places:

> What almost all playgoers from lords to waiting wenches did share was the urbanite's familiarity with local culture and city gossip, along with the self-satisfaction of the cosmopolitan. City comedies utilized collective understanding of local geography and its connotations.[22]

It is no coincidence that the first play that has merited the generic label of 'city' or 'citizen' comedy is also the first that might be described as a 'topographical comedy': William Haughton's *Englishmen for my Money,* staged at the Rose in the summer of 1598.

Haughton's play seems to deserve the stricture that it is jingoist, tedious and uncritical.[23] Three ladies of London have chosen three impecunious and rather laddish English gallants for their loves, but their Portuguese father has decided to marry them to a Frenchman, a Dutchman and an Italian.[24] With the help of their tutor and a servant-clown the girls succeed in tricking their father, humiliating the foreigners and marrying their English lovers. In a prolonged night-scene set in front of the Portuguese's house at Crutched Friars by Aldgate, the foreigners are sent all over town by their deceptively helpful rivals, and the stage is imaginatively transformed into London streets. The Italian arrives and politely asks for directions:

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[20] Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York, 1985, 124.

[21] Bradbrook, 'The Triple Bond,' 52.

[22] Wendy Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals. City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980*, Chicago, 1986, 35.

[23] Thus Theodore B. Leinwand in *The City Staged. Jacobean City Comedy, 1603-13*, Madison, 1986, 7.

[24] The set-up clearly echoes Robert Wilson's *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*, and there are numerous smaller echoes in phrase and situation that testify to the earlier play's popularity. In *Three Lords*, romantic male rivalry derives from national, religious and local politics; in Haughton it is a thin veneer for economic rivalry of trading nations. In fact, Dutch, Italian and French merchants were a strong presence on the Royal Exchange; the Dutch and the Italians each prepared a triumphal arch for King James's entry into London in 1604.

Alvaro. I prey de gratia, wat be dis plashe?
Wat do ye call dit strete?
Heigham. What sir; why *Leaden-hall*, could you not see the foure Spoutes as you came along?
Alvaro. Certenemento *Leadenhall*, I hit my hed by de way, dare may be de voer Spouts: I prey de gratia, wish be de wey to *Crouchefriers*?
Heigham. How, to *Croched-friers*? Marry you must goe along till you come to the Pumpe, and then turn on your right hand.[25]

From his actual situation at Crutched Friars, these directions would lead Alvaro outside Aldgate, where a formerly open field 'is now so incroched upon by building of filthy Cottages […] that in some places it scarce remaineth a sufficient high way for the meeting of Carriages and droves of Cattell, much lesse is there any faire, pleasant or wholesome way for people to walk on foot'.[26] This routine is played out again,[27] and finally even the English servant is made to lose his bearings:

Heigham. How Loger-head, is *Croched-friers* heere?
I thought you were some such drunken Asse,
That come to seeke *Croched-friers* in *Tower-streete:*
But get you along on your left hand, and be hang'd. (F4v)

No doubt the whole audience was amused by the spectacle of three actors groping about on the sunlit stage of the Rose pretending it was a pitch-black street. But the main joke was that to a person facing eastwards, the directions given were actually correct.[28] To 'understanders' even Heigham's casually impatient tag - 'and be hang'd' – would have been significant, because in order to get from Tower Street to Crutched Friars one would pass or even cross Tower Hill, the site of the gallows. In fact, it echoes the first entry of the English gallants as they had walked across Tower Hill towards Crutched Friars, remarking not on the gallows but on the fresh air and the fine view.

William Haughton combines populist xenophobia and what London cabbies nowadays call 'the knowledge' to comic, if rather obnoxious, effect. The chance to participate in this particular celebration of community – that is, in the rite of humiliating outsiders - is denied to anyone who does not know his or her way around the city. Nor is this a joke at the expense of foreigners only; the humiliation of having to ask the way and being sent up the garden path must have been an experience familiar to any of the thousands of migrants that arrived in London every year.[29] As a romantic comedy *Englishmen for my Money* may not deserve more attention than any other well-made but dramatically unambitious theatrical romp. I am suggesting, however, that the play has been undervalued as an 'occasional' play, a

[25] William Haughton, *Englishmen for my Money, or A Woman Will Have Her Will*, F3r and v.

[26] John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. Charles L. Kingsford, 2 vols., Oxford, 1908, vol. 2, 72.

[27] Vandalle the Dutchman is all this while suspended halfway up the house's front, Mark Antony-like, in a washing-basket, so he is not part of the nocturnal expedition through the streets of London.

[28] See Eilert Ekwall's map of Stow's London, *Street-Names of the City of London*, Oxford, 1954.

[29] It is estimated that some 7,000 to 10,000 migrants arrived in London each year to make it grow, by the end of the century, to a metropole in the region of 200,000 inhabitants, see Beier and Finlay, *London 1500-1700*, 'Introduction,' 9.

topical-topographical farce that anticipated the publication of a much more scholarly and high-minded celebration of the city of London.

In the course of the 1590s Londoners became increasingly aware of the figure - 'tall of stature, lean of body and face, his eyes small and crystaline, of a pleasant and cheerful countenance; […] very sober, mild, and courteous' – of the tailor-turned-antiquarian John Stow, who was preparing his *Survay of London. Conteyning the Originall, Antiquity, Increase, Moderne Estate, and Description of that City*.[30] In an astounding feat of diligence and erudition, Stow physically explored each of the twenty-six wards of the city, its liberties and outparishes and the City of Westminster and described its topographical features and their histories, its institutions, 'orders and customs' and 'sports and pastimes', from the Middle Ages through the crisis-years of the expropriation of the Roman Catholic church to the present day.

The *Survey* is dedicated not only to the lord mayor but also 'to the Comminalty, and citizens' of London; the author's 'perambulations' honour and recall ancient ceremonial customs like the beating of the bounds at Rogationtide or the midsummer processions. In form and function, the *Survey* imitates these urban rituals. It affirms a sense of London's communal space not by walking in the streets but by describing them on the page. This turns it, paradoxically, both into a preservation of and a substitution for the collective rites whose demise in post-Reformation times is repeatedly noted and regretted in the 580-odd pages. Stow calls his work 'an office that of right I holde my selfe bound in love to bestow upon the politicke body and members of the same [city]: what London hath beene of auncient time, men may here see, as what it is now every man doth beholde' (Dedication). He implies that every Londoner had the opportunity, certainly the right, strictly speaking even the duty, to be aware of the history of the city and contribute to the preservation not only of its physical fabric but also of its social and cultural heritage.

Stow was a member of the Society of Antiquaries and a friend and in many senses soulmate of more formally educated historians of his age, among them William Camden and the young John Selden. But the *Survey* essentially differs not only from annals and chronicles in the medieval style but also from the more classically-shaped descriptions of London by John Norden, William Camden and John Speed.[31] It is not characterised by idealising methods of description, by fitting London to a formal model of the urban commonwealth, but by the author's personal experience - the experience of having lived and walked through the city's streets and alleys with the critical alertness of a proud and inevitably conservative citizen. The *Survey* is thus suffused with a profoundly humanist spirit. Its purpose is to describe the city's transformation in time - not to compare it to the ideal image of a *civitas* but to

[30] Stow, *Survey*, xxvi.

[31] Norden's *Speculum Britanniae* (1593) did for Middlesex, Camden's *Britannia* (1586 Latin edition, 1610 English edition) for England's counties and Speed' *Theatre* (1611) for the whole country what Stow did for London's wards. – See also Manley, *Literature and Culture*, chap. 3: 'From Matron to Monster: London and the Languages of Description'.

compare it to its own former (and by implication more authentic and wholesome) self and to assess the differences.

Stow never aspired to the livery of his company of Merchant Taylors. He almost prided himself on having had 'noe gaines by his travaile,'[32] and he was not above seeking information from the people in the streets. Sometimes he reports popular opinion about a topographical feature or a sight merely to denounce it and counter it with his own more rationally historical view: he affirms that the enormous staff kept in a hostelry in Basing Lane was not, as mine host assured him, one Gerrard the Giant's weapon, but an ancient maypole. The proprietor had apparently been less than helpful to the antiquarian, which is not surprising in view of the probability that Stow would debunk his profitable tale (vol. 1, 348-50).[33] The reports, however, of claw marks made by the devil in the bell tower of St Peter Cornhill, in timber posts at Queenhithe, and in Paul's Cross Stow, oddly enough in so level-headed a man, Stow considers to be authentic on the authority of his father and a bell ringer he knew in his youth (vol. 1, 196). On other occasions he engaged the residents of Bishopsgate ward in debates about the origins of the bones and nails found in ancient graves in Spitalfields (vol. 1, 169-70), and was snubbed by the Vintners: an experience 'which hath somewhat discouraged me any farther to travail amongst the companies to learn ought at their hands' (vol. 2, 247).

Some of his contemporaries mocked the combination of topographical and social history, today praised as Stow's greatest achievement, as mere gossip. His brother Thomas, with whom he lived in strife, instigated a neighbour to say that he

> marvayled that mention was not made in the saide Survay of qwike sylvar roninge out of the grownde at the buildinge of his howse. More that the auctor set not downe that the parson of Christes Churche lyeth every night with the lord mayors wyfe; and suche lyke Knavish talke. (xix)

Writing London's history in the manner Stow used in his *Survey* was not an exclusive, intellectually elitist or authoritarian activity. It was conducted and presented as an enterprise that was in the last definition collective, just as the making of London, its flourishing as a commercial centre and civic corporation, had been and still was a collective endeavour. Stow seeks to pre-empt niggling objections in his description of the Skinner's Corpus Christi processions: 'Thus much to stoppe the tongues of unthankfull men, such as use to aske, why have yee not noted this, or that? And give no thankes for what is done' (vol. 1, 231). Yet such niggles only go to show that Stow's fellow citizens took an active interest in his project, felt they had something to contribute to the accumulation of detail, and may have known early in 1598 that it was coming to fruition.

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[32] *The Diary of John Manningham*, 103.

[33] The manuscript version gives an even livelier account of Stow's exchanges with the inhabitants: 'The servaunt of that howse (more curtise than his master) showed me the lengthe of the staffe […] But the master of the howse saythe […] Neyther would he rise from his sete to show me eny ferther […],' *Survey*, vol. 2, 353.

I read *Englishmen for my Money* as a manifestation of the interest Stow's work evoked, as a parodic and theatrical rendering of what was fairly generally known of Stow and his *magnum opus* among ordinary Londoners.[34] The play's topographical focus introduced a completely new note into London drama. Plays set in specific London areas would become a distinct variety of city comedy in subsequent decades, most prominently in the 1610s with *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Bartholomew Fair*, later in the 1630s with *Hyde Park*, *Tottenham Court*, *Sparagus Garden*, *Covent Garden Weeded* and others: plays that were 'set in clearly identified parts of London or in suburbs, towns, pleasure haunts frequented by London characters.'[35] *Englishmen* is clearly the first in this line. Only a confident knowledge of the street plan, specifically of the Eastern part of the city, allows the playgoers to follow the fantastic odyssey as the mischievous servant leads the foreigners astray in what the playgoers have to imagine as the dark city:

> Frisco. I in *Tower-streete*, you in *Leaden-hall*, and the third in *Fanchurch-streete*; and yet all three heare one another, and all three speake togeather: either wee must be all three in *Leaden-hall*, or all three in *Tower-streete*, or all three in *Fanchurch-streete*; or all three Fooles. (G1v)

As self-reflexive jokes, these references to London streets alert the playgoers to the imaginative transformations of theatrical space - to what the Chorus in *Henry V* would call 'working on the audience's imaginary forces'. But this fusing of theatrical and urban space also parodies the *Survey*. In mock-imitation of the ubiquitous antiquarian, the clown and the foreigners perambulate the whole city, bumping into the stageposts along the way:

> Frisco. I have the scent of *London-stone* as full in my nose, as Abchurch-lane of mother Walles Pasties: Sirrs feele about, I smell London-stone.
> Alvaro. Wat be dis?
> Frisco. Soft, let me see, feele I should say, for I cannot see: Oh lads, pray for my life, for we are almost at Croched-friers.
> Delio. Dats good: but watt be dis Post?
> Frisco. This Post; why tis the May-pole on *Ivie-bridge* going to *Westminster*.
> Delio. Ho Westminster, how come we to Westminster?
> Frisco. Why on your Legges, fooles, how should you goe? Soft, heere's an other: Oh now I know in deede where I am; wee are now at the fardest end of *Shoredich*, for this is the May-pole. (G1v)

This must be one of the few plays ever written in which two Londoners quarrel about the best way to get from A to B: 'Ile tell you how it was,' the servant defends himself later, 'when we come from Bucklers-Burie into Corn-Wale [ie. Cornhill], then you should have turnd downe on your left hand and

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[34] I read *Englishmen for my Money* as an *anticipatory* parody because John Wolfe registered the *Survey of London* in the Stationers' Register on 7 July 1598, while Philip Henslowe had paid William Haughton 20s on 18 February of that year in earnest of the play, and another 20s upon completion in May. Printers were supposed to register prior to publication, so the reading public cannot really have reacted to it any sooner than late summer or autumn. Unless Wolfe registered the *Survey* some months after it was ready for sale, Haughton could not in the spring of 1598 have known Stow's work. The snide remark made by a friend of Stow's brother was recorded by the injured party himself a full year later: '1599. The last of July, at the qwenes armes taverne by leden hall, in contempte of me the auctor of this boke called the Survey of London'. – I would rule out the possibility that the play Henslowe bought in 1598 was substantially different from the play as it was printed in 1616. The topographical interest, and thus the parodic allusions to Stow's project, are too integral to the whole design of the play to be later additions.

[35] Paul W. Miller, 'The Historical Moment of Caroline Topographical Comedy,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32 (1990), 345-374, 349.

so have gone right forward, and so turnd up againe, and so have crost the streate.' This, finally, is nonsense, but even Stow could not have denied that parts of the *Survey* sound almost as convoluted. The naturalised Portuguese impatiently cuts through the confusion: 'You asse, you Doit, why led you him through Corn-hill, / Your way had been to come through Canning [i.e. Candlewick] streete' (I1r). Haughton does not just throw in a few place names here and there to lend local colour, he goes out of his way to mention and represent as many places, sights and locations as possible and to integrate them into the fiction.[36]

Added to the spatial dimension of this topographical farce is the historical dimension also found in the *Survey*. When the Italian arrives at Crutched Friars, his English rival shouts at him: 'What a pox, are you mad or druncke; / What, doe you mean to break my Glasses?' - 'What Glasses, sir? the Italian asks, in understandable confusion. The reply: 'What Glasses, sir; why my Glasses: and if you be so crancke, Ile call the Constable' (F3r). The Englishman goes on to make a running joke of the imaginary presence of glass: 'You come hither to steale my Glasses. / And then counterfeite you are going to your Queanes' (F3v). To the next wooer he elaborates it: 'Sirra, you lye, heere dwells no body but I, that have dwelt here this one and forty yeares, and sold Glasses,' (F4v). Stow informs the readers of his *Survey* that the post-dissolution uses of the estate of Crutched Friars included a carpenter's yard, a tennis court and a glass manufacture (vol. 1, 147-8), but he also says that the glasshouse burnt down in 1575 - a fact the playwright apparently expects his audience to remember. Either the dramatic character or the playwright seems to playfully travel back in time when he pretends the glasshouse is still there. 1575 minus forty-one is a fairly accurate reference to the dissolution of the monasteries and thus an allusion to England's break from Rome and its claim of national independence that fits in well with the play's chauvinistic plot and tone and also with Stow's freely-expressed regret about the deterioration and breaking up of former ecclesiastical buildings.

But the early 1570s are also significant in showing the play's topical application, because at this time John Stow still lived opposite the aforementioned pump at the junction of Leadenhall and Fenchurch Street and had three daughters of marriageable age himself – not all that frequent a family constellation, especially at the time.[37] These biographical details, like his London project, would have been known even to people who were not familiar with his editorial and historiographical works. Yet

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[36] When Frisco the clown is sent on an errant to St Paul's, for instance, he has a nineteen-line monologue just about the place itself: 'Ah, sirra, now I know what manner of thing Powles is […] For my maister would say, Would I had Powles full of Gold. My young Mistresses, and Grimkin our Taylor, would wish they had Powles full of Neddles […]' (D2v and 3r). – The play is also the first to bring the Royal Exchange onto the stage, in a long and very naturalistic scene of bartering (about goods and about women), receiving news of shipwreck, networking, and so forth (B3v-C4v).

[37] Stow mentions the 'Well or Pumpe' on the north side of Fenchurch streete (vol. 1, 149). There was a lane that led down past Northumberland House towards Crutched Friars; this is the lane Alvaro is to take (F3v). On Stow's daughters, see *Survey*, lxii. – Note also that it was in 1569 that Stow read a Spanish pamphlet to his neighbours and got into trouble with the Merchant Taylors, the Court of Aldermen, and even the Privy Council, and that the play makes a point of Pisaro's neighbourly and hospitable behaviour.

the echoes are slight enough to serve as allusions, without turning the play into personal satire. Pisaro the Portuguese is not meant to be an impersonation of Stow. It is not Stow himself but Stow's project that Haughton mocks: the conception of London as a community bound by its physical surroundings of lime, wood and stone, if not by collective responsibilities and communal feeling.

The *Survey*'s interlacing of social and topographical history and Londoners' often violent fear of domination by foreigners is worked by the populist playwright Haughton into quips like the clown's, who imagines the intercultural marriages prevented by the English lovers' ingenuity: 'Oh the generation of Languages that our House will bring foorth: why every Bedd will have a proper speach to himselfe, and have the Founders name written upon it in faire Capitall letters, *Heere lay*, and so foorth' (I3v). In this Babylonic parody of urban foundation myths, rest in a tomb is replaced by sex in a bed. Romantic comedy is, of course, expected to focus on the pleasures of the living rather than the commemoration of the dead. But an ugly note creeps in when one of the English gallants is confronted by the furious father of the bride and threatens to consummate his marriage against the Cross in Cheapside in full view of the public – a violation not only of public decency but also of the images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and King Edward the Confessor that graced the edifice, or at any rate *had* graced it until they were destroyed by religious iconoclasts.[38] Sexual violence and iconoclastic vandalism are thus associated by the playwright, and it is not entirely clear whether he means to disparage the young swaggerer or to mock conservatives like Stow who preached traditional values to a generation that simply did not care any more.

Even the fact of the city's physical existence, then, could not guarantee a modicum of communal feeling in those who live in it. Stow felt that London's streets and buildings were 'common commodities' like historical truth,[39] and he wanted to see them respected and cared for – not cheapened, not sold off or neglected, nor privatised and appropriated. Leadenhall, for example, 'which is the chiefe fortresse and most necessarie place within all the Citie, for the tuition and safeguard of the same,' 'should nor ought not to be letten to farme, to any person or persons, to have and to hold the same hall for tearme of yeares'; the streets were not to be clogged by private coaches.[40] The 'common' right of using the city's space is implicitly associated with pre-Reformation civic values that are now being undermined.

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[38] 'Hearst thou, Ile lie with her before thy face, / Against the Crosse in Cheape, here, any where, / What you old craftie Fox you' (H2r). - Stow gives a heart-felt account of the repeated assaults upon this monument, *Survey*, vol. 1, 265-7.

[39] In his dedication of the *Chronicles* (1580 edition) to Leicester, Stow maintains that he has undertaken this 'searching out of truth' 'to the common commoditie', Rosenberg, *Leicester*, 78.

[40] Stow, *Survey*, vol. 1, 158. '[Coaches are] made so common, as there is neither distinction of time, nor difference of persons observed' (vol. 1, 83-4). Private coaches appear to have been a by-word for illicit sexual encounters; both are especially popular among upwardly mobile females in satirical city comedy, see e.g. the citizen wives who travel to Ware to meet their lovers in *Northward Ho*, Lady Petronel Flash in *Eastward Ho*, and *The Roaring Girl*, 3.1.13-4.

The focus on the physical appearance of the city was not Stow's and Haughton's alone. Ministers and magistrates, especially in London, fought continuous battles against unsuitable fabrics and colours embellishing lowly citizens' bodies, but conspicuous consumption did not stop there. Londoners prided themselves not merely on their public or semi-public architecture like St Paul's, Leadenhall, the Royal Exchange, Britain's Burse or later Covent Garden, but on their private buildings. Stow reports with almost Jonsonian malice several cases of citizens who, literally seeking to rise above their station and their neighbours by adding what he calls 'towers' to their houses, were struck by physical ailments that deprived them of the pleasure of 'overlooking' their peers:

> sir John Champneis Alderman and Mayor of London [...] builded in this house an high Tower of Bricke, the first that ever I heard of in any private mans house to overlooke his neighbours in this Citie. But this delight of his eye was punished with blindnesse some yeares before his death: since that time sir Percevall Hart a jolly Courtier and knight [has lived there].[41]

'Jolly Courtier' is indeed an insult, as Richard Johnson informs us in *Look On Me, London* (1613): 'if a gentleman purpose to scoffe a cittizen, he will call him, a trimme merchant: likewise the cittizen, scoffing the gentleman, will call every common fellow a jolly gentleman'.[42] Stow seems to feel that nothing more need be said about a *courtier's* vanity, but for a citizen such ostentation is unbeseeming.

The very project of topographical commemoration as Stow conceived it was an act of defiance against the new regime of Protestant merchant-magistrates, who had turned monasteries into tennis-courts, episcopal palaces into crowded tenements, and allowed hallowed edifices to decay. London comedy continued to work on this link between nostalgia and topography. In Dekker's and Webster's *Westward Ho*, Master Honysuckle is welcomed back in London by Master Justiniano after a business trip to France:

> Honysuckle. They say Charing-crosse is falne downe, since I went to Rochell: but thats no such wonder, twas old, and stood awry [...] Charing-crosse was olde, and olde thinges must shrinke aswell as new Northern cloth.
>
> Justiniano. Your worship is in the right way verily: they must so, but a number of better things between Westminster bridge and temple barre both of a worshipfull, and honourable erection, are falne to decay, and have suffred putrifaction, since Charing fell, that were not of halfe so long standing as the poore wry-neckt Monument. (2.1.35-47)

The nostalgic (and prurient) sentiments expressed here about the ecclesiastical and monastic foundations along the Strand which were dissolved by Henry VIII (and about the sexual activities of the Strand's current residents of shopkeepers and their wives), echoes Stow's regret for the old

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[41] Stow, *Survey*, vol. 1, 133, see also 151-2 and 172-3. Cf. the view from Hogsdon onto the City in *Pimlyco, or Runne Red-Cap* (1609): 'A thousand Steeples, Turrets, Towers, / (Lodgings, all fit for Emperours,) / Lifted their proud heads bove the Skie,' or Richard Johnson's raptures in *The Pleasant Walkes of Moore-Fields* (1607): 'The Citizens I perceive ever carried gallant mindes, and to this day (I see) they continually strive to beautifie this famous Citie, for what faire summer houses with loftie towers and turrets are here builded […] not so much for use and profite, as for shew and pleasure,' quoted in Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, Ithaca, 1958, 37 and 38.

[42] *Illustrations of Early English Popular Literature*, ed. John P. Collier, vol. 2, New York, 1863, 15.

buildings, the old order. At a time of accelerated and pervasive social transformations, stone and timber become preservers of old values:

> The old man-made structures (castles, churches, abbeys, bridges, tombs and monuments) which dominated the urban environment and broke up the horizon of the countryside conditioned people's memories and their sense of change. [...] Around such inescapable reminders of earlier times, communities could and did weave an invented past; around any prominent topographical or architectural feature there could eventually swirl not just one tale but an entire magnetic field of traditions, tales, images and rituals.[43]

Crutched Friars was one of the ecclesiastical properties secularised and profaned in post-Reformation London. Haughton's play weaves a romantic tale around it; Stow, too, sought to condition people's memories and their sense of change, but he proceeded to set before his readers a factual, not an invented past, the past of pre-Reformation times. The inevitable claims inherent in the architectural legacy of medieval Roman Catholicism are indirectly affirmed in Stow's wrath at iconoclastic violence and the neglect of church buildings in Elizabethan London. As long as the maypole stood by St Andrew (later St Andrew 'Undershaft'), even as long as it hung along the fronts of the houses there, the old festive customs were materially represented.[44] As long as the Virgin and Child were visible, carved in stone, on Cheap Cross, any adherent of the old faith walking past would feel (secretly) cheered.[45]

This continued and manifest presence of papism in London's material substance could not but perturb the godly. At the same time as Stow was writing the *Survey*, the presbyterian Henry Barrow spelt out the view of religious architecture implicit in Stow. Idolatrous rites of worship may have been abolished, but

> how then do they [i.e. churches] still stand in their old idolatrous shapes with their ancient appurtenances with their courts, cells, aisles, chancel, bells, etc? [...] The idolatrous shape so cleaveth to every stone, as it by no means can be severed from them whiles there is a stone left standing upon a stone.[46]

Churches, no matter how strictly Protestant the congregation that assembled in them, were containers of the old faith. The destruction of edifices that embodied the old religion or commemorated a local figure or a local myth precipitated the erosion of old beliefs and oral heritage. Topographical histories like the *Survey* could thus become a veiled kind of socio-cultural criticism of post-Reformation society from a pre-Reformation point of view.[47]

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[43] Daniel Woolf, 'Of Danes and Giants: Popular Beliefs about the Past in Early Modern England,' *Dalhousie Review* 71 (1991/2), 166-209, 171.

[44] See Stow, *Survey*, vol. 1, 143-4, on the fate of this maypole: in 1556 a preacher at Paul's Cross instigated the residents to lift it from the hooks upon which it had rested along the housefronts and to saw it up. 'Thus was this Idoll (as he tearmed it) mangled, and after burned.'

[45] See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 582-4 on 'the part which the physical remnants of Catholicism might play in the reversal of Reformation'.

[46] *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-90*, ed. L. H. Carlson, London, 1962, 478.

[47] Cf. Woolf, 'Of Danes and Giants,' 174: 'Popular beliefs [associated with local topographical features] often displayed a religious aspect that defied external events such as the Reformation. [...] Such stories often had catholic, or even magical overtones which offended more puritanical sensibilities from the mid sixteenth century on.'

The civic community presented in *Englishmen for my Money* is not founded upon any positive values or ideals. Knowing the city's streets, alleys and buildings is accounted a necessary accomplishment in its denizens, but it is used to create a group of outsiders: foreigners ridiculed and humiliated. The play essentially mirrors the cultural pessimism also expressed in the *Survey*, but it refuses to signal any kind of regret. Haughton's characters do not celebrate religious holidays together, or join in secular processions, or discuss the well-being of the civic commonwealth. Some sort of communal feeling may well have arisen among the London members of the Rose audience, but Haughton does nothing to render this feeling 'festive', that is, to effect a reconciliation between foreigners and Londoners, or between the father and his daughters. The affection for the city that suffuses Stow's *Survey*, and the at times wistful, at times scathing voice in which Stow records the undermining of the old, common social order is almost cruelly absent in *Englishmen for my Money*. Haughton offers a view of London's past that exploits Stow's *Survey*, but it is hard-headed and factual, not sentimental or nostalgic.

2.1.2. John Stow's Anti-Theatrical Prejudice

To modern cultural historians studying the variety of what Louis Wright has called "booster' literature' for citizens,[48] the similarities between Stow and citizen drama have been more significant than the differences, but Stow was at pains *not* to be associated with playwrights or players. In the *Survey of London* - the most comprehensive and respectable social study of the Elizabethan capital - not even plays about London or England qualify as as acceptable communal celebrations; Stow is thus fundamentally at odds with modern theatre historians who have suggested that the public playhouses became a festive space that compensated for the loss of pre-Reformation rites and customs.

John Stow has so little so say about the theatre that the reader may be excused for suspecting that he disapproved of it. He lists all the notable places in Southwark - the episcopal houses, the inns, the prisons, even the brothels and the beargardens - but the playhouses do not appear in a single sentence.[49] In fact, not only is he remarkably reticent about the theatre, he also censors himself in the

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[48] Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 41.

[49] The Rose had stood on the Bankside since about 1587, the Swan since about 1595, and in 1598/99 the timber of the Theatre was carted across the river from Shoreditch to make the Globe. In the early summer of 1597 the Swan gained a measure of notoriety by staging Thomas Nashe's and Ben Jonson's *The Isle of Dogs*, which provoked the Privy Council to agree with the aldermen to shut down all playhouses. The Privy Council order, like the petition, mentions by name only 'the Curtayne and the Theatre nere to Shoreditch or any other within that county,' see David Riggs, *Ben Jonson. A Life*, Cambridge/MA., 1989, 33. The theatres may actually have been closed down for a few weeks, though certainly not 'plucked downe', and the whole incident would not have impressed Stow favourably when he was putting the finishing touches to his first edition. - Stow condoned bear-baiting - unlike the Privy Council, who 'thinke yt fytt that all manner of concourse and publique meetinges of the people at playes, beare-baitinges, owlinges and other like asemblyes for sportes be forbidden,' printed in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 313.

little he does say. In the first edition of 1598, as in the extended edition of 1603, he quotes William Fitzstephen on 'sports and pastimes' practised in the late twelfth century:

> London for the shews upon Theaters, and Comicall pastimes, hath holy playes, representations of myracles which holy Confessours have wrought, or representations of torments wherein the constancie of Martyrs appeared. (vol. 1, 92)

The quotation extends over one-and-a-half pages and includes competitive horse-riding, river battles, football matches and ice-skating on Moorfields. Stow picks up the cue:

> These or the like exercises have been continued till our time, [...] Of late time in place of those Stage playes [i.e. biblical or miracle plays], hath beene used Comedies, Tragedies, Enterludes, and Histories, both true and fayned: For the acting whereof certaine publike places as the Theater, the Curtine etc. have beene erected. (vol. 1, 93)

In 1598 he finished his paragraph on the dissolution of the Priory of St. John the Baptist with the observation that

> neare thereunto are builded two publique houses for the acting and shewe of Comedies, Tragedies, and Histories, for recreation. Whereof one is called the Courtein, the other the Theatre: both standing on the Southwest side towards the field.[50]

These are the only references to the contemporary theatre, and both were cut in 1603.[51]

To an unbiased observer London's theatres would have warranted rather *more* attention in 1603 than before 1598, when Stow first wrote the paragraphs in question. The number and variety of playhouses had increased considerably, and the companies were noisily and aggressively engaged in professional competition, which helped them - as individual companies and as an occupational group - to form something like 'corporate identities' that would impress themselves on the playgoing public. The old Theatre had been pulled down, but there were now more than half a dozen purpose-built playhouses splendid enough to feature as tourist attractions. '[C]ertaine publike places as the Theater, the Curtine' Stow would have had to amend in 1603, probably to 'as the Globe, the Fortune'. The Globe (1599) and the Fortune (1600) had been built by the two major acting companies, the Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men, in order to accommodate a greater number of playgoers in greater style and with more attention to social distinctions: Andrew Gurr describes the 'more sophisticated admission system' at the Globe and the Fortune, which allowed gentle folk to pass right up to the galleries without having to squeeze their way through the groundlings in the yard, and which 'probably indicates a shift in priorities to favour the gallery audience'.[52] Alternatively, and here the furrows on Stow's brow would have deepened, he might have put 'certaine private places as at Blackfriars and St Paul's', but he describes the liberty of Blackfriars without even mentioning that the

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[50] Stow, *Survey*, vol. 2, 73; the fuller version is quoted on 262.

[51] Neither Anthony Munday nor John Strype, who extended the *Survey* in 1618 and 1633 respectively, do more than Stow to give the theatres their due; see also Stanley Rubinstein, *Historians of London*, London, 1968, 47-8.

[52] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 16 and 19.

great hall was converted to a playhouse in 1596. The boy companies performing on indoor stages had come back into business in 1599/1600, offering socially more exclusive theatrical experiences to playgoers able and willing to spend sixpence for a ticket. Rosencrantz's much-quoted acknowledgement of the boy players' initially successful competition with the adult companies ('Do the boys carry it away?' - 'Ay that they do, my lord.')[53] suggests that a surveyer of the urban scene may actually have found it quite difficult to assess the development of the theatre in the early years of the century. Stow was not prepared to make the effort, and if he suspected that his readers might be interested in the cultural landscape of theatre, he evidently felt they ought not to be indulged.

Lawrence Manley has suggested that in Stow's silence on the playhouses 'may be read an endorsement of the anti-theatrical bias of the London government'.[54] This surmise is misleading, however wary both Stow and the city fathers were of any event, including a public theatre performance, that might trigger a riot. For one thing, Stow is now fairly unanimously regarded as having leant towards the old religion.[55] Unlike Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday, he did not write against the theatres on behalf of the municipal leaders; nor was he a Protestant reformer like Philip Stubbes, whose *Anatomie of Abuses* aimed at the rooting out of pagan customs and popular initiative. Stubbes saw little to distinguish popular stage plays from May games, dancing and dicing. In his *Anatomie* he deals with stage plays directly before he proceeds to saturnalian cavortings at pagan festivals: 'Of what sorte be the other kinde of playes, which you call Lords of Mis-rule?' The only pastimes Stubbes allows are those 'conducible to example of life and reformation of manners'. This automatically ruled out festive occasions on which 'the whole towne, parish, village and cuntrey [...] make such gluttonous feasts as they doo'.[56]

Yet Stow's anti-theatrical prejudice *was* shaped by his views of the Protestant Reformation insofar as he regretted the demise of cultural practices that had been (and in 1598 still were) attacked by Protestants like Stubbes. He was more selective than Stubbes in his recommendation and condemnation of sports and pastimes, because he was not moved by a Protestant zeal to reform people's manners but by civic zeal to preserve his city's functional communality. His pessimism is not

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[53] *Hamlet*, 2.2.314-333, quote from 332-333.

[54] Lawrence Manley, 'Of Sites and Rites,' *The Theatrical City. Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1575-1649*, ed. David L. Smith, Richard Strier and David Bevington, Cambridge, 1995, 35-54, 50.

[55] Ian Archer has discussed the evidence for Stow's religious leanings and the question whether his cultural pessimism was justified in 'The Nostalgia of John Stow,' *The Theatrical City. Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1575-1649*, ed. David L. Smith, Richard Strier and David Bevington, Cambridge, 1995, 17-34, 28-30. - See Stow, *Survey*, xiii-xx for his brush with the authorities in 1569: it was a historian's occupational hazard to be taken up on charges of sedition and popery, so much of their source material fell into the category. John Selden held that 'Popish Bookes teach and informe what wee know; we know much out of them; the Fathers; Church story, Schoolmen; all may passe for popish Bookes and If you take away them: what learning will you leave [...?] Those puritan Preachers; if they have any thing Good; they have it out of popish Bookes, though they will not acknowledge it; for fear of displeasing the people,' *Table Talk of John Selden*, ed. Frederick Pollock, London, 1927, 23.

[56] Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, M1v, 'Preface' and M7r.

apocalyptic, it is social and cultural. Writing under the impact of two Protestant decades that separated him from Stubbes, Stow made the Reformation responsible for the lamentable deterioration of communal culture in his native city. He seems to have realised that the commercial theatre became established in London not only at the same time as traditional pastimes were declared ungodly, but that the rise of the professional stage was predicated upon the suppression of older, more participatory civic customs.

Reformers of manners and religion condemned plays because, as Stubbes phrased it, they were full of 'bawdrie, hethenrie, paganrie, scurrilitie, and devilrie', which is an early modern Protestant's way of saying that they were ancient festive customs and an integral part of popular culture.[57] Cultural historians have asserted that miracle or saints' plays, mystery plays like the Corpus Christi cycles and pagan folkplays about popular mythic figures continued into Queen Elizabeth's reign but had been suppressed by local civic authorities by 1580, at least in the towns.[58] The decline of local amateur drama thus coincided exactly with the rise of the professional drama in London; Stubbes had his eye on the country and wrote to precipitate the former process. In the mid-1590s Stow regretfully assessed the event: amateur drama had successfully been suppressed, and the professional theatre in London was thriving.

Stow did not share Protestant ministers' view of the theatre as idolatrous and immoral, and neither did he share Protestant magistrates' view of it as a kind of holiday event. Stubbes is a chief witness in the case of modern cultural historians who have argued that '[t]heater and popular festivity were closely related forms of social life' whose purpose was 'the enjoyment of corporate or communal solidarity', and that the established commercial theatre in London was 'a continuation of popular festive activity'.[59] These critics emphasise the temporal, spatial and legal 'otherness' of theatre and its links with holiday and carnival, while the differences between them are elided:

> Traditional pastimes and the theater were parallel cultural forms in that they held the same ambivalent status, outside the rules of ordinary life, yet integrally bound up with it. They tended to happen together, masques, plays, and traditional games all being particularly rife at holiday times and enjoyed in the same places - at court and, in the London area, in the no-man's-land of the liberties, outside the City's legal jurisdiction and under the protection of the crown.[60]

This view has achieved the status of a commonplace in anthropological and sociological studies of the English Renaissance, and the 'cultural migration in which the archaic and amateur forms of dramatic representation and ritual were absorbed by the mature national theater' has been the object of many

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[57] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, L7v.

[58] Collinson, *Iconophobia*, 11. See Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage. Corpus Christi Pageants and Plays*, Chicago, 1974 for a detailed overview over individual towns.

[59] Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater. Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, London, 1985 (quotations from 4 and 5).

[60] Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 24.

fruitful explorations of the Elizabethan and early Stuart theatre.[61]

It is unlikely, however, that Stow, for one, would have accepted this view, nor C. L. Barber's proposition quoted above that festive comedy tended 'to *be* a saturnalian, rather than to *represent* saturnalian experience' - at least not in the case of professional performances in London. To Stow, the differences between festival and theatre seem to matter more than the similarities. The manner in which he describes the amateur lords of misrule appointed at Christmas by the city's top officers is benevolent, and he expressly mentions the 'fine and subtle disguisings, Masks and Mummeries' that were part of the festivities (vol. 1, 97). If saturnalian mummings are fine and subtle, why are not festive comedies on the public stages also fine and subtle? It seems that Stow did not - perhaps not any more - understand the latter as kinds of saturnalia at all, that he did not understand commercial theatrical performances in purpose-built playhouses as holiday or festival occasions. The spirit and thrust of the *Survey* suggests that he assessed stage plays as he did pageants, processions and watches, primarily as *civic* occasions: festive, perhaps, but to be evaluated first of all as harming or benefitting the civic community.

Stow might even have shared the view that traditional festive forms and functions were 'migrating' into the playhouses, but he observed with a nostalgic sense of regret what was lost on the way: the authenticity of collective endeavour, and the active participation in celebrating common bonds and loyalties, possibly by temporarily reversing their structures. When he regrets the 'open pastimes in my youth, being now suppressed' and darkly hints that 'worser practices within doors are to be feared' (vol. 1, 95), he may have been thinking not only of cards, dice, bowls, drink, tobacco and sex at taverns and brothels but also of the revived taste for boy actors at indoor playhouses, where modish playgoers gamed, smoked and drank while watching adolescents pretending to make love. That frequenting the indoor theatres came under particularly harsh censure appears by Henry Crosse's attack in *Vertues Common-Wealth* (1603): 'But especially these nocturnall and night Playes, at unseasonable and undue times, more greater evils must necessarily proceed from them'.[62] To Stow – had he ever phrased it like that - playgoing was not primarily immoral or irreligious. His objection was that the theatre *represented*, rather than *was*, a saturnalian experience, and that representation in this case implied that the citizens were to watch rather than participate in the celebration of their civic communities. That is why he 'overpassed' it.

2.1.3 The Decline of Urban Communal Culture

John Stow, I am suggesting, regarded playgoing at the end of the sixteenth century as one of the new-fangled, privatised, commercialised pastimes that had sprung up in place of traditional outdoor sports

[61] Patterson, *Popular Voice*, 60.

[62] Quoted in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, 247.

and communal merry-making. Like the anonymous author whose *Apologie of the Cittie of London* he appends to the *Survey*, he was convinced that social harmony was maintained 'in Cities, where men by mutual societie and companying together, doe grow to alliances, comminalties and corporations', which were 'a continuall bridle against tyranny' (vol. 2, 198-9). Other writers who sang the praises of England's powerful *camera regis* tended not to comment on traditional or contemporary forms of communal culture other than to recommend the hospitality and charity of its citizens in general terms. Yet Stow was painfully aware that he was describing 'sports and pastimes' no longer or only perfunctorily honoured: 'What should I speake of the auncient dayly exercises in the long bow by Citizens of this citie, now almost cleane left off and forsaken? I overpass it' (vol. 1, 104).[63] Even though, in the words of Edward Bonahue, Stow intended his work as a whole to 'legitimize London's commercial activity and to reify the urban middling sort as a distinct, cohesive community',[64] he constantly detected evidence of the excesses of commercialism and the erosion of 'mutual societie'.

Modern historians studying Elizabethan London have confirmed his impression. They note 'the collapse of traditional collective forces in town life',[65] 'the fragmentation of the communal coherence, the diminution of the organized sociability, and the sundering of the powerful cultural identity of the older, medieval city',[66] the fact that '[m]uch feasting and association became increasingly imbued with consciousness of social rank and hierarchy [...] and the cultural life of London became culturally fragmented and elements of it socially exclusive'.[67] They affirm Stow's view that after the middle of the sixteenth century 'the expression of communitarian sentiments in the form of shared activities like feasting and recreations weakened as the vertical relationships strengthened. [...] Community in the sense of people of different social status doing things together was being eroded'.[68] Even medievalists, who tend to qualify the 'modern myth, according to which [...] a supposed parochial stability was, in the post-medieval period, shattered by an alleged growth of individualism', agree that after the Reformation

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63 Nearly all of the sports, pastimes and watches he lists are described as things of the past, now either curtailed or 'cleane left off'. - Archery was more warlike and thus more 'useful' than, for example, football, but by 1600 popular zest for it was on the wane. In his 1615 preface to the readers of *The Four Prentices of London*, Thomas Heywood speaks with approval of the private initiative to revive the practice of military exercise in the Artillery Gardens ('out of their voluntary affections, prosecuted by their private industries, and continued at their owne proper cost and charge'). This revival was not of long duration, however, as the authorities had decided to put more trust into firearms, see Lindsay Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia, 1558-1638*, London, 1967, 212 and 215-6.

64 Bonahue, 'Citizen History,' 63.

65 Jonathan Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort,' *The Middling Sort of People. Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, Basingstoke, 1994, 84-112, 87.

66 Peter Clark, *Sociability and Urbanity. Clubs and Societies in the Eighteenth-Century City*, Leicester, 1986, 4.

67 Jeremy Boulton, 'London, 1540-1700,' *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 2, *1540-1840*, ed. Peter Clark, Cambridge, 2000, 315-346, 331.

68 Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 92-3. - See also Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770*, Oxford, 1989, chap. 10 on the new formations of sociability after the Restoration.

'local communities [were] forced back upon the parish as the sole legitimate focus of collective activity'.[69]

The decades from about 1570 to 1630 were a time of almost unalleviated economic depression, to which contemporaries reacted with at times extreme anxiety. Communal culture thrived at times of prosperity and declined with the rise of unemployment and inflation. Paul Slack supports the view that the low-pressure economy of the post-Black Death era was one factor that had encouraged 'associate activities' of all sorts to flourish in the late Middle Ages, while the high-pressure crisis decades at the turn of the seventeenth century were correspondingly accompanied by the experience of an increasing cultural dissociation.[70]

It appears that there was a noticeable gap of time between the abolition or waning of old forms of sociability in the later sixteenth century and the emergence of new forms. Peter Burke acknowledges this gap when he observes that '[t]raditional popular culture was associated with traditional communities, and is likely to have declined with them, producing a kind of cultural vacuum in which it was easier for new forms of popular culture to take hold' - forms like the new print media, political clubs and societies, taverns and coffee-houses, or nonconformist congregations.[71] But apart from the print media - and, most significantly in the present context, the commercial theatre - these new collective phenomena really only achieved social significance shortly before the Revolution or even later, after the Restoration.

Commitment to company ethos was to some extent a personal choice: a citizen might identify more with his fellows in business than with his spiritual brethren in his parish; or, especially if his religious beliefs tended towards the unorthodox, he might feel alienated at guild functions and be much more deeply involved in the everyday life of his fellow sectarians. The territorial communities of ward, precint, neighbourhood and parish overlapped and competed for citizen loyality with each other and with the non-territorial institutions of the companies.[72] The fact remains, however, that in all of these collectivities it was an oligarchy of the affluent who dominated policies and proceedings. Members might decide to opt out and transfer their spiritual and financial support elsewhere, but 'elsewhere', in the early modern town, was likewise stratified into layers of 'sufficiency'.

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[69] Gervase Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild in the Middle Ages,' *Parish, Church and People. Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. S. J. Wright, London, 1988, 29-55, 29 and 45.

[70] Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement*. Public Welfare in Early Modern England, Oxford, 1999, esp. 151-2.

[71] Peter Burke, 'Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century London,' *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay, London, 1988, 31-58, 53; see also Tim Harris, 'Problematising Popular Culture,' *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850*, ed. Tim Harris, London, 1995, 1-27, 23-4, and Clark, *Clubs and Societies*, 39.

[72] This is the basic contention of Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities. Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London*, Stanford, 1997: 'members continually had to determine how strongly they would adhere to their officers' visions of their common goals. [...] This process of selectively giving and withholding allegiance was essential to the formation of an individual's identity' (3).

It is generally true to say that existing forms of institutional sociability in late-sixteenth-century London were monopolised by the socio-political elites. The great trade companies, for instance, 'were in fact becoming primarily social clubs and philanthropic organizations for wealthy merchants'.[73] Without their financial and administrative support, many of the old civic customs were doomed. When liverymen and city fathers grew impatient with the organisation, expenditure and danger of riots at the midsummer shows and processions, they simply stopped having them. 'Pageants with dragons gave way to processions in armour, and these yielded to innocuous civic dinners'[74] - which, needless to say, were only for the upper echelons of company or parish.

Within the companies the affluent merchants formed the elite, the livery, while lesser traders, retailers, shopkeepers and artisans formed the yeomanry. This unequal bipartite division had existed in the Middle Ages; again there is disagreement among historians to what extent the yeomen were free to organise and govern themselves, and to what extent they were dominated by the livery.[75] As far as the social functions of the company as a 'community' were concerned, it must have made a difference that in the Middle Ages ordinary citizens had tended to support independent parish fraternities, while the liverymen stuck to the fraternities of their own companies.[76] Religious guilds and independent fraternities had been demolished after the Reformation, but the continued existence of the company - its fraternity dissolved and its commemorative ceremonies adapted to the new doctrines - granted a measure of continuity of communal cohesion to the liverymen, which was not enjoyed by ordinary citizens. These were thrown back upon the parish, but the picture here is similar to that of the companies:

> the suppression of parish fraternities in the 1540s was accompanied by threats to the wider role of the church in the community [...] However, for the majority of the population, *especially the respectable classes*, the parish church continued as the main hub of communal life into the seventeenth century.[77]

One result of the marginalisation of the ordinary citizen in the city's political and ceremonial life was a growing suspicion of any form of privatisation. The accusation of conducting government in private was a powerful one in the contests over authority in the city's various institutions:

> 'Private' implied secrecy, enclosure, exclusion [...] 'Public' implied partial disclosure, inclusion, and participation, and was closely censored by concerns about citizenship and relations between men and women, young and old, and between classes.[78]

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[73] Manning, *Village Revolts*, 190.

[74] Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 27. As a favour to the companies' liverymen, King Henry VIII suspended the midsummer show and watch in 1539. Although they were intermittently revived, they never achieved their old glory; see Hutton, *Merry England*, 39-40 and 76.

[75] See e.g. Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, chap. 4, esp. 140-8.

[76] Sylvia L. Thrupp, The M*erchant Class of Medieval London*, 1300-1500, Chicago, 1948, 37.

[77] Clark, *Clubs and Societies*, 33 (emphases added).

[78] Paul Griffiths, 'Secrecy and Authority in Late Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century London,' *Historical Journal* 40 (1997), 925-51, 928 and 946.

As the streets and institutions of London became more crowded and popular discontent about socio-economic grievances more voluble, the leading members of ward and vestry, guild and parish began to exercise a tighter control over administrative and executive proceedings. Although political affairs were insistently conducted in the name and to the benefit of the commonwealth, commoners themselves were increasingly discouraged from participating in institutional political life: 'The governors of the city, guild and parish preferred to meet behind closed doors, and the exclusive nature of proceedings helped to institutionalize inequality by restricting access'.[79]

The 'open pastimes in my youth, being now suppressed' to which Stow harks back were 'open' in the sense that most of them took place out of doors, that in principle all citizens (i.e. freemen) could join in, and that they hid no factious design or degenerate pleasure. This ties in with the prejudice against private celebrations that François Laroque finds in his overview of the representation of festivity in early modern culture:

> Festivity in which the community played no part was inevitably regarded as ill-omened, even harmful. [...] Once it forfeits the sanction of the people, a festival loses its unificatory power [...] When hidden from public view or used to promote destructive forces, it became more disturbing, introducing a reversal of values that ran counter to the balance which it was supposed to preserve.[80]

For the majority of (male) people, the 'worser practices within doors' that Stow fears would follow upon the suppression of open pastimes took place at taverns and alehouses:

> in the aftermath of the attack on church-oriented games, rituals and the like, the alehouse progressively developed as a rival centre for communal and neighbourhood activities. [...] Driven from church, no longer favoured in circles of the well-to-do, old-style entertainments took refuge at the alehouse - one of the few alternative quasi-public buildings in the community.[81]

The pot-Reformation decline of festivities that involved the whole parish or guild, company, neighbourhood, village or even town manifested not only a prejudice against traditional communal activities but also against the public space in which they had happened. 'Civil' or 'polite' pastimes were increasingly sedentary and took place indoors, just as the governing of the corporation or parish increasingly went on behind the closed doors of small rooms. Deprived of many of the medieval institutions of sociability, ordinary people had to find new spaces in which to develop or cultivate alternative kinds of sociability. But all of these spaces became, or had long been, suspect for the same reasons. The objections to alehouses were practically identical with the objections to 'common' playhouses put foreward by London's magistrates: they infected people with diseases and seditious

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[79] Griffiths, 'Secrecy and Authority,' 928. - Gervase Rosser notes 'an active official hostility' to private associations like fraternities and religious guilds in the first decades of the English Reformation, 'Communities of Parish and Guild,' 45. At times of political uncertainty (often accompanied by social transformations), private assemblies invariably come under suspicion as being clandestine and unpatriotic.

[80] Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*, 303-4.

[81] Peter Clark discusses 'the threat posed by the alehouse to respectable society, to public order, the fabric of the family, and established cultural and political values,' *The English Alehouse. A Social History, 1200-1830*, London, 1983, 153, 154 and 159.

ideas, they encouraged idlers to waste time better spent serving God or their masters, rogues to pick fights, and the lecherous to seek the company of prostitutes.

Moralists were soon persuaded that the purging of the commonwealth of idolatrous rites had provided a pat excuse for irreligious worldliness. Thomas Middleton, that dramatiser of urban immorality, observed a causal link between the deterioration of morals and the stages of the Reformation:

> Their [i.e. gallants'] first oath in times past was *by the mass*; and that they have sworn quite away: then came they to their faith, as, *by my faith, 'tis so*; that in a short time was sworn away too, for no man believes now more than 'a sees; then they swore *by their honesties*; and that, mistress, you know, is sworn quite away: after their honesties was gone, then came they to their gentility [...and] at the last they came to silver, and their oath was *by the cross of this silver*; and swore so fast upon that, that now they have scarce left them a cross for to swear by.[82]

Roman Catholicism turned into Protestantism, has ended up as worldliness and avarice and has virtually bankrupted the country. All Jacobean Englishmen have left to swear by, is money - a modern form of idolatry. The wheel has come full circle, from religious idolatry to secular idolatry.

Measures closely associated with the Protestant reformers, such as religious iconoclasm, the suppression of seasonal festivity and the increase of magisterial control of the public space, interlinked with other developments such as socio-economic polarisation, cultural diversification and population growth, and led conservatives like Stow to lament the passing of pre-Reformation communal feeling. The relations of cause and effect in this nexus were difficult to distinguish:

> The richest and the poorest in England lived in London, side by side; the rich in great houses on the street fronts, the poor in alleys behind. As the Reformation progressed the distinctions in wealth became greater; not because of the Reformation, but because of the social and economic transformation created by the rise in population coeval with it.

Remans the question of how the Reformation was linked with the decline of collective sociability: 'Did this religious crisis destroy the sense and fact of community in London, or was the crisis in religion itself in part a symptom of fracture having other causes?'[83]

Socio-cultural life in late Elizabethan and Stuart London was greatly affected by the fact that at the same time as the material maintenance, administration and ideological harmonisation of the burgeoning metropolis was becoming even more difficult and demanding than hitherto, and the city fathers had to rely more than ever on people's voluntary adherence to rules of 'civilised' conduct, there was a Reformation-related scarcity of communal institutions and collective customs to direct people:

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[82] Thomas Middleton, *The Family of Love* (1606/7), 1.3.31-46, ed. A. H. Bullen, *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, 8 vols., vol. 3, New York, 1964. Bullen quotes an anonymous epigram, which lists oaths by the mass, by the cross, by one's faith, and finally 'God damme me'. The epigram lacks Middleton's focus on money worship but betrays a clearer aversion against the process of the Protestant Reformation.

[83] Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 4 and 3.

> For the alteration in religion was accompanied by and interacted with other social changes which tended to accentuate the distance between classes, while making it more difficult for those distances to be bridged and for tensions to be expressed, contained and surmounted by ceremonies and rituals.[84]

The alarming influx of migrants into the city and the commercialisation of leisure could not be laid at the door of the Protestant establishment, but the lack of stabilising rituals and customs evidently was:

> Now [...] those public exercises are left off by the reason that the preachers of the land did so inveigh against them as Lords of Misrule and the rest [...,] and so the preachers and justices did [...] forbid all such public sportings on the Sabbath day [...] What then followed? Why sure alehouse haunting [...] so that the people would have their meetings either publicly with pastimes abroad or else privately in drunken alehouses.[85]

In *Pasquil's Palinodia* (1619), the poet and his Muse wander out of London towards Westminster. They approach the Maypole in the Strand, and

> Stay, quoth my Muse, and here behold a signe
> Of harmlesse mirth and honest neighbourhood,
> Where all the parish did in one combyne,
> To mount the rod of peace, and none withstood:
> Where no capritious constables disturbe them
> Nor justice of the peace did seeke to curbe them,
> Nor peevish Puritan in rayling sort,
> Nor over-wise church-warden spoyl'd the sport.[86]

The demise of the old festive customs (and the communal harmony they had come to symbolise) is related squarely to the advent of the Reformation and the stricter regulations governing daily life. The magistrates who prohibited seasonal festivals represented official Protestantism as much as did the clergymen who denounced them from the pulpits. They each had their own reasons for wishing to spoil sport, but they are named in one breath and their motives intermingle. The Muse goes on to lament the detrimental effect of the 'reformation of manners' on communal life:

> But since the sommer-poles were overthrowne,
> And all good sports and merriments decayd,
> How times and men are chang'd so well is knowne. (15)

The precipitator of religious reformation, the 'fierie zealous brother', is singled out for particular censure, since 'He tooke it [i.e. the may-pole] for an idol, and the feast, / For sacrifice unto that painted beast' (16).

But at the end of the day the poet's Muse – unlike Richard Rawlidge quoted above, or John Stow - is just as happy to perform in a tavern, fired by wine, as on the village green, fired by ale. The tavern is offered as a perfectly satisfactory substitute for the marketplace:

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[84] Collinson, *Birthpangs*, 31. – See also Barry, 'Bourgeois Collectivism': 'The Reformation added religious weight to other tendencies that undermined the associational life of the guilds and the church' (87).

[85] Richard Rawlidge, *A Monster Late Found Out* (1628), quoted in Clark, *Alehouse*, 152.

[86] *Pasquils Palinodia*, in *Illustrations of Old English Literature*, ed. John Payne Collier, vol. 1, London, 1866, 14 (references are to pages).

> The house,
> Of which my Muse hath read so long a lecture,
> Is nothing but a schoole where men carrouse,
> And learne to drinke; a little common-wealth,
> Where every man is free to drinke a health,
> And none denide that can discharge the score:
> In briefe, it is a Tavern, and no more. (28)

The poem is an exercise of nostalgic yearning for the old seasonal customs, and it gives the religious and cultural factors that enter into it, but it does not explore an ongoing process. Its very off-handedness, however, shows that by the middle of the Jacobean reign at the latest, the causal connection between the Reformation and the decline of urban communal culture – insistently implied by John Stow in his *Survey* – had become a topic that was handled in popular literature, including public stage plays.

2.2 London Comedy: Sports and Pastimes Staged

Entertainments at the upper end of the social scale defined themselves in distinction from the 'common' pastimes of the multitude. By the time Stow published the *Survey* and its revised second edition, playgoing in London was, after a hiatus of some ten years, definitely becoming socially polarised into outdoor and indoor playhouse clientele. The playwrights themselves were keenly aware of the clash between the traditional ethos of communal celebration and the novel forms of commercialised leisure. One of the most frequent metaphors in addresses to the audience, predominantly at indoor playhouses but also at the amphitheatres, positioned the playhouse near the village green or the great hall by presenting the occasion as a feast and the play as a delectable morsel prepared for consumption. In the prologue to *Midas* (1589), an anti-Spanish comedy written for Paul's boys, John Lyly is struggling to dispel his customers' fashionable *ennui*:

> Gentlemen, so nice is the world that for apparel there is no fashion, for music no instrument, for diet no delicate, for plays no invention, but breedeth satiety before noon, and contempt before night.

As the theatre became firmly established among the entertainments available in London, the complaint became ubiquitous. In 1624 John Fletcher begins *A Wife For a Month* (King's) by having the prologue point out that

> He [i.e. the playwright] had rather dress, upon a triumph day,
> My lord-mayor's feast, and make him sauces too, [...]
> Than dress for such a curious company [i.e. the Blackfriars audience]
> One single dish.

George Chapman, who wrote mainly for the boy companies, ends the epilogue to *All Fools* (1599, Admiral's) with a sarcastic reluctance to rhyme:

> We can but bring you meat, and set you stools,
> And to our best cheer say, you are all - welcome.

Asper, Jonson's mouthpiece in *Every Man Out of his Humour* (1598, Chamberlain's) promises to exert himself for

> attentive auditors,
> Such as will joyne their profit with their pleasure,
> And come to feed their understanding parts:
> For these, Ile prodigally spend my selfe. (201-4)

The play/food metaphor turns the play into a dish the playwright has prepared for the delectation and edification of the audience, whose 'nice' palates and jaded appetites he finds difficult to please. To speak of art-lovers' (or art-consumers') 'taste' is nowadays a cliché. But the metaphor had not yet died at a time when playgoing could be said to be competing with older forms of sociability, when it was in a very real sense a kind of (displaced) feasting. The theatre betrays its roots in popular festivity, of which food and drink had been indispensable elements. At the playhouse, literal feasting could interfere with metaphoric feasting. The social activities of drinking and chatting at times distracted the playgoers' attention from the necessary questions of the play. In *Every Man Out* the clown Carlo tries to re-focus them:

> Mary, if any here be thirsty for it, [i.e. the play] their best way (that I know) is, sit still, seal up their lips, and drinke so much of the play, in at their eares. (351-3)

The festive similarity between plays and food was so common that Caroline playwrights could present it as a kind of anthropological fact. Thomas Carew elaborated shortly before the playhouses were closed by the puritans:

> It hath been said of old, that plays are feasts,
> Poets the cooks, and the spectators guests,
> The actors waiters. [...]
> Though sweets with your's, sharps with my taste meet,
> Both must agree this meat's or sharp or sweet:
> But if I scent a stench or a perfume,
> Whilst you smell nought at all, I may presume
> You have that sense imperfect.[87]

Ben Jonson, characteristically, turns the table on these difficult eaters in *The New Inn* (1629, King's), in which he - 'the same cook / Still, and the fat' - enjoins the playgoers to

> Hear for your health, then; but at any hand,
> Before you judge, vouchsafe to understand,
> Concoct, digest. If, then, it do not hit,
> Some are in a consumption of wit. (Prologue, 21-4)[88]

Preparing a stage play has become an anxious business for its producers. Their hospitality, paradoxically, is a way of earning a living. The guests are customers, who, their appetites surfeited by

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[87] Thomas Carew in the address to the readers of William Davenant's *The Wits* (1641), *The Dramatic Works of Sir William D'Avenant*, Edinburgh, 1872, 5 vols., vol. 2, 116.

[88] Cf. the exchanges between the Poet and the Cook in Jonson's court masque *Neptunes Triumph for the Return of Albion* (1624/5).

the varied supply, may pick at the playhouse's offerings instead of tucking in. Beneath the humourous or sarcastic remarks about audience 'appetites' lurks the fear of rejection: the customers can choose where to spend their spare time and money. There are no familial or corporative, moral or religious bonds that would oblige the playgoers to attend, and to attend with approval. The metaphorical characterisation of a theatre performance as a communal feast was by no means merely a joyful and inclusive gesture, it expressed unease both with the commercial nature of theatre and with the sentimental longing for communal feeling.

Cultural historians studying the socio-cultural role of playgoing often take recourse to anthropological theories, and indeed the distinction between 'liminal' rituals and 'liminoid' cultural phenomena as suggested by Victor Turner can be useful in elucidating how early modern playgoers may have perceived the inevitable contradictions inherent in watching in the playhouse representations of customs that were on the wane in everyday life.[89] Turner analyses how ritual events turn into cultural products, a process that invariably seems to accompany the emergence of capitalism. He describes the transition from liminal (i.e. 'threshold') events like initiation rites and major seasonal festivals to 'cultural phenomena, which may either be shown to have descended from earlier forms of ritual liminality, or are, in some sense, their functional equivalents'; thus he calls them 'liminoid'. The residual presence, both thematically and structurally, of ancient scapegoating rituals in Elizabethan comedy illustrates this transformation of a liminal rite into a cultural commodity, as does the aestheticised 'feasting' on/at a play.[90]

As John Stow's implicit critique of the theatre showed, early modern play-acting itself can be understood as a social and cultural activity that was shedding its liminal functions and turning into a cultural product that was determined almost entirely by commercialisation and consumer choice. In contrast to liminal phenomena, liminoid ones are 'not cyclical, but continuously generated' by customer demand. They are 'produced by specific named individuals or particular groups', 'schools' or 'coteries' and 'compete with one another in the cultural market, and appeal to specific tastes'. Having appropriated formerly liminal symbols and practices, these socio-cultural factions in their turn 'ritualise' their activities in order to increase their cultural validity:

> Again, when a group of liminoid artists constitutes itself as a coterie, it tends to generate its own admission rites, providing a liminal portal to its liminoid precinct [...] Nevertheless, despite the coexistence

[89] Victor Turner, 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality,' *Secular Ritual*, ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, Amsterdam, 1977, 36-52. See also the extended version of this article as 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual' in his *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York, 1982, 20-60. - For an application of Turner to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see Patterson, *Popular Voice*, 59-64; for a more general overview of anthropological concepts of festivity, see Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*, chap. 2: 'The Social Function of Festivity'.

[90] Skura connects the many references to eating and being eaten in Prologues and also in the clowns' speeches to the fear modern actors' express of being 'devoured' by their audiences, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 55-6 and 59-60.

> of liminal and liminoid phenomena in all societies, it remains true that in complex societies today's liminoid is yesterday's liminal.[91]

Turner is of course not using the term 'coterie' to allude to Alfred Harbage's distinction between 'coterie' playwrights and audiences and 'popular' ones, and Harbage has justly been criticised for generalising and exaggerating the differences between the two kinds of playhouses before the second Stuart decade.[92] But Turner's observations about the evolution of ritual into art, and the subsequent ritualisation of art, do illuminate the transition from amateur stage playing in the marketplaces into professional performances at 'private' indoor playhouses. Traditional social rituals were still residually present in commercial stage plays, for instance in the motif of the scapegoat. Inversely, the reports that come down to us about riotous crowds of apprentice playgoers who took over the amphitheatres on Shrove Tuesday and demanded to be shown the old Elizabethan favourites, or who sacked Christopher Beeston's Cockpit playhouse in 1617 in protest against the transfer of their favourite plays from the Red Bull to the more expensive indoor playhouse, suggest that these old plays had achieved the cultural status formerly granted only to religious images or seasonal rites.[93]

In John Stow's youth, Londoners celebrated midsummer by decorating the houses with greenery, eating and drinking with their neighbours in the streets and watching the pageants in the watch:

> In the Moneths of June, and July, on the Vigiles of festivall dayes, and on the same festivall dayes in the Evenings after the Sunne setting, there were usually made Bonfiers in the streetes, every man bestowing wood or labour towards them: the wealthier sort also before their doores neare to the said Bonfiers, would set out Tables on the Vigiles, furnished with sweete breade, and good drinke, and on the Festivall dayes with meates and drinks plentifully, whereunto they would invite their neighbours and passengers also to sit, and be merrie with them in great familiaritie. (vol. 1, 101)

At the end of his life, they went to the Globe at any time of the year to watch a play about midsummer, in which fairies intermingle with humans, and artisans provide amateur entertainment to dispel their ruler's *ennui* before his wedding night.

It is immediately obvious why Stow, who lovingly remembers these midsummer suppers at which eating and drinking together were the outward signs of communal reconciliation and festive levelling, would frown on the status-conscious 'feasting' at playhouses, at which 'every several mouth hath sundry taste'. Many scenes in city comedies that present feasts-within-the-play thus have a self-reflexive aspect in that the characters are participating in a communal custom that was dying out in real life and for which playgoing had become a kind of substitute. Many plays end with a feast proposed, sometimes - as in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Northern Lass* - the company of actors and

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[91] Turner, 'Liminality,' 46. Other quotations 39, 37 (Turner's italics) and 44-5.

[92] For critiques of Alfred Harbage's *Shakespeare's Audience*, New York, 1941 (and his extremest opponent, Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642*, Princeton, 1981), see Gurr, *Playgoing*, 3-5, and Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-42*, Cambridge, 1984, 293-306.

[93] Gurr, *Playgoing*, 171 and 250-1.

audience are equivocally invited. In Jonson's play, the contract at the beginning (which divides the audience into individual customers) is contrasted with the collective repast offered at the end:

> Overdo. I invite you home to me to my house, to supper. […]
> Cokes. Yes, and bring the actors along, we'll ha' the rest of the play at home.[94]

Playgoing, like a trip to the fair, is an awkward mixture of business transaction and collective recreation. The impression that *Bartholomew Fair* is one of Jonson's more placatory comedies is evoked by nothing so much as by its movement from commerce to commensality.[95]

2.2.1 *Jack Drum's Entertainment*: Holiday in the Playhouse

It would be a mistake to underestimate the ambivalence about traditional merry-making in an urban society self-consciously fashioning a more 'civilised' identity for itself. Many London citizens were quite happy to watch Morris dancing in the playhouses or in the streets as part of a civic festivity, but they would have been reluctant to participate in pastimes they had been led to regard as rustic, possibly pagan and popish, certainly faintly ridiculous. Most of the 'gentlemen' addressed by Nell and George, the citizen-spectators in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, would not have been seen dead in the scarfs and feathers, rings and knacks that adorn Rafe the apprentice.[96] The representation of holiday customs in the theatre - particularly in plays about social life in contemporary London - had to allow for two seemingly contradictory audience responses, participation and dissociation. This representation of traditional festivity was, I will argue, motivated by a paradoxical combination of motives, on the one hand to preserve the past and on the other to fix and reject it as no longer valid.

John Marston wrote *Jack Drum's Entertainment* soon after the re-opening of the boys' playhouse at Paul's in 1599. The company parodied citizen literature less condescendingly and satirised citizen values and manners less acidly than their rivals at Blackfriars, possibly because they 'lacked the narrowness of the 'select' social allegiance for which the Blackfriars boys consistently catered'.[97] Marston was deeply

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[94] Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fair*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, London, 1977, V.vi.106-11.

[95] A similar transition from festivity to professional entertainment, from spontaneous pleasure to commodification, can be detected in the descriptions of theatre as a kind of prostitution. Casual sex, the reformers of manners primly pointed out, was a frequent occurrence at traditional festivals, especially when the weather allowed outdoor activities. It was the express purpose of May games to celebrate the fertility of nature; ritualised as well as actual wooing and copulation were part of the whole idea. Sex on the South Bank, on the other hand, had to be paid for, both in the brothels and in the playhouses. While lovers and their lasses in the summer meadows could think of themselves as part of the eternal cycle of death and fruition, customers who were 'entertained' in Elizabethan playhouses knew themselves part of the seemingly inevitable nexus of economic exchange. - On theatre as prostitution, see Joseph Lenz, 'Base Trade: Theatre as Prostitution,' *English Literary History* 60 (1993), 833-55.

[96] Cf. however the anecdote told by John Manningham of 'a yong gallant, but of a short cutt, overtaking a tall stately stalking cavalier in the streetes, made noe more a doe but slipt into an ironmongers shop, threw of his cloke and rapier, fitted himselfe with bells and presently cam skipping, whistling, and dauncing the morris about that long swaggerer, whoe, staringly demaunding what he ment; 'I cry you mercy,' said the gent., 'I tooke you for a May pole,' *Diary*, 53.

[97] See Gurr, *Playgoing*, 160-4, on the mixed audience at Paul's playhouse, 22-30 and 159-63 on the hall playhouses and

involved in the Paul's company's business, both financially and as far as his and its dramatic reputation was concerned. Every play had to be chosen and devised with extraordinary care because the company had virtually no financial margin, no room for failure. The playhouse sat a mere two hundred playgoers and staged performances weekly, not daily. Marston betrays some qualms in the final act of *Jack Drum* about the 'mustie fopperies of antiquitie' he has offered his customers, but on the whole he must have expected to please his audience with a comedy that resembles nothing so much as an inconsequential inventory of entertaining 'acts' from festive culture and popular drama.

Jack Drum's Entertainment - the phrase colloquially denotes a failure to offer hospitality[98] - is set in Highgate, then a suburban resort much frequented by Londoners at weekends and on holidays. The play is framed by a get-together on Highgate heath on a May evening that directly mirrors the playhouse situation, all the more so since the play was probably staged in May or June 1600. The members of Marston's audience had already decided not to spend their evening sauntering outside the city to enjoy and honour the arrival of spring - but having gathered in the playhouse, they watched a play that held up to them an image of the very pastimes they might have been pursuing, had they not come to the playhouse instead. Marston's view of these cultural choices, however, is not so obvious: is he comparing playgoing with traditional merry-making in order to contrast them or to foreground their essential equivalence, as forms of communal celebration? And if there is any hint of nostalgic regret in his harking back to the holiday customs that are decaying in the urban environment, is he evaluating and judging his audience's preference for the playhouse in social or moral terms?

The main characters enter the stage and engage in small talk exactly as the audience in the auditorium must have done a few minutes earlier.

> Twedle. But is Holloway Morice prancing up the hill[?]
> Drum. I, I; and Sir Edward, and the yeallow toothd, sunck-eyde, gowtie shankt Usurer Maman, my young Mistresses and all are comming to the greene, lay Cushions, lay the Cushions, ha the wenches! (187)

Sir Edward Fortune is the type of the old (and thus exemplary) gentry: he is jovial and hospitable, patron to the Morris dancers, determined to enjoy the present rather than stint himself against an uncertain future; the antithesis of the 'wealthie, carefull, thriving Citizen' Mammon (187). The usurer's idle enquiry about news at court at once shows his fashionable pretensions and Highgate's geographical and cultural proximity to London and Westminster. Sir Edward is stung to reply with some heat:

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the rise of city comedy.

[98] It comes up once, in the first scene: Jack Drum is worried that there will not be enough food at Sir Edward's, 'therfore I beseech you give him [i.e. Mammon] Jack Drums entertainment: Let the Jebusite depart in peace' (185). Mammon is an early example of the ascetic-seeming, but really gluttonous and lecherous puritan often encountered in city satires, an older cousin of Jonson's Sir Epicure Mammon. Not the traditional May supper but its enemy is associated with the grotesque: with his Gargantuan appetite the usurer will devour all - money, food, 'whole Monarchies,' *The Plays of John Marston*, ed. H. Harvey Wood, Edinburgh, 1939, 3 vols., vol. 3, 181 (references are to pages).

> What newes at court? ha, ha, now Jesu God,
> Fetch me some Burdeux wine, what newes at court?
> Reprobate fashion, when each ragged clowt,
> Each Coblers spawne, and yeastie bowzing bench,
> Reekes in the face of sacred majestie
> His stinking breath of censure, Out-upont. (182)

The policies and conduct of monarch and councillors (at this tense time, the queen in her sixty-seventh year and no successor named) are 'The common food of prate'.[99] The people's wagging tongues enrage Marston's country squire:

> the zealous bent
> Of Councellors solide cares is trampled on
> By every hacknies heeles: Oh I could burst
> At the conjectures, feares, preventions
> And restles tumbling of our tossed braines. (182)

Sir Edward goes on to suggest a course of action that would become royal policy eighteen years later when King James devised the *Book of Sports* to defend traditional customs against puritan attacks and to forge a kind of royalist popular culture out of what was left after the Reformation:

> I had rather that Kemps Morice were their chat,
> For of foolish actions, may be theyle talke wisely, but of
> Wise intendments, most part talke like fooles. (182)

The reigning queen's policy on traditional festive culture had been comparatively lenient with precisely that objective. When appealed to in conflicts between provincial magistrates and the people on matters of festive custom, Elizabeth's Privy Council anticipated Stuart politics and demonstrated 'a readiness to protect the old pastimes if they were not politically dangerous or religiously offensive'.[100] Ben Jonson's masques of the 1610s would prepare the Jacobean court for this 'invention' of a set of secular rites to institutionalise royalist holidays, and he would do so again in the early 1630s when Charles I reissued the proclamation.[101] *Jack Drum's Entertainment* makes a similar point as early as 1600, if with much less intellectual stringency. It is possible that Marston had, in fact, read in *Basilikon Doron* (published the previous year) King James VI's advice to his son that in order

> to allure [the people] to a common amitie among themselves, certaine dayes in the yeere would be appoined, for delighting the people with publicke spectacles of all honest games. [...] For I cannot see

[99] Sir Edward's objection to the people's insistence on feeding back to their governors what they think about their government very much resembles that of a pillar of a contemporary London outparish who advocated more oligarchic vestries because the attendance of the common louts made it so much more difficult for respectable parishioners to conduct meetings: 'throughe the severall admittance of all sortes of parishioners into theire vestries their falleth out greate disquietnes and hinderance to good proceeedings by the discente of the inferior and meaner sorte of the multitude of the inhabitants,' Griffiths, 'Secrecy and Authority,' 948.

[100] Hutton, *Merry England*, 125.

[101] Cf. Brabant Senior at the tavern: 'Why this is Sport Imperiall, by my Gentry, I would spend fortie Crownes, for such an other feast of fooles' (193, emphasis added).

> what greater superstition can be in making playes and lawfull games in Maye, and good cheere at Christmas, then in eating fish in Lent.[102]

Sir Edward's outrage at Mammon's enquiry about news at court reverberates with the Elizabethan authorities' struggle to suppress popular discussions of governmental policies, but it also foreshadows the Jacobean containment of festive energy in royally ratified sports and pastimes.

Holidays practically oblige people to participate in them; unlike playgoing, they are not a voluntary leisure activity:

> Oh, a Morice is come, observe our country sport,
> Tis Whitson-tyde, and we *must* frolick it. (182, emphasis added)

The May Lord arrives with his crew, and they announce their function in a song: 'Let us be seene, on Hygate Greene, to daunce for the honour of Holloway' (183). Like pageantry at religious processions and local theatre productions, a parish's or village's Morris dancers had long been a source of communal pride and a matter for local competition; in the early seventeenth century they became a subject for dramatists portraying rural culture to elite audiences.[103] Presented here, by adolescent boys in a commercial playhouse, the layers of parody are difficult to penetrate. The wooing of Maid Marian by the fool was already a burlesque of courtship, and the transvestite element - like pantomime dames today, Maid Marians were usually chosen for their *unconvincing* femininity - transferred easily enough into the playhouse. But the androgynous agility of the boys would have contrasted oddly with the uncomplicated physical immediacy of the brawny Morris dancers in real life. An ironic undercutting of real-life sentimentality or even of gender stereotypes was the almost inevitable effect of having youths behave and speak like adults. But here parody is laid on parody in a kind of mannerist stylisation that turns ritual into art and theatre into an exhibition of 'acts' from cultural history.

The Morris is only the first of a line of set-pieces that seems to string traditional holiday customs, comic routines, songs, motifs from popular drama, and various forms of sociability together without betraying any impulse to evaluate them. A tavern scene, in which a social ritual of humiliation is played out by a group of acquaintances, is introduced by a curious mini-interlude. Two pages enter, one crying, one laughing:

> Page 1. Why do'st thou crie?
> Page 2. Why do'st thou laugh?
> Page 1. I laugh to see the crie.
> Page 2. And I crie to see thee laugh.
> [Both.] Peace be to us. Heres our Maisters.

This is a self-perpetuating joke of a kind still popular today. It is pleasing in its formal and paradoxical neatness, funniest perhaps in the way the two pages abruptly cut short the inevitable escalation to

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[102] King James I, *Basilikon Doron*, 164.

[103] See *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, 4.53: 'With scarfs and garters as you please, and 'Hey for our town' cried', and Hutton, *Merry England*, 166.

hysteria. Its artificiality contrasts with the naturalism of the following tavern scene and illustrates the playing companies' attempts to create artistic bonds with their clientele.[104]

Subsequent 'acts' juxtapose holiday customs and popular romance: Puffe's page sings a bawdy love song underneath Katherine's window, Mammon *ditto*, followed by Pasquil's amorous address in mighty lines - which is almost as self-conscious an act as the two songs - and the two lovers' necking. The kissing is the expected continuation of the rites of May mornings as the lover successfully entices his lass down from her window. At the same time, and on the level of playhouse reality, it is an instance of the lewdness so abhorred by the theatre's enemies. Puffe's and Mammon's inept attempts to arouse Katherine's desire with their Maying songs is doubly mocked by the boy actors' much more efficient titillation of the audience's erotic fancy:

Pasquil. This is no kisse, but an Ambrosian bowle,
The Nectar deaw of thy delicious sowle:
Let me sucke one kisse more, and with a nimble lip,
Nibble upon those Rosie bankes, more soft and cleare
Then is the Jeweld tip of Venus eare. [...]
Katherine. Come you grow wanton. Oh you bite my lip.
Pasquil. In faith you Jest, I did but softly sip
the Roseall Juice of your reviving breath. (199)

In as much as the playhouse situation competes with the holiday customs presented in the play, the boys are doing nicely. The pleasure of watching them enact love-making in May would to many London gallants seem decidedly preferable to getting up at three o'clock in the morning (as Puffe had done) to sing silly songs in front of a girl's window with no guarantee that she would subsequently be willing to grant less cerebral favours. Watching a *representation* of traditional festivity is a perfectly 'civil' form of entertainment - taking part in it would betray an old-fashioned, sentimental aberration of taste.

The usurer Mammon is flanked - and counterbalanced - by the lecherous but amiable Frenchman Monsieur John fo de King, who is probably meant to be a Protestant emigrant and not a Roman Catholic, but an outsider nonetheless. Mammon pays Monsieur to kill Pasquil, 'but me know there is a God that hate bloud, derfore me no kil, me know dere is a vench, that love Crowne, derfore me keep de money' (201). His motives to abstain from murder are thus a mixture of the God-fearing and the randy, an endearingly realistic combination as well as a source of low comedy. His is the only reference in the play to the Reformation. When Mammon exults over Pasquil's body ('Stinke, rot, damne, bake in thy cluttered bloud, / Snakes, Toades, and Earwigs, make thy skull their neast'), Monsieur admonishes him: 'Hush, hush, leave praying for the dead, tis no good Calvinisme, puritanisme. Dissemble, here are company' (201). Of course the main joke is that he mistakes Mammon's curses for prayer, and that the Protestant strictures against the old religious rites are uttered by a foreigner; but there is also a

[104] Gurr mentions Marston's 'insistence on the intimate and clubbable atmosphere at Paul's' - an atmosphere that seems to be predicated on an unmistakeable *distinction* between private playgoing and traditional holiday mirth, *Playgoing*, 157.

pragmatic hypocrisy that adds up with his his sexual appetite and the Reformation link to transform him into the clown of this play. At the end, this foreigner-clown is triumphant: he is the only one who has had sex, and what is more, he has (unwittingly) cuckolded the man who had schemed against him.

On the other hand, Marston pairs old Mammon with young Pasquil and overlays their rivalry with allusions to spring fertility rites in which the old year and the new fight for dominance, and time was purged of stifling winter spirits and freed for growth. When Pasquil lies down to pretend that he is dead, and Mammon exults over the body, he is momentarily terrified when Pasquil rises and beats him: 'Old wretch, amend thy thoughts, purge, purge, repent / Ile hide they ulcer, be but penitent' (202).[105] But upon reflection Mammon decides that he has merely seen Pasquil's ghost, and this calms him. The faked death, so popular later on the Jacobean stage, here still connotes seasonal resurrections and primitive (or at least unreformed) beliefs about the afterlife.

Contrasted with these archaic rituals is once again a tavern scene, 'ordinary' discourse. Sir Edward's daughter Camelia and her suitor join a group of lower-class characters and propose a song, so there is a mixing of social ranks at the tavern that might be called 'festive'. As before, the erotic quality of the actors' presentation is foregrounded:

> Come laie thy head then in my virgin lappe,
> And with a soft sleeke hand Il'e clappe thy cheeke,
> And wring thy fingers with an ardent gripe:
> Ile breathe amours, and even intraunce thy spirit,
> And sweetly in the shade lie dallying. (211)[106]

These tavern scenes are probably best understood as an up-to-date, slightly sordid, slightly weary variety of what moralists attacked as almost arbitrary encounters between the sexes at spring festivals. Philip Stubbes had pointed at the sexual licence prevailing at these occasions, and more recently Shakespeare had offered in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* his own typically sylvan view of fevered and confused adolescent sexuality contained - just - by 'The rite of May' (4.1.133). Marston disenchants and transfers the woods of Athens to a tavern at Highgate, which in terms of contemporary communal culture precisely pinpoints the transformation of the event consequent upon the 'reformation of manners': 'By the early Stuart period the alehouse was in many parishes, particularly in southern

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[105] Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Cambridge/MA., 1968, 197-8: 'Abuse is death, it is the former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into a corpse. [...] But in this system death is followed by regeneration, by the new year, new youth, and a new spring. [...] It is combined with carnivalesque thrashings, with change of costume and travesty.' Here, of course, it is initially Youth who is beaten; the eventual punishment of the old usurer is meted out institutionally, in Bedlam.

[106] Cf. the tavern as a place of carnivalesque licence in *1 Henry IV*, contrasted by Shakespeare with the Northern rebels reposing with their allies and their wives (3.1): like Marston's Camelia, Shakespeare's Welsh lady suggests that her suitor, Mortimer, rest his head in her lap while she sings a song, but this offer has to be translated by her kinsman and protector, Glendower, without whom the couple could not communicate in words at all. Mortimer is of course a model of respectability and would not think, as Hamlet terms it in a similar situation, of 'country matters'. Hotspur, similarly reposed, is more restive, but his fantasies involve 'the Welsh lady's bed' more than his own wife (242).

England, the principal focus of communal games and entertainments. [...] at least some of the observances of the folk year were now celebrated at the alehouse.'[107]

Marston contrasts a group of late Elizabethan urban 'flappers' not only with Shakespeare's Athenian lovers, but also with his own Pasquil and Katherine, who have to contend with homicidal usurers, near-rape, attempted suicides, near deaths, madness and resurrections in a number of set-pieces from popular romantic tragedy. In a morbidly displaced ejaculation, worthy of the darkest Jacobean sex tragedy, the spurned suitor Mammon squirts a disfiguring toad secretion onto Katherine's face, thus allowing her to go into a Cressida-like routine of imploring Pasquil to abandon her, and Pasquil to rant and rage across the stage in a completely gratuitous impersonation of Hercules after he has slain his children: '*Pasquil furens. O dira fata, miseranda, horida*[.] *Quis hic Locus? quae Regio? quae Mundi plaga? Ubi sum?* Katherina, Katherina, *Eheu* Katherina' (217). Speech is printed as stage direction, so presumably the actor was meant to ad-lib in the manner indicated. Pasquil tears Mammon's 'obligations', his debtors' bonds, and they outdo each other in their wailing:

> Mammon. Alas my Obligations, my Bonds, my Obligations, my Bonds. Alas, alas, alas.
> Pasquil. Katherina, Katherina, Eheu Katherina.

Contrasted with the pages' sardonic little pastiche of the comic and the tragic humour, these melodramatic outbursts ridicule not only the two characters but the plays and the theatrical traditions to which they allude. By implied contrast, the Paul's audience are allowed to retain a sophisticated, laid-back attitude of artistic discretion, even of *ennui*. The rest of the scene transforms Mammon into a cross between Shylock and Malvolio as he is told of his ships' loss and seems to go mad. 'Why me thinkes this is right,' the clown observes, 'Ile even laye him up in Bedlame, commit him to the mercie of the whip' (219). Bedlam is where Mammon, the spoilsport usurer, the fly in this soupy suburban holiday-play ends up: 'Oh Sir,' Jack Drum gloats later on, 'M. Mammon is in a Citie of Jurye, called Bethlem, Alias plaine Bedlame: the price of whips is mightily risen since his braine was pitifully overtumbled' (237). The contrast between the dramatic characters, who are going a-Maying, and the Paul's audience, who are playgoing, is virtually doubled within the play as Pasquil and Katherine enact the darker confusions of love – and the darker forces contained in holiday - before their fellows.

The play begins and ends by reflecting the Paul's audience in the company on Highgate heath. In the last scene the company returns to the heath to enjoy the rest of the evening:

> Wee'l crowne this evening with triumphant joy,
> Ile sup upon this Greene, heer's room enough
> To drawe a liberall breath, and laugh aloud:
> [...]
> I would have had a play: Ifaith I would.
> I sawe the Children of Powles last night,

[107] Clark, *English Alehouse*, 152-3. - Cf. *Westward Ho*: three citizen wives meet their suitors in a tavern to plot an illicit outing: 'But come: Is this merry Midsomer night agreed upon? when shal it be? where shall it be?' - 'Weele take a Coach and ride to Ham, or so' (2.3.65-8).

> And troth they pleasde mee prettie, prettie well,
> The Apes in time will do it hansomely.

A Morris dance or a play on Highgate heath are declared to be culturally equivalent to a play at an indoor playhouse. The boisterous self-reference of course stresses the fact that the audience *were* watching the Children of Paul's, and allowed Marston to insert some remarks that praise the 'good gentle Audience' and to pre-empt the criticism he seemed to expect. The boys' programme is good,

> but they produce
> Such mustie fopperies of antiquitie,
> And do not sute the humorous ages backs
> With cloathes in fashion. (234)

When Sir Edward calls a page to dance a galliard, the scene shifts almost imperceptibly from the fictional scene into the playhouse. This time there is no ironic incongruity between actor and character; the boy actor performs almost as himself. A galliard was a courtly accomplishment, not a country dance, and Highgate heath - formerly so spacious - is suddenly as cramped as a small playhouse stage: 'Good Boy Ifaith, I would thou hadst more roome' (234). Sir Edward and his guests literally merge with the playgoers sitting on the stage, everybody has to huddle up to give space to the playwright's conceit. The playhouse situation seems finally to be privileged over and against the holiday customs, as indeed it must be if the Paul's audience is not going to take umbrage at being implicitly reprimanded for being in the playhouse in the first place – and not out in the fields.

The play's artistic shapelessness, then, is an effect of the necessity the playwright evidently perceived to allow his audience festively to indulge in a represented, 'liminoid' celebration of May even as he allowed them to distance themselves from the vulgar associations of this kind of merry-making. The dramatic frame of a holiday get-together offered the nearest a Londoner could get to the experience of participating in communal gaity on Highgate heath on a May evening without actually going there. 'The seasonal exits to the woods and fields,' writes Patrick Collinson, 'to return with greenery and maypoles perhaps symbolised something even more subliminal: the need to reconcile the teeming, crowded city with the countryside.'[108] In *Jack Drum*, this reconciliation is merely represented and thus both affirmed and subverted; and it encompasses a reflection not only on the countryside and its seasonal rites but also with the past, the citizens' own atrophying communal culture. The playgoers have to choose, on any particular summer evening, between the heath and the playhouse, while Sir Edward harmonises the potential tensions between popular holiday customs and commercial entertainment by doing first one and then the other. Marston begins to acknowledge the emerging irreconcilability between the two, which would become more pronounced as the century wore on. But he opts out of confronting the implications of his sketch by providing a festive closure that superficially satisfies both the fictional characters (except the usurer in Bedlam) and the playhouse audience.

[108] Collinson, *Birthpangs*, 53.

Barber's contention that 'there is *always* a sense of solidarity about pleasure' should be modified: *as yet* there was, in 1600, 'a sense of solidarity about pleasure, a communion embracing the merrymakers in the play and the audience, who have gone on holiday in going to a comedy'.[109]

2.2.2 *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*: Conflicting Dramatic Impulses

About a decade after Marston's *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, Francis Beaumont undertook a dramatic exploration - in fact, a theatrical experiment in the best sense - of much the same material and much the same contradictions in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.[110] One of the reasons why this play - in form like *Jack Drum* a 'revue' harking back to the sequences of comic routines in folk theatrics - does not leave the same impression of meandering indecision is that it is much better structured: Beaumont juxtaposes not merely various dramatic insets but also two socially and ideologically distinct audiences.[111] Nonetheless the play flopped, and the basic reason for its commercial failure lay in the young playwright's misjudgement of his audience's cultural sensibilities. While Marston pandered to his audience's status-consciousness by offering them seasonal delights in the safely genteel surroundings of a private playhouse, Beaumont forces the spirit of traditional civic festivity onto them by imaginatively transforming the indoor playhouse into Cheapside and Mile End.

Audience response in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* has been considered mainly under an aesthetic heading, but as in the cases of the urban migrant-clown in Robert Wilson's *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* and Dekker's shoemaker apprentices, theatrical and festive participation at a play about London's civic community more generally implies participation in civic ceremonies and eventually also in civic politics. By juxtaposing the playhouse situation not with a seasonal rite, like Marston does in *Jack Drum*, but with traditional urban celebrations, Beaumont foregrounds the question Dekker and Marston had left discreetly unfocused, that is, whether watching a dramatic representation of traditional urban festivity is to be regarded as an equivalent substitute for actually celebrating the old festivals, or whether the conditions of regulated, commercialised representation prevent a real communal festive experience.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle's two plots do not, as the Induction might lead the audience to believe, present a clear-cut contrast between romance and satire, folklore and city comedy. 'The London Merchant' harks back to holiday abandon much more than Rafe's mock-chivalric adventures and civic achievements. Old Merrythought exasperates his wife by his happy-go-lucky approach to life,

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[109] Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 8-9, emphases added.

[110] Michael Hattaway presents the cases for a first production either in 1607/8 or in 1610/11 in his introduction, ix-xi. The earlier date would imply the Blackfriars, the later date perhaps the Whitefriars as the space of performance.

[111] This, at any rate, is the playwright's conceit: Nell and George are the 'citizen' audience while all the rest are addressed as 'gentlemen' or 'gallants'. This should not, however, be regarded as reliable evidence that 'citizens' were rare among the Blackfriars' patrons. Critics have been unable to decide whether the play fell through because there were too many unamused 'citizens' or too many unamused 'gentlemen' in the audience.

behaving like a lily in the field in the commercial world of contemporary London: 'Hang bread and butter! Let's preserve our mirth, and we shall never feel hunger' (4.354-5). When he is confronted with what he must take to be his son's coffin, and then his son's ghost, all he offers as a response is songs about love and the good life (5.169-97). The play seems to endorse Merrythought's attitude, for the festive community at the end of the play is somewhat forcefully welded together by his refusal to allow his family to enter his house unless they submit to his carefree spirit by singing songs in their turn: 'Sing, I say, sir, or by the merry heart, you come not in' (5.235). But the only song his younger son knows is a Protestant ballad against idolatry, and the Merchant's song laments 'Fortune my foe' (5.220 and 237): the spirit of communal mirth is felt to be waning.

Ostensibly, of course, the play insists on a difference between the various plots and the genres they incorporate. Contrasted with Merrythought's blithe irresponsibility is 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle' on the one hand, a tale of grocer-errantry commissioned by the citizen-spectators, and the commercial business of playacting on the other hand. In stentorian tones that might have come from Merchant Taylor John Stow, George, member of the worshipful company of Grocers, declares that the players' function lies not in catering for fashionable gallants but in presenting 'something notably in honour of the commons of the city' (Ind. 25-6). The boy players try to defend themselves against this interference: 'Why, sir, you do not think of our plot. What will become of that, then?', but George is adamant: 'Why, sir, I care not what become on't. [...] I'll have something done in honour of the city' (Interlude 4, 11-15). The Grocer brushes away the theatre as a viable commercial concern and insists that it is, or should be, a kind of community service. This is not to deny its financial side. George's status in the company of Grocers is not specified, but he is evidently not without 'substance'. He does not bat an eyelash at the fact that one evening at the theatre will have cost him the best part of a pound,[112] and he seems to be in a position to secure Rafe the post of captain of the galley-foist, that is, of the new mayor's barge in the water procession on Lord Mayor's Day (5.161). Basically, the conflict between the boy actors and their imperious clients is that the commodities the citizens want to buy are not the ones offered by the players: 'You'll utterly spoil our play,' an actor complains when George and Nell shoo off Mrs Merrythought because they want to see Rafe fighting the giant, 'and make us to be hissed, and it cost money; you will not suffer us to go on with our plot' (3.293-5). The citizens' view of the theatre may be old-fashioned, perhaps naïve, but they are perfectly aware of the ordered, economic nature of the transaction, in which money is exchanged for embodied fantasies.

Merrythought seems to exist apart from economic structures, he does not buy or sell although he eats and drinks – and sings. Entertainment, this figure implies, could or should be 'home-made', too, as

[112] George dishes out two shillings for the waits of Southwark (who do not materialise), one shilling for two tickets, twelve shillings to defray Rafe's bill at the Bell Inn, four shillings, five pence and one groat in Moldavia. George and Nell would not break the contract forced upon the audience at the beginning of *Bartholomew Fair*: they judge only 'to the value of [their] place', they do not 'drop but sixpence at the door, and will censure a crown's worth' (Ind. 87 and 91-2).

it was in the old days recalled in his ballads. Were London peopled by Merrythoughts, the players would be unemployed. Since it is peopled partly by citizens like George and Nell, who stage amateur theatrics at their company halls, go to watch citizen comedies, and employ professional playwrights (and occasionally even actors) to design and present the Lord Mayor's Show, the players can make a living. But this sort of customer considerably limits playwrights and players in artistic scope and subject matter. 'Something done in honour of the city' turns out to be native and exotic romance in the Quixotian vein, an address to the London populace by a May Lord, a militia parade at Mile End, and a tragicomical dying speech halfway between the *Mirror for Magistrates* and *The Spanish Tragedy*. The sequence is not arbitrary: Rafe, the chivalric hero from another age, the leader in declining civic celebrations, is figuratively killed by the protagonists of the tragedies and histories latterly to be seen in London's commercial playhouses. That is to say, the nostalgia felt here is only initially about old plays or fictions of romance. Finally and more essentially it is directed at the communal festivities themselves, ceremonial events in which the vast majority of Londoners were in fact no longer actively taking part, either because they had been abolished or because participation had been restricted to the civic oligarchy. Theatre killed the May Lord.

George and Nell are two citizens of the old sort, who, expecting to be excluded from the playhouse community of metropolitan sophisticates and turned into satiric butts, resolve not to stand and gape, transfixed at the sidelines. They insist on climbing into full view and elevating their representative spokesman even higher: 'Let Rafe come out on May Day in the morning, and speak upon a conduit with all his scarfs about him, and his feathers and his rings and knacks' (Interl. 4.8-10) The raw energy of a spring festival incorporating pagan fertility rites was channelled into civic ceremony, the appeal to the audience a powerful combination of seasonal rejoicing, sexual energy, patriotism and civic pride. But while other evocations of traditional culture defended the essentially 'honest' nature of its mirth, Rafe ends with a rallying cry that aims to infuse buoyancy into sluggish youths who seem to have little mind to join him:

> And let it ne'er be said for shame, that we the youths of London
> Lay thrumming of our caps at home, and left our custom undone.
> Up then, I say, both young and old, both man and maid a-maying,
> With drums and guns that bounce aloud, and merry tabor playing!
> Which to prolong, God save our king, and send his country peace,
> And root out treason from the Land! And so, my friends, I cease. (Interl. 4.56-61)

It is open to speculation whether this rousing address – as 'quaint' and 'folksy' as it may appear on the page – excited the Blackfriars audience. Even if it did, this might argue the case for the irresistible force of theatre rather more than for local patriotism among upmarket London playgoers in the early seventeenth century. And even if it did not, if the playgoers greeted Rafe's big speeches with supercilious mockery, it is possible to interpret the absence of comments from George and Nell as a

pause scripted in by the playwright to accommodate a cheerful response from the audience.[113] The play's festive climax is reserved for Rafe's address to the watch, which draws from 'Omnes' the cry of 'Saint George! Saint George!' (155). At these moments, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* seems to be on the brink of turning into a triumph of civic celebration, particularly if it was performed at the appropriate time, in May or June.[114]

But the theatrical frame asserts itself insidiously, just as it does in the apprentices' Shrovetide feast in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Dekker, and this goes for Beaumont too, gives with one hand and takes with the other, allowing playgoers and freemen a moment of triumph, but insisting - via the self-reflexive movement of having the stage mirror the auditorium - on their status as mere spectators. Besides, Rafe's achievements have a strong air of nostalgia about them. Neither May Day festivities nor militia parades were flourishing in the early Jacobean years. Stow had pointed out in the *Survey* 'The causes of greater shewes and musters in this Citie of olde time, more then of late', namely that non-free residents, spiritual or temporal, no longer lived together 'in good amity with the citizens, every man observing the customes and orders of the Citty' (84-5). Rafe's best success, leading a militia parade, would have brought a glow to Stow's cheek:

> The Midsommer Watch was thus accustomed yearely, time out of mind, until the yeare 1539 […,] in which yeare on the eight of May, a great muster was made by the Cittizens, at the Miles end all in bright harnesse. […] The marching watch contained […] Captains, Lieutenants, Sergeants, Corporals, etc. Whiflers, Drommers, and Fifes, Standard and Ensigne bearers, Sword players, Trumpeters on horsebacke, Demi-launces […] Gunners […] Archers […] Pike men […]. (*Survey*, vol. 1, 103 and 102)

Mile End musters and shows of the kind recalled by George and staged by Rafe in Act 5 were neglected in the early seventeenth century because, according to Stow, the traditional civic customs were disregarded by the new elites. May Day celebrations, on the other hand, had in fact only recently been revived after having been officially discouraged for a century after the riots on Evil May Day 1517;[115] but like any subsequent revival of 'folklore', especially in the urban environment, Stuart May Day had something *voulu* about it. Maypoles were once more allowed, but as it is described in *Pasquil's Palinodia*, the new maypole in the Strand operated more as a *reminder* of the old customs than as an actual replacement for the old maypoles burned by iconoclasts.

The real irony of the play[116] is that it is not 'The London Merchant' that presents the most poignant 'girds at citizens' (Ind. 8), but 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle' itself, the sequence of

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[113] Rafe's energetic evocation of communal rejoicing is directly countered by the Merchant, who plans a niggling, paltry, private wedding feast for his daughter; cf. the quarrel between Turf and Mrs Turf in *A Tale of a Tub*, below in this chapter.

[114] Cf. *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, 'Introduction,' xii.

[115] Manning, *Village Revolts*, 198.

[116] Walter Burre, who published *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* in 1613, pointed out in a dedicatory epistle to a wealthy goldsmith-patron of the Blackfriars company that 'the wide world […] for want of judgement, or not understanding the privy mark of irony about about it […] utterly rejected it'.

pageants in which fantasies of citizen-heroism are represented. The play as a whole suffers, however, from the dramatic weaknesses that result from the playwright's ambivalence towards his onstage audience and their views on the theatre. Michael Hattaway's observation that 'What we have within the play's frame is the theatrical equivalent of a series of ritualised riots' seems unnecessarily vehement.[117] The occupation of the stage by the playgoers at the beginning is, of course, an insurrection of a kind not uncommon on Shrove Tuesday or on other recorded occasions on which the playgoers dictated to the players what to present, on pain of physical violence.[118] But George's and Nell's impulse to participate and act in the celebration of their community was perfectly justified from a traditional point of view and threatened riot only when the relations between rulers and ruled were seriously disrupted.[119]

Beaumont's Induction and Interludes differ markedly from other contemporary plays that stage exchanges between 'playgoers' and 'players', such as Webster's addition to Marston's *The Malcontent* (1600), or John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* (1605/6) or Jonson's *The Staple of News* (1626). Like Simon and Margery Eyre, George and Nell take over the functions of the clown and his wife in earlier comedy: bickering and self-righteous, unashamedly involved in the issues that are presented, shrewdly generous, and like Simplicity in *Three Lords and Three Ladies* fiercely protective of civic order as they define it. Like Robert Weimann's 'platea'-figures,[120] who inhabit both the playhouse world and the fictional world and comment on the actions and speeches of the serious characters, they are risible and disruptive at the same time, and like the clown in Wilson's play, they maintain an ideal of communality and revel in festive forms that were on the wane. They break the dramatic illusion by addressing the playgoers, as playgoers by addressing the actors. Thus aligning themselves with Richard Tarlton's kind of stage performance, they also implicitly uphold an older and more communal kind of theatre – a theatre that had still been much closer to *being* a communal festival rather than merely *representing* it.

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[117] *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, 'Introduction,' xv.

[118] See e.g. Edmund Gayton's well-known reminiscences in *Pleasant Notes Upon Don Quixot* (1654): 'the spectators frequently mounting the stage, and making more bloody Catastophe amongst themselves, then the Players did. I have known upon one of these Festivals, but especially at Shrove-tide, where the Players have been appointed, notwithstanding their bils to the contrary, to act what the mayor part of the company [i.e. the audience] had a mind to [*etc.*],' 271-2.

[119] See e.g. John Day's *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, in which the young country gull Stroud and his servant are introduced to the delights of the city by two cony-catchers, who draw their attention to the tumblers, to representations of 'the famous City of Norwitch, and the stabbing of Julius Caesar in the French Capitol by a sort of Dutch Mesopotamians. […] the amorous Conceits and Love songs betwixt Captain Pod of Pycorner and Mrs Rump of Ram-Alley,' or 'a stately debate combat betwixt Tamberlayn the Great and the Duke of Guyso the less,' *The Works of John Day*, reprinted from A. H. Bullen's edition from 1881 by Robin Jeffs, London, 1963, 72-3. The servant is lured away, misguidedly determined to get actively involved in these shows: 'I'll murther your Tamberlayn and his Coatch-horses, I'll stab your Caesar, I'll ravish your Rump, I'll pepper your Pod, I'll powder your Motion' (74). When he comes away, glowing from his achievements, his master has already fallen victim to his seducers.

[120] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater. Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, Baltimore, 1978.

The play failed, however, not only because Beaumont misjudged his citizen-playgoers' willingness to laugh at their own susceptibility to the festive spirit of shopkeepers, but also because it is dramatically flawed. Nothing is more destructive of a theatrical performance than the absence of an expected surge of emotion from the audience. Neither *The Shoemaker's Holiday* nor *Henry V* would work in the theatre if the audience were not at least secretly or in spite of themselves elated by the crowd scenes. Shakespeare includes the disenchanted and unconvinced in the stage audience of the king's rally at Harfleur. Constantly alerted to the playhouse situation by the Chorus's equivocating directions, the playgoers are overwhelmed by the violent passion of Henry's speech and drawn into the attack. The denizens of Eastcheap – familiar to the playgoers from the earlier plays about Prince Hal – remain like pebbles on a beach after a storm. Even Bardolph is momentarily mobilised, but Nym and Pistol remind him of what Falstaff had taught them: 'The knocks are too hot; and for mine own part, I have not a case of lives' (3.2.2-3). The good sense of their self-preservation is undermined not so much by Fluellen but by the Boy, who exposes their cowardice and thievery in an earnest and quiet monologue without explicitly endorsing Henry's militaristic fervour. The battle-dodgers stand reprimanded by youth and decency, but so does the battle (perhaps even the king himself), in which the Boy will be slain in the ignominious French attack on the English camp.

Against this broken English nationalism Dekker set the London apprentices in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, but there seems to be no equivalent dialectic at work in his play.[121] Unlike *Henry V* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* has no 'privy mark of irony' about it. As wrong is wrong, Jane must be taken from Hammon and returned to Ralph, which is as much as to say that the city (conventionally gendered female by everyone except Ben Jonson wearing his classicist's hat) must be taken from the gentlemen and returned to the citizens. Athough Hammon is no out-and-out villain, the playgoers are allowed, indeed, encouraged to merge with the crew of self-righteous, proud artisans who defend their own against gents and all comers. Whoever among the Rose's audience felt alienated by the roaring apprentices and excluded from the Leadenhall feast had no right to be there, nor to number himself among 'true' Londoners and Englishmen.

This is not how the scenes of civic celebration work in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Beaumont, writing after Shakespeare and Dekker, would (or should) have tried to take their achievements into consideration. Both earlier plays work on the assumption that many, if not most, members of the

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[121] Henslowe paid Dekker for his play on 15 July 1599, *Henry V* must have been staged before Sept./Oct. 1599 because *Sir John Oldcastle*, staged in October, borrows from it. If Dekker leaves the identity of the king in the dark (historically it should be Henry VI but the play seems to allude to Henry V), it may be because he wants to present a general model for the dealings between crown and city, or because he is indeed alluding to *Henry V*. Shakespeare, on the other hand, in denying his citizen-spectators the historical scene of Henry's triumphal entry into London (Chorus 5.0.22-8) may or may not be getting at Dekker, who may shortly before have regaled London playgoers with the spectacle of king and artisans in festive harmony. Since the point of the Chorus's speech is to allude to Essex's return from Ireland in the autumn of 1599, the playwright may have felt that his over-enthusiastic audience would have distorted his intention and appropriated the scene for facile nationalism. On the whole, it seems likelier that *Henry V* was staged first and Dekker provided the 'urban'version, the home-front side, of the war.

audience would catch the patriotic spirit, but both are prepared for a less enthusiastic response. Shakespeare, who quite literally turns the playgoers into an audience of soldiers, incorporates opposition to King Henry as one element in his dramatic exploration of nationalism in action. Dekker, who avoids the direct audience address but presents interacting parties, pointedly rules it out. Echoing Henry's speech at Harfleur, Beaumont appears to have intended his audience to be swept along by Rafe, to 'bear [them]selves in this fair action like men, valiant men, and freemen', to 'Remember, then, whose cause [they] have in hand' and to 'show to the world [they] can as well brandish a sword as shake an apron' (*Knight*, 5.139-3) - and then to stand back with ironic detachment from their own responses to consider them in the context of status-conscious entertainments and collective civic identities. But Beaumont seems not to direct them closely enough in these movements of self-reflection. Up to this point, the Blackfriars' patrons have been encouraged to distance themselves from the onstage audience, now the playwright apparently wants to involve them in George's and Nell's applause of Rafe's speeches. This turn in dramatic procedure is too sudden; the second half of the play seems to require, but lack, a dialectic counterpoint.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, I suspect, embarrassed its audience. By attempting to combine romantic and satiric city comedy, Beaumont had set himself a laudable goal: a civic version of the notorious 'rabbit/duck'-*Gestalt* of *Henry V*. *Henry V* did not fail even though it is equivocally both militaristic and anti-militaristic; *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* did fail because it demonstrated to the gallants at the Blackfriars that the traditional forms of civic celebration still held some appeal even to them, while at the same time reminding the citizens among the audience that their sentimental re-creations of civic glory could not seriously be endorsed - unless it were in vulgarly low-brow settings like the Red Bull playhouse. Beaumont's mistake was to choose citizens' festive culture as the theme for his satire. Had he emulated Jonson or Middleton and satirised urban business and/or marriage transactions, he would probably have avoided rejection. But early seventeenth-century playgoers went to the Blackfriars specifically to *distance* themselves from traditional civic or 'common' forms of festivity. They were still too uncertain of the socio-cultural status of playgoing to appreciate the 'privy mark of irony' about a play that draws them into precisely the kind of bourgeois festive humour that they despised.

2.2.3 The Playhouse as a Museum of Social History

As the reluctance to celebrate in the undistinguished communities of parish, ward or company grew, so the knowledge of the old ceremonial customs declined:

> Written accounts of public ceremonies begin to proliferate only in the middle and later years of the sixteenth century, at a time when traditional forms of public ritual were on the wane; the landscape of community [... was] in need of the supplementary gloss provided by documentary transcription.[122]

The preservation of traditional communal culture in written form, partly motivated by a nostalgic yearning for the communal cohesion it had supposedly ensured, is a symptom of its demise. Stow's citizen history is both

> an objective antiquarian chorography of England's greatest city and a rehearsal of idealized tales from London's own civic mythology. It is both a vehicle for praising the success of the citizenry and a lamentation over encroaching commercialism.[123]

From the gap between idealised past and present grievances springs the author's impulse to set down a memorial to the community whose disintegration he mourns. But once a social ritual has left the sphere of oral culture and finds itself fixed and defined in written form, it is far more likely to be represented in other written texts than to be re-created in everyday social discourse. In this sense, Stow's undertaking in the *Survey* defeats the object.

This paradox becomes clearer in the cases of London comedies like *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, in which the nostalgic representation of traditional festivities is complicated by their vulgar taint and the uncertain socio-cultural status of playgoing. There has been some debate among literary critics about the ideological thrust of representations of popular culture in early modern drama. Most critics agree that representations of holiday customs and other forms of saturnalian misrule in early modern drama 'carry important valences, national, cultural and political', but whereas Annabel Patterson concludes that Shakespeare and others 'seem to privilege the past and primitive even as they are registered as such', sceptics like Richard Helgerson argue that popular culture - whether of festivity or of revolt - was staged in order to distance and dissociate from it the theatre as a cultural enterprise:

> Festivity discredited rebellion; rebellion discredited festivity; and both discredited the clown and the common people he represented. [...] In its inclusion of such materials, the Elizabethan history play unquestionably participates in popular culture. But in its handling of them, it prepares the way for a withdrawal from that culture.[124]

A third possibility suggests itself. If one foregrounds the latent unease inherent in nostalgic views of a past ideal, which is perhaps analogous to the suppression of antipathy towards a dead person after his or her funeral, it begins to appear likely that pre-Reformation sports and pastimes were represented in fictional and non-fictional texts out of a paradoxical desire both to preserve them *and* to distance them precisely by lodging them in the past. There arose around the turn of the sixteenth century a deeply-felt need for the communal cohesion associated with 'merry old England', but the religious, political and

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[122] Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage. License, Play and Power in Renaissance England*, Chicago, 1988, 14.

[123] Bonahue, 'Citizen History,' 78.

[124] Patterson, *Popular Voice*, 59, and Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 222.

cultural regime of Elizabethan Protestantism made a true revival impossible and also, finally, undesirable. The re-creation of the past in the circumscribed and controlled form of a representation, however, enabled poets and their readers, playwrights and their audiences, to have their cake and eat it too.

It makes sense to consider the poetic and dramatic re-creations of pre-Reformation England in the context of other measures and attempts undertaken at the time to fix and preserve the past. The phenomenon of 'civic religion' in later Tudor and early Stuart England – a society that severely restricts religious ceremonies and the use of sacred objects – has not, perhaps, been adequately studied. Deprived of the wonder and ravishment available in Roman Catholic worship, people's frustrated need to adore directed itself at secular objects or persons, most obviously the monarch.[125] A society in which a Protestant queen considers it ideologically opportune to assume the mantle and the pedestal of the Mother of God and to present herself to her courtiers and lowlier subjects as a 'virgin queen', can be called 'secularised' only in certain circumscribed ways, and yet it is accurate to say that history had to a significant extent taken the place of religion as a quarry from which to win the raw materials of civic identity:

> Ein neuer Kult überlagert den alten, der unfähig geworden ist, die Gesellschaft in ihrer Gesamtheit zu integrieren, ein Kult, in dem die Nation gleichzeitig Subjekt und Objekt wird. Das heißt, sie bringt sich selbst eine permanente Huldigung dar, indem sie ihre Vergangenheit unter allen möglichen Aspekten feiert.[126]

Antiquarian research, for instance, can be regarded as the cool-headed, focussed older cousin of the much more comprehensive phenomenon of cultural nostalgia. The historical investigation, tracing and charting the city's topography, customs, institutions and laws that boomed in the later sixteenth century, was not divorced from the desire to see them preserved and honoured.

John Stow believed that the London's past, if properly recovered and presented, could serve as a looking-glass in which the city would see a figuration of the future for which it should strive. Unlike the majority of moralists on stage and in print - Dekker in his various prose narratives, Lodge and Greene in their vision of Israelite London, or the anonymous playwright who gave *Alarum for London* by staging the siege of Antwerp - Stow largely avoided holding up to the city an exaggerated image of its own depravity. He does not indulge himself and his readers with long colourful descriptions of 'cony-

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[125] But not only the monarch: 'While investing the monarch with reflected divinity the Reformation charged with moral significance all other authorities and political duties, all normative structures of the social order: magistracy, certainly, but also the household and its head,' Collinson, *Birthpangs*, 10. - Roy Strong's work on Queen Elizabeth has put this sacralisation into context and alerted other cultural historians to it, see e.g. *Portraits of Elizabeth I*, Oxford, 1963. For contemporary criticisms of the ideologies and cults that had sprung up around the queen's person, see Julia M. Walker, ed., *Dissing Elizabeth. Negative Representations of Gloriana*, London, 1998.

[126] Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums. Vom Sammeln*, transl. from the French by Gustav Roßler, Berlin, 1988, 70.

catching' or other abuses, like Richard Johnson's *Look on Me, London*, which demand is undertitled: 'I am an honest Englishman, ripping up the Bowels of Mischiefe, lurking in thy sub-urbs and Precincts'.[127] Instead he reminded London of what had made it not only great but also good in the past and could do so again. This quality, as James Dalton puts it in the *Apologie of the Cittie of London*, was not London's 'substance', but its 'ceremonie',[128] and it was the observance of these time-honoured civic ceremonies, rituals and customs more than anything else that would safeguard the city from 'forgetting itself'.

The trouble was that many of the city's rites (and rights) had either been forgotten already and had to be unearthed in archives, or were in the process of being forgotten in a fast-moving, increasingly utilitarist environment. Yet they were central to the proper functioning of the post-Reformation urban corporation not only for social but also for legal, political and economic reasons. The Protestant reformers had breached the walls of the medieval church and the feudal order armed not only with religious zeal but also with historical arguments, and once established inside the fortresses, they defended and buttressed their positions as much with the documentary force of records, custumals, chronicles and calendars as with the brute force of weapons. No Protestant claim to power or privilege, neither in theology nor in ecclesiastical or secular government, could do without recourse to history:

> The Protestant Reformation contributed its share independently to the historical movement, for [...] the reformers appealed to the past for justification of their program. The Scriptures supplied them with doctrinal reasons for the schism from Rome, the early Christian writers with a picture of the Apostolic Church unmarred by later ritualism [...], while in Anglo-Saxon writings they found evidence of an ancient and uncorrupted English church from which their own might claim descent.[129]

Ironically, the antiquaries' and historians' task of supplying Protestant magistrates with useful information - they were consulted to settle questions concerning the use or ownership of land or buildings, prerogatives in monitoring market regulations, taxation, parish or ward boundaries and so forth - had been rendered a great deal more difficult by the reformers themselves. Uncounted numbers of manuscripts of all sorts had been dispersed, lost or deliberately destroyed after the dissolution of the monasteries. It was only in 1568 that the Privy Council concerted Archbishop Parker's efforts to retrieve and collect monastic records in order to put the established Elizabethan church onto solid medieval feet; and what was sauce for the Elizabethan church would be sauce for the Elizabethan nation state as well.[130]

Parker and William Fleetwood founded the Society of Antiquaries in the early 1570s, and from this time also dates the evidence that London's Court of Aldermen took much more care than hitherto

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[127] Printed in *Illustrations of Early English Popular Literature*, ed. J. Payne Collier, vol. 2, New York, 1863.

[128] Stow, *Survey*, vol. 1, 207. - Archer, 'Nostalgia,' 18, surmises that the author of the *Apologie* was probably James Dalton, common pleader to the City.

[129] Rosenberg, *Leicester*, 61.

[130] Cf. F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution. English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580-1640*, London, 1962, 23-4.

that records were diligently kept. In 1571 the aldermen decided to pay someone whose job it would be to 'reduce [their correspondence with other institutions, especially the Privy Council] into indices, tables or calendars whereby they may be more easily, readily and orderly found'.[131] The first 'Remembrancer' Thomas Norton produced a Ceremonial Book of civic rituals noting that 'things […] have their prescribed times, and so be set under the titles of every several month';[132] printed maps of the city proliferated from this time; annotated scripts of the Lord Mayor's Shows began to be printed and publicly sold. In 1620 Thomas Middleton was appointed to the new post of 'Chronologer', whose task it was to commemorate important festive events in encomiastic verse.

The objectives of this nostalgic ceremonialism were manifold. It was useful to be able to produce documented precedents to decide ancient quarrels, as that between the city and the crown about the Tower liberties. But calendars of the civic year or laudatory verses about special occasions served a purpose more ideological than legal: 'By the early seventeenth century, […] an appeal to traditional values as often as not emanated from polemical needs of those in power, and masked the reality of their demise.'[133] 'Corporate memory' and 'corporate vanity' were equally served by having 'set down in writing and hanged up in a table in the Inner Chamber of the Guildhall what things appertain either by charter, usage, Acts of Common Council or by customs to be yearly done and performed by the Lord Mayor'.[134] The public display of 'tables' noting civic rituals in Guildhall obviously imitates the practice of hanging up tables of the ten commandments in the churches: 'civic religion' in Protestant towns relied on a 'quasi-sacramental adherence' to customary ceremonies and required authorative texts that legitimated both the rule of the oligarchic elite and the corporation's continuity through the centuries.[135]

Yet in many ways this traditionalism was a case of protesting too much. Browsing in the book stalls, the country squire's son with money in his purse would pass by a work of topographical history or a printed Lord Mayor's Show and invest in one of the self-help books for budding city gallants, such as Dekker's satiric (but extremely useful) *Gull's Hornbook* or Henry Peacham's *The Art of Living in London*,[136] which advertised [themselves] by selling knowledge as the city's chief commodity. For the outsider unversed in city-lore - like the 'meere country gentleman' - it was essential to know how to act, to know where and what to buy, and, most importantly, to know what to wear.[137]

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131 Quoted in Piers Cain, 'Robert Smith and the Reform of the Archives of the City of London, 1580-1623,' *London Journal* 6 (1987/8), 3-16, 6.

132 Quoted in Manley, 'Of Sites and Rites,' 39.

133 Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England*, 20.

134 The terms are Cain's, 'Robert Smith'; he quotes from a declaration issued in 1596, 10-11.

135 Manley's discusses the phenomenon of 'civic religion' in 'Of Sites and Rites,' *passim*.

136 Supplemented to the 1642 edition of Peacham's *The Compleat Gentleman*.

137 John Twyning, *London Dispossessed. Literature and Social Space in the Early Modern City*, Basingstoke, 1998, 125.

The way to be integrated into the metropolitan community – and integration now depended as much on difference as on similarity - was no longer by participating in traditional collective customs, but by self-conscious consumer behaviour and self-display.[138]

Further down the scale of cultural sophistication, attempts to salvage traditional culture within the boundaries of propriety by setting it down in writing, were similarly doomed to fail. Margaret Spufford notes in her study of cheap print material the many publications in Elizabethan England that sought to teach their readers 'honest mirth'; the projects to 'Protestantise' and to 'civilise' the English went hand in hand. Deprived of or alienated from traditional sports and pastimes, many people evidently felt at a loss about how to spend their time in a godly manner: 'how shal we passe away the time on Sundayes, what wold you have us doe in the Christmas Holydayes[?]' They were provided with approved songs to sing or edifying dialogues to read with their families, but here as in other fields, print undermined oral culture:

> The end of the spread of printed songs in a newly literate society is that people, with an awed respect for the authority of the printed word, come to believe that the printed text is *the* text; they lose their acceptance of the textual multiformity of the oral ballad story. Once they believe in the fixed text, then it is only a short step towards their memorizing the one 'right' text to the song.[139]

Celebrating traditional culture in the one and only 'right' way was precisely the purpose of officially organised revitalisations of the old festivals. The Cotswold games, established by one Robert Dover with King James's approval (and, it seems, in one of the king's old hats) towards the end of the first Jacobean decade, manifest a shift from participating in collective customs to merely watching them. The Whitsun games and frolics over which Dover annually presided like a cross between a Lord of Misrule and a Master of Ceremonies were an event that drew crowds from the neighbouring towns, villages and estates pretty much as 'medieval' fairs and tournaments or mayoral shows do nowadays. 'Holiday mirth' had been refined and civilised, rendered not only harmless but positively conformist.

These games are a perfect example of what Eric Hobsbawm has called 'invented traditions'; and indeed Dover had been expressly told 'T'invent these sports'.[140] 'Invented traditions', according to Hobsbawm, are simultaneously geared to establishing continuity with the past in a society that recognises the desirability of such a continuity and to inculcate certain conformist values and norms in participants and spectators. Hobsbawm's description of the process in England from the early nineteenth century onwards has to be modified only slightly to fit the early seventeenth century:

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[138] The observation that without money to spend you cannot properly take part in Londoners' prime activity, buying, is of course, older. The speaker in the fifteenth-century poem 'London Lyckpeny' visits Westminster and London, but whatever catches his eye is not available to him, be it justice or strawberries: 'for lack of mony I cold not spede,' printed in Gordon Home, *Medieval London*, London, 1927, 13-14.

[139] Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 10, and D. Buchan, *Ballad and the Folk*, London, 1972, quoted by Spufford, 13.

[140] See Christopher Whitfield, ed., *Robert Dover and the Cotswold Games: Annalia Dubrensia*, Evesham, 1962, 224.

> Sometimes new traditions could be grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation – religion and princely pomp, folklore and freemasonry.[141]

Robert Dover did not borrow from 'official ritual' or 'freemasonry', but from the 'warehouse' of traditional festive culture. Like a modern open-air museum, his stagings of sports and pastimes 'necessarily decontextualize[d] and recontextualize[d] their contents, thereby radically altering the matrices through which meanings may be projected, discerned, constructed'.[142]

The form is preserved, the function is lost: this is precisely what happens to an object that is exhibited in a museum, and it is what happened to the traditional sports and pastimes that were re-created in Robert Dover's Whitsun games in the Cotswolds and to waning urban celebrations that were re-presented on London's playhouse stages. *Musealisation* is an impulse that has been associated by modern cultural theorists with mourning, that is, an equivocal urge to come to terms with the past by preserving it in an emasculated form.[143] Relics – objects or, as here, rituals – are kept, paradoxically, both to remember the dead and to prevent them from reappearing. The grotesque, truly saturnalian energy that used to be expressed and channelled in rites of misrule is 'shadowed forth' (as an Elizabethan would say) in carefully controlled circumstances, to present to the spectators a mere spectre of traditional culture without allowing them to participate in the experience.

Musealisation means preserving the past as it were within a glass case that protects the beholder as much as it protects the object. It is strongest at times of accelerated social change, most especially when these changes have been brought about not by catastrophe (as the Great Plague, a world war, the Holocaust), but by transitions in ideology and interpretation (as during the Reformation). The point here is that cultural customs atrophied and rituals lost their meanings for a reason; change was actively precipitated. The nostalgic representation of pre-Reformation communal culture in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, then, can be understood as an equivocal defence against disintegration and disorientation. Like the objects in a museum, the re-created festive event requires the spectators to keep at a distance, to inspect, to view, but not to touch, not to join in – in a word, to 'Sit still, and expect'.[144]

Nostalgia provides the impulse as well as the structure of a piece of literature because it 'posits two different times, a present and a longed-for past, and on this contrast a poem [or a play, or a novel] can

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[141] Eric Hobsbawm 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, 1-14, 6.

[142] Peter Jones, 'Museums and the Meanings of Their Contents,' *New Literary History* 23 (1992), 911-21, 915.

[143] For an overview of theories of musealisation, see Eva Sturm, *Die konservierte Welt. Museum und Musealisierung*, Berlin, 1991.

[144] Ben Jonson, *The Magnetic Lady*, in *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. G. A. Wilkes, 4 vols., Oxford, 1982, vol. 4, 4.5.125.

be built'.[145] But good writers will not only contrast past and present, they will set them into relation and, if possible, explore the ways in which people 'filter, select, and reconstruct a past […] which later comes to seem not only different and desirable, but a way of criticizing the present'.[146] Marston almost completely neglected the historising perspective one would expect in a superior piece of satiric nostalgia; Beaumont seemed to hope that a larger picture of cultural change would emerge as the combined effect of 'The London Merchant' and 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle'. Both contrast traditional sports and pastimes with the privatized, commercial and socially divisive leisure activities condemned in Stow's *Survey of London*, of which playgoing – especially at 'private' playhouses – was one.

But none of these plays achieves for the urban environment the kind of valedictory social history weaved into the *Survey*.[147] One would not expect playwrights to reproduce Stow's frank disapproval of the decadent entertainments that had sprung up in the city of late, but neither did they attempt to emulate his effort at presenting a coherent and comprehensive survey of post-Reformation sociability. The results of Marston's and Beaumont's efforts were theatrical medleys, not dramatised urban histories: theatre as a sort of *omnium gatherum* of old and new forms of communal culture.

2.3 Reformed London on Stage II: *Bartholomew Fair* and *A Tale of a Tub*

Ben Jonson was, in his way, as much fascinated by the spirit of festival as William Shakespeare, and he set at least two of his urban comedies on a holiday, *Bartholmew Fair*, now one of his best-known plays, and *A Tale of a Tub*, one of his least popular ones.[148] In his very last, unfinished piece, *The Sad Shepherd*, the Prologue asks, 'For whence can sport in kind arise, / But from the Rurall Routs and Families?' (35-6), but anyone familiar with his earlier plays would have taken that as a rhetorical question. There had been sport and to spare in Jonson's city comedies, although most of it was of the satiric kind: fun at the expense of others. The true festive spirit - measured, controlled, temperate – was most noticeable by its absence.[149] Neither *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) nor *A Tale of a Tub* (1633), however, are among his most acerbic satires, and the later play is yet much more reconciliatory, much less judgemental – to use a Jonsonian key term – than the earlier. The reason for this is partly that Jonson had mellowed with age,

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145 Lawrence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia. Studies in Pastoral Poetry*, London, 1972, 44.

146 Barton, 'Harking Back,' 724.

147 This does not mean to say that playwrights were not inspired by the *Survey* in other ways, especially in topographical and historical matters, see e.g. the rebels' intrusion into the city in *Edward IV*, the Leadenhall feast in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the celebration of charitable donations in *A New Wonder, a Woman Never Vex't*, to name but a few obvious examples. Besides, Munday and the other devisers made ample use of the *Survey* as source material for the Jacobean Lord Mayor's Shows.

148 Besides these two, *A Staple of News* is set at Shrovetide, *The Sad Shepherd* is an honorary masque. The courtly masques themselves are, of course, festive by their very nature; but I am here concerned with holiday in the *urban* environment.

149 See e.g. Michael McCanles, 'Festival in Jonsonian Comedy,' *Renaissance Drama* 8 (1977), 203-19.

partly that *Tub*, unlike *Bartholomew Fair*, is a history play – not a comical satire.[150]

With regard to my main theme in this chapter, the re-creation and re-presentation of pre-Reformation festivities in London comedy, plays set on St Bartholomew's Day (24 August) and St Valentine's Day (14 February) respectively seem promising.[151] Both feast-days are religious – that is, Roman Catholic – in origin and commemorate martyred Christian saints who had strictly been outlawed from Protestant England. Both had been celebrated for centuries and thus provided a historical thread, a link between past and present, between pre-Reformation and Reformation times. Both had over the centuries been amplified by rituals and customs that had little to do with the Christian religion and more with perennial social concerns, either by surreptitiously incorporating pre-Christian fertility rites or by providing a setting for those essentially urban activities, buying and selling. St Valentine's had become associated with courtship and marriage; St Bartholomew's had in London been the date for the great fair on Smithfields since 1120.

The two plays are remarkably similar not only in their general setting but also in structure. They begin by showing various groups of characters at home planning how they are going to spend the day; their intentions, although never outright criminal or immoral, are at least on the shady side of propriety and give the first cause for conflict among them. Then individuals are separated from their groups and dispersed over a geographical territory that is familiar and at the same time labyrinthine, that is, Smithfields and the north-western fields between Tottenham Court and Kentish Town. Finally, the whole cast are assembled – and reduced to order – at a stage show, a play-within-the-play that uses some kind of material substitute for human actors, puppets at the fair, shadow play at Totten Court.[152]

This, however, is where the similarities between the two plays end. Like Thomas Middleton in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Jonson brings Reformation London on stage in *Bartholomew Fair* with the ultimate purpose to show how little Protestantism had really changed everyday social life. Fun, Superstition and Hypocrisy – the 'three hizzies' encountered by Robert Burns on his way to 'The Holy Fair' in late eighteenth-century Ayrshire – had been and would be present at festive 'do's' for some time yet, although they might change their vocabulary. Justice Adam Overdo's officious determination to expose 'enormities' sheds a quizzical (though not, after all, unsympathetic) light on Jacobean London's magistrates, who were at the time asserting a comparatively tight grip on public cavortings. Zeal-of-the-Land Busy's precisian attacks on hobby-horses and gingerbread men as an 'idolatrous grove of images' points to the Protestant sectarianism that sprang up after the Elizabethan settlement

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[150] On *Bartholomew Fair* as an attempt to improve on his earlier satires and 'write a masterpiece while virtually dispensing with a strong main plot and one or two major protagonists,' see Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 180.

[151] I will argue my case for reading *Tub* as a London comedy further below.

[152] Puppets and shadow play are distinct from human actors, as Puppet Dionysios points out, in that there is nothing 'fleshly' about them. They are thus a degree less abominable and blasphemous than human actors. Cf. the subheading of *The Actors' Remonstrance, or Complaint for the Silencing of their Profession* (1643), which adds that the puritans' closing of the playhouses is especially injurious, 'the exercise at the Beares Colledge, and the motions of Puppets being still in force and vigour'.

to become henceforth a permanent feature in English life. As an enemy to (more or less) honest mirth, Zeal must be chastened, as blinded by prejudice, he must be enlightened or expelled; this is the law of festive comedy.

Yet even if human nature is presented as a constant, the play insists at the very beginning that the stage, the theatre itself, had most definitely undergone a 'civilisation' since the 1580s. 'I hope we have reform'd that indifferently with us, sir,' says the First Player to Hamlet, meaning bad acting and clowning, and by 1614 – according to Jonson – Hamlet's demand, 'O, reform it altogether,' (3.2.36-8) had been fulfilled. The old stage-keeper finds fault with the play because it is not verisimilar enough, because it does not include the sights and acts he enjoys at Bartholomew Fair, and because its comic decorum does not allow for the heckling banter and the rough and tumble he remembers from Richard Tarlton's time. His observations are immediately affirmed as he, the advocate of popular theatre, is shooed off the stage by the book-keeper, the force of authority and order.

The Induction to this play manifests most palpably the transformation of the theatre from festival to consumption. It emerges that what may count as a 'reformation' of manners precisely detracts from the theatre's function as communal festival. The characters of the play, Leo Salingar has summed up, 'are not a community but a crowd'[153] – and the same may be said for the playgoers at the Hope. A community the characters may, perhaps, become at Justice Overdo's dinner table, and a crowd they are at the staging of 'Hero and Leander', but for the most part they are individual customers at the fair. The playgoers, too, are addressed by the book-keeper as individual customers in the playhouse, and this definition of theatre as a legally fixed, economic transaction undermines even the perverted sort of levelling that had prevailed in a place where customers are made equal by the money they spend. In *The Guls Horn-Booke*, Dekker had scoffed

> Sithence then the place is so free in entertainment, allowing a stoole as well to the Farmers sonne as to your Templer: that your Stinkard has the self-same libertie to be there in his Tobacco-Fumes, which your sweet Courtier hath: and that your Car-man and Tinker claime as strong a voice in their suffrage, and sit to give judgement on the playes life and death.[154]

Bartholomew Fair is the most 'grotesque' of Jonson's comedies: the puritan arrives on the scene of idolatry because his daughter-in-law-to-be is pregnant and craves roast pork, the magistrate is cut short in his judgement of enormities because his wife has to be sick. The grotesque, although its evaluation is historically contingent, presents itself as essentially timeless, certainly unhistorical: the materiality of human life is an unavoidable fact. Jonson is not interested in this holiday-play to give a review of festive customs or in exploring the transformations of the fair from pre-Reformation times; he wants to consider its capacity to reveal London to itself at the present moment, in 1614. (I can think of no other play that integrates the date of its first performance into the dialogue.)

153 Leo Salingar, 'Crowd and Public in *Bartholomew Fair*,' *Renaissance Drama* 10 (1979), 141-59, 43.

154 Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Horn-Booke* (1609), in *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas* Dekker, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 5 vols., vol. 2, New York, 1963, 247.

Smithfields as a historical site for martyrdoms – both people and religious images had been and were still burnt there – reverberates strongest in Busy's iconoclastic rant. But even this tends to erase, rather than explore, the differences between Roman Catholics, Protestants and other non-conformists, both then and now: Jonson condemns religious intolerance of whatever persuasion.[155] The playwright does not even make much of the irony that while the nearby parish church of St Bartholomew the Great had fallen to decay and its relics very likely been destroyed in one of the iconoclastic purges in the last century, the only remnants of the saint in 1614 were indeed the semi-pagan gingerbread men sold by Jane Trash and 'overthrown' by Busy (3.6). No-one could be more scathing than Jonson about the human tendency to imbue material objects with religious or erotic meaning, no-one more alert to everyday violations of Calvin's dictum that 'God himselfe abideth like himselfe and is no imagined Ghost or fantasie, that may be diversely fashioned after every mans liking'.[156] The puritan in the play disqualifies not only himself but his whole cause by venting his holy wrath on something as innocuous as hot baked goods – but Jonson does not pursue the buried allusion in this to Protestant refutations of Christ in the eucharistic wafer.

In *Bartholomew Fair* the major detractors of the festival get their come-uppance at the play-with-the-play: the puritan 'becomes a beholder' (5.5.116-17) with the rest, and the magistrate invites the company to dinner. In *A Tale of a Tub*, as will be seen, the highest-ranking male, Squire Tub himself, has to be regarded as the main detractor of the feast, yet he is also the patron of the show staged at the end. Here, theatre does not lead to a exposure of hypocrisy and ineffectuality, on the contrary, it is demonstrated to be a most effectual form in which authority can hide its misdemeanours. In *Bartholomew Fair*, theatre is not discussed for its political, social or historical functions, it is fundamentally questioned in its very nature. Soon after the play was written and staged, Jonson requested his friend John Selden to satisfy him on the permissibility of female impersonation, so Puppet Dionysius's triumphant rejoinder to Busy's accusations seem not to have 'converted' the playwright himself.[157] This doubt does not worry Jonson in *A Tale of a Tub*. There it is the making of history – and thus the making of history *plays* – that commands his interest.

The two plays' similarity-in-difference can be accentuated by comparing both to a third play, with which they have different things in common, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Bartholomew Fair* has variously been read as a comment on the *Dream*. Its saturnalian structure imitates Shakespearean comedy, and in both plays heterogenous groups of urban characters enter into a 'green'

[155] In the middle decades of the 16th century, Roman Catholic rulers had burnt Protestants in Smithfields, Protestant rulers had burnt Roman Catholics. The St Bartholomew's massacre in France in 1572 had been directed against Huguenots; the most recent person to suffer martyrdom in Smithfields had been the separatist Bartholomew [*sic*] Legate in 1611, see Clifford Davidson, 'Judgment, Iconoclasm and Anti-Theatricalism in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*,' *Papers-on-Language-and Literature* 25 (1989), 349-63, 352-55.

[156] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), 1.4.3. All quotations are taken from Thomas Norton's English translation of 1587.

[157] See *Table Talk of John Selden*, 95-6.

world of festive irregularity. Both 'playing fields' – the Athenian forest and Smithfields – are imaginary spaces full of 'cockle-shells, pebbles, fine wheat-straws, and here and there a chicken's feather and a cobweb' (*Bartholomew Fair*, 1.5.87-8); both rely on the playhouse audience's willingness to come clean about the nature of these fantasies. At the end of both plays, a considerable number of characters has no more than a diffuse idea about what has actually happened to them, but on the whole they are well satisfied.

A Tale of a Tub also looks back to the *Dream*. Shakespeare seems to evoke the memory not only of seasonal frolics at midsummer but also of artisanal drama, of Corpus Christi and the mystery plays, only to affirm its demise and the superiority of a theatre that is patronised (in both senses of the word, it seems) by noble or even royal potentates. This has been read as a shift from 'a culture focused upon social dynamics within the local community to one that incorporates the local within and subordinates it to the centre',[158] and it is also very much what happens in *Tub*. Jonson, writing almost forty years later than Shakespeare, seems deliberately to be dramatising this shift. He gives far more space than Shakespeare to the popular festivities that were customarily conducted on St Valentine's Day, and when Squire Tub assembles everyone at Totten Hall at the end of the play to watch 'A Tale of a Tub, a story of myself' (5.2.44), the losses and gains of 'the reformation of manners' are more equally weighed than in Shakespeare's dream play.

2.3.1 *A Tale of a Tub*: A History of Urban Festive Culture

The proposition that Ben Jonson's *A Tale of a Tub* is a 'charming and unjustly neglected play [that] makes sense only when read - in its entirety - as a Caroline work' is by now widely accepted. Only if one assumes that the play was indeed conceived and written shortly before it was performed at the Cockpit in 1633, where it pleased, and at court the following year, where it did not, can one make a case for its 'nostalgic Elizabethanism'.[159] This case really rests on the kind of artistic virtuosity and social vision critics want to ascribe to the late Jonson. Herford and the Simpsons would, on the whole, like to distance him from the flatness of the characters, the uneven style of language and the allusions to mid-sixteenth-century religion, politics and culture: 'If Jonson wrote this in 1633, he was archaising with a vengeance.'[160] Anne Barton, too, observes the 'antiquated flavour of the dialogue' and the 'anthology of

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[158] Louis A. Montrose, 'Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Kingdom of Shadows,' *The Theatrical City. Culture, Theatre and Politics in London, 1575-1649*, ed. David L. Smith, Richard Strier and David Bevington, Cambridge, 1995, 68-86, 72.

[159] Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, Cambridge, 1984, 321 and 324. Barton had treated this subject earlier in 'Harking Back,'. See also her '*The New Inn* and the Problem of Jonson's Late Style,' *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979), 395-418.

[160] Herford and Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, vol. 9, 271, suggest an early, perhaps fragmentary composition.

Elizabethan public theatre humour', but she takes these to be a deliberate strategy to 'resurrect' a 'remote past'.[161]

Leaving aside the question of the play's date of conception and/or finalisation - after all, only further evidence could finally resolve it[162] - it might be more fruitful to examine more closely the time and place to which Jonson seems to be harking back. Here the critics' debate continues: Herford and the Simpsons cite references to Queen Mary and King Edward VI draw attention to Chanon Hugh's Latin tags and agree with E. K. Chambers that 'The time is in Queen Mary's reign'.[163] Barton re-interprets the religious and ecclesiastical references as evidence of Reformation controversies still very much alive after 1558 and cites other historical and literary references, among them one each to *Doctor Faustus* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,* which 'suggest Elizabethan rather than Marian England' as the setting.[164]

Since Jonson seems to have left 'The time when?' undecided, one might get further by asking 'Then for the place where?' Although it has often been so described, *A Tale of a Tub* is by no means 'unequivocally a country play'.[165] At the beginning of the printed version, the scene is given as 'Finsbury-Hundred' - a location as clear as mud, for although there was a recreative area north of Moorfields called Finsbury, this was no administrative unit, and there was no 'Council of Finsbury'.[166] All the other settings of the play belong to the Middlesex hundred of Edmonton, and yet there are about a dozen references to Finsbury, which lay in the county of London. Considering that *A Tale of a Tub* is a play explicitly concerned with 'all the neighbourhood', 'old records' and festive traditions such as 'Whitsun lords, / [...] wakes and ales' (Prologue 7-9),[167] the ambiguities about time and place begin to look deliberate. It would seem that Jonson wants to associate the characters' social space

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161 Barton, *Dramatist*, 325-5.

162 The most recent (linguistic) assessment of the play's conception tentatively supports the hypothesis that Jonson revised an/his earlier version, see Hugh Craig, 'Jonson's Chronology and the Styles of *A Tale of a Tub*,' *Re-Presenting Ben Jonson. Text, History, Performance*, ed. Martin Butler, London, 1999, 210-232. Yet Craig, too, admits that the archaic, uneven style may have been intented by the playwright.

163 Herford and Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, vol. 9, 270-71.

164 Barton, *Dramatist*, 336. - The literary allusions do not decide the debate, however. 1.1.1ff recall John Donne's 'Epithalamion,' 1.1.30 recalls the Elizabethan prodigy Sir Philip Sidney, the Henrician poet laureate John Skelton (d. 1529) is mentioned by name (5.7.24), *Appius and Virginia* (either the 'tragical comedy' from the 1560s or John Webster's version from 1626) is alluded to (3.6.10-16). Audrey seems to fancy herself as a witty young woman from an early Shakespeare comedy, with a touch of Lady Petronel Flash from *Eastward Ho* (2.4.67-85 and 4.5.73-81). There is a reference to Robert Fabyan's *New Chronicles of England and France*, which were first published in 1516, last published in 1559 and used by John Stow. If these clues indicate anything, it is the deliberation with which Jonson is spreading his characters' literary allusions to cover the best part of a century.

165 Barton, *Dramatist*, 336.

166 For information about the locations see Fran C. Chalfant, *Ben Jonson's London. A Jacobean Placename Dictionary*, Athens/Georgia, 1978, and the notes in Florence M. Snell's edition of the play, London, 1915. Maps of Moorfields and Finsbury are available in Felix Barker and Peter Jackson, *The History of London in Maps*, New York, 1990, 14-5 and 28-9.

167 All quotations from *A Tale of a Tub* are taken from G. A. Wilkes, ed., *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1982.

simultaneously with various historical moments since the beginning of the English Reformation, and with the country (Middlesex) as well as the city (Finsbury/London).[168]

Martin Butler's elucidation of the 'conflict between the centre and the localities, the demands of office and the demands of neighbourliness', effaced rather than solved at the end of the play to 'promulgate ideas of deference and political passivity'[169] is admirably acute, but it neglects both the time span suggestively encompassed by the ambiguous setting and the changes that transform the play's little community in the course of the day's action. The dramatic technique of telescoping time and space - familiar from plays about national history but just as effective in a play about social history - allows Jonson to turn the accomplishment of many years of Protestant socialisation and early modern urbanisation into an hour-glass and to present a civic community in transition from small town to city, from semi-rural communality to urban privatisation, from oral customs and traditions to written chronicles and traditionalism, from the Roman Catholic, semi-pagan festival of St. Valentine's Day to the 'civic chronicle masque' presented at the end of the day and the play.

Jonson's object in *A Tale of a Tub* is neither wilful archaism nor a nostalgic resurrection of good Queen Bess's glorious days but a critical depiction of the historical process of urbanisation and religious reformation, more particularly of the way these processes influenced the decline of communal participation at civic festivities in early modern London. By the first decade of the seventeenth century a historical perspective had begun to imply a self-reflexive perspective that demanded an exploration of the historicity of the form, mode or genre in which a piece was written. Jonson provided in 1633 a dramatised social history of festivity of which earlier playwrights had seemed incapable and which he himself had not attempted in *Bartholomew Fair*.

A Tale of a Tub is not usually read as a comedy about urban history. The play's 'country' aspects have received far more attention from critics than the 'city' aspects. Rather unfortunately, critical appreciation in these cases is sometimes qualified by an attitude of dreamy condescension, similar to the way a Caroline city gallant would have viewed folk from the outer suburbs or the provincial hinterland: 'The very considerable charm of *A Tale of a Tub* resides chiefly in its affectionate re-creation of a long-ago world of rustic innocence. [...] Detail by loving detail, Jonson builds up the picture of a fresh, simple, essentially uncorrupted country world.'[170]

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[168] These anachronisms and incongruities of place and time cannot but seem entirely deliberate when seen in conjunction with the effortless and unobtrusive observance of the dramatic unity of time, place and action.

[169] Martin Butler, 'Stuart Politics in Jonson's *Tale of a Tub*,' *Modern Language Review* 85 (1990), 12-28, 18 and 28. Butler reads the play's nostalgia as an endorsement of the *Book of Sports*: it affirms the rule of a strong monarch, who identifies herself or himself with 'the traditional festive culture' against 'that puritan sentiment which regarded revelry with aversion' (17).

[170] Barton, 'Harking Back,' 726.

Leah Marcus stresses the fact that the play was written shortly after King Charles I had republished *The Book of Sports*, his father's strategically devised endorsement of popular festivity and holiday customs, and in between the entertainments Jonson devised for Charles's progress to and from Scotland in 1633 and 1634.[171] Both *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* and *Love's Welcome at Bolsover* have unambiguously rural settings and proceed by 'the traditional formula whereby peasant sports give way to the dances of the gentles'.[172] Marcus - rashly, I think - finds a similar pattern in *A Tale of a Tub*. Presumably this pattern was also expected by the members of the court when it was presented there. But in this case Jonson fails to supply it, and this may very well be one of the reasons the play fell through at Whitehall. Were the play a royal entertainment, as Marcus seems to suggest, the wedding planned at the beginning within the context of a traditional holiday would be set as a kind of anti-masque against the ordering and transforming effect of Squire Tub's masque at the end. But the play is not a royal entertainment; and Squire Tub's masque is by no means an 'unambivalent celebration [...] of popular festival'.[173] On the contrary, the masque is a privatized, disciplinary event of exactly the kind of civic myth-making of which John Stow was so suspicious.

Fran Chalfant, noting all the London locations Jonson mentions in his plays, is necessarily more alert to city resonances. 'The members of Jonson's imaginary civic body speak in 'rustic' dialect [...]. Many of their concerns, however, such as ancestral pride, social mobility, and antiquarianism are those in which London's would-be elite (and Jonson's audience) were keenly interested.'[174] The crucial detail that should not be overlooked in reconstructing the context of *A Tale of a Tub* is that Jonson's audience were the citizens at the Cockpit, not the king touring the country. He picks up the theme of 'antiquarian nostalgia for a vanishing 'Merry England'' from the entertainments he wrote for King Charles but this time he looks at traditional customs and communal festivities in relation to *civic* ideologies. Presented at a playhouse that 'sustained an older and more openly citizen repertoire than its rival at Blackfriars' and that would get into trouble a few years later over plays that 'generally show[ed] hostility to the councellors of government and its City agents rather than to the king himself',[175] *A Tale*

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171 Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 128-35.

172 Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 131.

173 Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 134.

174 Chalfant, *Jonson's London*, 8. - John Lemly, "Make odde discoveries!' Disguises, Masques, and Jonsonian Romance,' *Comedy From Shakespeare to Sheridan. Change and Continuity in the English and European Tradition*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and J. C. Bulman, Newark, 1986, 131-147, notices that '[a]lthough in *A Tale of a Tub* the powers that make all end well are more domestic than Olympian, this rural setting [...] seems surprisingly congenial to the former master of city comedy,' (141) but he does not follow up this hunch.

175 Gurr, *Playgoing*, 172 and 187. Riggs, *Jonson*, 336, points out that by selling the play to Queen Henrietta's Men, 'Jonson took care to ensure [...] a sympathetic audience'. Queen Henrietta's Men, who played at the Cockpit from 1626-42, owned and performed a number of London comedies: *Covent Garden*; *Hyde Park*; *If You Know Not Me, You Know No-One*; *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*; *A Mad World, My Masters*; *Tottenham Court*; *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, see Gurr, *Playing Companies*, 432-33.

of a Tub demands to be related to the dramatic tastes of Caroline playgoers – and these tastes were for nostalgia and suburban pastoral.

An experimental reading of *A Tale of a Tub* as a city comedy thus offers a further explanation of why the play has seemed so 'Elizabethan' to modern readers: it is not because it was written at the time but because it engages parodically with romantic and satiric plays about London written at the time. Like all good parodies it goes to the very heart of its pre-texts in that it engages not merely with their structures, characters and ideas but with the historical conditions of their existence. It does not come as a surprise at all that Jonson's sociological impression of urban history also bears a great deal of resemblance to John Stow's *Survey of London.* Stow and Jonson were, in fact, acquainted; Jonson spoke affectionately of Stow to William Drummond.[176] Both men were Londoners born and bred, Roman Catholic sympathisers, shrewd and conservative observers of city life, and both spent a great deal of time and effort in setting down their views and complaints of London in various literary forms in order to reach and teach a wider public. Both register 'a distaste for a theatricalisation of public life that [they associate] with the coming of the Reformation, acquisitive individualism and the secular bureaucratic state'[177]. In *A Tale of a Tub* Jonson depicts the effects of the Reformation and of social and political elitism on semi-urban communal life more strikingly than in any of his other plays, and it is telling to see where Stow's ghost seems to be sitting on his shoulder to accompany and direct him in this exercise of dramatising social history.

The members of the Council of Finsbury enter the scene deep in conversation about the impending festive occasions: a wedding on a saint's day. 'But what was that Zin Valentine?' (1.2.6) enquires Medlay, headborough of Islington, sparking off a debate that shows that these small-town worthies have not the slightest idea whom they are venerating on this 14th of February. 'Zin Valentine,' offers Clench, petty constable of Hampstead,

> He was a deadly Zin, and dwelt at Highgate,
> As I have heard, but 'twas avore my time:
> He was a cooper too, as you are, Medlay,
> An In-an'-In: a woundy, brag young vellow:
> As th' port went o' hun, then, and i' those days. (7-11)[178]

St. Valentine, bishop of Rome and early Christian martyr, whose very institution had originally been an attempt by the Church to overlay pagan fertility rites with Christian holidays, is turned into a townie.[179]

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[176] See Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, vol. 1, 'Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden,' 128-78, 149.

[177] Manley, 'Of Sites and Rites,' 51. Manley talks only of Stow, but Jonson made no bones about his own 'anti-acquisitive attitude'; see e.g. L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, London, 1937, 200-27.

[178] By 1633 Highgate was beginning to be thought of as a part of 'Greater London': 'Why how now Babel, wither wilt thou build? / I see old Holborne, Charing-crosse, the Strand, / Are going to St. Giles his in the field; Saint Kathernes she shakes Wapping by the hand: / And Hoggesdon will to Hy-gate ere't be long,' *London's Progress* (1614), quoted in Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 37n.:

The gossips reconstruct 'Zin's' place of habitation and his occupation, earnestly searching their memories for what they have read in parish or county registers, and 'remember' him as a lusty young fellow and a decent craftsman.[180] 'You are a shrewd antiquity, neighbour Clench!' (29), To-Pan exclaims with truly Dogberrian precision. Clench's great old age and his ability to remember make him an authority on the history of the neighbourhood and qualify him, in To-Pan's opinion, for membership of the Society of Antiquaries.[181] The first commandment in civic historiography – John Stow was adamant on this point - was accuracy and factuality. Scriben feels obliged to object to Clench's (hi)story:

> Did he not write his name, Sim Valentine?
> Vor I have met no Sin in Finsbury books,
> And yet I have writ 'em six or seven times over. (13-5)

Had he lived a hundred years earlier, Scriben would have copied out books of holy writ; now, in secular times, he copies out annals and registers, books of civic religion. For the members of the Council of Finsbury, as for Stow, 'much of the piety that might once have been reserved for religious veneration has now become invested in a civic religion based on veneration of the past.'[182] Authority, both in reformed religion and in civic history, rests with written chronicles, in 'reading and writing' (41 and 1.3.3-15), and High Constable Turf "scourses of the great Charty' (34) like a preacher would 'divide' a passage from the Bible. When the question of Valentine's identity comes up again, Scriben puts it in unmistakeably exegetical terms: 'There's another reading now: / My Master reads it Son, and not Sin Valentine' (1.4.44-5). And in matters of civic religion, a high constable wields the authority of a high

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[179] On St. Valentine's Day, see *A Tale of a Tub*, ed. Snell, 1.1.1n. and Ethel L. Urlin, *Festivals, Holy Days and Saints' Days. A Study in Origins and Survivals in Church Ceremonies and Secular Customs*, London, 1915, 34-7. Snell, in her list of literary references to St. Valentine's Day, discreetly neglects to mention Thomas Nashe's pornographic poem 'The Choice of Valentines', in which the poet seeks his Valentine at home, finds her in a brothel in Southwark, but himself sadly incapacitated. Perhaps it is not entirely fanciful to detect an allusion to Nashe's poem in Jonson's Audrey, who is repeatedly lost, mislaid, missed, found and thus passes through the hands (though not beds) of various men. Barton, 'Harking Back,' touches on the more general aspect of economic circulation: 'Awdrey herself is a commodity kept waiting too long to be enjoyed,' 726.

[180] For an example of the dilettante historians with an axe to grind at whom Jonson is getting here, see Munday's pains in the Lord Mayor's Show of 1614 to determine - in some ninety-odd lines - whether Henry Fitz-Alwin, London's first mayor, was a Goldsmith or a Draper. His authority, Stow's *Survey*, has Fitz-Alwin down as a Goldsmith, and as one such Munday had presented him in 1611, but in 1614 he wanted to 'use' him for the Drapers' show. (Munday was a Draper himself.) Jonson may not have had this example in mind, but Munday had always been a man he loved to despise.

[181] See also the etymological elucidation of the term 'clown' from 'colonus', 1.3.21-37. –Since Jonson approved of the discipline and had counted several of the Antiquaries among his friends, we may be certain he is not mocking it but its third-rate followers. Perhaps it is not too fanciful, however, to wonder whether the debate about Valentine's 'title' was a gentle parody of Henry Spelman's *Archaeologus* (1626), an enquiry into medieval ranks, titles, customs and institutions, based on philological enquiry. Spelman's study was written in Latin, so this allusion, if it is there, would presumably have been lost to the majority of playgoers.

[182] Manley, 'Of Sites and Rites,' 53.

priest: 'and he is i' the right: he is High Constable. / And who should read above 'un, or avore 'un?' (46-7).[183]

The characters validate themselves, their names, their customs and their social space by rooting them in (local) tradition and in history.[184] However, their recourse to tradition has become self-conscious, and their grasp of history is shaky and incomplete. Both are affected by a haphazard Protestant socialisation. Jonson seems to be as sceptical about his fellow citizens' understanding of Protestant doctrine as he is about their knowledge of civic history. In the course of seventy lines, Bishop Valentine is translated from 'Zin Valentine' to 'a deadly Zin' (a trusty if irascible neighbour), to 'Sim' (an idiosyncratic spelling variant like, say, 'Jonson'), to 'Sin' (unheard of among the good people of Finsbury), to 'the nine deadly Sims' (a family of brawling six-footers?),[185] to 'the Zin o' the shire' (a wise old match-maker?), to 'Son Valentine' (a character in a scene of domestic martyrdom).

The main thrust of the word-play, difficult to convey in the theatre, is surely the conflation of 'saint/sin/Sim'. In terms of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, faith in the mediating power of holy people is, of course, blasphemy.[186] This group of Protestants - it is never clear whether they are first-, second- or third-generation Protestants because the time of action is unclear - has become so alienated from the religion of their forbears that they seem to have forgotten the term 'saint' altogether. Clench vaguely yet poignantly recalls that 'Zin' 'had a place, in last King Harry's time' (22), the last time England was properly Roman Catholic.[187] The acuteness of Jonson's social analysis appears in the subtle and compressed way in which he shows how old habits of thought survive and manifest themselves in new forms. Religious devotion has been secularised and turned into local patriotism, but historiography is pursued with as much ardour as hagiography: Saint Valentine is transformed into Citizen Simon Valentine.

The only character who shows at least a rudimentary grasp of Christian tenets is Lady Tub, the highest-ranking female in the play. She remembers that Zin Valentine was a clergyman, who 'Left us example to do deeds of charity' (1.7.9). When her maid suggests that she set out, on this St. Valentine's morn, to find 'A proper man, / To please your ladyship' (4-5), Lady Tub protests indignantly:

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[183] The Protestant insistence on written authority is contradicted by this belief in the officer's pseudo-papal omniscience: a further satiric comment on the tenacity of old habits of thought.

[184] See the Scene Interloping, in which the district 'bodies' relate their family backgrounds to each other, emphasizing the integrity of their vocations and the worthiness of their forebears. It is a kind of trial-run for Squire Tub's extravaganza of civic self-legitimation in 5.10 and sets the latter in the context of the former, removing it from the expected context of royal self-legitimation.

[185] This is primarily an echo of the Seven Deadly Sins, of course.

[186] By the 1620s or 1630s it was possible to be amusing about the idea of sainthood, see e.g Robert Herrick's mock-prayer to 'Saint Ben' ('His Prayer to Ben Jonson'). He may have written it when he knew Jonson in the mid-1620s, and Jonson may have known Herrick's evocation of spring festival, 'Corinna's Going a-Maying,' which begins with a boy calling for his girl underneath her window at day-break, when he wrote the first scene of *A Tale of a Tub*.

[187] Again 'Zin' means 'saint' (from a RC perspective) and 'sin' (from a Protestant perspective): in pre-Reformation times, saints/sins had a place.

> Out o' that vanity,
> That takes the foolish eye: any poor creature,
> Whose want may need my alms, or courtesy;
> I rather wish. (5-8)

So far, so pious. Her Anglican credibility is somewhat impeded, however, by the fact that five minutes earlier she was in raptures about the physical attributes of her manservant and will return to the subject of male beauty within a moment. In between, in a fit of uncharacteristic hypocrisy, she turns St. Valentine into an expounder of Protestant iconoclasm:

> These were the works of piety he did practise,
> And bade us imitate; not look for lovers,
> Or handsome images to please our senses. (13-5)

Her character, her every inclination, go against the only moderately sophisticated doctrinal point she has understood and which, if she followed it, would mark her mode of Christianity 'Protestant' rather than 'papist'.

Far more effective in shaping the relations between the sexes, however, are the forces of the market economy. Asked to describe her ideal Valentine, the maid replies:

> I would have him such,
> As not another woman, but should spite me!
> Three city ladies should run mad for him:
> And country-madams infinite. (28-31)

The value of a person-as-object is determined by demand, by others' desire for it, not by any intrinsic worth or value. This assessment of human relations comes straight out of satiric city comedy. It gives a brief indication of what it may be - with communal cohesion and traditional customs under erosion and religion nothing but dimly understood precept - that really does and will shape people's conduct. The answer is the same Jonson had given in his earlier plays: self-interest and the market.

Jonson precisely outlines the features of an early modern semi-urban community that is becoming self-conscious and turning into an enactment of itself. It is self-conscious both about its old ways, which do not feel 'natural' any more, and about its new ways, because these do not feel 'natural' yet. At the beginning of the day and the play, two festive events are combined into one, St. Valentine's Day and an old-style wedding. High Constable and Dame Turf have decided to honour the ancient custom of drawing lots on St. Valentine's Eve to find a husband for their daughter. It is the same manner in which they found and married each other thirty years ago. Chance has lighted on Clay the tile-maker, the wedding preparations are already under way. The house is decorated with what greenery is available in February, the bridegroom has arrived tricked out in his finery, the bridesmaids are dressing the bride, the musicians have been hired, the pigs are on the spits. Except for the three most educated characters - Squire Tub, who seems to have had an understanding with Audrey Turf himself, his rival Justice

Preamble and the cynically mercenary priest Sir Hugh - everyone submits to the perennial authority of custom, which prevails over individual or factious interests and ensures social harmony.

In the course of the bridal preparations in Kentish Town it emerges, however, that the traditional customs are no longer accepted as a matter of course by those who adhere to them. The bride's parents disagree about the appropriate form of the bride-ale. Turf will not hear of his wife's plans for the traditional big spread feasting 'All the young bachelors and maids, forsooth, / O' the six parishes hereabout' (2.1.15-6). He thinks the size of the bride's train of women inappropriately large (28-31) and feels uncomfortable with the idea of dancing 'o'er the fields like fays, to church, this frost' (52). Worst of all, he has refused to hire the musicians, obliging his wife to do so in order to spare her daughter the ignominy of walking to church without a consort of music (45-50).[188]

Turf has several motives for spoiling sport. For one, he shirks the expenses entailed by a traditional bride-ale ('Dear meat's a thief', 22), thus violating the dictate of hospitality so valued by social conservatives like Stow. He wants the wedding small, and he wants it select, 'three, or vour our wise, choice honest neighbours: / Upstantial persons: men that ha' borne office' (19-20). 'Upstantial' says it all: he means to invite only the local elite, men of financial means and social standing. His objections to the wedding procession to church (52-5) make him sound very much like Philip Stubbes, who in his *Anatomie of Abuses* condemns 'All lewde, wanton, and lascivious dauncing in publique assemblies and conventicles' but is prepared to allow it 'privately (every sex distincted by themselves)'[189] - a scenario very different from Dame Turf's idea of a get-together for all the youngsters in the area. Turf no longer has the same set of criteria as his wife in interpreting and judging the old customs. The traditional wedding she envisions is seen by him in the light of socially inappropriate ostentation and theatricalised self-display, 'To show your pomp' (51). His reproaches cast her as an ambitious mother from a city comedy, a Mistress Touchstone or Mistress Goldhammer, who seeks to improve her social status by marrying her daughter well and making sure that everyone knows it.[190]

After some persuading Turf is still game to celebrate in the old way, but his sensibilities are clearly at variance with his family's and friends'. The marital squabble Turf and Dame Turf enter into on the morning of their daughter's wedding is nothing less than a contest for control over the festive

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[188] Compare the detailed preparations in Richard Brome's slightly earlier *The Wedding* (1626): 'To the tailor's, man, run! [...] The arrant shoemaker, too. [...] Call upon Cod the perfumer.[...] when th'art at the Peacock, remember to call for the sprig [...] bid the vintner make haste with the runlets of claret' (2.1.5-31), ed. Sister Martin Flavin, New York, 1980, or the same writer's *The Northern Lass* (1629): Luckless has rashly married the city widow Fitchow: 'Wee'll have all very private: not above foure or five friends more' (1.1.37-8). When it turns out that Luckless can marry the eponymous heroine because the minister who conducted his first marriage was a fake, the whole company are invited 'at our Northern Lasses Feast,' ed. Harvey Fried, New York, 1980.

[189] Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, N8r.

[190] See *Eastward Ho* (1605) and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611). - The marital quarrel in *A Tale of a Tub* echoes that in *Eastward Ho* more than incidentally in that communal celebration and traditional hospitality are tainted by being linked with theatrical ostentation, while modesty and sobriety are rendered suspicious by being linked with privatization and (puritan) niggardliness, see *Eastward Ho* 2.1.

occasion. The women's arguments are so forceful because their authority is the authority of Time.[191] Turf acknowledges this when he interrupts his cronies' debate about the force of authority in oral tradition as against authority in written texts and admonishes them for being tardy about decorating the house: 'You take up 'dority still, to vouch against me. / All the twelve smocks i' the house, zur, are your authors' (1.3.24-5). Turf may well say he is yielding to 'truth' (1.3.58), because to a large extent in a society untouched by the influence of social or religious reform, that which *is*, is true.

For Dame Turf the distinction between public and private does not exist (yet), or if it does, she does not evaluate the two as her husband does. To her, privatisation would equal privation. Turf, on the other hand, is eager to withdraw from the communal space and to turn the wedding into a private function. The very first thing he says in the play expresses his desire for privacy. He joins his friends in front of his house and rebukes them good-humouredly but firmly: 'What's that, makes you all so merry and loud, sirs, ha? / I could ha' heard you to my privy walk' (1.3.1-2). There is nothing paranoid about his desire to keep his privacy unviolated, nothing to suggest that Jonson is recalling Morose, the noise-hater in *Epicoene*, but it sets Turf apart from his fellows nevertheless.[192] He also betrays this tendency in a brief remark about his son-in-law-elect: 'I wonder Clay / Should be so tedious: he's to play Son Valentine!' (1.3.29-30). Protestant governments from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards discouraged the tradition of staging scenes of martyrdom on saints' days. Turf acknowledges this dramatic tradition but duly transforms the religious pageant into a private function, providing yet another variation on 'Saint Valentine'. The Romish saint is domesticated and turned into son-in-law John Clay.

On Clay centres the other episode in the play in which religious issues are foregrounded. 'Son Valentine' several times comes near to following Saint Valentine in being sacrificed: first he is about to be martyred on the altar of marriage (2.1.1-8), then to be hanged as a thief (2.3.14-6) and finally rescued from what some of the characters take to be the jaws of hell (4.6). Jonson provides a deft and vivid impression of the passing of superstitious fears down the social scale and out of common consciousness. The clown Ball Puppy surprises the company with the news that there are devils in the barn in which he has just been taking a nap. Most of the Whitefriars audience in 1633 would have

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[191] Lady Tub also clings to custom, charmingly appropriating it to her private purposes. On the morn of St. Valentine's she summons her woman and her lower-class servant-*cum*-gigolo and sets out on a day of widow-errantry in search of a Valentine to 'satisfy' her 'present fancy' (1.7.20). Jonson may be indicating that while the men appropriate the law to achieve their personal aims, the women appropriate custom. This emphasis picks up the train of association from paganism, papism, sensuality, enchantment, idolatry to women and femaleness that was a commonplace in polemics on witchcraft and iconoclasm.

[192] The desire for privacy is much more pronounced in Caroline comedies than earlier. In Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden* there are half a dozen instances were characters demand more privacy, complain about not getting enough privacy or intend to conduct some business in private. It had apparently become a mark of gentility as well as a a sign of clandestine dealings.

disparaged belief in demonic apparitions, and even Puppy knows that they are such stuff as stage plays are made of:

> Oh for a cross! A collop
> Of Friar Bacon, or a conjuring stick
> Of Doctor Faustus! Spirits are in the barn. (30-2)

But the old Elizabethan devil-plays have not diminished his fear of the fiend. On the contrary, they furnish him with horrible images:

> Now, now, even now they are tearing him in pieces:
> Now they are tossing off his legs and arms,
> Like loggets at a pear tree. (67-9)[193]

Superstitious beliefs are presented as a sign of lack of education, and thus of lower social status. The higher-ranking characters, Lady Tub, her son and Dame Turf, are unmoved: 'Go see,' Tub orders his man-servant, 'I warrant thee there's no such matter'(38). But like his fellow Puppy, Basket Hilts, a ferocious bully up to this point, is terrified. The force that is invoked to subdue the fiend, however, is not Protestant doctrine or rational enlightenment but the power of law and bureaucracy: 'No, if I be torn in pieces, / What is your warrant worth?' (40-1), and Puppy agrees:

> Stay for my master, the High Constable,
> Or In-and-In, the headborough; let them go
> Into the barn with warrant; seize the fiend;
> And set him in the stocks for his ill rule. (58-61)

The play shows that warrants, offices, titles and badges were perceived to be increasingly influential in everyday town life. But against supernatural forces they are about as efficacious as the consecrated host or the crucifix which a popish priest would extend in front of himself when entering a fiend-infested building. The figure that Tub marches out by the scruff of his neck, however, is no devil but John Clay, who went missing after he was wrongly accused of theft. 'If this be all your devil, I would take / In hand to conjure him,' Hilts comments, 'but hell take me / If ere I come in a right devil's walk' (84-6).

The interest of this little episode lies not so much in the fun the educated playwright and his 'understanding' audience poke at credulous yokels but in the way in which it shows the process of acculturation. Fundamental ideological and epistemological transformations – as those connected with Protestantism and rationalism - are effected from the political and cultural centre out to the peripheries and from the educated top of society down to the lower orders, who are liable to hold on longest to folklore and remnants of the old religion. In a play about social history at the 'end' of the English Reformation, some sort of dramatisation of these processes is to be expected, and Jonson provides it not only on the theme of bureaucratic surveillance but also on superstition.

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[193] This is a wonderful acknowlegement of the power of theatre: the scene Puppy 'remembers' from Doctor Faustus is not actually shown on stage in that play. Faustus is taken off as it strikes midnight, and his fellow scholars find his limbs strewn around his study the next morning. Puppy has provided the scene of dismemberment in his imagination.

The question of authority in festive matters is debated once more, and even more heatedly than in the Turf family, at the end of the day and the play when Squire Tub commissions In-and-In Medlay to design a masque, 'A Tale of a Tub, a story of myself' (5.2.44). The phrase has undergone a most telling change of meaning. It was first used by Turf to deny that he had promised his daughter to Tub: the rumour was 'a mere tale of a tub' (1.4.25). Herford and the Simpsons gloss this as 'a stupid or nonsensical story'.[194] When Squire Tub uses it to describe the 'toy' he wishes to have 'presented' (5.2.43), the phrase has become privatised, appropriated for personal, individual purposes. Even by calling it a 'masque' he marks the show's private, aristocratic character. But Tub appropriates not only the phrase but also the day's events, even the day itself. The time set aside from everyday labour to celebrate the wedding of Audrey and her husband (whichever one of the available males she may end up marrying) is now taken over by Tub's efforts 'To be adopt in your society' (5.2.27), that is, to be integrated into the Council of Finsbury. The fact that he seeks to achieve this purpose by way of theatrical self-aggrandisement shows that he means to be 'adopt' as head and governor, not merely as a member of the community.[195] The day's events, in which every member of the community had a part, are turned into a dramatic entertainment 'to note *our* name and family', 'to show *my* adventures' (5.2.49-50); it is '*my* masque' that 'Shall make the name of Totten Court immortal: / And be recorded to posterity' (5.6.26-7, all emphases added). Ironically - after all he has not obtained a bride - Tub fancies himself as the founder of a dynasty complete with family history.

There is some awkwardness in being made immortal for the achievement of having got rich quick by saltpetre. The saltpetre-men, exempt from the Statute Against Monopolies in 1624, had the patent 'to break open all premises and to dig up the floors of stables, and even dwelling-houses'. [196] This extreme violation of property and privacy cannot have endeared them to their neighbours. In Tub's case, nemesis arrives - intrudes, rather - in the shape of In-and-In Medlay, who hoists him by his own tub. At the beginning of 5.7 Jonson builds in a wonderfully funny and witty moment when Tub

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194 Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, vol. 9, 267.

195 He might simply have treated the others to a feast, provided food and drink, perhaps music and a bonfire, and made sure that neighbourly harmony was restored. This would have corresponded to Stow's memories of the midsummer festivities, *Survey*, vol. 1, 101.

196 Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, vol. 9, 277. - A rather charming biographical note cries out to be added here: in a begging letter written on 20 December 1631 to his patron, the Earl of Newcastle, Jonson elaborates that he had had a dream a few days before, in which his pet fox had complained about the scarcity of food and comfort in the poet's home. 'There I found my Reynard, in his tenement - the Tub I had hired for him - cynically expressing his own lot.' In his dream Jonson retaliates by calling the fox 'stinking vermin', but the fox sends him into his cellar to 'find a worse vermin there'. So 'methought I went down and found all the floor turned up, as if a colony of moles had been there, or an army of Salt-petre men'. The royal mole-catcher, however, tells him that 'this kind of Mole is called a WANT', and that he needs the help of a nobleman to destroy it (printed in *Publications of the Shakespeare Society of London*, vol. 11, no. 24, Nendeln, 1966, 8-9). I do not know whether Jonson used this idea anywhere else, but it seems to have stuck in his mind until he wrote *A Tale of a Tub* a little over a year later. The anecdote may strengthen the case for a late date of composition, however.

enters his home and finds it has been wrecked by In-and-In, who, in a rush of creative frenzy, has 'Surveyed the place, sir, and designed the ground, / [... and] fixed in the earth, a tub' (2-4). This is the only moment in the play when Tub is seen to lose his cool: 'Oh Master In-and-In, what ha' you done?' It is dramatically fitting that at this moment, when Tub finds he is done to as he has done to others, ensues the fiercest debate about who controls the show. 'By your leave,' Tub snaps,

> I am Tub, the tale's of me,
> And my adventures! I am Squire Tub,
> *Subjectum Fabulae.*

'But I the author,' In-and-In insists, but this argument is routed: 'The workman, sir! The artificer! I grant you' (5.7.20-3). In-and-In Medlay may well be a satire of Inigo Jones,[197] but this quarrel is between an artist and his patron, possibly between a writer of masques and the king, but just as plausibly between a professional designer of pageants and a civic governor demanding to be turned into a *triumphator*.

In the course of this St. Valentine's Day more time has passed than a few hours and the scene has shifted further than a couple of miles from Kentish Town to Totten Court.[198] Tub's privatised festivity stifles or at least controls the energies released by the communal festival. Like the replacement of 'open pastimes' by 'worser practices within doors' lamented by Stow, it is characterised by a 'transformation of familiar public symbolism into a manipulative theatricality marked by hypocrisy, ostentation and divisive individualism'.[199] Tub's masque is a fine example of the combination of theatrical display and privatised leisure for which Stow reproaches London's social and political elite, and it clearly manifests the anthropologist Victor Turner's qualifying characteristics of liminoid cultural phenomena: for the first time in the play the scene is set indoors, both the private sphere and the entertainment itself are thereby ennobled (5.10.1-7). The show is the artistic product of a known individual, a professional. It is very obviously made to 'appeal to specific tastes'.[200] Clench notes Tub's satisfaction with Medlay's work: 'The Squire recommends 'un. He doth like all well'. To-Pan's reply can hardly be imagined without a sardonic tone: 'He cannot choose. This gear is made to sell' (5.10.46-7). Even if Medlay is not actually paid by Tub, the entertainment has been rendered commercial. Like a royal masque - here the comparison holds - or like a Lord Mayor's Show it is meant to appeal to an individual's taste, Tub's, and in being individualised it is also divisive because it denies the spectators equal access to the material presented. '[*L*]*iminal* phenomena tend to have a common intellectual and

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[197] See Riggs, *Jonson*, 334 and Richard Dutton, 'Ben Jonson and the Master of the Revels,' *Theatre and Government under the Early Stuarts*, ed. J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Cambridge, 1993, 57-86, 81-2.

[198] The change in location quite literally signifies a movement closer to the city: Totten Court was about a mile north-west of the Strand, Kentish Town about three miles to the north.

[199] Manley, 'Of Sites and Rites,' 51.

[200] Turner, 'Liminality,' 43-7.

emotional meaning for all the members of the widest effective community'.[201] The wedding planned by the Turfs would have had this common appeal. The masque's individualised appeal, on the other hand, can be measured by the fact that it seems to have an almost therapeutic effect on Tub: it elicits from him an over-due reaction to his mother's incestuous interest in him. 'Lady Tub,' In-and-In narrates, 'Missing her son, doth seek him up and down.' 'With her Pol-Martin bare before her,' (5.10.24-6) Tub chips in with more than a hint of filial sexual aggression, picking up his mother's own bawdy word-play in calling Pol-Martin her 'foreman, daily waiter' (1.6.33).

The contrast in the nature of the two festive events - the old-style wedding and the new-fangled masque - and the activities of the participants at the former and the passivity of the spectators at the latter, manifests itself very strikingly in the use made of the musicians. Father Rosin and his consort of minstrels, who would have offered song and dance to involve everyone and get them to their feet,[202] are now employed to sound the flourishes to the masque. Their task is no longer to provide dance-music but table-music, not to amuse all but to honour one, not to provide cheer in the communal space but to lend an aristocratic nimbus to a private home.

The saturnalian, carnivalesque spirit of a liminal festival was still felt earlier in the day in connection with the bride-ale and St. Valentine's Day customs. Puppy the clown most graphically describes what he has just eaten and drunk, still unable to 'sussify wild nature':

> I am with child of a huge stomach, and long;
> Till by some honest midwife-piece of beef,
> I be delivered of it. (3.8.38-42)

The image of food delivering Puppy of the child of his hunger is a brilliantly concise blending of saturnalian reversal and grotesque corporality, reminiscent of Ursla's stall at Bartholomew Fair. None of this sort of revelry is to be expected at Totten Court. Tub's servants arrange the seating-order for the spectators at the masque, centering on Lady Tub. Everyone – 'all [who] are in the note' that is - are allotted a specific place in the static, hierarchically ordered community that is once more affirmed at the end of the show (5.9.1-11 and 5.10.86-95). Neither the bride and groom, nor the Turfs are heard to speak. In fact, the only comment heard by members of the Council of Finsbury at all is Clench's and To-Pan's murmured observation that Tub seems pleased. And murmur they well might: those who could have been participants at a traditional holiday-*cum*-bridal are turned into passive, transfixed spectators at a privatised pageant.

But for my claim that *A Tale of a Tub* is a comical-historical play about London. For all its similarities to a royal masque, Tub's masque is more nearly related in form and function to the spectacles London's

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[201] Turner, 'Liminality,' 45.

[202] See 1.4.39-44 and 2.1.48-55. - Note that it is expressly mentioned in 1.4.35-6 that Dame Turf has already paid Rosin for the evening. This former engagement seems now forgotten.

civic elite had latterly organised to celebrate itself, most ostentatiously the annual Lord Mayor's Show. In the course of the play, the masque is foreshadowed by allusions to city-lore and civic pageantry that figure as a foil and contrast to it, mainly romantic narratives of derring-do and paramilitary events like the Finsbury battles or the midsummer watches. 'Son John shall bid us welcome all this day,' Turf cries, getting into the festive spirit,

> We'll serve under his colours. Lead the troop John,
> And Puppy, see the bells ring. Press all the noises
> Of Finsbury, in our name; D'ogenes Scriben
> Shall draw a score of warrants vor the business. (1.4.48-52)

Old customs and new bureaucracy intermingle to benefit those in office. As long as he does not have to spend his own money but can use his authority as high constable, Turf is quite happy to have as much pomp and circumstance at the wedding as possible. He demands a militia parade led by the bridegroom as captain, accompanied by banners, music and ringing of bells. The similarity of this parade to earlier May games and the tours of lords of misrule through inns and neighbouring villages is historically accurately observed by Jonson; it is another detail that may have alerted playgoers at the Whitefriars to the evolution of civic ceremonies out of ancient festive customs. Later in the day, when Turf has retrieved his daughter from Justice Preamble, he develops this idea of a parade into a vision of civic triumph imitating the annual parade of the Society of Arthur's Knights:

> next our Saint George,
> Who rescued the king's daughter, I will ride;
> Above Prince Arthur. (3.6.3-5)

No mean ambition, considering that the Finsbury Archers were constituted by Henry VIII in honour of his brother Prince Arthur, whose name was given as title to the victor. 'Shoreditch duke' and 'Pancridge earl' likewise were titles of honour available to candidates excelling at this traditional citizens' exercise; to Turf they are all inferior to a high constable.

The Finsbury Archers are an additional link to John Stow as regards the demise of collective activities. The art of archery was especially dear to Stow's heart as a prime example of a wholesome communal sport. He directly connects the lack of private and official enthusiasm for it with the rise of commercialized and corrupt indoor leisure activities: 'our Archers for want of roome to shoote abroade, creepe into bowling Allies, and ordinarie dicing houses, nearer home, where they have roome enough to hazard their money at unlawfull games.'[203] The party arranged by Tub will end up indoors too, not to bowl or play at dice, but to watch a semi-private show that, by no means incidentally, brings them all into line and affirms the social order.

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[203] Stow, *Survey*, vol. 1, 104. - Squire Tub 'sat up at play, and watched the cock' (1.6.9) on St. Valentine's Eve, so in the morning he is presumed to be in no fit state to accompany his mother, who intends to walk abroad to find a Valentine.

To Stow, secular fraternities like the Finsbury Archers were a praiseworthy manifestation of citizen self-esteem. They created a sense of civic identity that was eroded by individual theatrics and private ostentation. The Council of Finsbury are still guided by the former, while Tub forces on them the latter. As in the matter of the wedding celebration, Turf's vision of a militia parade occupies a middle ground between all-inclusive and socially elitist practices. National heroes, adventurers from medieval romance narratives, illustrious figures from Roman history are all grist to the mill of Turf's fantasies of grandeur. In this he recalls the citizen-spectators in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, who also demanded a militia parade 'done in honour of the city'. 'You ha' seen none of his works, sir?' Clench asks Tub (5.7.45), and in excited half-lines the worthies praise In-and-In Medlay's achievements in devising 'postures'. These Finsbury battles and militia parades - 'dromes and Awnsientes and such like shows' as one Elizabethan apprentice termed the holiday sports familiar to him in London[204] - are the events that have provided Medlay with the expertise and knowledge he brings to bear on the masque he is commissioned to devise.

Medlay's commission to 'architect' a masque for Tub is clearly a move up the market. Tub advises him to ask other professionals for help, among them 'old John Heywood' (5.2.74). The Heywood most fit to assist in creating the sort of spectacle Tub has in mind, however, was not John, but Thomas, fifty-nine years old in 1633, author of the two most recent Lord Mayor's Shows, the third one no more than a few weeks off.[205] Heywood introduced a kind of 'anti-masque' (his term) for the ignorant multitude, visual spectacle 'more Mimicall then Materiall',[206] to circumvent the problem of interpretation brought up by Tub himself: 'But how shall the spectators, / As it might be, I, or Hilts, know 'tis my mother?' (5.7.41-2). Without the commentary Medlay's shadow-play might be just that, a visual spectacle to arouse admiration. With the commentary, its effect is like that of the last pageant of a mayoral procession, which customarily stopped in front of the new mayor's house to sum up the moral lessons of the preceeding show.

The authors of the inaugural shows had habitually played upon the name of the new lord mayor and the symbols and legends connected with his guild. A fishmonger would be presented with a float in the shape of a fishing boat, an ironmonger with a pageant representing the Lemnian forge, a Mr Campell with a beautiful field, a Mr Leman with a lemon tree.[207] The saltpetre tub Medlay integrates

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[204] Quoted by Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, 94.

[205] *A Tale of Tub* was licensed by the Master of the Revels on 7 May 1633, with the proviso that a caricature of Inigo Jones be removed, Riggs, *Jonson*, 334. It is uncertain how long it took Jonson to revise the play and to get it staged, perhaps not before autumn. - On Heywood's LMSs, see Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry*, 217-41.

[206] Quoted in Bergeron, *Civic Pageantry*, 222.

[207] See Jean Robertson and D. J. Gordon, eds., *A Calendar of Dramatic Records in the Books of the Livery Companies of London, 1485-1640*, (Malone Society Collections, vol. 3), Oxford, 1954, xxxvii-xxxviii, and Bergeron, *Civic Pageantry*, 155 and 175. The first extant inaugural scripts turn on puns on the mayor's name (Harper/harp music in 1561 and Roe/roe-deer in 1568); the last pre-war instance I have come across is the cock in Middleton's 1619 show for William Cockayne. It may be that by 1633 these puns had a slightly antiquated, Elizabethan flavour.

into his show is Jonson's parody of guild iconography and its deployment in public relations, 'Precluding by your father's name, Sir Peter, / And the antiquity of your house and family, / Original from saltpetre' (5.7.6-8). Clench and To-Pan focus on the nature of the theatrical occasion and on the prime spectator, Tub, who is thus turned into a kind of actor himself, an object of their gaze. Their comments would ring true from two courtiers at a royal masque watching the king, but they are even more poignant from two disgruntled London citizens banished to the sidelines at a Lord Mayor's Show, watching the new man proceed from Westminster to the Guildhall after taking his oath of office. Both Heywood's Lord Mayor's Shows and the 'masque' in which he might assist, testify to the 'effort of the ruling sort [in early modern cities] to encourage a cultural perspective favourable to their interests, in which a new and selectively constructed civic memory formed a part.'[208]

Jonson designed *A Tale of a Tub* to review the transformations of London's various annual festive events through the course of a century, from religious holidays (e. g. Corpus Christi or St. Valentine's Day) to a community-enhancing, para-military parade (midsummer matches or Finsbury battles) to a civic display geared to guarantee 'government by ceremony'[209] (Lord Mayor's Show or the Masque of a Tub). This development is overlaid by the sketches of four different communal spaces shown in transition. One, the Golden Age during which the communal harmony envisioned in the play 'really' existed. Two, the early days of Elizabeth's reign when things were looking up after years of civil strife, the Elizabethan Settlement provided a measure of security for (almost) everyone, and London had just assumed the stature that allowed it to think of itself as the 'head' of the other English towns and a fully paid-up member of the handful of European urban centres. Three, the last days of Elizabeth's reign when Reformation teaching had sunk in just deep enough to alienate people from their Roman Catholic or even pagan roots without actually transplanting them, London had turned into a moloch from which it was difficult for citizens to derive any sense of identity, and civic pageantry and dramatic or narrative fictions about London, its socio-political status groups and their relations had to a considerable extent taken the place of collective festivals and actual participation in civic government. And finally and implicitly Caroline London in 1633, factious and out of patience with itself, slip-sliding into civil war. None of these social spaces is seriously held up as an ideal or a norm, least of all perhaps the Golden Age of communal harmony, general hospitality and unselfishness bordering on selflessness. Jonson may have mellowed with age, but he had not gone soft. Still, the functional society that he projects onto the fields of Pancras is clearly an idea to which a part of Jonson was attracted. It is not a bubble he pierces as savagely as he pierces that of Sir Epicure Mammon's perverse utopianism in *The Alchemist*. Rather, it is a balloon he gently and perhaps regretfully deflates.

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[208] Tittler, *Reformation and the Towns in England*, 306.

[209] The phrase is Michael Berlin's, 'Civic Ceremony in Early Modern London,' *Urban History Yearbook* (1986), 15-27, 23.

There is a further twist of application in Jonson's allusion to Thomas Heywood at the end of *A Tale of a Tub*, one that directs the focus on the genre of city comedy and on the communal significance of its performance in playhouses. Before Heywood started devising shows for the mayoral inauguration, he had churned out middle-brow plays for and about London citizens.[210] The tale of Tub is introduced like a tale about any citizen hero such as Dick Whittington or Thomas Gresham, and the audience are happy to sit and watch as their own 'parts' in history are quite literally 'shadowed forth'. As far as the masque is a chronicle play, it illustrates once more that the Elizabethan and Stuart theatre was 'a history-producing institution.'[211] Even though 'his-story' is very likely spin-doctored by him whose story it is, audiences will swallow these beautified accounts of history if their own 'shadows' - that is, their 'images', 'appearances' and 'reputations', but also their 'ghosts', their 'former selves' - are beautified too.[212] If Jonson, like Shakespeare, ever believed in the theatre as a place 'where the failures of ceremony could be looked at in a place apart and understood as history,'[213] he is not very optimistic about this event at Totten Court, although he may have hoped for it at the Cockpit.

Historiographical accuracy and an enquiry into the past on its own terms were fairly recent demands. Most Tudor history writing - especially when intended for the public stage - had privileged moral 'truth' over factual verity and the lesson to be drawn from an event over the event itself. They had to do this in order to fulfil their noblest task, the justification of the existing authorities and power structures, and this is precisely what the tale of Tub seeks to achieve. Like early modern histories it is 'calculated to inculcate 'true' principles of behaviour in readers [or audiences] by entertaining and persuading them'.[214] Jonson exposes this old-fashioned, moralistic invention of history in the play-within-the-play, while teasing the Whitefriars audience with the whole play's combination of historical vagueness and socio-political exactness. 'Stuart drama,' it has been observed, 'is generally more *deliberate* in its styling of historiographical representation. Tudor drama occasionally makes representation *an* issue, but in the Stuart plays […] it is *the* issue.'[215]

As far as the tale of Tub represents *A Tale of a Tub*, it is a professional 're-creation' of earlier historical and cultural moments. This means that *A Tale of a Tub* is an urban history play (doubling as a civic festivity) about history plays doubling as civic festivities. Writing a city comedy about the historical genesis of the genre itself, exploring and analysing rather than judging and condemning, Jonson showed that at the end of his life he modified not only 'more and more of his original attitudes towards the

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[210] Cf. Gurr, *Playgoing*, 165: 'Heywood's celebrated plays and displays of the *Four Ages* at the Red Bull playhouse were a variation on the annual City pageants sponsored by the Mayor and guilds.'

[211] The term is Ivo Kamps', *Historiography and Ideology in Stuart Drama*, Cambridge, 1996, 11.

[212] To the appositely nick-named Bramble sticks the blame of having accused Clay of robbery to secure Audrey, 5.10.52-55; see also 3.3.24-36, 3.8.1-4, 4.2.76 and, finally, 5.10.92: Tub has indeed made the story 'sound better'.

[213] Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 15.

[214] Woolf, *Idea of History*, 12.

[215] Kamps, *Historiography and Ideology*, 201.

literature of his own youth' but also many of his original attitudes towards his own literature and theatre.[216]

A Tale of a Tub, then, is a dramatised reflection on the form and function not only of civic festivities but of city comedy *as* a kind of civic festivity. Elitist snobbery and pseudo-artistic sophistication - the desire to create factions, sub-groups, coteries - had made their way from the socio-cultural reality of urban life into the playhouses and back again into the streets: ordinary London citizens were barred from participating in civic events of self-celebration in the same way and with the same arguments as they were barred from participating in the theatrical event proper, particularly if it was felt they had ventured onto upmarket territory. Their taste and understanding were simply said to be too limited.

Francis Beaumont transforms an exclusive indoor theatre into Cheapside, Ben Jonson reverses the process and thus opts for a structure that resembles John Marston's *Jack Straw's Entertainment*: the audience is transported from village green into a private space and then is brought to realise that it is watching itself watching the play. Perhaps this transition is gentler, or perhaps the citizens at the Cockpit in 1633 were more detached than the citizens at the Blackfriars in 1607. Had Stow ever seen *A Tale of a Tub*, he would probably have approved of the effect to which Jonson connects urbanisation, the Reformation and the decline of communal culture, but he would almost certainly have disapproved of the conditions of the play's performance. Jonson's contention that, in life, 'though the most be Players, some must be Spectators'[217] must be inverted to describe civic life in London. Participants at occasions of civic self-celebration had been transfixed as mere spectators, in the streets and in the playhouses. The activity of 'watching' an inaugural show or a stage play about London (possibly about Londoners who are in their turn watching) had supplanted the activity of 'watching' - that is, of guarding and cherishing - the city itself, at midsummer or any other time.

[216] Barton, 'Harking Back,' 724.

[217] Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, vol. 8, 562-649, 615.

Part Three

From Propaganda to Meta-Theatre
The Drama of the 'Second' Reformation

> I am Deus Pater, a substaunce invysyble.[1]
>
> Wherein is manifestly proved, that it is not onely unlawfull to bee an Actor, but a beholder of those vanities.[2]
>
> I stumbled upon a photograph in the *Standard* of Darcy and Elizabeth, hideous, dressed as modern-day luvvies, draped all over each other in a meadow [...] Apparently they are already sleeping together. That is absolutely disgusting. Feel disoriented and worried, for surely Mr Darcy would never do anything so vain and frivolous as to be an actor, and yet Mr Darcy *is* an actor. Hmmm. All v. confusing.[3]

In 1998, after handsomely confessing a bias against 'the religious approach' to early modern drama, Elizabeth Hanson continued her review of Claire McEachern's and Debora Shuger's Religion and Culture in Renaissance England by singling out Robert Watson's essay on 'Othello as Protestant Propaganda' for intrigued rejection: his is 'a reading which, I suspect, will strike most readers as simply cracked but which I found one of the more riveting essays in the collection, although I remain unpersuaded by its argument'.[4] Watson had many times proven himself to be a critic of perspicacity, so one wonders what kind of error of judgement he might have allowed himself to commit here. It was no more than to read *Othello* as an exercise in religious education, as an application of the Protestant premium on faith in the unseen God to the human realm of marital relationships. In short, Watson argues that Iago teaches Othello to fall back into a pagan (and by implication, popish) need for material manifestations of the divine. Like a lapsed Calvinist, Othello breaks under the weight of his own doubt, of the perennial uncertainty of being loved, and drives himself mad with thoughts of his own unworthiness and his wife's essential unattainability. It is his craving for 'ocular proof' that sinks him deeper and deeper into despair. His potential salvation is implicit in a character constellation that makes 'Desdemona a Christ-like heroine, Iago a Jesuitical devil, and Othello an imperfectly reformed infidel': sola fide.[5] All would end well if Othello could persuade himself to believe (in) his wife.

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[1] John Bale, *The Thre Lawes, of Nature, Moses and Christ*, in *The Complete Plays of John Bale*, ed. Peter Happé, 2 vols., vol. 2, Cambridge, 1986, Scene 1, 36.

[2] *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes*, 1599, title page.

[3] Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary,* London, 1997, 247-8.

[4] Elizabeth Hanson, 'Review of *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, edited by Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger'. *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999), 266-72, 271.

[5] Robert Watson, '*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda,' *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, Cambridge, 1997, 234-57, 250.

Surely this interpretation is not, as Hanson declares, 'alien […] to [one's] own experience of the play'. Most readers and audiences would agree that the tragedy takes its course because Othello does not believe in his marriage any more, because he 'loses faith'. Margaret Aston has shown that for puritan sensibilities, the love between spouses constantly hovered on the brink of idolatry; and the novel concept of the 'companionate marriage' was based on the analogy between earthly marriage and the marriage between Christ and the Church.[6] Watson's interpretation of *Othello* was not fundamentally new, as he himself admits, but it alerted readers to a neglected context: 'the aspect of *Othello* I am describing has not been unseen in the play's critical history, only unrecognised as theologically factional'.[7] Watson anticipated puzzled or even hostile responses by acknowledging that 'some critics would forbid discussing Desdemona as a Christ-figure unless Othello were to nail her palms to the headboard'.[8] Hanson was not hostile, but she admits that the layer of sacramental meaning Watson detects in *Othello* 'reminds me that my own receptors may be deaf to the meanings that Shakespeare may have been consciously trying to produce'.[9]

A mere decade later, 'the religious turn' has infused more vigour into the study of English Renaissance drama than any other topic, with the possible exception of the question with whom and on which plays Shakespeare collaborated. Literary and cultural historians have learnt to listen closely to theological and ecclesiastical reverberations in drama; and sacramental doctrine was the most concise summary of the Protestant tenet that faith is the only way to salvation.[10] When Othello, sublimely superior, assures Brabantio that he trusts Desdemona - 'My life upon her faith' (1.3.289) – a Jacobean audience would presumably have heard an echo of the Homily of the Sacrament: 'Faith is a necessary instrument in all these holy Ceremonies'.[11] It is entirely likely that Othello's obsession with the magical efficacy of the handkerchief would have recalled to playgoers denouncements of the idolatrous adoration of the consecrated host at mass: only the faithful receive the true, spiritual body of Christ. My only caveat concerns Watson's conclusion that 'the play uses the appeal of romantic love to enhance the appeal of Protestantism', in other words, that it is 'theologically factional', 'Protestant propaganda'.[12] 'Propaganda' implies partisanship, and as far as the majority of Shakespeare's Protestant contemporaries were concerned, there was little heated controversy about doctrinal matters and a great

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6 Margaret Aston, *Iconoclasts*, 466-7.

7 Watson, '*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda,' 243.

8 His hedging tone betrays his insecurity. The allegorical level, he says, is 'secondary, recessive, and protean', it is 'subliminal', 'much further in the background of Shakespeare's work than of Herbert's', '*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda,' 236 and 237.

9 Hanson, '*Religion and Culture*,' 271.

10 Clifford W. Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine in England from Hooker to Waterland*, London, 1942, 7. See the whole of his chapter 1: 'The Elizabethan Settlement'.

11 *Homily of the Sacrament* (1562/3), at http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/homilies/index.htm.

12 Watson, '*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda,' 253.

deal of orthodox teaching.[13] In the later Elizabethan years and afterwards, plays were no longer written in order to explain and teach various aspects of reformed theology but to contrast and explore them. This is the difference between first- and second- or third-generation Protestants. Shakespeare's contemporaries had began to integrate the new faith and the new customs into their lives; now also began the process of weighing the losses against the gains, testing the present against the foil of the past. From a dramatic and meta-theatrical point of view, Protestant teachings on true and false notions of representation, on faith, sacrifice and sacrament, on the commemoration of the dead, on the danger that lay in craving 'ocular proof' of God's grace, on 'mad idolatry / [That makes] the service greater than the god' (*Troilus and Cressida*, 2.2.56-7), were worth taking up because these were the issues that also bore on the theatre as an event that relied upon conventions of representation and as an interactive, communal experience.

'If the distinction between magic and religion had been blurred by the medieval church,' Keith Thomas begins his chapter on the impact of the Reformation on the decline of magic, 'it was strongly reasserted by the propagandists of the Protestant Reformation.'[14] Nothing illustrates more persuasively than the following 700-odd pages of Thomas' study that the decline of magic was a slow one, and that for most people in early modern England, Protestant or recusant, the distinctions between magic and religion, between words and things, between the physical world and the supernatural world, were far from clear-cut. In her discussion of 'the sacramental/analogical character of premodern thought [that] tends to deny rigid boundaries,' Debora Shuger lays great stress on the necessity to be aware of the possibility, perplexing to the modern mind, that 'Both sides of any given contradiction may be held by a single individual, sometimes in a single work'.[15] Several explanations offer themselves for this apparent contradictoriness, this confusion about causes and categories, which characteristically manifested itself as an apparent uncertainty about the logical thrust of metaphor. This was the crux in doctrinal debates of the first half-century of the Reformation: when Christ told his disciples that 'This is my body […] this is my blood' (Mark, 14:22-24), did he mean it literally or figuratively? During a time of radical transition in all fields of thought and experience, from incarnational to semiotic representation, from a magical to a scientific world view, metaphor and analogy are much more potent than they are now, but they are also more slippery. 'It is a (rather discredited) commonplace that Renaissance thought is

[13] 'Concerning customs of worship or ceremonies, therefore, the evidence clearly shows that during these halcyon middle years between Cartwright and Laud there was a large measure of mutual adjustment and agreement among all contributors to English Protestant literature,' Charles H. George and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1640*, Princeton, 1961, 358. The doctrine of the eucharist, hotly contested since the 1520s, 'was destined to remain a battle ground for rival schools of thought in England for the next century and a half', but this war was fought at the margins of the established church and beyond, not within it, Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 22.

[14] Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, 58.

[15] Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, 13 and 12.

analogic, yet the concept of analogy leads to the center of our problem, understanding by "analogy" here the exchange of symbols and concepts from the secular realm to the sacred and vice versa.'[16]

Characteristically, however, early modern writers were far from sure where to draw the lines of distinction between the two, secular and sacred. Similarly, few early modern Englishmen and Englishwomen, from Eastcheap to Preston, from Taunton to King's Lynn, could have explained with perfect clarity why they were not supposed to light candles for the souls of their deceased, why Morris dancing was frowned upon by their ministers, whether it mattered that the bishop wore a mitre, and what they were supposed to think when they attended holy communion at Easter. Modern readers of late Tudor and early Stuart writers might be confused by the way they held 'both sides of any given contradiction'; but chances are that those writers themselves were not in the least bothered – in fact, detected no contradiction at all. To quote Macauley again:

> The best proof that the religion of the people was of this mixed kind is furnished by the Drama of that age. [… The dramatists] speak neither like Catholics nor like Protestants, but like persons who are wavering between the two systems, or who have made a system for themselves out of parts selected from both.[17]

When we take stage plays as our source material to assess the state of England's, or even just London's, 'reformed-ness', we have to remember that playwrights not only shared their contemporaries religious uncertainties, but their job was to feed their culture's anxieties and fantasies into dramatic scripts for performance. A playwright interested in exploring religious issues – without explicitly mentioning them, of course – would present as many different and contradictory aspects of these issues as were required to make a good play. The play's final slant on religious matters (or political matters), if it was clearly discernible at all, might reflect the playwright's personal preferences. But then again, it might not. Plays are a bad indication of what people held to be true. They indicate what people worried about and dreamt of, consciously and subconsciously.

> It is important to read the religious engagement of Shakespeare's plays and his exploitation of the theatrical and poetic potential of the old religion in a wider way than simply as evidence of his own doctrinal affiliation. [Historians] have shown the pervasiveness of unanalysed habits of mind in conforming Elizabethans, not simply among recusants.[18]

Beliefs and practices that we nowadays would define as 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' went on to exist side by side, within the same person and within the same community, for over a century. This is why historians now talk of the 'long' Reformation. Charles Barber observed about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that 'So perfect an expression and understanding of folk cult was only possible in the moment when it was still in the blood but no longer in the brain.'[19] But it is debatable whether old habits of

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[16] Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, 162.

[17] Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Burghley and his Times', *Essays on English History*, London, n.d., 24-5.

[18] Beatrice Groves. *Texts and Traditions. Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604*, Oxford, 2007, 32.

[19] Barber, *Festive Comedy*, 11.

thought remain longest in the 'blood' or in the 'brain'. Elizabethan playwrights reflected (on) their reformed and transformed culture's unanalysed assumptions about the interrelations between church and playhouse, holy and theatrical communion, representations of the numinous and representations of the fictional by analysing them dramatically on the public stage.

3.1 The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Religious doctrine, primarily eucharistic doctrine, was a common point of reference, part of people's everyday discourse, at least in London. This, not surprisingly, is the impression quite deliberately created by John Foxe in his reports of ordinary people apprehending the ways of the True Church: 'Nay, William,' says one to an unreformed neighbour who claims to have had a vision of Christ at the elevation of the host at Mass, 'thou saw'st not the Lord God, thou sawest bread, wine, and the chalice […,] only a figure or sacrament of him, which is in substance bread and wine'.[20] Foxe's common layman is an exemplary Protestant who has grasped the vital difference between the popish doctrine of transubstantiation and the reformed, semiotic understanding of the Lord's Supper. In terms of the enquiry at hand, that is, the familiarity of late Elizabethan and Jacobean playgoers with Reformation debates about sacramental theology, it is beside the point how fact and fiction, history and propaganda, intermingle in Foxe's *opus magnum*. He certainly did not have to invent material. As early as the late 1530s interludes parodying and ridiculing Mass and the 'miracle' of transubstantiation were staged in the capital, and Londoners were being interrogated for declaring that 'the sacrament of the altar was not offered up for sins, and that the body of God was not there, but was a representation and signification of the thing'. Susan Brigden comments that 'Theological sophistication may have been beyond some of those [Protestant 'heretics'] discovered in 1540, but there is no doubting the subtlety of some alehouse arguments or that laymen felt free to discuss high matters of doctrine'.[21]

Foxe repeats in tale after tale the basics – and often more than the mere basics – of reformed doctrine, put into the mouths of ordinary people and expressed in comprehensible English. A huge number of Elizabethan Protestants read the *Book of Martyrs*, or at least had passages read out to them.[22] They would be given expository passages;

> The bread, which by the ministry of the priest is made the body of Christ, doth import one thing outwardly to the senses of man, and another thing it speaketh to the minds of the faithful. Outwardly, it is bread, the same it was before […] but inwardly [there is] the body of Christ, that is seen, not with the outward eyes of the flesh, but with the sight of a faithful mind.[23]

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[20] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 4, 206-7. Diehl, *Staging Reform*, discusses this passage on 100-101.

[21] Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 365, 442, 404 and 405.

[22] Susan Felch discusses the various prefaces to the four sixteenth-century editions of the work, and how the second and third editions are clearly aimed at a broad lay readership, in 'Shaping the Reader in the *Acts and Monuments*,' *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades, Aldershot, 1997, 52-67, esp. 58.

[23] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 5. 270-1.

And they would be given the same arguments in dramatic speech. Anyone who was familiar with so much as the best-known extracts from Foxe's martyrology could hardly fail to have a fair idea of the exchanges between popish and reformed interlocutors, what the interrogating 'doctors' said and what the 'poor godly woman' or 'the good constant man' said back:

> Parson. What seest thou yonder?
> Palmer. A canopy of silk, broidered with gold.
> Parson. Yea, but what is within it?
> Palmer. A piece of bread, in a clowt, I trow.
> Parson. Thou art as forward a heretic as ever I talked withal. […] Do you believe that they which receive the holy sacrament of the altar, do truly eat Christ's natural body?
> Palmer. If the sacrament of the Lord's supper be ministered as Christ did ordain it, the faithful receivers do indeed spiritually and truly eat and drink in it Christ's very natural body and blood.[24]

Since Foxe's purpose in the *Acts and Monuments* was the religious education of the English people, it was to be expected that the reformed view of holy communion would be a major theme. More telling are perhaps passing references, playful allusions to doctrine. Among educated Protestants, eucharistic doctrine upon occasion served to elucidate other points at issue. King James VI of Scotland has one of the interlocutors in the *Daemonologie* refute the suggestion that devils may assume bodily substance. He scoffs: 'To be so straitlie drawen together, and yet feele no paine; I thinke it so contrarie to the qualitie of a natural bodie, and so like to the little transsubstantiat god in the *Papistes Masse*, that I can never believe it' (40). Protestant reformers had habitually denigrated the 'miracle' of Mass by calling it superstition or a cheap sleight-of-hand trick; but here the strategy is reversed in the name of rational enquiry.

Even more off-hand is the reference in an anecdote John Manningham relates in his diary of life at London's Inns of Court in the last few Elizabethan years. A servant had been ordered by his master to keep his place at the bar of the Exchequer until his return, but one

> Lancaster of Grayes In coming in the meane tyme, would needes have the place, though the man would have kept it. 'For,' said L. 'knowes thou not that I believe nothing but the reall presence?' meaning that he was a Papist; and besides, 'could not thinke it to be *corpus meum* except [the master] himselfe were there'.[25]

This anecdote is telling for several reasons. One, it appears that amongst educated Londoners it was no desperately dangerous thing to admit, albeit half-jokingly, to adhering to papist doctrine.[26] Mr Lancaster

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[24] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 8, 215. Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 405. Brigden gives many instances of Londoners' publicly rejecting (often in full view of the congregation at Mass) the old customs and uttering 'heresies' of the sort Foxe collected and set down in the 1550s and 1560s, see esp. chap. 9: 'The Old Faith and the New' and chap. 10: 'The Religion of Edwardian London'.

[25] Manningham, *Diary*, 62.

[26] The same impression is created in *Letters Written by John Chamberlain During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*: he records with grim satisfaction in April 1602 that 'Here were three seminarie priests hangd and quartered the last weeke, but what is that among so many?' In November, however, he relates in the tone of the amused gossiper that 'The young Lady North is brought to bed of a sonne; [...] Dr Dee hath delivered the Lady Sandes of a devill, or of some other strange possession. Your Lady Thomas Norris is become a great Catholique, and takes great care and paines to convert her sisters'. Jesuits converting, spying and plotting in England deserved the harshest punishment, but women discussing

assumes he is well known for his recusancy, but he proceeds to provoke rather than to keep quiet about it. Second, it appears that eucharistic doctrine had become a common point of reference at least for the more educated. Mr Lancaster may deliberately have spoken over the head of the servant for the benefit of the other attending lawyers, whom he evidently expected to appreciate the wit of his remark, but Manningham does not comment on this; in fact, he does not comment at all: the remark did not need elucidation.

Yet even this interpretation may underestimate the currency sacramental doctrine had in the population of late sixteenth-century London. In the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker explains why the sacraments had been the major bone of contention among reformers:

> Sacraments, by reason of their mixed nature, are more diversely interpreted and disputed of than any other part of religion besides, for that in so great store of properties belonging to the selfsame thing, as every man's wit hath taken hold of some especial consideration above the rest, so they have accordingly seemed one to cross another as touching their several opinions about the necessity of sacraments, whereas in truth their disagreement is not great.[27]

Holy communion was an event that fired the imagination of the impressionable, and it seems that it was a matter 'diversely interpreted and disputed' not only by theologians, but by ordinary English Christians. But Hooker urges reconciliation and a humble acceptance of God's incomprehensible grace: 'Take therefore that wherein all agree, and then consider by itself what cause why the rest in question should not rather be left as superfluous than urged as necessary.'[28] That others considered this dangerously lax appears by an anonymous open letter addressed to Hooker in 1599:

> The sacraments being a matter so much debated, it seemeth strange that you which take upon you so great care of the Church, should never take the pains at the least for the good of your own soul, to know that which every shopman and prentise is now acquainted with in this matter. You speak of sacraments as if by the space of these thirty or forty years you had lived in some cave of the earth.

The authors presented the doctrine of the eucharist as an issue of popular interest, and one that was still crucial to the tradition and identity of English Protestantism:

> [You] seem to make light of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, as a matter not to be stood upon or to be contended for, cared for or enquired into: which maketh us marvel […] why so many reverend Fathers, as Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper, Latimer, Rogers, Bradford, etc., have given their lives in witness against it, if it be a thing that neither furthereth nor hindereth?[29]

Hooker's adversaries presumably had more social contact than he with shopkeepers and apprentices, and it is evident that they meant to emphasise that this particular doctrine above all others was known

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doctrine over their embroidery were nothing to worry about. When he complains to Sir Dudley Carleton about Carleton's 'Catholique sister', anti-popish prejudice becomes audible between the lines: 'she is become so cunning, and hath profited so well in that schoole of dissimulation'. But Chamberlain's main objection is that 'she is so irresolute and inconstant, and yet peevish and wilfull *au bout*' and a great nuisance to family and friends, ed. Sarah Williams, New York, 1968, 125, 160 and 126.

[27] Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, 273.

[28] Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, 378.

[29] *A Christian Letter of Certaine English Protestants*, quoted in *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, 273-4, n. 1 and 377, n. 9.

in all ranks of (urban) society. Mr Lancaster of Gray's Inn may well have assumed that his interlocutor, whom he knew to be socially inferior and much less well educated than himself, would be capable of understanding his jest. After all, King Edward VI's 'Proclamation Concerning the Irreverent Talkers of the Sacrament' (1548) had rebuked those who

> do not cease to move contentious and superfluous questions of the said holy sacrament and supper of the Lord; entryng rashly into the discussing of the high mystery thereof, and go about in their sermons or talks arrogantly to define the maner, nature, fashion, ways, possibility or impossibility of such matters.[30]

It has long been thought that the sacraments were of peripheral importance in a reform movement that emphasised reading and hearing the Word, and that Tudor theologians put the baby out with the bathwater when they seized on transubstantiation as the key doctrinal error of the Roman Church. This was true for some, like Thomas Cartwright and his circle, but it does not at all characterise adequately the attitudes of figureheads like Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Becon, John Jewel, Richard Hooker or Lancelot Andrews. Nor, according to the 'Proclamation' does it adequately describe public feeling, at least in London. Precisely because the celebration of the 'idolatrous Mass' - with its centre-piece of the miraculous transformation of bread and wine into flesh and blood - became the anathematised rite *par excellence*, it was of paramount importance to develop and teach an orthodox reformed doctrine – without encouraging too much independent debate about it. Both the Lutheran and the English Church retained certain ceremonies, but, as John Donne pointed out,

> without danger, because, in both places, we are diligent to preach to the people the right use of these indifferent things. For this is a true way of shutting out superstition, Not always to abolish the thing it self, because in the right use thereof, the spiritual profit, and edification may exceed the danger, but by preaching, and all convenient wayes of instruction, to deliver people out of that ignorance, which possesses people in the Roman captivity.[31]

In the course of Edwardian and Elizabethan iconoclastic purges, paintings of biblical scenes, rood screens, statues and statuettes, painted cloths and other kinds of religious image were to be taken down and destroyed, and *had* been taken down and at least stowed away, if not actually destroyed, in the majority of English churches by 1570.[32] But the sacrament of bread and wine was instituted by Christ and so had to be honoured. It was far more difficult, although absolutely imperative, to develop an orthodox position on the eucharist, and proportionately difficult to convey the new doctrine to people who had their own views of the significance of holy communion.

For all this adoration, people had received the body of Christ only once a year, usually at Easter or Whitsun. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) had stipulated annual communion as obligatory, and once a year had seemed sufficient to both clergy and layfolk. As far as post-Reformation English

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[30] John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorial Relating Chiefly to Religion*, 2 vols., vol. 2, 1822, 340.

[31] *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols., vol. 8, Berkeley, 1962, 311.

[32] This, at any rate, is the tenor of Aston, *Iconoclasts*, 326-42, Phillips, *Reformation of Images*, chap. 4: 'Images Attacked' and chap. 6: 'Compromise', esp. 99-100, Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, 426-33, and Hutton, *Merry England*, 81.

churchgoers were concerned, for whom Mass had been replaced by sermons, this was a perfectly satisfactory arrangement. Up to the end of the sixteenth century communion remained an 'infrequent but fairly consequential' event.[33] It seems that Elizabethan Protestants valued the Lord's Supper highly, but not always for the reasons the clergy would have had them value it. Clergymen admitted that 'men have generally an high conceit of the Sacrament, what ever esteeme they have in the meane time of other Ordinances', but they also saw that this 'reverence of the Sacrament [was] no lesse than superstitious' and that it confirmed 'simple and popish people in their superstitious opinion of the Sacrament'.[34] They were probably right to point out that adherence to this custom betrayed an unreformed loyalty to medieval practice and did not do justice to the ideal of early Christians, who communicated every Sunday.[35] It appears that people came at Easter or Whitsun because it was a traditional event of reconciliation with friends and family, because it reinforced parochial identity both by social differentiation ('at Communion the gentry were given sweet, fortified wine, all the rest plonk'[36]) and spiritual integration, and because it strengthened their assurance of salvation.

In the early seventeenth century, many urban parishes recorded attendance levels of over 90%, and many London parishes were offering quarterly or even monthly communion services.[37] Whether people went out of some need for social ritual, for spiritual renewal, or simply because parish administration was tight enough to make non-attendance difficult, there is no way of ascertaining. They certainly felt compelled to attend not only by law but also by peer-pressure. Non-participation cast a shadow not only on their religious (and patriotic) conformity but also on the strength of their commitment to the local community, and expulsion from communion was a severe punishment for troublemakers and ignorants. The obligation to receive communion at Easter also served to winkle out Roman Catholics, many of whom felt they could attend Protestant church services without endangering their souls, but shrank from participating in the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper was a social institution as much as a religious practice, a 'popular sacramental festival' at which the whole parish turned out to be reconciled with each other as much as with Christ.[38] The Elizabethan Church allowed it, and people went on celebrating it. Historians of the Reformation are adjusting their bias: 'Perhaps we have heard too much of 'sermon-gadding' by the godly, and should

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33 Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, 1991, 64.

34 Jeremiah Dyke, quoted in Hunt, 'Lord's Supper,' 46.

35 See Arnold Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England,' *Past and Present* 161 (1998), 39-83, 52 and *passim.*

36 Patrick Collinson, 'Holy-Rowly-Powliness: Common Worship. Services and Prayers for the Church of England,' London Review of Books 4 January 2001, 33-4, 33.

37 Boulton, 'The Limits of Formal Religion,' *passim.* - Hunt surmises that attendance at rural lowland parishes may have been even higher, 'Lord's Supper,' 53 and 44.

38 The term is Leigh Eric Schmidt's, *Holy Fairs. Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the early Modern Period, Princeton*, 1989, 31. See also Patrick Collinson, 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture,' *The Culture of English Puritanism*, *1560-1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, London, 1996, 32-57.

be more sensitive to 'sacrament-gadding' by the rest.'[39] Contrary to common prejudice, holy communion was regarded by many 'puritans' as complementing the hearing of sermons, not to compete with it, and the more radical preachers in particular urged parishioners to participate more often. The presbyterian separatist John Greenwood defended his cause: 'In that we have no sacraments amongst us, it is not by our default (whose soules gaspe and bray after them) so much as by your barbarous crueltie and tyrannical dealing with us, who will not suffer us to assemble.'[40] Two things contributed to the demise in the seventeenth century of communion as a communal event; one, celebration of 'closed' or 'private' communion, which corresponded to a dissociation of 'popular' and 'elite' culture in other fields, and the exclusion of the 'puritan' contingent from the English Church after the Restoration.[41]

The evidence suggests that most London playgoers at the turn of the sixteenth century would have had a sufficiently precise idea of what *not* to believe about holy communion – mainly that the bread and wine did *not* literally transubstantiate into the body and blood of Christ, that the priest was not enacting a real sacrifice, that the consecrated host did *not* have pseudo-magical efficacy, that they did *not* benefit spiritually by merely being present and watching. They may have understood that the ceremony in which they participated was in the nature of a commemoration, that the bread and the wine represented Christ's body and blood the way a seal represents its owner. If they had no more than a vague idea about what exactly it meant to believe, as the 29th of the Thirty-nine Articles would have them believe, that 'the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten […] is faith,' they were only slightly more befogged than Richard Hooker and John Calvin himself: 'If anyone inquire of me respecting the manner [i.e. of God's presence in the sacraments], I shall not be ashamed to acknowledge that it is a mystery too sublime for me to be able to express, or even to comprehend.'[42]

Notwithstanding the unresolved question of the precise nature of God's presence in the eucharist, Hooker and his fellow clergymen did what they could to advance the religious education of their flock. From around 1590, not only the unwieldy volumes of Hooker's *Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, but reams of cheap print publications expounding various aspects of orthodox reformed

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[39] Christopher Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics, and the People,' *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, ed. Christopher Haigh, London, 1984, 212-32, 218.

[40] Quoted in E. Brooks Holified, *The Covenant Sealed. The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720*, New Haven, 1974, 71, and cf. 75: 'the Separatists retained a surprising appreciation for both baptism and the Lord's Supper.'

[41] Hunt, 'Lord's Supper,' 80-2. – Boulton, 'Formal Religion', notes that both the parish of St Saviour's in Southwark and the parish of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate, where attendance levels at Easter communion were over 90%, were rigorously 'puritan'; 'All the lecturers appointed by the St Saviour's vestry before 1625 have been described as protestant radicals' (137).

[42] Calvin, quoted in Davies, *Worship and Theology*, 310.

theology descended upon the reading public, primarily, of course, in London. Sacramental theology and practical guidance in proper communion conduct became major themes in these booklets, and it can only be assumed that what was printed was also sold, and what was sold was read, and what was read was to some extent understood and could be applied to other forms of representation. Playwrights could sound theological and even sacramental overtones in their dramatised discussions of such topics as doubt and faith, literal and figurative representation, the seductiveness of magic and spectacle, the vagaries of sensual perception and imagination, the commemoration of the dead, the nature of the quasi-mystical experience that is theatre – and they could reasonably expect their audiences to hear them.

An enquiry into 'Protestant dramaturgy' – devising a kind of theatre that corresponded to Protestant works of religious education in that it aimed to teach the beholder to decode truth from signs rather than to be fooled by appearances and led to adore meaningless objects - bears on the anthropological suggestion that the commercial theatre in a very direct and seamless way took over from biblical drama and traditional worship and provided people with the quasi-religious experience of wonder and ravishment that they were now denied at church:

> religiously atavistic, dangerously so, and able to appeal to sensibilities that should properly have atrophied in the reform of religion. The popularity of the London theatres testifies to the survival of those sensibilities, even as the reform was successful in eliminating them from worship.[43]

This notion of the theatre as a substitute for the old religious rites is, in fact, indirectly affirmed whenever an enemy or a defender of the stage compares it to idolatry: the theatre's puritan enemies felt more keenly than anyone that what people sought in the playhouses were quasi-mystical experiences of the most intense sort: 'We speake of common playes, the very mockery of religion, and the toyes of our life. For while wee playe at Theaters and stages, we are ravished with the love thereof.'[44]

3.1.1 Doubling Bodies: Transubstantiation Parodied

Jack Juggler is a Reformation school play probably written in the late 1550s or early 1560s, in which the physical impossibility of a person to be in two places at once is presented as a parodic refutation of the belief that Christ appears bodily, and every Sunday, on all the altars of the land. At the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, parody served to render Protestant propaganda and doctrine more lively. At the end of it, I will argue, allusions to the discredited notion of transubstantiation served to add a layer of meta-theatrical comment to anti-Catholic remarks or scenes.

Jack Juggler has been described as

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[43] O'Connell, 'Idolatrous Eye,' 307.

[44] Munday, *Second and Third Blast*, 32.

> the best dramatic satire produced in England up to date. Within a narrow compass [the anonymous playwright] has developed a humorous action quite novel in English comedy, and has introduced us, not only to the first English double and one of the first English practical jokers, but […] to our first victim of confused identity.[45]

It is a quick, witty and topical piece about a practical joke one London serving-man, Jack Juggler, plays on a fellow serving-man, Jenkin Careaway: Jack disguises himself as Jenkin, enters the house of Jenkin's master Bongrace, and when Jenkin arrives, hot and late because he has been dawdling at play, Jack denies him entrance with the observation that he – that is, Jenkin – is already at home. From indignation and outrage Jenkin falls into confusion and despair and finally accepts that he has no name, no master, no identity. 'Good Lord of heaven,' he soliloquises,

> Where did I myself leave?
> Or who did me of my name by the way bereave?
> […]
> Albeit I would never the deed believe,
> But that the thing itself doth show and preve
> There was never ape so like unto an ape,
> As he is to me in feature and shape;
> […]
> But where is that other I? Whither is he gone? [46]

The Plautine set-up and the choice of phrase is echoed in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, when both Syracusian visitors have had their first disturbing encounters in Ephesus:

> S. Drumio. I am transformed, master, am not I?
> S. Antipholus. I think thou art in mind, and so am I.
> S. Drumio. Nay, master, both in mind and in my shape.
> S. Antipholus. Thou hast thine own form.
> S. Drumio. No, I am an ape.
> S. Antipholus. If thou art chang'd to ought, 'tis to an ass. (2.2.195-99)

Jack Juggler, however, is no more simply a harmless farce than 'tis Shakespeare's play. Jenkin presents his plight to his master, but Bongrace is impatient and incredulous:

> Why thou naughty villain, darest thou affirm to me
> That which was never seen nor hereafter shall be?
> That one man may have two bodies and two faces?
> And that one man at one time may be in two places? (31)

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[45] Farmer, *Early English Dramatists*, vol. 3, 278, quoting C. M. Gayley, *Representative English Comedies*. White, *Theatre and Reformation*, suggests that it may have been performed by the boys at Westminster school, 180. The resulting possibility that *Jack Juggler*, like *Respublica* and *Ralph Roister Doister*, was written by Nicholas Udall, master at Westminster in the early 1550s, is rejected by T. C. Baldwin, *Shakspere's Five-Act Structure. Shakspere's Early Plays on the Basis of Renaissance Theories of the Five-Act Structure from 1470*, London, 1947, 670. – Bevington, *Tudor Drama*, regards the play as 'a trifle': a defence of 'modest courtly hedonism', with an epilogue 'so jarring in tone and so simply irrelevant that it is surely an Elizabethan addition for publication in 1564'. Jenkin Careaway, he notes with manifest distaste, 'has been somehow transformed into a hero from John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*' (126-8). Barton herself had in fact briefly mentioned *Jack Juggler* in connection with Plautus in *Idea of the Play*, but she had not commented upon the theme of transubstantiation.

[46] *Jack Juggler*, in *Early English Dramatists. Anonymous Plays*, ed. John S. Farmer, 5 vols., vol. 3, New York, 1966, 24.

Here, at the very latest, an audience would have heard an echo of the reformers' scoffing about the doctrine of the Real Presence: 'Out of this puddle of transubstantiation,' writes Foxe, 'have sprung up adoration of the sacrament, and inducing men to believe that Christ hath many bodies.'[47] Hooker explained that those who misunderstand the 'two natures' of humanity and deity in Christ, 'infer a power which the body of Christ hath thereby to present itself in all places; out of which ubiquity of His body they gather the presence thereof with that sanctified bread and wine of our Lord's table'. It is arrant nonsense to believe that the body of Christ, which rose up to heaven, is cut into pieces on thousands of altars at Eastertime. 'To conclude, we hold it […] a most infallible truth that Christ as man is not every where present.'[48]

Like a Marian Protestant interrogated for his heretic beliefs, Master Bongrace insists on empirical evidence:

> I woll not be deluded with such a glossing lie,
> Nor give credence, till I see it with my own eye.
> […]
> Plainly it was thy shadow that thou didst see;
> For, in faith, the other thing is not possible to be. (32-3)

Bread remains bread, as Foxe's martyrs maintain; the mouse eats it, the dust rots it. One minor but persistent plot strand in the play is Jenkin's failure to fetch his mistress to supper. The word 'supper' is mentioned at least twenty times in the play, to alert even the slowest auditor to its double meaning. At long last Dame Coy vents her anger on Jenkin:

> I bequeath him with a hot vengeance to the devil of hell,
> And heartily I beseech him that hanged on the rood,
> That he [i.e. Jenkin] never eat nor drink that may do him good,
> And that he die a shameful death, saving my charity! (35)

If people had understood one thing about holy communion it was that they ought not to participate if they were out of charity with someone. Non-attendance on these grounds was acceptable to parish vestries, exclusion from communion for trouble-making a heavy penalty.[49] Dame Coy is, in effect, ostracising Jenkin from the community of Christians. The play proper ends with Jenkin looking for his 'double' among the auditors, indirectly warning them to desist from the errors of the Roman Church:

> But, masters, if you happen to see that other I,
> As that you shall, it is not very likely,
> Nor I woll not desire you for him purposely to look,
> For it is an uncomparable unhappy hook. (35)

The references to the Lord's Supper and the absurdities of transubstantiation are no mere quips, they are the major polemical theme of the play. The Prologue protests rather too vehemently that the play is

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[47] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 6, 328.

[48] Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, 380 and 257.

[49] Hunt, 'Lord's Supper,' 62-4 and 74.

nothing but 'pastime convenient', by that time a hoary excuse for stage playing. As 'the ground' of the play, Plautus's comedy is given, 'for higher things indite / In no wise we would, for yet the time is so queasy' (4-5), which applies to the reign of Queen Mary as well as the first Elizabethan years. Coy self-deprecation shades into an indication of the play's underlying theme:

> And such a trifling matter, as when it shall be done,
> Ye may report and say ye have heard nothing at all.
> Therefore I tell you all, before it be begun,
> That no man look to hear of *matters substantial*. (6, italics added)

The Epilogue enlarges in some sixty lines on the sufferings of those who bear the cross of religious persecution:

> Such is the fashion of the world now-a-days,
> That the simple innocents are deluded,
> […]
> By subtle and crafty means shamefully abused,
> And by strength, force, and violence ofttimes compelled
> To believe and say the moon is made of green cheese
> Or else have great harm, and percase their life lese. (37)

And so on, quite in the manner of Foxe recording the interrogation of Protestant martyrs. The Epilogue's picture of life under a hostile government looks surprisingly like marital relations in an early Shakespeare comedy:

> He [i.e. Jenkin] must say the crow is white, if he be so commanded,
> Yea, and that he himself is into another body changed.
> […]
> And when he [i.e. Jack Juggler] could not bring that to pass by reason,
> He made him grant it, and say by compulsion. (38-9)[50]

This is not brainwashing so much as coercion by brute force, until the victim of oppression in the play begins to doubt his own perception and judgement.

3.1.2 Shadow and Substance: Transubstantiation Dramatised

Jack Juggler was printed, possibly in the early 1560s, but only one copy survives.[51] We do not know whether it was known to late Elizabethan playwrights; but if it was performed by the boys at Westminster school, the script and its printed versions must have been available in London for some time afterwards. Only a close comparison between the *Menaechmi*, *Amphitruo* (both of which existed

[50] Cf. *The Taming of the Shrew*: 'Then God be blest, it is the blessed sun, / But sun it is not, when you say it is not; / And the moon changes even as your mind. / What you will have it nam'd, even that it is, / And so it shall be so for Katherine' (4.5.1-26, quotes from 18-22). It is perhaps worth lingering over this echo of religious persecution and the eucharistic debate in a comedy about marriage. If the presence of John Foxe and early Reformation drama can at all be felt in later Elizabethan drama, this passage in *Shrew* must be allowed to be an instance – and one that reflects on Robert Watson's discussion of *Othello* and on the allegorical reading of *Errors* that I outline below.

[51] Farmer gives some bibliographical information in the appendix to *Jack Juggler*, 278.

only in the original Latin in the early 1590s), *Jack Juggler* and *The Comedy of Errors* could lend colour to the speculation that Shakespeare knew that an earlier English adaptation of Plautus's plays existed. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Shakespeare did have access to the play, or at least that he had been told about its existence and scheme, a situation would arise not very different from the scenario I briefly developed in the first chapter of this study, about the interrelations between *The Cobbler's Prophecy* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare would have found himself re-working an earlier play of Protestant propaganda – or at least working on *material* that had earlier been used to devise a play of Protestant propaganda. Both plays engage in religious controversy, but whereas in *Jack Juggler* it is doctrinal, in *Errors* it is ecclesiastical. Donna Hamilton has argued that Shakespeare re-works Plautus's *Menaechmi* and *Jack Juggler* into a parodic presentation and assessment of the English Reformation and of the Elizabethan compromise and the settlement that seemed to be within reach in the early 1590s.

Shakespeare begins his play as it were in the middle of *Jack Juggler*: Antipholus of Syracuse has left his home and his father because he has 'lost himself' already, bereft as he is of mother and brother (1.2.35-40). Where *Jack Juggler* insists that no body, not even Christ's, can be in two places at once, *Errors* begins by affirming that in the case of identical twins, this is (almost) possible – only to proceed to the Platonic-psychoanalytical contention that each can only become a complete human being when united with his other half. While the 'Doppelgänger'-motif is employed in *Jack Juggler* to drive *ad absurdum* the doctrine of transubstantiation, in *Errors* it signifies the essential likeness, the compatibility, of English Christians of all persuasions.

The transfer of the play's setting from Rome to Ephesus was certainly not the choice of a playwright who wanted to gloss over the evangelical shape that Plautus had received at the hands of the unknown Protestant satirist who wrote *Jack Juggler*. Critics have not been slow to point out that two of the major themes of the play - the ordering of society by observing proper hierarchy in the community, particularly in marriage, and the dangers of sorcery and idolatry - are among the principal concerns of St Paul's in his Epistle to the Ephesians and in the Acts of the Apostles. Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights who discussed social and political conflicts by way of the domestic 'commonwealths' of family and marital relationships had ample scriptural authority for this. In the Plautine epistles, hierarchical order in marriage and in the household is as frequent an image for the unity of all Christian believers as that of the communion bread or Christ's body. To an Elizabethan playwright who *intended* to weave a strand of religious or ecclesiastical allegory into his play, marriage and the family would suggest themselves as images with which to signify the English Church. Further, he would very probably be led by contemporary religious debates and personify the church as a woman, indeed, as a wife.[52]

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[52] Donna Hamilton discusses the various shapes of the figure of 'Ecclesia' in Reformation polemics in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, chap. 3: '*The Comedy of Errors*: The Errors of Exorcism,' 67-8. The following argument

The *topos* of the supper-as-holy-communion is, if anything, given even more emphasis than in *Jack Juggler*. Claimed by Adriana as an integral part of her, 'undividable incorporate' (2.1.122), whose adultery/idolatry ('I know his eye doth homage otherwhere', 2.1.104) taints her as much as him, the Syracusian Antipholus is invited to dinner. He and his servant, however, are by no means certain that it is not precisely by 'supping' with her that they would be committing some form of idolatry or entering upon some kind of demonic ritual: 'What error drives our eyes and ears amiss? / Until I know this sure uncertainty, I'll entertain the offer'd fallacy.' 'Dinner', sure enough, is made to rhyme with 'sinner', and the key word from the play's title reverberates in a context of witchcraft and idolatry – and religious allegory: 'This is the fairy land. O spite of spites! / We talk with goblins, owls and sprites' (2.2.184-90). Jenkin Careaway meets Red Cross Knight as Antipholus struggles to detect Truth in a bewildering set of circumstances: 'Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? / Sleeping or waking, mad or well-advis'd? (2.2.213-14)

Antipholus of Syracuse, then, finds himself in a strange, uncanny world, forced into religious rites whose nature he cannot define, coerced to 'dinner' where he feels he does not belong. The native brother is jolted out of the world he knew, denied entry into his house ('Your cake is warm within', 3.1.71)[53], and proceeds to dine at a prostitute's – a 'whore', however the term may remind playgoers of the Whore of Babylon, whom he calls 'Pretty and witty; wild, and yet, too, gentle' (3.1.110). His brother, however, vents on her all the hatred and disgust a puritan might feel for the personified Church of Rome: 'Satan avoid, I charge thee tempt me not.' She, taking him for his twin, invites him to supper but is repelled: 'Avoid then, fiend, what tell'st thou me of supping? / Thou art, as you are all, a sorceress' (4.3.48-66).

Peace, and a solution to this 'one day's error' (5.1.398) is provided by the Abbess, who assumes Adriana's position of 'Ecclesia' and welcomes all the various members of her family into her church. Her first words in the play might have come from any Elizabethan conservative: 'Be quiet, people' (5.1 38) – for instance from Richard Hooker, who was busy with his *Ecclesiastical Polity* even when Shakespeare wrote *The Comedy of Errors*:

> All things considered and compared with that success which truth hath hitherto had by so bitter conflicts with errors in this point, shall I wish that men would more give themselves to meditate with silence what we have by the sacrament, and less to dispute of the manner how?[54]

about *Errors* largely agrees with Hamilton's comprehensive and generally persuasive reading of the play as 'Shakespeare's re-imagining the contemporary contests about church polity as a domestic quarrel that is fuelled by a profound anxiety about faithfulness and loyality' (61).

[53] In the fifteenth-century *Play of the Sacrament*, the blaspheming Jews call the host 'cake', printed in *Specimen of the Pre-Shaksperean Drama*, ed. John Matthew Manly, 2 vols. New York, 1967, vol. 1.

[54] Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, 373.

As diferent as the two pieces of writing are, both Shakespeare and Hooker strongly urged their audiences and readers to consider the interests of the commonwealth and concentrate on common ground rather than on the differences.

Jack Juggler had dramatised the Reformation debate about the nature of the eucharist by resorting to a rhetorical trick well-established in medieval anti-clerical satire: literalist pastiche. Miri Rubin briefly mentions little sketchings in the margins of an early fourteenth-century liturgical books, 'a mitred ape elevating the host' or, more poignantly, 'a mitred ape wearing a chasuble [elevating] a sheep's head at a wash-stand'.[55] The form of the ceremony is preserved but the elements are perverted. The priest representing Christ becomes an ape, the sacramental bread - presenting Christ's body *sub specie panis* - becomes a grotesquely literal synecdoche of the sacrificial lamb of God: the parodic host changes not only into Christ's body, it literally changes into an embodiment of one of Christ's metaphorical functions. Shakespeare was apparently not interested in picking up the cue for this sort of frolic from *Jack Juggler* and other, non-dramatic renderings of this trope, even though he must have realised that it offered wonderful opportunities for meta-theatrical play.[56] Some of his fellow playwrights, however, among them Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, George Peele and Robert Greene made the most (meta-)theatrically effective use of it.

The Comedy of Errors does not foreground sacramental doctrine the way *Jack Juggler* had done, but its vehement call for and end of religious factionalism in the ecclesiastical and national polity aligns it with 'romantic' comedies that seem to engage with ecclesiastical and doctrinal controversies. Elizabethan drama is replete with traditional romantic motifs involving transformations and separations, magic potions, and uncanny apparitions. The character constellation of two boys and a girl (or, more rarely, *vice versa*) is a plot motif that is found in the tales and stories of all people at all times, one of the principal elements in a narrative structuralist's view of world literature. Given that Sir Philip Sidney thought it suitable as an allegory of ecclesiastical schism and built the whole edifice of *The Fairie Queene* on it, it is perhaps surprising that romance motifs, including magic, in Elizabethan stage plays have not been read more topically as dramatic comments on the English Church's break with Rome and on Roman Catholic doctrine. Since playwrights were not at liberty to discuss religious issues, especially not those bearing on royal or national politics, the obvious move was to stage them the way they were presented in popular polemics. The Roman Catholic Mass had been denounced in the most colourful tones as (fake) magic and as showy theatre; nothing could be more pleasing to the groundlings or seem as harmless to the censor as theatre about theatre. But to the interested beholder,

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[55] Rubin, *The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, 340.

[56] John Frith, for instance, who was burnt at Smithfield in 1533, explained the notion of sacramental signification by stating that the ignorant communicant may 'wel be likened unto a fond fellow, which when he is very drye, and an honest fellow shew him an alepole and tell him that there is good ale inough, would goe and sucke the alepole, trusting to get drinke out of it,' quoted in Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers*, 99.

the way from meta-theatre to ecclesiastical politics – via the theatrical hollowness of the Mass, the problem of 'presencing' the unrepresentable, and the dramaturgical necessity to balance the popish antithesis with an orthodox thesis, could be quite short.

George Peele's *The Old Wife's Tale* (c. 1591) is littered with allusions to traditional religion and liturgy. There are at least two scenes that seem to allude parodistically to the eucharistic debate. When Huanebango and Booby – Don Quichote and Sancho Pansa – meet the Old Man, a quarrel about alms-giving ensues: 'Father,' Booby complains,

> do you see this man? You little think he'll run a mile or teo for such a cake, or pass for a pudding. I tell you, father, he has kept such a begging of men for a piece of this cake! Whoo! He comes upon me with a 'superfantial substance and the foison of the earth', that I know not what he means. If he came to me thus, and said 'My friend Booby' or so, why I could spare him a piece, with all my heart. But when he tells me how God hath enriched me above all other fellows with a cake, why, he makes me blind and deaf at once![57]

This is not entirely lucid, but Booby seems mainly to be upset about Huanebango's canting and hypocritical greed. Giving alms is any Christian's duty to his fellow man; it is unnecessary to wield spurious metaphysical arguments.[58] The 'cake' – human alms and God's grace – is not to be withheld by other people.

The play's villain, the evil magician Sacrapant, enters directly after this. His name and character are taken from Ariost's *Orlando Furioso* and Robert Greene's play of that name; editors do not seem to note that 'sacripant' is not only French for 'villain' or 'rascal' but that 'sacer panis' also denotes the 'holy bread'. Holy bread was the substitute traditionally dealt out to the congregation in place of the host: a parishioner donated the bread that was blessed and distributed to the laity, supposedly the first thing one tasted on a Sunday morning. It was not nearly as powerful as the consecrated host, but it was thought to have protective powers if carried around in one's pocket.[59] The reformers felt that holy bread added insult to injury: not only was the wine withheld from the laity on all occasions, they were even denied proper communion of the host except once a year at Easter. Holy bread was thus a fake article at a fake event.

The play proceeds to associate the magician with Roman Catholicism by subjecting him and the Mass to Delia's mockery. Eager to please her, he offers to conjure anything she wants. Delia, apparently compliant like Ariost's Angelica in the clutches of her evil suitor, demands to have 'the best meat from the king of England's table, and the best wine in all France, brought in by the veriest knave in all Spain' (350-2). The knave, of course, is a friar, who brings in meat and wine. The corresponding

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[57] George Peele, *the Old Wife's Tale*, ed. Charles Whitworth, London, 1996, 306-16.

[58] The editor conjectures that 'superfantial substance' may be a nonsensical rendering of 'supersubstantia', transcending substance.

[59] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 125.

scene in *Dr Faustus* is much more sophisticated and acute: Faustus, made invisible by Mephistopheles' art, snatches meat and cup from the pope in a farcical enactment of the reformers' insistence that God is immaterial and that wilfully erring papists have no right to the sacraments.[60] Peele's parody is rather innocuous, but it provides enough hints to the audience to understand that Sacrapant allegorically represents the Roman Catholic Church. His power and his life are preserved by '*a light in a glass*' (409SD), like the eternal light by the tabernacle in church:

> See here the thing which doth prolong my life.
> With this enchantment I do anything.
> And till this fade, my skill shall still endure;
> And never none shall break this little glass,
> But she that's neither wife, widow nor maid. (410-14)

The female to do so is Venelia, the Old Man's betrothed, who had been charmed by Sacrapant to 'run madding in the woods' (812-13). Once the Roman Church's flame of life is out, everything should go swimmingly for the three sets of lovers, but Jack the ghost, who is the benevolent supernatural centre of this play, demands of Eumenides to stand by his oath to give him half of what he owns: 'draw your sword, part your lady, let me have half of her presently' (859-60). Like a mixture between Abraham and Solomon, Eumenides lifts his sword to strike, but Jack is satisfied: 'Stay, master! It is sufficient I have tried your constancy' (875).

The Old Wives' Tale warrants an interpretation of this dividing of the lady in terms of the conflicts between conservatives, the mainstream and nonconformists in the Elizabethan Church, partly in view of its casting of Sacrapant as the Roman Church that is overcome by 'the lady', partly because of the way it associates Jack the ghost with Reformation controversies. It is Jack who confronts Sacrapant directly (although invisibly) to disarm him. He had been introduced in a comic graveyard scene between Eumenides, a churchwarden, a sexton and some 'clowns' that reads like a transposition into everyday Elizabethan mundanity of the conflicts about funeral customs and mourning rites; a scene that aptly characterises contemporary English village life. The theme is the decline of piety and charity: no-one will pay for Jack's funeral, the church is falling apart from neglect – if not, in fact, from iconoclastic attack (439-510).

There are no twins or *Doppelgänger* in *The Old Wife's Tale*, but the theme of stealing somone's body (and thus to disrupt their identity) appears in the plot and in the staging. At the end of the play Jack the ghost explains that Sacrapant was not as 'young and fresh' as he seemed: 'this conjurer took the shape of the old man that kept the cross, and that old man was in the likeness of the conjurer' (842-4). So presumably the following stage direction, '*Enter* […] *he that was at the cross*' (845SD2), requires the actor

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[60] *Doctor Faustus, A- and B-Texts (1604 and 1616) by Christopher Marlowe and his Collaborators and Revisers*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, Manchester, 1993, 3.1. – Cf. the '*woman with a shoulder of mutton on a spit, and a Devil*' conjured by Friar Bacon in Robert Greene's *Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay*, in *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*, ed. J. Churton Collins, Oxford, 1905, 1.2.86SD.

who played Sacrapant to come out as the real, young Erestus to be reunited with his wife. The audience would have had to disentangle these interchanges of 'shapes' and actors into order to enjoy the whole wonder of the play's resolution. Theatre – as its puritan enemies seem to have realised perfectly well – is like holy communion: its meaning lies not in 'the thing that we see, but [in] that which we beleve', and 'we see not, that which we beleve, but […] we see one thing, and beleve another.' That is its mystery.[61]

3.2 Theology as Metaphor

In this chapter I want to explore further the suggestion that religious discourses were apparently familiar enough to Elizabethan readers and playgoers to serve as tools in anti-theatrical and meta-theatrical analysis. Pamphletists and playwrights in the 1580s and 1590s engaged in intense theoretical debates about the nature of playacting. (Most of the players' responses came in dramatic form, but their interest was still theoretical.) At the core of this controversy were the twin issues of representation and imagination – probably the two most hotly contested topics in Protestant theology. The relation between signifier and signified is crucially important in understanding Protestant eucharistic doctrine, the lynchpin of reformed theology; and the vulnerable and unreliable faculty of imagination was seen as the devil's gateway into his victim's souls. The two are linked in the discourse of idolatry: a non-semiotic notion of representation will lead worshippers to adore bread or a wooden crucifix or a stone statue instead of Christ; and the adoration of material objects is idolatry, that is, devil-worship. The basic tenets of eucharistic doctrine and of demonology seem to have been so well understood by a majority of educated and even moderately educated Elizabethans that they could be used as analytical terms to wrestle with the questions of whether theatrical impersonation was essentially demonic and whether actors' illusion-mongering turned them into servants of the arch-shape-shifter, Satan. With the phase of 'the Second Reformation', in which the Elizabethan establishment (rid for the time being of Catholic contenders for the crown and serious Catholic opposition at home and abroad) concentrated on consolidating its hold on people's religious beliefs, their socio-cultural practices and their political convictions, arose the necessity to determine how playacting and playgoing fitted into the ways of a 'godly commonweal'.

As I hope to have illustrated in Part 2 of this study, early modern writers and playwrights were perfectly well aware of the fact that playgoing had replaced more traditional, less commercial communal celebrations; and they used this knowledge to engage in reflections on how playgoing created festive communities – or not. The theatre was able to preserve old festive customs by re-presenting them, but since 'watching' festivities rather than actively participating in them was precisely

[61] Cranmer is quoted in Clifford W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers*, London, 1958, 130; Calfhill, *Treatise of the Cross*, 83.

the decline lamented by nostalgic conservatives, playgoing was not only a poor second to frolicking on the village green, it contributed to this decline. In this chapter I want to pursue the suggestion that writers and playwrights were similarly aware of the ways in which the playhouse offered its customers an experience that in some ways was not unlike the experience of magic or demonic enchantment or a Roman Catholic communion service: there was ceremony, ritualised speech, transformation, wonder, fascination, ravishment; there was an opportunity for intense emotional excitement and purgation; there was the titillating danger of losing one's self in illusion.

In her ground-breaking study about English Reformation drama, Huston Diehl explores her impression that Elizabethan and Jacobean plays were 'agents of reform, destabilising their audiences' relation to images and nurturing new, Protestant ways of seeing'.[62] At a time when the clergy – first in opposition to the established church, then its representatives – were almost obsessively anxious about the relation between *signum* and *res*, a medium like the public theatre could not possibly keep out of the fray. Or even want to keep out. But I am sceptical about the claim that playwrights were driven to develop a distinctly 'Protestant' dramaturgy'.[63] They had no reason to be, and a good reason not to be. They primarily wanted to sell plays. Since they always had the support of the crown, they did not seriously need to fear any threat to their survival by the hostility of the London magistrates and some of the clergy. However, defending their *métier* from the accusations of idolatry and demonism levelled at it by its enemies was an interesting *self-reflective* exercise. Actors, no matter what modern playwrights and directors might decide to the contrary, will always strive to ravish and enchant their audiences, because their power to ravish is what protects actors from the audience's power to humiliate them. As long as the power to ravish an audience by way of real-seeming illusions was defined as 'demonic' or 'idolatrous' or 'popish', the theatre had no choice but to embrace this challenge to its moral and religious integrity, without any hope of ever fully clearing itself of the accusations.

No Elizabethan or Jacobean playwright would in all seriousness have agreed that his craft was devilish or recusant; but the alternative – a 'godly theatre' – was, by puritan definition, an oxymoronic impossibility.[64] How playwrights nonetheless tried to 'figure out' how theatrical representation worked and to maintain the essential beneficence of playacting and playgoing is what I will explore below. I share Diehl's conviction that 'the practice of the Protestant ritual of the Lord's Supper shape[d] the way London playwrights imagine[d] and London playgoers experience[d] the spectacle and theatrics of

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62 Diehl. Staging Reform, 3.

63 The term 'poetics' has been habitually applied to the theatre, but seen in relation with the Protestant bias against embodiment and physical representation, this is inadequate and should be dropped for the term 'dramaturgy'. – Cf. Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador, 'The Sacralizing Sign: Religion and Magic in Bale, Greene and the Early Shakespeare, *Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993), 30-45, 34: 'Is there such a thing as a Protestant dramaturgy, being based upon and presenting the Word?'

64 As Anthony Dawson points out, the reformers engaged in their very own brands of theatricality: 'smashing or destroying the defensive idols [in iconoclastic purges] was itself theatrical in its showiness, and ritualistic in the kind of participation it offered' *Culture of Playgoing*, 134-5.

Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.'[65] I believe that eucharistic doctrine and demonology furnished playwrights and other writers about the theatre with the paradigms and the terminology to develop something approaching a theory of theatrical impersonation and representation.

3.2.1 Satan's Synagogue

To mid-Elizabethan moralists, stageplaying was merely one abuse amongst many, enjoyed by the ignorant multitude on holidays and, latterly, in their spare time or while they should be at church or in the workshop instead. In 1577 John Northbrooke authored a *Treastise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterludes with other Idle Pastimes … are Reproved*, Stephen Gosson followed suit two years later with *A Schoole of Abuse, Conteining a Plesant Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and suchlike Caterpillars of a Commonwealth*. The title of Gosson's pamphlet suggests the nature of these pamphlets as a rhetorical exercise. It is a 'plesant' invective against pleasure, and Gosson pleases himself and his readers by restricting himself to Greek and Roman authorities without making use of the Bible. At the same time the political impetus is evident. Poets, pipers and players, like popular preachers, had done sterling work in advancing Protestant ideas among the people. Now, with English Protestantism more securely fixed than ever before, the Elizabethan establishment decided it was time to halt the momentum of social reform and put bridles on those who earned their living by commenting on the state of the nation in humorous, possibly satirical or disrespectful tones. Excesses in holiday revelry had always concerned clerics and magistrates, but the proliferation of sermons and pamphlets attacking not only popular festive customs but also the media of popular political debate was a phenomenon of the late 1580s and early 1590s.

Commercial plays had intermittently been staged at innyards, but the building of the Red Lion in 1567, the Theatre in 1576 and the Curtain in 1577 signalled a fundamental change in the organisation of playacting in London. It became a permanently established business, not an occasional but a constant distraction to impressionable youths, not a holiday event but a viable commodity. Within a few years the theatre was singled out amongst the abuses of the age for particular and uncompromising attacks. Gosson's *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) was probably the most coherent of its kind and the most influential.[66] These pamphlets were an odd mixture of the entertaining and the sanctimonious: many of them imitated the form of the medium they vilify. Gosson divides his piece into 'five Actions'; William Rankins relates the tale of a journey to 'Terralbon', where he attends a masque at the wedding

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[65] Diehl, *Staging Reform*, 97.

[66] Anthony Munday's follow-up *Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Playes and Theatres* (1583) reiterates much of the same material in more sensationalist tones. Philip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) is again more comprehensive in target; William Rankins' *A Mirrour for Monsters* (1587) is directed as much against courtly extravagance as against everyday playgoing; the Oxford/Cambridge divine John Rainoldes transposed the debate to boy actors, at university and, by implication, in the choir schools at St Paul's and the royal chapel. – The best overview remains Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley, 1981.

feast of 'Luxuria' and 'Fastus'. Fifty years later the future Member of Parliament William Prynne would not only organise the one thousand-odd pages of his *Histrio-Mastix* (1633) into scenes and acts but also offer a Chorus and a 'Catastrophe', an ironic homage to dramatic form that here becomes a joke at the author's own expense.

These anti-theatrical concoctions were not required to be original in content, merely rhetorically effective in presentation. They all level more or less the same accusations at the players and their business: the large gatherings at playhouses precipitate the spread of contagious diseases and of politically subversive thought, Sunday performances not only violate the Sabbath but also seduce people to stay away from church, time wasted in the theatre is stolen not only from God but also from the master or employer, the sumptuous and lascivious presentations – most particularly the boy actors presenting females – are erotically stimulating and induce wanton behaviour, and, in fact, any kind of fiction is a kind of lie, an illusion designed to deceive: theatrical impersonation falls little short of the pleasing shapes assumed by the devil in order to damn his victims. The beginning and the end of stageplaying, so its enemies maintained, was idolatry: the adoration and service of false gods. 'Playes are the inventions of the devil, the offrings of Idolatrie,' Gosson concludes *Plays Confuted*, 'the roote of Apostacy, […] detest them.'[67]

If it is true that at least some of these pieces were commissioned by the Court of Aldermen, this may indicate that the religious line of argument was perceived by the city fathers to be a powerful weapon against the players which they wanted to have wielded well and effectively by professional writers.[68] Gosson, Munday and the others might have enlarged on any of the ills attending the assembly of crowds in small spaces, but they homed in on the theatre's essentially idolatrous nature and the ways in which it endangered the playgoers' souls. They would not have chosen this rhetorical strategy had they not expected it to work. Their line of attack was time-honoured. Groups or ideas that question the authority or the ideologies of a society's dominant institutions had long been maligned as being in league with the devil. From the moment the medieval church and, a little later, medieval nation-states, moved in concerted action against their opposition, three accusations turn up in combination: the enemy serves the devil; the enemy is a traitor; and the enemy engages in unnatural or at least reprehensible sexual activity. Where there is one offence, the other two are not far.[69] So when the puritan lobby and their hacks accused players of devilry and erotic indulgence, they were only doing the

[67] Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, 1582, G8v.

[68] William Ringler, 'The First Phase of the Elizabethan Attack on the Stage, 1558-1579,' *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 4 (1942), 391-418, 409, for the proposition that the aldermen paid Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday to write their anti-theatrical pamphlets in the early 1580s.

[69] The accusation of treason remained an unspoken undercurrent in anti-theatrical attacks. Seducing playgoers to luxurious indulgence and inciting them with depictions of rebellion and riot naturally weakened the body politic. But even Gosson or Munday did not have the gumption to accuse the Queen's own servants of treason.

obvious thing. But a closer look reveals that more was at issue than a token charge. The particulars of the attack allow us to understand how theatrical representation was actually thought to work.

How was the accusation of idolatry made good by the theatre's enemies? In *A Schoole of Abuse* it does not occur yet, and the tract only condemns the *abuse* of poetry and drama, not their responsible and proper use. But in *A Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse* (1582) Gosson goes as far as to accuse the poet of blasphemy because he elevates the cruel and wanton figures of classical mythology to the status of gods and goddesses:

> *Jupiter* which was but a mortall man and almost a patricide, [...] a cruell tyrant, an unnaturall childe, an usurping Prince, an abhominable lecher, [...] by Poets is made the king of gods. [...] Thus making Gods of them that were rude beastes, in the likenes of men, divine goddesses of common harlots, they robbe God of his honour, diminishe his authoritie, weaken his might.[70]

The shocking deeds of the pagan deities are best forgotten, certainly they ought not to be glorified in poetic verse, because this would mean a violation of the second commandment. This argument strikes home. God's second commandment had become the first commandment of the English Church, and idolatrous worship of any kind the worst sin. 'First,' it says in John Smyth's *A Paterne of True Prayer* (1605), 'we must pray that we may keep the second commandment.'[71] In the *Authorised King James Bible* (1611) the relevant passage reads:

> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
> Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I am the Lord thy God. (Exodus 20.4-5)

Reforming English Christians' religious life meant reforming their concepts of representation. Cool reasoning was forwarded to discredit the fashioning of religious images: 'God is invisible, and hath no body: how can he then be portrayed? Shal we give a shape to him, that hath no shape? [...] for howe can God a most pure spirit, whome no man ever sawe, be expressed by a grosse, bodyly and visible similitude?'[72] People were supposed to distinguish between the material means of representation and the divine spirit represented, but they could not be trusted to do so. 'For so sone as they have forged a visible forme for God, they also tye the power of God unto it, so beastly foolish are men, that there they fasten God where they counterfait him.'[73]

In his first tract, Gosson merely presents stage plays as a breach of poetic decorum – gods in human shapes are shown to pursue immoral and often shameful activities, humans of dubious morality are adored as gods. Three years later in Plays Confuted, the readiness to differentiate between proper and

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[70] Stephen Gosson, *A Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*, 1582, L3 und L5.

[71] John Symth, *A Paterne of true Prayer*, in Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, vol. 1: *Laws Against Images*, Oxford, 1988, 371.

[72] James Calfhill, *An Answere to the Treatise of the Crosse by J. Martiall (1565)*, 13.

[73] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 11.9. Quotations are from Thomas Norton's 1587 translation unless otherwise specified.

improper uses has been superseded by a radical rejection of all forms of stage play. It is here that Gosson expresses the ontological objection that would be echoed in virtually all later anti-theatrical writing. The theatre is ex origine tained by idolatry,

> for, whatsoever was consecrated to the honour of the Heathen Gods was consecrated to idolatrie, Stage Playes [...] were consecrated to the honour of Heathen Gods, therefore consecrated to idolatrie. Being consecrated to idolatrie, they are not of God, if they proceede not from God, they are the doctrine and invention of the devill.[74]

Centuries of biblical drama, at which no-one batted an eyelash when an actor stepped on stage and announced, 'I am Deus Pater, a substaunce invysyble,' have been forgotten.[75] Note how Gosson phrases it: 'the *doctrine* and invention of the devil'; this implies that not just the practices of but the *theory* behind theatrical representation is demonic. The establishment of the theatre in contemporary London, he adds, was by no means accidental, but a careful, perfidious measure by Satan, who feels his power waning in Eliza's Protestant England:

> The Devill, [...] feeling such a terrible push, given to his breast by the chaunge of religion, and by the happy entrance of her Majestie to the crowne, hath played wilie beguilie ever since. [...] he entertayneth his captives with all manner of curtesie [...] sente over many wanton Italian bookes [... and] because all cannot reade presenteth us Comedies cut by the same paterne. [...] he settes Comedies abroach and erecteth Theaters to make us fall backwarde and flie the fielde.[76]

Gosson pinpoints one of the greatest problems encountered by Protestant reformers in converting the English people: 'all cannot reade'. The Devil benefits from the people's lack of education; without the armour of God's word they are helpless against his temptations. Before the Reformation it had been possible to be a good Christian without being able to read: watching performances of religious drama and gazing upon the incarnations of the divine at church had been quite enough. In reformed worship, this was no longer possible. Defenders of the theatre would predictably forward the claim that plays were useful tools of moral instruction: 'there is neither Tragedy, History, Comedy, Morrall or Pastorall, from which an infinite use cannot be gathered'.[77] but the fact remained that stage presentations catered for the spectators' craving for sensual excitements and so had to be condemned, no matter how ideologically sound their message. The actors, with their costumes and their unashamed presentations of love and violence, give Satan an unfair advantage over God, who had to rely on clergymen to appeal to people's consciences.[78]

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[74] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, B4v.

[75] God is the first figure to enter in John Bale's Protestant allegory, *The Three Laws* (1538).

[76] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, B6v.

[77] Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, F4r. – Cf. Stephen S. Hilliard, 'Stephen Gosson and the Elizabethan Distrust of the Effects of Drama', *ELR* 9 (1979), 225-39.

[78] Cf. e.g. Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, C3v, who argues that church service attendance would rise sharply if plays were banned.

Gosson sets pagan religions and the theatre at one. Stage plays are not only consecrated to the heathen gods, they are in their very nature sacrificial rites. The pagan deities – *alias* Satan – demanded scenic representation of their deeds in return for protection. These irresistibly fascinating representations ensured the gods' continued glorification and incited the beholders to imitate their ignominious actions:

> For as the wicked spirits which the Gentiles worshipped appeared once fightinge in the plaine of *Campania*, to whet them to slaughter and bloudshead by this illusion: so did they (saith *S. Augustine*) with the like subtility, cause Playes to be consecrated unto them, wherein their Adulteries, and Impurities were pointed out, that such as gave credite to the same, might follow their example [...] playes are the Sacrifices of the Devill, taught by him selfe to pull us from the service of our God, as ofte as ever wee set them up in our Christian Cities.[79]

Satan, then, pursues two aims in fostering the theatre. It is bad enough that pagan deities are given shape and voice on the public stage and their memory is kept alive in Christian communities. But it is worse that the audience are thus distracted from imitating Christ and seduced to take an example from iniquity and vice, for *imitatio* was, after all, the ultimate proof of veneration. William Prynne would elaborate with characteristic obsessiveness

> that Stage-Playes are fraught with the Genealogies, Ceremonies, Images, Reliques, Imprecations, Invocations, Names, Adulteries, Whoredomes, Incests, Rapes, [… and] abominable Villanies of Heathen Idole-gods: and for this very cause, they [i.e. the church fathers and the Elizabethan polemicists] utterly condemne them. [...] And so much the rather: because these Demoniacall, and Infernall Deities, being delighted with their true or feigned wickednesse; did purposely command them to be Acted on their [i.e. the heathens'] Festivalls; that so men might be encouraged to imitate them.[80]

The incitement to immoral behaviour was evil; but Gosson had already made it unmistakeably clear that every single aspect of the theatre was inherently idolatrous:

> Tertullian teacheth us that every part of the preparation of playes, was dedicated to some heathen god, or goddesse, as the house, stage, apparell, to *Venus*; the musike, to *Apollo*; the penning, to *Minerva*, and the *Muses*, the pronunciation and action to *Mercurie*; he calleth the Theater *Sacrarium Veneris*, *Venus* chappell, by resorting to which we worshippe her.[81]

In good academic manner Gosson derives his authority from the authorities he cites, primarily the early church fathers. Stubbes in *The Anatomie of Abuses* lists half a dozen voices from late antiquity condemning the rites of the pagans; the margin of Prynne's *Histrio-Mastix* is tightly packed with literary references. Tertullian, one of the most frequently cited sources, lived in North Africa at the turn of the second century. The theatre he attacks in *De Spectaculis* was indeed an integral part of heathen culture, the circus a place where Christians were killed in sport. So, as the lawyer and historian John Selden admitted half a century after Gosson, 'the fathers speake against playes in their time with reason enough, for they had reall Idolatry mix'd with their playes, haveing three Altars perpetually upon the

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[79] Gosson, *Plays Confuted,* C1v-C2v.

[80] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 76-77.

[81] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, D7.

Stage.'[82] This absolves present-day actors, Selden argues, because society and its theatre are Christian, not heathen; so the charge of idolatry against actors is unjustified.

As far as we can tell from extant scripts and titles, only a minority of plays from the mid-Elizabethan decades actually presented pagan gods and goddesses, but many of them are set in ancient times or non-Christian countries (if only to avoid censorship), and the characters do invoke non-Christian deities. Anthony Munday suspects that this was a disingenuous trick by playwrights and players to avoid a charge of idolatry:

> Christ hath willed us not to sweare at al, but these felowes think they may jugle with God [...] Therefore to verifie their false-hoodes they take the names of *Jupiter, Saturne, Juno*, and such like prophane Gods [...] and that they thinke they maye doe lawfulye.[83]

God, however, cannot be tricked: 'when they not onlye name those prophane gods in their mouthes, and take them as witnesses of their falsehood, shal wee not saye they have consented to idolatrie?'[84] Munday allows no distinction between the actions of the actor and of the character he presents; in this he follows the anti-theatrical tradition as it was begun by the proto-Protestant Lollards in the late fourteenth century: 'no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye the myraclis and werkis that Crist so ernystfully wroughte to our helye, [...] for in that he takith the most precious werkis of God in pley and bourde, and so takith his name in idil.'[85] The presentational nature of theatre might be thought to exonerate the actor; after all, it is not he who prays to idols but the historical, mythological or fictional figure he embodies. But neither the Lollard nor the Elizabethan enemies of the theatre admitted this excuse. Without expressly referring to Jean Calvin's teachings on gestures of religious veneration, Gosson affirms that 'if we make a divorce betwene the tongue and the heart, honouringe the gods of the heathens in lips, and in jesture, not in thought, yet it is idolatrie, because we do that which is quite contrarie to the outward profession of our faith'.[86] According to Calvin, the intention of the person who makes obsequies to an image or swears a heathen oath is of no significance: the outward gesture

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[82] Selden, *Table Talk*, 95-6.

[83] Munday, *Second and Third Blast*, 80. The complex interrelation of classical form, 'idol-characters' and Protestant ideology, to which none of the anti-theatricals does the least justice, can be seen e.g. in Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (?1588), which stars Mars, Mercury and Venus and a ritual of distinctly non-Protestant thanksgiving, see chap. 1 above.

[84] Munday, *Second and Third Blast*, 81-2.

[85] *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, in William C. Hazlitt, ed., *The English Drama and Stage under the Tudor and Stuart Princes, 1543-1664*, New York, 1869, 85. This Lollard preacher evidently did not share his society's view of stageplaying: 'The aim of the Corpus Christi drama was to celebrate and elucidate, never, not even temporarily, to deceive. It played action in 'game' - not in 'ernest' - within a world set apart,' V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, London, 1966, 32; see also R. W. Hanning, "You have begun a parlous pleye': The Nature and Limits of Dramatic Mimesis as a Theme in Four Middle English 'Fall of Lucifer' Cycle Plays,' *The Drama of the Middle Ages. Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson *et al*, New York, 1982, 140-182.

[86] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, D8.

or the spoken words alone are enough to offend God.[87] In *War Against the Idols* Carlos Eire comments upon Calvin's position:

> Any human motion in the material sphere that is intended as worship, or carries with it any reverence toward divinity, is an attempt to cross over from one sphere to the other [i.e. from the human to the divine], to communicate. [...] Since every act of worship is charged with this real, spiritual sense, which relates to God, it is wasted if it does not have the true God as its object.[88]

The reformed sensibilities that were outraged by the pomp and circumstance of the Elizabethan church and urged radical measures in the on-going vestarian debate were similarly offended by plays representing pagan worlds. Superficially plausible, their line argument was, however, deeply contradictory. At the heart of the accusation that the theatre was inherently idolatrous was a refusal to accept the very distinction between signifier (here: actor) and signified (here: dramatic character) on which the Protestant eucharistic doctrine depended. At the Lord's Supper, reformed preachers had drummed into the ears of their audiences, the signifier (here: bread and wine) must on no account be taken to be identical with the signifier (here: the body and blood of Christ). Hundreds of Protestant martyrs had witnessed to this all-important doctrine:

> I find in the Scripture, that Christ took the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body which shall be broken for you; meaning his substance, his own very body, the bread being thereof an only sign or sacrament. […] So that the bread is but a remembrance of his death.[89]

Enemies of the theatre categorically denied that the very notion of semiotic representation that prevailed in Protestant churches also applied in the playhouse. Prynne would take the distinction between actor and character *as absurdum*:

> Can they say, that all was done in sporting mirth, or in the part, and person of some other [...]? Alas, this Plea will not availe them [...] hee who personates these Heathen Gods, or supplicates, or sweares by any of their Names, by representation onely, in anothers person, may chance to enter Heaven in that other person, but Hell undoubtedly, in his owne.[90]

The Protestant God does not allow for a level of play or 'as if' that could be considered apart from the dichotomy of 'truth' and 'falsehood'.

According to Elizabethan anti-theatrical voices, the idolatrous nature of the theatre resulted from its historical roots in pagan rites. No attempt at improving the form by presenting morally unexceptional matter could ever succeed: 'every play to the worldes end, if it be presented up on the stage, shall carry

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[87] See e.g. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [trans. 1587 by Thomas Norton], ed. John T. McNeill, Philadelphia, 1960, I.12.3. Calvin's influence in England had been strong at least since the publication of the *Institutes* (1559), although Gosson cannot have read the English translation in 1582.

[88] Carlos M. N. Eire, *The War Against the Idols. The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, Cambridge, 1986, 213. – This view became dominant in England in the following decades. In 1641 George Salteren wrote in *Against Images*: "For however, or under what pretence soever, if the knee be religiously bowed, before any Image, Idolatry is committed" (C4v).

[89] Anne Askew, quoted by John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of the Church,* ed. John Cumming, 3 vols., vol. 2, 1844, 654.

[90] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 88.

the brand on his backe to make him knowne, which the devil clapt on, at the first beginning, that is, idolatrie.'[91] The worshipping of heathen gods, however, is only one aspect of the more generally heinous sin of representing them in the first place:

> much les ought this to be suffred among us, that any should take unto them the names of the idols, and jette upon Stages in theire attire, contrary to the counsel of Saint John which exhorteth us to kepe our selves from idols, wherein he doth not onely forbid the worshipping, but the representing of an idoll.[92]

This interpretation of the second commandment and the passage from the last gospel sweeps all playacting before it. The mere *representation* of heathen figures constitutes the gravest violation of God's word. Gosson restricts himself to the neutral term 'representation', effected by donning a costume. Prynne's rendering of the same point betrays a darker, more subliminal fear of essential *transformation*:

> such representations [i.e. 'either of idols or Divels'], doe not onely cause men to frame the very images and portraitures of Pagan Deities, which is grosse Idolatry; but likewise transforme even men themselves, (the most lively image of the living God) into the very portraiture of those Divell-Idols, whose parts they are to act: and so turne the expresse Image of God himselfe into the very image of the Devill.[93]

Embodying a heathen deity transforms the actor himself into an idol, that is, a devil. And it does not stop there, because actors even portray Satan himself: 'What collor I pray of godly learning can be in this, when they approche the devill so neere in condition, that they can cunningly present hys person, and nothing can there be so damnable, eyther in Heathen, Pagans or Infidels, but they can present the same[?]'[94] Actors 'approach the devil so near in condition' in that they are 'Proteans', shape-shifters, illusion-mongers. Their fault is double: in character, they behave wantonly, cruelly, foolishly, *and* they do so voluntarily:

> There is no difference at all betweene a foole, a fantastique, a Bedlam, a Whore, a Pander, a Cheaters, Tyrant, a Drunkard, a Murtherer, A Divell on the Stage (for his part is oftimes acted) and those who are such in truth [...] farre more inexcusable that the latter, because they wilfully make themselves that in sport, to foment the more childish folly, of some vaine Spectators.[95]

Implied in Prynne's statements here is a whole range of ideas, superstitions and anxieties associated with scenic representation and theatrical impersonation in early modern England. The temporary self-elevation of rogues and vagabonds into kings and noblemen was regarded as the most brazen instance of what cultural historians are fond of calling 'Renaissance self-fashioning'. At its most extreme, the self-distortion of the actor presenting a demon or pagan god entailed a manipulation of the divine image in which man was formed. The proto-Protestant Lollards, following John Wyclif, had exhorted

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[91] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, E7v.

[92] Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, D8-D8v.

[93] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 89.

[94] Rankins, *Mirror of Monsters*, 21v.

[95] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 174-5. Passages like these remind us that Prynne had an obsession with the theatre; his overheated rants do not represent even a sizable minority opinion. But his very exaggerations clarify the discourse to which he was contributing.

the church to rid itself of all but the simplest religious representations, suggesting 'that ech Christen man is a perfiter and a fuller and a speedier ymage of Crist than is eny stok or stoon graved', and the sixteenth-century reformers agreed: 'man [is called] a little worlde, because he is a rare representation of the power, goodnesse and wisdom of God'.[96]

Further, imitation and impersonation were granted the power to influence, even transform, the actor. This power was not wholly destructive. Teachers at school and university encouraged their students to memorise and enact approved passages from classical drama in the hope that this would improve their strength of character. But it also meant that the impersonation of villains, or of women, affected the actor's nature and personality for the worse, particularly if it happened on a regular, professional basis.[97] But theatrical impersonation endangered not only the souls of the actors but also of their audience, who 'frame the very images' not only of pagan gods but of vice, immorality and crimes. This, the theatre's effect on the audience's fantasies and actions, was the underlying concern of all writers against plays and players.

In a Christian commonwealth, idolatry and stage playing were incalculable dangers for the same reason: it was impossible to direct and keep the beholders' imaginings within legitimate boundaries. John Rainoldes picks up William Gager's defence that 'neither actors nor spectators could receive hurt by [his] playes', the play in question being the story of Ulysses. According to Rainoldes, Gager had claimed

> as certaine that all your spectators did admire the constancie of Penelope, and dispraise the lightnes and bad nature of Melantho […] not meaning to pronounce of [the beholders'] secret thoughts, but that your playes were naturallie to woorke these effectes: […] you say that the spectators might doe so, or so; yea, could not be the worse.[98]

But how could Gager be so sure that all spectators would admire the virtuous characters? Even if they were touched by beauty and chastity, how could one tell which way their fancies would take them?

> And what if all, who were present, not the young men only, did admire the constancie of Penelope? Could no evill affection bee therefore stirred in anie by seeing a boy play so chast a part? Happy would Lucretia then have thought her selfe. For shee was not inferiour in chastitie to Penelope: and when Tarquin saw her, he saw her employed as a most vertuous woman. Yet, [...] the very sight of her chast behaviour stirred up his wicked lust. (112)

Therefore, Rainoldes concludes, Gager's 'generall propositions, that all the spectators must needes bee moved thus or thus thereby, are untrue' (113). The faculty of the human imagination is so deprived – partly because Fallen Man will always be pulled towards the flesh by his senses – that even a depiction of flawless virtue may incite lust and cruelty.

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[96] Quoted in 'Lollards and Images: The Defense of Religious Art in Later Medieval England,' *Journal of the History of* Ideas 34 (1973), 27-50, 35. The second quote is Calvin, *Institutes*, 5.1.

[97] See e.g. Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing. Anti-Theatricality and Effeminisation, 1579-1642*, Cambridge, 1994; or Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations. The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge, 1996.

[98] John Rainoldes, *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes*, 1599, 110.

English iconoclasts were familiar with this argument: 'The countenaunce, the proportion, the apparel of [religious images], is as pleaseth the workman to devise: the vertue, the power, and the qualities of them, is as pleaseth the lokers to imagine.'[99] You cannot control what other people imagine or fantasise, no matter how carefully you try to direct their responses. The later Elizabethan debate about the abuses of stage playing closely mirrors and repeats the earlier debate about the abuses of religious images. Surely, the moderates had argued, if we educate people to avoid idolatrous worship of wood and stones, images may be allowed. But the iconophobes had been pessimistic:

> They [i.e. the 'papists'] tell us [...] that they forbid the people, to give Divine worship to Images: but we say, they had better forbid the people to have Images. A blocke lies in the high way, and a watchman is set by it to warn the Passengers; Take heed, heere is a blocke. [...] Whether is the safer course, quite to remove the blocke out of the way, or to trust the passengers safetie upon the watchmans vigilance?[100]

Reason and education, the watchmen over the path taken by the Christian soul, cannot be trusted to be alert to all the stumbling blocks that fancy and imagination will strew in its way. Religious images ought to be abolished altogether, because experience shows

> how the ignorant and the common people are deceived by the cunning of the workeman, and the beautie of the Image, to doe honour unto it [...] The painting of the picture and carved Image with divers colours, enticeth the ignorant so, that he honoureth and loveth the picture of a dead image that hath no soule.[101]

The beholder of a beautiful statue of a saint cannot be trusted to tell signifying substance (wood, stone) from signified spirit (saint, Christ). Defenders of the theatre adopted the iconophobics' metaphors: 'When vices are really acted, they stand as Copies, and Examples, which men are apt to follow; but when they are only feigned on a Stage, they stand as Rocks, shewed onely to be shunned.'[102] But since the theatre's enemies denied the very distinction between 'real' and 'feigned', the suggestion that vice presented on stage might deter as well as incite to imitation did not persuade them.

As far as their irresistible effect on the beholder's imagination is concerned, embodied action is of course far more effective than 'stills'. Again, Thomas Heywood tries to stress the positive aspects of this:

> [a] Description is only a shadow received by the eare but not perceived by the eye: so lively portrature is meerely a forme seene by the eye, but can neither shew action, passion, motion, or any other gesture, to mooue the spirits of the beholder to admiration: but to see a souldier shap'd like a souldier, walke, speake, act like a souldier [...] Oh, these were sights to make an *Alexander*.[103]

But William Prynne worries more about the imitation of vice and quotes Jean Bodin, the French writer against witches: '[Stage-plays] have the more power and effect, for that their words, accents, gesture,

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[99] James Calfhill, *An Answere to the Treatise of the Crosse by J. Martiall*, 1565, 169.

[100] Thomas Adams, *The Temple. Sermon at Paul's Cross*, 1624, 25.

[101] *An Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* (1562/3), at http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/homilies/index.htm.

[102] Richard Baker, *Theatrum Redivivum, or The Theatre Vindicated*. New York, 1972, 33.

[103] Heywood, *Apologie for Actors*, B3v.

motions and actions, governed with all the art that may be, and of a most filthy and dishonest subject, leaves a lively impression in their soules who apply thereunto all their senses.'[104] Bodin's countryman, Pierre de la Primaudaye, agreed: '[Playgoers] soone receive into their soules a lively impression of that dissolutenes and villanie which they see and heare, when it is joined with words, accents, gestures, motions and actions, wherewith players and juglers know how to inrich by all kinde of artificiall sleights, the filthiest and most dishonest matters.'[105] Anti-theatrical feeling was by no means an English or even a Protestant prerogative; but Catholic writers were unlikely to equate the wicked dissimulation of tricksters with that of a celebrant at mass: 'By this juggling it is plain enough that those miracles that be alleged by many men for the real presence in the sacrament of the altar, do not confirm their error, but be very delusions of the devil, or of his juggling ministers.'[106]

Before they turned against the stage and argued that playacting incited the audience to lustfulness and idolatry, Protestant clergymen and preachers had levelled the same accusations against the Roman Catholic mass. In *The Displaying of the Popish Mass* the popular mid-Tudor reformer Thomas Becon declares that the doctrine of transubstantiation – the belief that the consecrated host really and substantially changes into the body of Christ – serves but 'to make a show of it to the people, that they may fall downe and worship it as a god'. Like a conjuring confidence-man, the priest attempts to 'compell' Christ 'to come down from the glorious throne of [his] Majestie, and to be handled as the Papists please' (194). Against this 'hypocrisie and counterfeit holinesse, yea, […] double dissimulation and devilish deceiving of the simple people' (48), is set a more truthful, a semiotic concept of the Lord's Supper. To grasp this was of vital importance, for not only people of limited understanding were deceived by the 'apish Masse':

> so doe yee [i.e. the priests] make the Queene, her Counsell, the Nobility and Commons of this Realme for the most part believe that the little thin round white cake, which ye hold up above your head, at your abominable Masse […] is straightwayes both a living God, and a very living man. (95-6)

The old-style mass is declared to be a danger to the very head of the body politic.

The misguided belief that a 'live' performance of a miracle is happening at the altar leads the priest to deport himself like an actor, both in gesture and concupiscence:

> Yee [i.e. the priests] come unto your altars, as a game-player unto his stage. [...] Thus as men well harnessed for an Enterlude, yee come forth to play Hickscorners part with your shamelesse, smooth, smirking faces, and with your lustie broad, bald, shaven crownes […] you cast a Stoale about your necke in stead of an halter, which signifieth that ye wil persecute and strangle with an halter, or else burne with fire so many as speake against your abominable apish Masse [...] But whence have ye your game-players

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104 Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 483.

105 Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie*, 1601, vol 1, 205.

106 *The Remains of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. Henry Jenkyns, 4 vols., vol. 4, Oxford, 1833, 206.

> garments? Of the heathen and idolatrous Priests? [... You] binde all your captives to kneel at the receiving of the Sacrament, and so make them plain Idolators in worshipping the bread of a god.[107]

All three – mass, idolatry and theatre – are misguided attempts at representing what must not, indeed, cannot be represented. With carefully orchestrated movements they seduce the beholders to stray from the narrow path of faith by enticing them with alluring embodiments of the supernatural and by fixing their desire onto the material signifiers of an unrepresentable.

The stage players learnt the art of manipulating their audience's imaginations from their father, the devil, and their cousins, popish divines. These had taught them that the human mind is most susceptible to that which stimulates its organs of sensual perception and its imagination:

> Well knew the cunning contrivers of that policy [i.e. Roman Catholicism] how the greater part of the world is transported up and down by force of imagination. Therefore have they devised […a] Transubstantiation like a Metamorphosis, to please imagination; lives of Saints, like tales of the Queene of Fairies, to please imagination; orders of Friars of all colours, like the dreame of a Painters apron, to please imagination; Masses, Elevations, Processions, like Measures, Mummeries, Enterludes, and all to please imagination. [It follows that 'the Popish humour' is] a Religion merely Poeticall, Theatricall, Histrionicall.[108]

Miraculous transformations, wonderful stories, fancy dress, ritualised spectacles – these are the marks of the fraudulent kind of representation. It is immediately obvious why the theatre's enemies assumed that playgoers would enjoy a theatrical performance very much the same way they had enjoyed the celebration of an old-style mass. From their idolatrous inception to the present time, plays have been used by the devil to seduce the credulous: 'what are [plays] but a bastard of Babylon, a daughter of error and confusion, a hellish device (the divels owne recreation to mock at holy things) by him delivered to the Heathen, from them to the Papists, and from them to us'.[109] The pamphletists' references to the church fathers have a more immediate purpose than 'merely witlessly parroting their ancestors'. Pagans and papists pose the same sort of threat to the True Church and its struggle to maintain biblical forms of worship: 'The patristic charge of idolatry was one the Puritans could passionately revive, since it expressed so vividly their own hatred of traditional religion.'[110] Some of the hatred of the old religion is displaced onto the commercial theatre. Stage plays at the Globe or the Blackfriars, the Rose or the Red Bull were neither pagan nor Roman Catholic rites, but its representational techniques, its psychological efficacy and its emotional effects resembled these rites far too closely for comfort.

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[107] Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Masse*, 1559/1637, 70-71, 75 und 87.

[108] John Hoskins, *The Conclusion of the Rehearsal Sermon at Pauls Crosse*, 1614, 32-3.

[109] William Crashaw, *The Sermon Preached at the Crosse, 14 February 1607*, 1608.

[110] Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 88.

3.2.2 'Making circles about your imagination'

'The ttack on theatre had a close affinity to the denunciation of catholic worship as theatricality, just as the puritan polemic against magic and witchcraft connected with rejection of the Mass as a kind of conjuring and necromancy.'[111] Demonology is the third discourse that overlaps with the socio-cultural practice of play-acting on the one hand and the celebration of holy communion on the other hand. The devil had his finger in every pie that threatened the godly living and the salvation of English Protestants. He rejoices every time someone commits idolatry by worshipping a piece of wood or by believing that a piece of bread has miraculously transubstantiated into the body of Christ. In that stage plays, too, seduce actors and audiences to idolatry by representing and glorifying heathen gods, they also do the devil's work for him. But players are guilty of an even more insidious apostasy: the very nature of their occupation – shape-shifting, illusion-mongering – is demonic.[112] Satan's power over the natural, material world was limited by God's authority, but he was the unquestioned virtuoso of illusion – of 'as if': 'First, the Divell immediately by his suggestions allureth us to sinne, he being a spirite, by secret meanes can enter into the former parte of our braine, and there chop and chaunge our imaginations.'[113] A good actor has exactly the same effect of manipulating the minds of the beholders, 'as if the Personater were the man Personated, so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt'.[114] But while Heywood stresses the role model function that dramatic characters may have and uses the terms 'bewitch' and 'new mold' metaphorically to describe the envigorating effect a good actor may have on his audience, there is nothing metaphorical about the demonisation of playacting in the anti-theatrical polemics:

> The divel is not ignorant how mightilie these outward spectacles effeminate, & soften the hearts of men, vice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, & those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the players do counterfeit on the stage.[115]

Gosson has observed that players act out or imitate certain mental or emotional states that are conveyed to the spectators' minds. When he says that this happens 'secretly', he means that the process is strange, devious and inexplicable; just as Thomas Wright explains (or fails to explain) the strategy of the devil, who 'by secret meanes can enter into […] our braine'. Playgoing begins to sound like a kind

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111 Collinson, *Iconophobia*, 27.

112 A very detailed and in many ways exemplary analysis of the connections between theatre and demonology is provided by Henk Gras, *Studies in Elizabethan Audience Response to the Theatre,* vol. 1, *How Easy is a Bush Supposed a Bear? Actor and Character in the Elizabethan Viewer's Mind*, Zürich 1993, 123-97.

113 Sir Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde*, (1601), 294.

114 Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, B4r.

115 Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, G4r. Note that 'gazers' could be the plural form or the genetive, in which case the exchange is clearly one from mind to mind.

of demonic possession, a process in which the actor/devil gains access to and control over the playgoer's/victim's imagination and thus his mind and his subsequent actions:

> The *Poetes* that write playes, and they that present them upon the Stage, studie to make our affections overflow, whereby they draw the bridle from that parte of the mind, that should ever be curbed, from runninge on heade: which is manifest treason to our soules, and delivereth them captive to the devill.[116]

His fantasy unbridled and his desires unleashed, the playgoer is open to evil manipulation, like melted wax upon which the devil can print his mark.

In order to understand the fact that to many puritan observers, demonic and theatrical illusions had a more than merely metaphorical similarity, it is necessary to understand a little about early modern faculty psychology and why it was so extremely vulnerable to suggestion. The organs of sensual perception, primarily the eye and the ear, are essentially unable to distinguish between reality and appearance because they only ever receive the 'species' of things, never the substance itself. Like the impression of a seal upon wax, we take our sense impression as evidence of reality, even if what we thought we saw or heard is not really there. This weakness is Satan's opportunity: 'The outward senses be the doores and windowes of the soule, and unless good care be had thereto, the devill will enter by them and fill the soule with all corruption', William Perkins warns his readers in his tract *On Man's Imagination*.[117] The devil may have no power to transform material objects – nor does he need to:

> Notwithstanding, since the outward shape and figure, and proportion of any substance, and not the substance it selfe, or creature, is the true and naturall object of the eye, according to the *Philosopher* [ie. Aristotle], who truely saith, *Res non videtur, sed rerum species*; [...] it is possible to reason that the Divell in these supposed apparitions of the bodies and substances of dead men, may present true, reall, and naturall objects, certaine and assured unto the eye and sight, if hee can onely present them unto the outward lively pourtraitures and shapes of the substances or bodies, though the bodies themselves be away. That the Divell can doe this is no doubt.[118]

Since human understanding and relies on the information it receives from the imaginative faculty, the devil is not obliged to tamper with external reality. He can manipulate his victim by the simple expedient of infusing illusory 'forms', 'shapes' or 'figures' into her imagination, which she - possibly at the cost of her soul - will believe to correspond to external objects.

> Therefore a true testimonie may bee truely given, and justly accepted or taken of a lively shape, figure, likeness, or proportion, really presented (by the Art of the Divell) unto the eye. All the doubt then remaining, is, to put a true difference betweene that which our imagination doeth represent unto us, from within the braine, and that which wee see without by the outward sense.[119]

Early modern texts on perception offer no escape from this impasse. What we perceive with our senses may be imaginary, or it may be really and actually before us – the effect on us will be the same. We will

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[116] Gosson, *Playes Confuted*, F1v.

[117] Perkins, *On Man's Imagination*, 182.

[118] John Cotta, *The Tryall of Witchcraft*, Cambridge 1624 (1616), 39-40.

[119] Cotta, *Witchcraft*, 105.

take fright at a bush that looks like a bear in the moonlight; or we will desire the beautiful apparition that looks like Helen of Troy.

The devil's shows can thus be designated 'illusory', but this is of no help to anyone who comes into his clutches and is exposed to his machinations, because there is no certain procedure by which to make sure that the 'species' one receives in one's imaginative faculty emanate from an actual object: they may well be nothing more than delusions, without material substance. Even a ghost may be 'real', even though it has no substance. Hamlet knows that there is no way for him to tell whether 'the spirit that I have seen may be the devil'. A ghostly shape and a demonic shape would to him look exactly the same, 'for the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.600-605). He even knows that a melancholic soul and the sensitive, creative imagination of an artist are particularly susceptible to demonic suggestion. Robert Burton subsumes poets and painters among those melancholy men in whom 'this faculty [of imagination] is most Powerfull and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things', often under the influence of the devil: 'For he being a spirite, may hee not so ravishe their thoughes, and dull their sences, that […] hee may object to their spirites as it were in a dreame, and […] represente such formes of persones, of places, and other circumstances, as he pleases to illude them with?'[120] And having done this to one person, the devil may work even on a group or an assembly and 'illude such other persones so in that same fashion, whome with he makes them to believe that they mette'.[121] The meta-theatrical potential of this demonic discourse is evident. 'If we shadows [illusions, representations] have offended,' says a player (devil?) who for two hours has been assuming the pleasing shape of Puck, the fairy (and has so been giving off the 'species' of 'Puck' to the eyes, ears and imaginative faculty of the playgoers), 'Think but this, and all is mended: / That you have but slumbered here, / While these visions did appear' (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Epilogue 1-4).

EXORCISTS AND RAVISHERS OF SOULS

I now want to compare and contrast two rhetorical exercises that also blend assumptions about theatre, demonology and semiotic confusion, but in two completely different contexts, with completely different intentions. The first context is Anglican polemics against puritan and Roman Catholic exorcists; the second context is tribute paid to stage actors and playwrights for their professional skills, for instance in prefaces or obituaries. It will appear that while anti-theatrical writers create a metonymical association between stage playing and idolatry/demonology (the devil as the causer and beneficiary of the theatre), anti-exorcist writers and poets and actors themselves create a merely

[120] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner et al., Oxford, 1989, 1.1.2.7.

[121] King James, *Daemonologie*, 41, see also 74. James is of course talking about witches' covens.

metaphorical link between them. And yet even these two metaphorical discourses aim to persuade their readers of two almost diametrically opposed views of theatrical impersonation.

Thanks to perceptive studies by Stephen Greenblatt, Frank Brownlow, Marion Gibson and others, the phenomenon of early modern exorcism and the Anglican reaction against it is now familiar enough to allow quite a brief summary.[122] When, after the Elizabethan 'settlement', the established church found its authority in spiritual matters challenged by itinerant non-conforming clergymen who relieved alleged victims of demonic possession from their burdens in hugely popular performances of exorcism, it fought back by exposing these exorcists as 'egregious impostors'. Since miracles had ceased, it was never an option for Anglican ministers to enter into competition with non-conforming clergy to see which of them had more power over the demonic spirit that was tormenting an innocent soul. Trouncing radicals and recusants, when an important point of doctrine was to be made, had to be achieved by debunking. This rhetorical deflation-by-metaphor took the predictable path: 'the Pope, and his spirits he sendeth in here amongst you, do play Almighty God, his sonne, and Saints upon a stage; do make a pageant of the Church, the blessed Sacraments, the rites and ceremonies of religion; do cog and coine devils, spirits, and soules departed this life'. Thus Samuel Harsnett, chaplain to the Bishop of London, in his address "To the Seduced Catholiques of England" in the case of the Jesuit exorcisms in Denham, Buckinghamshire. 'Popish Impostures' are always theatrically fraudulent, whether they claim to transform cake into Christ at the altar, or to rid a soul of its alleged possession. 'And who can but bleede in hart to see you as farre bewitched on our imposturising renegadoes that come fresh from the Popes tyring house, masked with the vizard of holy burning zeale?'[123] Obviously the pope and his agents/actors ('spirits') have not turned thespian, but they are using the same juggling tricks and sleight-of-hand manoeuvres as of old.

Greenblatt explains that Harsnett vilifies performances of exorcism as fraudulent, disingenuous shows because 'he needs an explanatory model, at once metaphor and analytical tool, by which all beholders will see fraud where once they saw God'.[124] These 'acts' are worse than actual stage plays, because a stage play openly declares its theatricality. An exorcist's show pretends to be reality, when in fact it is

> a Comedy, wherein the Actors, which present themselves, are these, A crafty old man, teaching the feats and pranks of counterfeiting a person Demoniacal and possessed of the Devil; the next, a most docible, subtle, and expert young Boy, far more dextrous in the *Practique part*, than his Master was in the *Theory*; after him appear three Romish Priests, the Authors of seducement, conjuring their only imaginary Devils,

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[122] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations. The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Oxford, 1988; Frank B. Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett and the Devils of Denham*, Newark, 1993; and Marion Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print. Darrell, Harsnett, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Exorcism Controversy*, London, 2006.

[123] Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), in: Brownlow, *Devils of Denham*, 196-7.

[124] Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 106.

> which they brought with them; and lastly, a Chorus of credulous people easily seduced, not so much by the subtlety of those Priests, as by their own sottishness.[125]

This 'theatre review' issued from the quill of the Protestant preacher Richard Baddeley, who wrote to refute the Catholic account of the notorious - and notoriously 'fake' - case of demonic possession and subsequent exorcism recorded as *The Boy of Bilson or, A True Discovery of the Late Notorious Impostures of Certaine Romish Priests in Their Pretended Exorcisme* (1622). Baddeley implies that although the 'Comedy' was a flat, hollow affair, the audience's highly emotional response is a deplorable fact impossible to gainsay. It would be most convenient to blame it on their gullibility - their *desire* to be gulled - but this verdict is qualified somewhat by the adjectives with which he describes the actors: 'crafty', 'subtle', 'expert' and 'dextrous' are back-handed compliments, certainly, but they testify to a skill which excuses the audience's enchantment to some extent. The fact that skilful performance involves a 'Theory', handed down to beginners, as well as the actual 'Practique part' seems to make it more, not less, devious and disreputable.[126]

To achieve their purpose of demystifying exorcisms, Baddeley has to be sure to express a thoroughly sober, unalluring view of the theatre. If he allowed stage acting even a little glamour, even just a little 'magic', this would reflect on the spectacles of demonic possession and exorcism, and his project would fail. The parallels Baddeley sets up actually fuse both practices in a sort of metaphor, in which the *tertium comparationis* is the enchantment of spectators by skilled, manipulative operators. The commonly perceived difference between them – that exorcism involves the devil, theatre does not – is dissolved. Both involve various kinds of specialist knowledge, both are hierarchically ordered, both involve presenters and spectators, both share the declared purpose of impressing these spectators, in fact, of 'seducing' them. The essential similarity between exorcism and stage acting is that both rely on illusions to create an imaginary reality in the minds of their audiences. The spectators' imagination is to be impressed with 'shapes', 'figures' or 'species' that will work on their affections and passions as if the species were evidence of objective external reality. In fact, however, they emanate from merely illusory scenes, enacted by players whose material bodies have been trained to deceive even the sharpest onlookers.

Writers like Harsnett or Baddeley, who aimed to dispel the aura of the supernaturally strange and potent that surrounded demonic possessions and exorcisms, encouraged their readers not to be deluded by the signified fiction but to focus rigorously on the material means of signification, the actors. Dozens of dramatic insets in Elizabethan and Jacobean stage plays testify to the fact that as far

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[125] [Richard Baddeley], *The Boy of Bilson; or, A True Discovery of the Late Notorious Impostures of Certain Romish Priests in Their Pretended Exorcism*, London, 1622 (emphases, added.), quoted in Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 601-2. For an account of events, see Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 2004, chap. 8.

[126] Baddeley is using the terms ironically, of course, but they chime with Gosson's statement that plays are 'the *doctrine* and invention of the devil'.

as playwrights and players were concerned, this kind of advice to audiences was at best precarious, at worst disastrous. Nothing could destroy a performance as effectively as an audience that was not prepared to fuse their perception of the material signifier (the actor) with the fiction of the character (Pompey) into the real-seeming illusion of the actor-in-character:

> *Enter* COSTARD *for Pompey.*
> Costard. I Pompey am –
> Berowne. You lie, you are not he. (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.540SD-1)

Here I return to my suggestion at the beginning of this chapter that early modern actors could only ever feel ambivalent about developing a 'Protestant dramaturgy'. For one thing, there is far too much dramatic and non-dramatic evidence that they liked to beautify themselves with the mantle of uncanny illusion-mongers. To be sure, Sir Philip Sidney earnestly affirmed that

> The poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes. [...] What child is there, that, coming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes?[127]

In fact, playwrights and players were extremely pleased to read of themselves that they succeeded in making circles about the audience's imagination; and 'conjuring' is one of the most popular metaphors used to describe the realisation of a theatrical fiction. Ben Jonson's homage to the dead Shakespeare itself takes the form of a conjuration: the poet conjures the spirit of another poet, who is said to have charmed his audience:

> Soul of the age!
> The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!
> My Shakespeare, rise! [...]
> [...] like Apollo he came forth to warm
> Our eyes, or like a Mercury to charm![128]

Jonson describes the same impact on the audience as an enemy of the theatre might, but from him, it becomes a commendation. Next to the almost paranoid warnings of the indiscriminate forwarding of visual impressions by the eyes - 'There commeth much evil in at the eares, but more at the eyes, by these two open windowes death breaketh into the soule.'[129] - his choice of phrase to remember plays able 'to warm our eyes' is heart-warming in its affectionate simplicity. But Shakespeare is not the only demon writer. Robert Herrick commends John Fletcher in a similar vein:

> So that when 'ere wee circumvolve our Eyes,
> Such rich, such fresh, such sweet varieties,
> Ravish our spirits, that entranced wee see

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[127] Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. J. A. van Dorsten, Oxford 1966, 52-3.

[128] Ben Jonson, quoted in *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Oxford 1988, xlv.

[129] Munday, *Second and Third Blast*, 95-6.

> None writes love's passion in the world, like Thee.[130]

This - in this context pleasurable - experience of being 'ravished' and 'entranced' is at times described as an experience of admiration or wonder:

> So have I seen, when Caesar would appear,
> And on the stage at half-parley were,
> Brutus and Cassius; O how the audience
> Were ravished, with what wonder they went thence.[131]

Samuel Harsnett explains that exorcist spectacles are not quite the same as miracles - '*mirandum & non miraculum*', but they resemble each other in that 'both terms spring from one root of wonder or marvel: an effect which a thing strangely done doth procure in the minds of the beholders, as being above the reach of reason and nature'.[132] 'Strangely', 'secretly' – those are the words used to describe both the devil's and the actor's sway over their 'victims'. Playwrights, too, have an effect on audiences that seems to leave no doubt that they do things 'strangely'. This goes for John Fletcher: 'Thus he Affections could, or raise or lay; / Love, Griefe and Mirth thus did his Charmes obey.'[133] And it goes for Shakespeare, who was able

> [t]o strike up and down both joy and ire;
> To steer th'affections, and by heavenly fire
> Mold us anew; stol'n from ourselves - [134]

The affections of the spectators, closely interrelated with their imaginations, are likened to spirits the writers can conjure at will by the power of their dramatic fictions. The spectators are caught in a state of transformative ecstasy. The emphasis lies squarely on their passivity and their helplessness at the hands of the playwrights - a passivity and helplessness for which they have paid money, of course, which clearly distinguishes them from the devil's victims.

What was praise for the writer seems to have been praise for the actor, too. Like the devil, a good actor can assume pleasing shapes and allure the audience with real-seeming illusions - but the actor, unlike the devil, is celebrated for it:

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[130] Quoted by Richard Levin, 'The Relation of External Evidence to the Allegorical and Thematic Interpretation of Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Studies* 13 (1980), 1-29, 11.

[131] Leonard Digges, from a poem perhaps intended for Shakespeare's second folio, quoted in Wells and Taylor, *Complete Works*, xlviii.

[132] Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 100.

[133] Levin, 'External Evidence', 18.

[134] I. M. S., quoted in Wells and Taylor, *Complete Works*, xlvii.

> I have seen a Proteus, that can take
> What shape he please, and in an instant make
> Himself to anything; be that or this,
> By voluntary metamorphosis.
> When thou dost act, man think it not a play
> But all they see is reall.[135]

John Webster, if it was indeed he, observes in his 'Character of an Excellent Actor' that an actor who has 'lent' a dramatic character his 'substance' can make illusion appear like reality, 'for what wee see him personate, we thinke truly done before us: a man of deepe thought might apprehend, the ghost of our ancient *heroes* walk't againe, and take him (at several times) for many of them'.[136] A man of 'deep thought' - is that a spectator who loses sight, for a moment, of the fact that he is in the theatre, and who imagines himself 'inside' the fictional scene, to meet his national heroes in the flesh? It requires a certain state of mind to take the illusion for real, but it does not seem to be one that is hard to achieve when the spectator is confronted by actors as good as the ones Webster has in mind.[137]

In terms of more or less conventional flattery, the honorary title of conjuror, magus, even demon was thought to be very much acceptable to playwrights; and playgoers were fully prepared to *imagine*, if not to *believe* that they were in Thebes, or in Rome, or in Illyria, should the theatrical illusion demand it of them:

> fearful at plots so sad,
> Then laughing at our fear; abused, and glad
> To be abused, affected with that truth
> Which we perceive is false; pleased in that ruth
> At which we start, and by elaborate play
> Tortured and tickled.[138]

Theatre is play, and the roles in this play are set: the dramatists and actors play at bewitching the audience, 'moving and altering their spirits', 'stealing them from themselves; the spectators play at being 'ravished' by the show, particularly the verse and the skilled impersonations by the actors, which allow them to engage emotionally and imaginatively with the fiction. Like the devil, a good actor was said to assume pleasing shapes and to enchant the audience with his 'art', with real-seeming illusions - but the actor, unlike the devil, was praised for it.

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[135] Thomas Randolph on Thomas Riley in 1632, quoted in Levin, 'External Evidence', 20.

[136] In: *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Sir Thomas Overbury, Knight*, ed. Edward F. Rimbault, London 1890, 147-48, Webster's emphasis.

[137] There is a tradition of assuming that Webster is talking about Richard Burbage when he continues that "tis a question whether [his painting] make him an excellent player, or his playing an exquisite painter', *ibid.*, 148.

[138] I. M. S., quoted in Wells and Taylor, *Complete Plays*, xlvii.

3.3 Entering the Fiction: *Doctor Faustus*

How and to what purpose did playwrights work these discursive intersections of demonology, idolatry and meta-theatre into their plays? Once again we are confronted with Stephen Greenblatt's candid admission that 'we duly note the allusion […], but the question is what work the allusion is doing'.[139] William Haughton's *Englishmen for my Money* (1598), to chose an almost random example from among the plays I have written about in this book, is strewn with random-seeming terms from demonology and necromancy to describe disguise, role-playing and impersonation; and yet the play has no coherent interest in issues of representation or in demonology that I can detect. One of the sisters' suitors gains access to their house dressed as their tutor:

> then discribe this Cloake,
> This Beard and Hatte: for in this borrowed shape,
> Must I beguile and over-reach the Foole [i.e. the blocking father] (303-5)

The girls' father, Pisaro, hits on the scheme of sending his continental bridegrooms-elect to the girls, disguised as the girls' English lovers:

> How say you sirs, what will you have a jest worth the telling; nay worth the acting [?]
> [...] each one shall change his name:
> Maister Vandalle, you shall take Heigham, and you
> Younge Harvey, and monsieur Delion Ned,
> And under shadowes be of substance sped. (1187-8 and 1206-9)

Laurentia disguises herself as the servant Anthony to escape her father's house, her father questions the witnesses:

> Pisaro. How say you maister Browne, went he not forth?
> Browne. Hee, or his likenesse did, I know not whether.
> Pisaro. What likenesse can there be besides himselfe?
> Laur. My selfe (forsooth) that tooke his shape upon me. (1597-2600)

Later, the clown offers a demonological pun to inform Pisaro that his daughter has had sex with her suitor: 'What say I? Marry, say I, if shee lay not heere, there was a familiar in her likenesse; for I am sure my Maister and she were so familiar togeather' (2639-40). William Haughton was not a particularly gifted playwright, but his parody of John Stow's *Survey of London* shows that he had an ear out for what would appeal to playgoers.[140] I can only interpret the demonological allusions in his play as evidence of the fact – borne out by a score of surviving play texts – that referring to shape-shifting and shadow-play was still an amusing convention in the late 1590s. Haughton may also be making the rather familiar point that the streets of London were not only a stage but also a kind of hell, in which role-playing is

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[139] Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Mousetrap' in *Practising New Criticism*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, Chicago, 2000, 136-162, 151.

[140] See Part 2, chapter

always cunning and devious. Jacobean city comedy would explore this suggestion rather more thoroughly than he does.

Representations of hell and devils in early modern drama have been read as central elements of 'a language through which to indict and criticize the social system within which he [i.e. the devil] had to work'.[141] In city comedy, the devil becomes literally the 'familiar' of city-dwellers in that they are shown to be even more cunning, devious, unscrupulous than he. Hell, playwrights like Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton seem to suggest, is other people; and the devil is quite out of his depth in metropolitan life, the entertainment business, the morass of patronage and the abyss of destitution. Role-playing and pretence characterise this satirically distorted world, 'the decidedly theatrical conjunction of London and Hell'.[142]

I am less interested in representations of devils on stage – although Mephistopheles remains the most famous devil of literary history, always excepting Milton's Satan himself – than in the sense in which hell is both 'a fable' (that is, the staged fiction of the playwright's invention) and an imaginary space, a state of consciousness, without limits: 'for where we are is hell, / And where hell is, there must we ever be' (*Faustus*, 2.1.124-5). The magic circle of the wooden O, peopled with 'raisèd spirits', is an anti-church in which fictions (i.e. 'lies') to rival God's reality (i.e. 'truth') become an imagined (and therefore subjectively real) experience for the playgoers. In a culture that set Truth against Appearance along the same lines that it set God against Satan, the playhouse is necessarily a 'diabolical' space: 'As God did raise up his holy men and Prophets, that being inspired with the holy Ghost might declare his will, and by force of miracles winne the more credite: So hath the Divell his conjurers, his witches, his figure flingers and his sourcerers, with the spirite of illusion to worke straunge effects.'[143] The theatre is a place of seduction; and we would not be there in the first place if we were not willing to be seduced. It is our passions, our illicit desires, our unfulfilled and unfulfillable yearnings that drive us into the theatre in the hope of finding gratuitous satisfaction; but they are also the impulses that destroy our peace of mind and thus create a hell for ourselves. When Faustus steps into the magic circle to conjure the spirit that is to satisfy his deepest and darkest wishes, we – the playgoers in the Rose – are already there.

Basically, a playgoer has three angles of perception in the theatre. First, he can keep his attention strictly on the signifiers/actors instead of the signified/fiction. In this case, theatre fails – as Shakespeare's amateur actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost* find to their cost. The fault may lie with spectators unwilling to cooperate, or it may lie with incompetent actors – sometimes both,

141 Twyning, *London Dispossessed*, 129.

142 Twyning, *London Dispossessed*, 171.

143 Calfhill, *Martiall*, 2.

because as Theseus and Hippolyta observe about bad actors: 'the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.' The caveat: 'It must be your imagination then, and not theirs' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.212-4). Shakespeare seems to have been fascinated with questions of 'faith', not just between spouses, as in *Othello*, but also in the delicate relation between actors and audience. 'It is required / You do awake your faith' Paulina tells the audience before she 'effects' the 'miracle' of the resurrection of Hermione (*A Winter's Tale*, 5.2.94-5); and her words echo Protestant eucharistic doctrine: 'Sayest thou then the mean to receive the body and blood of Christ standeth upon faith?' – 'Yea,' is the answer in Alexander Nowell's *Catechism* of 1570.[144] The demand for verisimilitude is weighed against the beholders' willingness to enter upon a quasi-religious experience.

At the other extreme is the playgoer who forgets that he is sitting at a play. This is Harsnett's gullible spectators at an 'exorcism', or an audience 'ravished' or 'new moulded' by the actor's consummate skills of impersonation. Of the two extremes, this is the one actors will prefer, because it gives them power over their audience. So they must make their illusions seem real, risking the comparison with/to shape-shifting devils and conjuring necromancers. How are they going to fashion their shows so that their beholders are 'drawn into' the presented fiction and do not indulge themselves by criticising the means of presentation? Marlowe's exploration of this meta-theatrical issue focuses on a protagonist who, at different points in the play, is seen as a presenter and, later, as a spectator of demonic shows – and not just a spectator but an uncritical, bewitched spectator who loses sight not only of the fact that what he sees is an illusion, not reality, but also of the fact that the actors are demonic 'spirits'. Faustus' decline from presenter (or even 'producer', in his own estimation) to ravished spectator exactly follows his degeneration from neo-platonic magus to witch. As a necromancer with arcane knowledge, he controls demons; as a witch, he is controlled by them.[145]

All of the dramatic insets in *Doctor Faustus* involve devil-actors. That alone will have alerted audiences to the concentrated attention to meta-theatrical questions in the play. These actors are not 'like' devils in their crafty illusion-mongering; there is no metaphorical ambivalence here. This looks like a dramatisation of anti-theatrical polemics: these actors *are* devils. The first magic feat Faustus wants to perform after he has signed the contract with the devil is that of producing demonic shows: 'But may I raise such spirits when I please?' (2.1.86). This is the main point of contact, but also of rivalry, between magic and theatre in *Doctor Faustus*: both centre around the re-

144 Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism, or First Instruction of Christian Religion* (1570), 75.

145 In fact, Marlowe's audiences would have understood that Faustus is never anything but a witch: he is approaches by the devil when he demonstrate the vulnerability of his soul by calling on devil, sells his soul in return for devil-assisted power and cannot accomplish any magic feats on his own – although he thinks he can. This is the typical early modern witch narrative, cf. Dekker's and Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1622), which takes an equally sharp at witchcraft, but not from a meta-theatrical but from a sociological point of view.

presentation of human beings, mostly of historical or mythological personages. Magic can conjure the dead to wondrous effect -

> Have not I made blind Homer sing to me
> Of Alexander's love and Oenone's death?
> And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes
> With ravishing sound of his melodious harp
> Made music with my Mephistopheles? (2.3.24-8)

- but so can the theatre, 'for what wee see [the actor] personate, we thinke it truly done before us; a man of a deepe thought might apprehend, the ghost of our ancient heroes walked againe, and take him (at several times) for many of them'.[146] Theatrical 'conjuration' was a conceit so well-known that not only university-educated playwrights would use it to a court audience - 'Whatsoever we present, we wish it may be thought the daunsing of Agrippa his shadowes, who in the moment they were seene, were of any shape one woulde conceive' – but the lowliest water-bearer who fancies himself a *magus*: 'I thinke I never name her,' say Simplicity in *Three Ladies and Three Lords of London* about his wife, Penury, 'but it conjures her, look where she comes' (417-8).[147]

Apart from conjuration, the rivalry of theatre and demonic magic in *Doctor Faustus* manifests itself in other, equally wonderful feats, such as legs coming off, horns appearing and disappearing on courtier foreheads, and the good old 'robe for to go invisible'.[148] In all of these, theatre is celebrated at the same time as magic is deflated. The effect depends entirely upon the spectators' perspective. If they keep their minds and - this will turn out to be a major factor - their imaginations engaged with the fiction, the events onstage will seem magical and wondrous. But if they keep their eyes on the actors, the properties and the set, the tricks will be clever and entertaining at best, possibly merely flat and frustrating. 'some comic transformations presumably occur for the audience to see. [...] the transformations [...] are to be achieved by means of masks. The actors' ludicrous apelike and doglike gestures would also help create the illusion, of course'.[149] Stage craft helps to create the illusion – and helps to break it, too. This ambivalence is at the very heart of Marlowe's exploration of theatrical representation.

The first time the play shows Faustus using Mephistopheles to conjure spirits in a large way is at Emperor Charles V's court (4.1). Before, for his private delectation, Faustus was content to have Homer sing of the heroes of classical mythology; now they are to appear in their own shapes, as a

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146 'The Character of an Excellent Actor,' *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Sir Thomas Overbury, Knight*, ed. Edward F. Rimbault, London, 1890, 148.

147 John Lyly, *Campaspe*, 'Prologue at Court' (January 1584), *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. Richard Warwick Bond, London, 1902, 316.

148 As listed by Henslowe among his props and costumes, see Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*, Oxford, 2000, 54.

149 *Doctor Faustus*, B-text, 3.3.44-9, note.

proper theatrical representation. The two versions of the text vary significantly in the design of these scenes, but both versions express a valid dramatic purpose; neither of the two can with any justification be called inferior.[150]

The Chorus of the 1604 version distances the audience momentarily from 'Faustus' fortunes' in order to reflect on his rise to fame, and, perhaps, to introduce an ironic note. 'What there [ie. at court] he did, in trial of his art, / I leave untold, your eyes shall see performed' (4.1.16-17). Marlowe's play is half peopled by demons and demonic apparitions: how reliable is eye-witness experience when the devil is in it? What our eyes will actually see performed in the remainder of the play until Faustus' death is either a devil organising frivolous entertainments for an increasingly desperate man who has almost used up his twenty-four years, or theatrical trickery, false legs and stuck-on heads. The word 'performed' has become ironically loaded, too, by now; does it mean 'done', 'represented' or 'faked'? The audience are prodded to consider the difference between what their eyes will see on stage and what they will imagine in their minds, and to ask themselves which of the two deserves the name of 'reality' or 'truth.'

Emperor Charles V explains at length why he would like Faustus to present Alexander the Great and his paramour to him: Charles has appropriated Alexander as his ancestor and is suffering from feelings of inferiority towards that legendary hero. These, he implies, would be soothed - and his personal connections with Alexander strengthened - if he had the chance to see him with his own eyes. The act of seeing serves to allay curiosity and to express admiration, and it is also a mild way of further appropriation. Poetic licence has no place in the history lesson Charles has in mind. He desires Faustus to

> raise this man from hollow vaults below,
> […]
> And bring with him his beauteous paramour,
> Both in their right shapes, gesture, and attire
> They used to wear during their time of life. (A 4.1.36-40)

His heroes are to appear exactly as they looked in real life; in other words, he demands a mimetic illusion. He would not be satisfied if Faustus showed him two devils in skirts and sandals and told him to imagine that these are Alexander and his ladylove. He wants verisimilitude in body, manner, movements and dress. Faustus does not baulk at the request of external authenticity, but he feels obliged to point out that

> it is not in my ability to present before your eyes the true substantial bodies of those two deceased princes [...] But such spirits as can lively resemble Alexander and his paramour shall appear before your grace, in that manner that they best lived in, in their most flourishing estate. (A 4.1.47-56)

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[150] Bevington and Rasmussen offer an excellent comparison of the A-text (1604) and the more elaborate B-text (1616) in their introduction to the Revels edition. They suggest that A is closer to Marlowe's own version of the play, but this cannot be finally decided.

The stage direction and his next speech do not indicate how much time the imperial spectator spends looking, perhaps marvelling, at the apparitions; but when he speaks, it is not to express wonder or amazement. His interest still lies firmly in the verisimilitude of the figures and on the historical knowledge he may gain from them: 'I heard this lady, while she lived, had a wart or mole in her neck: how shall I know whether it be so or no? - Your highness may boldly go and see,' Faustus concedes. Charles rises from his throne to do so and is satisfied: 'Sure, these are no spirits, but the true substantial bodies of those two deceased princes.' (A 4.1.68-70). Since there is nothing to indicate that Charles loses his head over this demonic show, this last remark – which sounds so much like popish idolatry – is just a metaphorical compliment of the kind habitually found in obituaries for actors. The show seems real, but ravishment and entrancement do not enter into this idea of theatre. Faustus organises a very satisfying theatrical impersonation; but since he concentrates on details of mimesis, the spectator manages to remain fairly detached.

In fact, Marlowe's Emperor displays an attitude towards theatrical representation that is distinctly Protestant. In that stresses the naturalistic, indeed verisimilar, appearance of the conjured spirits, is also the most 'orthodox' dramatic inset in the play, the one that is intended as a kind of history lesson, not as an embodied fantasy. When an actor speaks, Richard Baker reflects in pro-theatrical *Theatrum Redivivum*, 'he is but a Storie; (and therefore perhaps a Player is called Histrio, quasi Historio) […] a Historie in person'.[151] But history is, by definition, true; so the representation of history is legitimate. Even such stern a puritan as William Perkins agreed: 'We hold the historical use of images to be good and lawful: and that is, to represent to the eye the acts of histories, whether they be human, or divine: and thus we think the histories of the Bible many be painted in private places.'[152] Mimetic theatrical representation of historical people, this scene in the A-text of *Doctor Faustus* also clarifies, is not dangerous to the soul, because it focuses the spectators on what they can see and in that sense on what is 'true'. It also stresses, however, that the spectators must be motivated to restrict themselves to take in merely what their eyes can see and their ears can hear: 'my words only, not your fantasies', to invert Faustus' own confession of what has 'won [him] over to Cornelius' and Valdes' experiments in black magic (A 1.1.105).

In the B-text, Emperor Charles is a much more excitable playgoer. The beginning of the scene is dominated by the political material added to the 1616 version. Faustus' visit at the court is introduced not by a Chorus but by a group of German noblemen who discuss Faustus' reputation and his late patriotic action. The almost subliminal reservations of the Chorus in A are much extended and personified in the courtier Benvolio, who is positioned '*above at a window, in his nightcap*' (4.1.23 SD). He remains on the balcony for the whole scene and bandies sceptical remarks with the audience and with

[151] Baker, *Theatrum Redivivum*, 42-3.

[152] Perkins, *The Reformed Catholique*, quoted in Aston, *Iconoclasts*, 451.

Faustus, in very distinct contrast to the Emperor below. This Charles immediately outs himself as a spectator of common Elizabethan tastes. Verisimilitude is only one aspect of the treat he is anticipating:

> We would behold that famous conqueror
> Great Alexander and his paramour
> In their true shapes and state majestical,
> That we may wonder at their excellence. (B 4.1.75-8)

Does he want to see the ghosts of his ancestors, or a popular stage play? 'Wonder' is an Elizabethan key-term in remarks on the effects of theatre, especially before the turn of the century; 'state majestical' sounds more like a demand for rich costume than for historically authentic dress, and 'excellence' can mean 'surpassing splendour' but also 'superior (acting) skills'. Faustus' request that 'Your Grace demand no question of the king, / But in dumb silence let them come and go' (95-6) takes account of the precarious nature of the process of conjuration; but it is just as familiar as the first rule of behaviour for theatre audiences. Erasmus writes in *The Praise of Folly* that

> If anyone tries to take the masks off the actors when they're playing a scene on the stage and show their true, natural faces to the audience, he'll certainly spoil the whole play and deserve to be stoned and thrown out of the theatre for a maniac. [...] To destroy the illusion is to ruin the whole play, for it's really the illusion and make-up which hold the audience's eye.[153]

The demonic apparitions of Alexander and Oenone in the B-text do not merely present themselves, they perform a spectacular little dumbshow. With a protagonist, an antagonist, a struggle, victory *and* some love interest, the plot includes all the elements a structuralist would demand for a narrative. Perhaps it is the drive of the plot, perhaps the state of mind he had expressed right from the beginning that incites in Charles the desire to touch: '*... both salute the* [*German*] *Emperor, who, leaving his state, offers to embrace them, which Faustus seeing suddenly stays him.*' (102 SD 5-7). But Charles is not driven by an urge to destroy the illusion, like Erasmus' spoilsport spectator, on the contrary:

> My thoughts are so ravishèd
> With sight of this renownèd emperor
> That in mine arms I would have compassed him.(105-7)

Charles is any Elisabethan Puritan's perfect case study on the damning effects of theatre.

> It is marvelous to consider how the gesturing of a plaier, which Tullie termeth the eloquence of the bodie, is of force to move, and prepare a man to that which is il. [...] Whereby a double offence is committed; first by those dissolute plaiers, [...] secondly by the beholders, which vouchsalfe to heare and behold such filthie things, to the great losse both of themselves and the time.[154]

With the promptness of a reflex action, Charles proceeds to imitate in his own life the indecencies he saw performed in the show: he saw Alexander embrace his mistress and straight rises from his throne to embrace them both. An alternative, but no less worrying explanation for his behaviour would be that, overwhelmed with desire and passion, Charles instinctively tries to cope with the illusion by

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[153] Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, ed. A.H.T. Levi, Harmondsworth, 1971, 44.

[154] Munday, *Second and Third Blasts*, 95

literally 'grasping' it. He commits a breach of convention by approaching the personating figures, but the very evident analogy between demonic and theatrical illusions leaves no doubt that more is at stake here than etiquette: Charles is out of himself, in a state of ecstasy, 'ravishèd'; and Faustus recognises at once that this is a fundamental threat to his sense of self : 'My gracious lord, you do forget yourself' (103).

As in the A-text, Charles then checks whether the female apparition sports a mole on its neck. In an interesting contrast to A, it is not the apparition that is to be authenticated but the historical report: 'How may I prove that saying to be true?' (113). The mimetic accuracy of the shapes is no issue at all for this ravished spectator. Following his attempt to embrace it, Faustus' encouragement to 'boldly go and see '(114) is very poignant. Even a noble spectator, a ruler in whose empire the sun never set, may merely see but not touch the demonic/theatrical illusion. This scene is far more a lesson in play-watching than in magic conjuring. Against the spectator's desire to be ravished, to be carried away by the fiction, is pitted the adamant rule that he must be quiet and keep his distance, physically if not emotionally. The part of the spectator demands a constant deferral of gratification, even a denial of gratification. His role is a passive one; he bears no part in the creation of the fiction, except to lend it a kind of reality by responding with real passions. This physiological response to theatrical stimulation is only natural: Absent objects arouse passions in the heart, but 'when the objects are present, and possessed by sense, then the passions inhabite, not onely the heart, but also are stirred up in every parte of the bodie'.[155]

Anti-theatrical writers habitually regurgitated the observation that theatre enchants, bewitches, ravishes - the authors of the B-text take these observations seriously and dramatise the implications. What happens when a spectator is 'ravished'? He wants to take (a) part. He wants to enter the fiction. In the A-text this scene at the imperial court is designed as a *contrast* to the conjuration of Helen of Troy; its Jacobean revisers, however, changed its emphases so that it parallels and *foreshadows* the later scene. In both versions, as a presenter of demonic shows to the German emperor, Faustus is completely in charge. He supervises the proceedings and interferes to prevent his audience from confusing illusion with reality.

One act and an unspecified number of years later, Faustus himself has lost the ability, or the will, to distinguish illusion from reality. Perhaps his increasing despair has made him reckless; perhaps he has consorted too long with the devil. Virtue in the figure of the nameless Old Man had brought Faustus to the edge of repentance, but Mephistopheles has bullied him into renewing the bond between himself and Lucifer. As in earlier moments of - perverted - spiritual crisis, Faustus distracts himself with a demonic spectacle. But by now he is no longer satisfied with watching the show. The

[155] Wright, *Passions of the Minde*, 63.

sensation of sight is no longer strong enough to counter his feelings of fear and remorse; he requires a heavier sedative:

> That I may have unto my paramour
> That heavenly Helen, which I saw of late,
> Whose sweet embraces may extinguish clear
> Those thought that do dissuade me from my vow. (B 5.1.87-90)

In striking contrast to Emperor Charles in the A-text, Faustus is not interested at all in verisimilar detail. What he has read of her, what he has imagined of her, and what he can see before him are at once fused into a vision of irresistible wonder. He loses touch with reality altogether; all he can see is the spirit - and his own spirit, which he exchanges with the demon: 'Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!' (97). As with the Emperor of the B version, it is action or narrative that draws the spectator into the fiction. Faustus is not content to look, not even to embrace or kiss; he will re-enact the stories of classical mythology, that bottomless tub of fantastic material. 'I will be Paris, and for love of thee / Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked' (101-2). And as with the Emperor, his impulse is as contradictory as it is overwhelming: he wants to touch the illusion, reduce it to his own material level and make it come true that way; at the same time he envisions himself as taking a part in the illusion. Faustus fulfils himself the ultimate desire of the ravished playgoer; he 'enters' the theatrical fiction: 'Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. [...] And none but you shall be my paramour' (96 and 113).[156] The very real threat this poses to Faustus' soul is brought home to the audience at the Fortune by the fact that Helen of Troy is not only a theatrical fiction, she is also a demonic illusion; and Faustus should know this better than anyone else: 'neyther soules nor bodyes can appeare to Conjurers, but by a figure or a shadow of illusion, so far as it may take a seeming colour, by the practice of our enemy'.[157] But Faustus has forgotten that one must watch these illusion 'in dumb silence' and 'let them go'. In performance, the meta-theatrical poignancy of Faustus' delusion may be accentuated by making the spirit that presents Helen of Troy look exactly like the 'Devil *dressed like a woman*' whom Faustus had rejected for a 'hot whore' in 2.1. She might be as ugly as hell, but in his advanced state of despair, Faustus he sees an embodiment of his desire:

> An illusion is a worke of Satan, whereby he deludeth or deceiveth man. And it is two-fold; either of the outward senses, or of the minde. An illusion of the outward senses, is a worke of the devil, whereby he makes a man to thinke that he heareth, seeth, feeleth or toucheth such things as indeede he doth not.[158]

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[156] The 1967 film version of the play, directed by Richard Burton and Nevill Coghill, with Burton in the title role, realises this aspect of the illusions quite wonderfully. The Seven Deadly Sins are not merely a show that Faustus watches, he walke among them in a kind of garden and joins in an imaginary battle envisioned for him by Pride, speaking lines from *Tamburlaine* ('and ride in triumph through Persepolis'); Lechery speaks lines from *Edward II* (Gaveston's vision of pages dressed like 'sylvan nymphs' and 'a lovely boy in Dian's shape'). So this Faustus may not just fantasise about emulating the heroes of classical mythology but also the heroes of Marlovian drama. – All of the visions presented to Faustus have a dreamlike, visually distorted quality as he mingles with the spirits, while Alexander the Great and his paramour are quiet, dignified, non-threatening to their courtly audience.

[157] Henry Howard, *A Defensative Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophesies*, London 1583 (2nd ed. 1620), 89.

[158] Perkins, *Damned Art of Witchcraft*, 22-3.

All the tricks of the theatre, the squibs and fireworks, the pained cloths and machinery, the costumes and the might lines – impressive and entertaining as they are – do not pose a threat to the wary and pious beholder. Conversely, the flattest and most mundane presentation might trigger self-delusion and desperate acts in a beholder who comes to the playhouse in search to fulfil more essential desires, to assuage a deeper longing for mystical participation. Faustus dreams of himself as a Greek hero-warrior; but what the spectators see - and here they share Mephistopheles' perspective - is a witch enthralled by a succubus.[159] The distinction between magician and witch is helpful if one aims to contextualise the play in the contemporary demonological discourse; it also characterises Faustus' deteriorating fortunes, the course of his tragedy. He is a magician in that he presents magic shows to others; he is a witch in that he is himself charmed by them. Charmed so completely and fatally, in fact, that shortly before his death, and as if to seal his damnation, he commits the one act of perdition most often connected with witches in contemporary accounts of witchcraft: he has sex with the devil.

Huston Diehl argues that the play stylises itself by claiming that theatre is magic and how it also - at times in the same scene, the same words - deconstructs itself, admitting that magic is nothing more than theatre: 'Marlowe exploits the power of the stage to enchant, paradoxically, to disenchant.'[160] This conclusion is not only paradoxical but self-contradictory, for if any effect on an audience is achieved by 'the power of the stage', one can expect this power to be the lasting impression, not the doubts and ambivalences endured during the performance. In *Doctor Faustus* the 'sinking feeling' the spectators suffer whenever they have to recognize themselves in one of the erring figures on stage intensify the theatrical experience - but I should be very much surprised to learn of a spectator who, upon seeing the play, had decided henceforward to avoid the theatre. In my view *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* – written sometime between 1587 and 1592, a half-decade that saw a veritable spate of plays full of magicians, ghosts and spirits – Marlowe says almost the last word in refutation of anti-theatrical rhetoric. The actors are not to blame if the playgoers allow themselves to be ravished by their presentation: the responsibility lies squarely with the beholder. Theologically, idolatry *is* devil-worship, of course. But in exploring the nature of theatrical representation, there is a vital difference: an idol is created by the fanciful abuse of an image by the beholder. A demonic illusion, on the other hand, is hard to decipher for the best of men, because the human faculty of imagination does not equip us to tell the 'species' of

[159] The 1967 film does not spoil this erotic moment between Faustus (Burton) and the spirit of Helen (Elizabeth Taylor) by turning her face ugly, as before when Faustus gazed upon the lovely female vision and tried to embrace her. But when he rises from his post-coital stupor, the spirit gone, he looks into a mirror and realises that he has no reflection any more: he has become a spirit, too. – It is Helen, now glowing in a ghoulish hue and cackling like a fiend, who pulls Faustus down to hell, while Mephistopheles looks on, with tears in his eyes.

[160] Huston Diehl, 'Dazzling Theater: Renaissance Drama in the Age of Reform', in: *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 (1992), 211-35, 222.

an apparition from those of a real, and the devil has access to our imagination and so has power to abuse us, to damn us. But that can happen within the playhouse or in the streets or in the churchyard.

The fact remains – and Marlowe acknowledges it with relish – that representation is the central challenge in Protestantism. God is invisible, but he created and commands heaven and earth. The devil tempts people with visible, tangible spectacles, but all he commands are illusions and delusions. Theatre is thus the devil's medium, essentially, in that everything you see there is not really itself. But if you understand the rules of illusion-mongering ('Sit still, and expect', as Ben Jonson would put it), your soul is not in danger. Faustus falls because he cannot withstand 'the appeal of the sacred […], his desire to participate in it […] In his blasphemy he seeks a demonic equivalent for the sacred experience he feels is beyond his reach'.[161] Any kind of erotically charged watching that evoked or gave expression to the desire to become one with the object of the gaze, either in mystic ecstasy or in sexual union or – more gratuitously, by entering a theatrical fiction – was denounced at idolatrous. This is what Ben Jonson meant when he wrote that he loved Shakespeare 'this side of idolatry': he means he respected his art but had no desire to emulate it: he had no desire of turning into Shakespeare.

3.3 Performing Roman Rites in Revenge Tragedy: *Titus Andronicus*

Indisentangling sacramental allusions in early modern drama, one does well to distinguish between communicants' experience of the *event* of the sacrament, in which traditional expectations and customs were likely to be predominant, and people's grasp of the *doctrine*, which might or might not interfere with their experience. Playwrights dramatising their culture's 'habits of thought' will want to instrumentalise precisely this tension between what playgoers' would claim to *think* about certain topics and what they can be made to *feel* about them if these topics are worked into an emotionally affecting performance. After Act 5, unanalysed thoughts and feelings will, hopefully, have been clarified and reflected upon.

Remembering and avenging the dead is the major task, usually the bane, of the protagonists of revenge tragedy; and discussions of the genre do not always appreciate that not only avenging but also remembering the dead were impulses early modern English Protestants were expected to control tightly. The fascination of what Francis Bacon so aptly termed 'wild justice' has been related to the historical fact that 'Local justice, based in the competing interests of families, was rapidly giving way to a centralized legal bureaucracy in which personal passions and honour counted for little and patronage and rhetorical skill became all-important'. The individual's frustration in 'an increasingly impersonal legal system' is only surpassed by his or her helplessness in the face of 'the apathetic, intolerant machinery of biological nature'.[162] Death in 1600 must have seemed even more absolutely annihilating

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[161] Barber, *Creating Tragedy*, 16-7.

[162] Robert N. Watson, 'Tragedy,' *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael

than death in 1500. In view of the wholesale rejection by Protestant reformers of medieval religiosity and its 'cult of living friends in the service of dead ones',[163] however, the emergence of a dramatic genre in which rituals, ghosts and dead bodies figure prominently makes perfect psychological sense.

The abolishment of traditional commemorative rites, in effect the discouragement of ritualised mourning, was one of the most disrupting and disturbing elements of the Reformation as regards the emotional lives of ordinary people. Contrasting the funeral rites specified in the prayer book of 1549 with the much more radical one of 1552, Duffy stresses the fundamental change of focus. The priest had used to address the dead person ('I commend thy soul to God…'), now he addressed the mourners ('we therefore commit his body to the ground…'):

> in the world of the 1552 book the dead were no longer with us. They could neither be spoken to nor even about, in any way that affected their well-being. […] There was nothing that could be mistaken for a prayer for the dead in the 1552 funeral rite. The service was no longer a rite of intercession on behalf of the dead, but an exhortation to faith on the part of the living.[164]

The lighting of candles and the reading of Mass for the recently deceased had been prohibited, and the myriad points of contact, either by rite or object, between this world and the next were denied. Traditional funeral customs had to be conducted clandestinely or not at all: 'Hush, hush, leave praying for the dead,' the French clown warns the usurer in John Marston's comedy *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, 'tis no good Calvinisme, puritanisme. Dissemble, here are company' (201).

Revenge tragedy, bluntly put, dramatises the inability of the living to let go of the dead (and *vice versa*, in a manner of speaking). This inability may entail the necessity to find someone who can be made responsible and punished: 'Revenge tragedy offers a figurative way of saying (with Donne), 'Death, thou shalt die'; isolating the source of mortality in a human villain is a fantasy that cures the passivity and futility of mourning.'[165] But traditional forms of mourning had been the opposite of passive and futile. Purgatory may have been an uncomfortable state for the inmates, but it allowed the living to imagine the deceased at some mezzanine level of beyond-ness, in praying distance. Protestant preachers' adamant insistence that the dead were out of reach, that charitable intercession on their behalf was impossible, evoked in many people a sense of helplessness and terror. Displaced violence or spectral visions of the late beloved are extreme and rare manifestations of grief that become symptomatic in a society that had been segregated from its dead, a society that was, as it were, going through a period of collective bereavement.[166]

Hattaway, Cambridge, 1990, 301-52, 318.

[163] The phrase is John Bossy's, 'The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700,' *Past and Present* 100 (1983), 29-61, 42.

[164] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 475.

[165] Watson, 'Tragedy,' 318.

[166] Note the anecdote related by Archbishop Parker about the origin of idolatry: 'an image made by a father […] for the memorial of his son departed, was the first invention of images and occasion of idolatry,' *Correspondence*, 83. Kyd seems to allude to the common belief in the *Spanish Tragedy*, when Hieronimo keeps a bloody handkerchief as a relic from his son.

The protagonists in revenge tragedies are generally obsessed with death, dying and dead bodies in a way that borders on the pathological. The ubiquity of ghosts of the departed may manifest a comprehensive denial of their passing, the significance of dismembered bodies or severed body parts is that of a fetish – or of a relic. Revenge tragedies, Huston Diehl suggests, 'rehearse a divisive and deeply disturbing struggle occurring in reform culture between a traditional mode of commemorating the dead that emphasizes presence and a reformed mode that emphasizes absence.' The genre thus addresses 'the central challenge of the reformed religion: how to relinquish the (idolatrous) body and sustain faith in an invisible God.'

The idolatrous body in revenge tragedy is usually a bleeding body, sometimes a dead one or a relic of a dead one, often the spectre of a dead one. Medieval religious iconography had teemed with the martyred bodies of saints and, of course, the bleeding body of Christ himself.[167] The average English churchgoer was unlikely to have seen paintings of classical or mythological scenes of physical violence, but he or she was sure to have seen images of Christ on the cross, or Christ taken down from the cross and swathed for the tomb. Religious iconography of the violated sacred body, however the reformers disapproved of it, must have lingered in the imagination. But while the sensationalist or sentimental impact of blood and gore in the theatre is always strong and direct, their religious and cultural significance is almost impossible to assess through several layers of alienation. The whole medieval cult of the sacred body – more often than not parts of bodies that had been tortured to death in the most gruesome manner – had been officially denounced in late sixteenth-century England; and to the early 21st-century agnostic, mystical rapture at the sight of open wounds is most uncongenial. It is thus doubly difficult to detect and interpret in 'secular' plays, written when England was to all intents and purposes firmly Protestant, allusive uses of these medieval religious images.

When the Viceroy of Portugal in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* has his son's assassin bound to a stake to be burnt, was this stage image meant to recall to playgoers in the late 1580s the stakes on Smithfields and the martyrs that had been burnt there less than thirty years ago? When Tamyra in Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* is put on the rack and tortured by her husband to write a betraying letter to her lover, when her husband accuses her of idolatry as much as of adultery, and a chance witness bewails the 'rape of honour and religion', did this remind the theatre audience of Protestant martyrdoms and the racking of 'atheists' and presbyterian separatists?[168] In Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Giovanni sticks his sister's bleeding heart on his dagger and shocks an incredulous assembly of dinner guests into believing that he has committed incest with her: 'Have you all no faith / To credit yet my triumphs?' Are we to assume that Ford (who was a Roman Catholic) here purposefully alludes to medieval 'blood miracles' in which

[167] On the literary representation of religious persecution and martyrdom, see Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*.

[168] George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, ed. Maurice Evans, London, 1965, 5.1.147.

the baby Jesus was seen to offer his heart to the beholder?[169] Did Shakespeare's couples of dying fathers and sons in the first Henriad remind playgoers of images of the dead Son in the arms of the Father, as seen in painted windows, on painted cloths and monuments? As with all instances of intertextuality, it is one thing to detect an allusion and another to determine its scope: how far does the writer intend the reader or playgoer to pursue the echo? or as Greenblatt puts it: what work is the allusion actually doing?

The first scene of Shakespeare's first tragedy supports the suggestion that the Elizabethan theatre provided compensation in kind for the abolishment of the traditional cult of the dead. Within the first ten minutes of *Titus Andronicus* a paganised version of Roman Catholic funeral rites – 'Roman rites' in Lucius' equivocal term – is enacted, complete with sacrificial Mass.[170] The old warlord returns to Rome with a train of captive Goths and a coffin bearing one of his many dead sons. Unlike 'reformed' Elizabethans, Titus can invite his fellow citizens to honour the dead with ceremony: 'stand gracious to the rites that we intend!' (1.1.78). A 'tomb' is opened on stage – presumably the trapdoor that will later figure as the pit that proves fatal to Titus' son-in-law and two of his remaining sons. Protestant graves were not holy, and they were not apostrophised, but the (pagan/medieval) Roman may address his family mausoleum: 'O sacred receptacle of my joys' (92). The funeral over, Roman Catholics would read votive Masses to shorten the dead one's time in purgatory. But the Protestant reformers had prohibited Mass as a misguided and grotesque enactment of ritualised slaughter; intercession on the behalf of the dead was declared to be impossible and anyway unnecessary because purgatory had been abolished too. Ancient Romans, however, were not only free but obliged to offer sacrifices to honour and calm their dead:

> Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
> That we may hew his limbs and on a pile
> *Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh
> Before this earthy prison of their bones,
> That so the shadows be not unappeas'd. (96-100)

Tamora tries to prevent the murder of her son, but Titus explains that this ritual absolutely has to be observed:

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169 John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*, ed. Brian Morris, London, 1968, 5.6.56-7. Miri Rubin notes eucharistic visions in which a child offered its own heart to the sceptical or overwrought communicant, *The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, 344-5.

170 The suggestion that 'Rome' in *Titus Andronicus* signifies the Roman Catholic church or England's Roman Catholic past or residual Roman Catholic beliefs has been made elsewhere, most notably by Lukas Erne, "Popish Tricks' and 'a Ruinous Monastery': *Titus Andronicus* and the Question of Shakespeare's Catholicism' in *The Limits of Textuality*, ed. Lukas Erne and Guillemette Bolens, Tübingen, 2000, 135-55. For a different take on the material, see 'Reformation and Deformation: *Titus Andronicus*', chapter 1 in Lisa Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage*, Aldershot, 2008. See also 'Thomas Rist, 'Outrage Fits': Revenge and the Melodrama of Mourning in *The Spanish Tragedy, Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*', chapter 1 in *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*, Aldershot, 2008.

> These are their brethren, whom your Goths beheld
> Alive and dead, and for their brethren slain
> Religiously they ask a sacrifice: […]
> T'appease their groaning shadows that are gone. (122-6)

What Titus calls 'religious' is to Tamora the very opposite: 'O cruel, irreligious piety' (130). The celebrants return:

> See, lord and father, how we have perform'd
> Our Roman rites. Alabarbus' limbs are lopp'd,
> And entrails feed the sacrificing fire,
> Whose smoke like incense doth perfume the sky. (142-5)

A later remark of Saturnius' provides a direction to set the stage as a church in the old style: 'Sith priest and holy water are so near, / And tapers burn so bright' (323-4). The funeral pyre is pagan, but the breaking of the body (that is, the fraction of the consecrated host), the incense, the holy water and the candles were 'Roman rites' indeed, and familiar to any member of Shakespeare's audience who had ever celebrated a traditional Mass.[171]

Later in the play, Aaron the Moor will scoff at Titus's remaining son:

> I know thou art religious,
> And hast a thing within thee called conscience,
> With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies,
> Which I have seen thee careful to observe.

This is the only time in any of his plays that Shakespeare uses the word 'popish', a term ubiquitous in Protestant attacks on the old religion. The only Andronicus unspotted by shame or murder is presented as a Christian role model who seems to combine the best of the old faith, its cultic richness, with the best of the new faith, its earnest self-searching. Yet the passage is not without bias. By putting the jibe at 'popish ceremonies' into the mouth of the ruthless infidel, Shakespeare rehabilitates both the abusive term and the ceremonies themselves. What Aaron mocks or despises, the audience is inclined to value. Ritual observance and 'conscience' went perfectly well together for an educated Roman Catholic; it was puritan preachers like William Perkins who implied that the 'miraculous' rites of the papists prevented a full appreciation of God's grace: 'For these outward symbolicall or Sacramentall actions serve to no other end, but to signifie unto us those inward actions of the mind and will, whereby we apprehend and receive Christ, to our salvation.'[172] Lucius, the closest character the play has to a role model, combines both.

No other play of Shakespeare's makes such extended use of the trapdoor-as-grave, not even *Hamlet*. By staging different ways of burying people, Shakespeare spins a subliminal thread through *Titus Andronicus* that links the 'Roman' cult of the dead with the 'Roman Catholic' one and thus

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[171] In his introduction to the play in the Riverside edition, Frank Kermode subsumes these details under the heading of anachronisms we expect in Elizabethan representations of Roman history, 1067.

[172] William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (1636), 201-2.

activates in his audience emotions associated with Reformation controversies about funeral rites. Having buried one son with all pomp and circumstance, Titus refuses burial to the son he has slain for standing up to him: 'Traitors, away, he rests not in this tomb […] / Bury him where you can, he comes not here' (349-54). Marcus echoes Tamora's earlier reproach of 'irreligious piety': 'My lord, this is impiety in you' (355). In the eyes of his friends, Mutius's patriotism and his honourable intentions earn him a place among his ancestors; his father, insisting on his authority as *pater familias* and war hero, sets his personal pride higher than his family's entreaties. Political decisions are evaluated in religious terms, and a decent burial becomes a political issue.

In the course of the unfolding tragedy, the stage's trapdoor will be transformed into a hole in the ground, an animal pit containing a human body, that is compared to the sepulchre of Christ. While Lavinia is being raped off-stage, her brothers are led by Aaron to find the body of her murdered husband in the pit. Martius falls in and cannot climb out of what he calls 'this unhallow'd and blood-stainèd hole' (3.2.210). As he describes to his horrified brother what he finds in the hole, the scene turns into a macabre parody of a Play of the Resurrection, the centre-piece of the medieval cycles of mystery plays: 'Quem queritis in sepulchro?' The first image that comes to Martius's mind upon detecting the dead body is that of a sacrificial animal, a biblical and Christological emblem of innocence:

> Lord Bassanius lies berayed in blood,
> All on a heap, like to a slaughtered lamb,
> In this detested dark, blood-drinking pit. (222-4)

He recognises Bassanius by the dim light reflected in the dead man's jewellery, which makes him associate a candle-lit tomb:

> Upon his bloody finger he doth wear
> A precious ring that lightens all this hole,
> Which, like a taper in some monument,
> Doth shine upon the dead man's earthy cheeks. (226-30)

The 'same' tomb – that is, the stage's trapdoor – that his father had called a 'sacred receptacle', to Martius now is 'this fell devouring receptacle' (235).

Shakespeare here does two things he will perfect in later plays: one is to withhold from the playgoers the visual focus of the scene and to have them imagine it at the directions of an observing character: the audience cannot see into the pit, Quintus does not dare to look into it, so all rely on Martius's description of it. The other is to present a choric scene of social or lyrical comment by confronting a character with a shocking sight. The images found to describe the indescribable say as much about a society's taboos and archetypes as about the character who uses them, and they allow the playwright to give strong and direct signals to the audience about the world he is depicting. The dark cavern, the dim candle light and the mutilated corpse impress on Martius the fantasy that he is in a hellish – or at least an 'unhallowed' version of the sepulchre of Christ, the 'slaughtered lamb' of

Christian iconography. The 'Roman' world of *Titus Andronicus* is not pagan; it is a world with a strong undercurrent of Christian, in fact, Roman Catholic, rites and beliefs – like late Elizabethan England. Only that these traditional religious rites and beliefs have been distorted and no longer serve to provide comfort to the afflicted soul.

The Edwardian abolishment of the elaborate rites of Easter week had hit English Christians hard. Easter was by far the most important holiday of the liturgical year, and lay participation in the services had been intense. After the liturgy on Good Friday, a consecrated host in a pyx and the cross to which the parishioners had crept on their bare knees to kiss it, were 'buried' in a timber or stone hearse.[173] This sepulchre was then lit with candles and watched continually until Easter morning, when the host was removed to the monstrance above the altar, and the cross was 'raised' and carried around the church to the singing of hymns and ringing of bells. The whole ceremony had been forbidden, with other Holy Week ceremonies, in 1548; and although it is not likely that all candles were snuffed, all watches broken and all processions discontinued from that year onwards, it does mark a break in tradition. Eamon Duffy stresses the crucial significance of the sepulchre not only among the Easter rituals but as a solemn communal effort of worship: 'Expressing to the full as it did the late medieval sense of the pathos of the Passion, the sepulchre and its ceremonies were also the principal vehicle for the Easter proclamation of Resurrection.'[174]

For ancient Romans there was no resurrection, and many of the older members of Shakespeare's audience may have felt doubtful of their own, too, deprived of the rites they had been brought up to consider necessary to ensure it. The episcopal visitors, who monitored the reformation of England's parishes, regularly complained that traditional funeral rites were still being observed. People would not forego the candles, the crosses, the watches, the bells, and most importantly, the prayers for the dead; the stakes were simply too high.[175] At the same time, the rites and customs that were being denounced in anti-Catholic religious writing may already have been unfamiliar to many of the younger members of Shakespeare's audience. Their parents or grandparents may have explained to them the former use of the ornamental shelf-like alcove in the parish church wall, but only those from recusant households, parishes or regions would ever have participated in a traditional Easter Sunday service.

Shakespeare does not, I think, specifically defend or denounce these forbidden rites. He is not demonstrating the destructiveness of revenge in order to imply an analogous condemnation of sacrificial Mass. Rather, he feeds his culture's subliminal anxieties about rites of mourning into a play

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[173] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, has illustrations of stone sepulchres carved into the walls of churches, plates 7 to 10. – Hans Holbein's famous altar piece of the body of the dead Christ in his tomb (1521) represents such an alcove.

[174] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 31. Duffy mentions elaborate images of Christ, not necessarily crucifixions, that had a hollow space in the chest in which the host would be deposited: the ritual of creeping to the cross was thus also a most expressive act of venerating the sacrament (30).

[175] On the persistence of traditional funeral rites and ceremonies in the later sixteenth century, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 577-9.

that asks more generally how to deal with insufferable grief. Shakespeare makes a point, in this play more than in most, about the political and the psychological significance of ritual and ceremony as such, as coping strategies in times of crisis or as a performative representation of the state of the community. The play's well-nigh unbearable emotional pressure results not only from the extreme physical violence to which the characters are subjected but also from the spectacle of their grief, either helplessly raving or pathetically trying to maintain a coherent grip. This grief might find channels of expression in a society with a functional culture of ritualised mourning.[176] But for ancient Romans who do not know the merciful Christian God – or for 'reformed' Elizabethans who no longer know how to gain access to this God – this kind of mourning is hard to achieve.

The celebration of votive Masses had maintained a solacing contact both with God and with the deceased family member or friend. But these had not been its only functions. John Bossy has suggested, *via* René Girard's theory of sacrifice as a ritual, that ritualised sacrifice channels aggression between members of a community, that the late medieval Mass combined the functions of vengeance, sacrifice and legal punishment in a communal ritual of renewal.[177] In its capacity as a sacrifice - figured in the fraction of the host - Mass symbolised social division and strife; in its capacity as sacrament - figured in the priest's consumption of the host and the wine, and their elevation for all to see - it healed division and symbolised the integration of the congregation in Christ.[178] The reformers strongly objected to the *elevatio* on the grounds that it led to the idolatrous adoration of a piece of bread, but they also objected to the fraction because it symbolised the blood sacrifice they rejected, the exclusion of the laity from the benefits of the sacraments, and the division of the church that was thus created.[179] Roman Catholics felt reassured of salvation because they saw the sacrifice of Christ literally repeated on the altar every Sunday; Protestants felt reassured of salvation because the sacramental ritual of commemoration reminded them of Christ's promise to redeem them, sealed with his blood, and because the ceremony and the community of the faithful strengthened their own faith in this promise.

Sacrificial violence in *Titus Andronicus* is balanced by 'sacramental' fellowship in mourning, an almost mystical readiness to empathise and feel the other's pain and sorrow. Time and again there are moments in which the victims of malice and brutality are comforted by the tender compassion of others, the close-knit family circle a tottering fortress against attacks from outside. 'Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee,' Marcus assures his niece, 'O, could our mourning ease thy misery!' (2.4.56-7). Titus's spontaneous acceptance of his daughter even in her shame is sublimely affecting in

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176 Cf. the much more satisfying funeral and mourning rites in *Much Ado about Nothing*, 5.3 – which, of course, lack a corpse because Hero is not really dead.

177 Bossy, 'Mass as a Social Institution,' 53.

178 Bossy, 'Mass as a Social Institution,' 35.

179 Cranmer sums up these points in his chapter 'Of the Oblation and Sacrifice of Christ', *Cranmer on the Lord's Supper* , 347-50.

performance: 'This was thy daughter,' Marcus warns him, but Titus corrects him: 'Why, Marcus, so she is' (3.1.63).[180] To ease his daughter's lot he offers to cut off his hands and bite his tongue, too, a sentiment familiar to many a medieval nun in a trance of *imitatio Christi*, and sees the whole family as fellows in purgatory: 'O, what a sympathy of woe is this, / As far from help as limbo is from bliss!' (3.1.148-9). Even the Messenger who returns the two heads and the severed hand is moved to forget his own dead in order to condole with the living: 'That woe is me to think upon thy woes, / More than remembrance of my father's death' (3.2.239-40).

Ritual sacrifice serves to alleviate social tensions and renew communal bonds; both the Roman Mass and the Protestant Lord's Supper fulfilled some of these functions. In the first centuries of Christian worship, the *pax* or Holy Kiss between communicants used to be exchanged before the sacrifice, that is, before the consecration and breaking of the host. From the fifth century onwards the kiss was shifted to a position after the sacrifice, before the communicants' reception of the host. John Bossy, who mentions *en passant* that this shift happened at about the time of the sack of Rome by the Goths, comments that it is a clear manifestation of the separation, in the celebration of Mass, of the sacrificial element (which stressed social division and strife, to be alleviated by symbolic violence) and the sacramental element (which stressed the unity of believers with Christ and one another). In short, the shift of the Holy Kiss shows that the Christian sacrifice originally *required* social harmony, but by the late Middle Ages it had long been understood to *create* it.[181]

For a Roman tragedy set in the fifth century against the backdrop of the war between Romans and Goths, there is a surprising amount of kissing in *Titus Andronicus*, and it all occurs after the rape and mutilation of Lavinia and Titus's fruitless sacrifice of his hand. It takes a strong-stomached father to comfort a daughter in Lavinia's plight with the words 'let me kiss thy lips, / Or make some sign how I may do thee ease' (3.1.120-1). An actor might decide against it here, but Lavinia certainly kisses Titus before 3.1.250. If this is intended as a kiss of peace, it fails: 'Alas poor heart, that kiss is comfortless / As frozen water to a starved snake.' Titus only takes heart after his burst of bitter laughter. He resolves to capture and kill Tamora's sons and sends his son Lucius to raise an army of Goths and sack Rome. This resolution is sealed with a kiss – 'And if you love me, as I think you do, / Let's kiss and part, for we have much to do' (3.2.286-7) – and with a banquet. Kissing and eating together in a sacrificial/sacramental context was supposed to generate social harmony; in Act 3 of *Titus Andronicus*, these rituals fail.

According to the Protestant reformers, the souls of 'papists' come to grief because they set too much store by senseless images. If Titus could persuade himself to end his days in suffering 'sympathy' with his family, the play might yet turn into a 'Christian' tragedy. But Titus turns his sons' bodily

[180] Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity*, Cambridge, 1993, 50-9, discusses the dramaturgy of the staggered (that is, shocked and carefully arranged) reactions to Lavinia's mutilated body.

[181] Bossy, 'Mass as a Social Institution,' 52.

remains into relics and thus, to a Protestant, into idols that lead him astray by suggesting to him his darkest desire:

> For these two heads do seem to speak to me,
> And threat me I shall never come to bliss
> Till all these mischiefs be return'd again,
> Even in their throats that hath committed them. (3.2.271-4)

Idolatry can be avoided if signs are not interpreted according to the beholders' fancy but decoded according to an authoritative paradigm, an obligatory external guideline. Or, to put it more abstractly: if Titus could suppress his sense of a quasi-religious obligation towards his dead and settle for a 'sympathy of woe' with the living, the round of sacrificial murders of revenge might be broken.[182]

The 'idolatrous', fanciful interpretation of the bleeding body is once more illustrated within minutes of Titus' oath of revenge. The Andronici assemble at the dinner table, and the only advice Titus can give his daughter is to transform herself into an emblem, an inverted and perverted version of the self-wounding pelican, a traditional image for Christ nourishing man with his blood:

> Or get some little knife between thy teeth,
> And just against thy heart make thou a hole,
> That all the tears that thy poor eyes let fall
> May run into that sink. (16-9)

He promises to 'wrest an alphabet' (44) of her dumb gestures and 'learn to know thy meaning' (45), but he manifestly does not do so yet, and her violators are yet undisclosed. It is a supper with food but without drink (34-5), and the devil seems to be present in the shape of a fly 'That comes in the likeness of a coal-black Moor' (72). The stage image of Titus feeding his handless daughter - 'Come, let's fall to, and, gentle girl, eat this' (34) - may allude to a minor issue in reforming the eucharist: many people were still reluctant to touch the host with their own hands and insisted that the priest place it in their mouths.[183] Lavinia in her plight is, of course, obliged to receive in the 'popish' manner. If more allusions to an 'idolatrous popish Mass' were required, Marcus comments on Titus' crazed grief in the words of a Protestant reformer pointing out the danger of idolatry: 'He takes false shadows for true substances' (80).[184]

I have been arguing that the traditional votive Mass and the sacrifice of Christ under the species of bread and wine reappears in perverted form in this 'Roman' revenge tragedy as sacrificial slaughter.[185]

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[182] Kyd builds a similar moment of human fellowship in mourning into *The Spanish Tragedy* when Hieronimo meets his 'double', an old man whose son has been murdered, 3.13.

[183] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 579.

[184] Cf. e.g. William Prynne on the spectators of 'false representations of true stories', who are 'Cheated, with shadowes instead of true substance,' *Histrio-Mastix*, 157.

[185] Or, as in this play, as rape: Tamora rejects Lavinia's plea for mercy by pointing out that to allow her sons to '*satisfice* their lust on thee' will atone for the *sacrifice* of their captured brother by Titus (2.3.164 and 180, my italics).

But dramaturgy demands an antithesis, and 'popish' doctrine demands a refutation. The Protestant answer to Mass was the Lord's Supper, a celebration in which sacrifice was not enacted but commemorated, Christ's bleeding body was not present but only represented, the host in Thomas Becon's words 'an holy signe, figure, token, and Memoriall of his Body breaking'.[186]

The word 'sign' in the semiotic sense in which Becon uses it appears five times in *Titus Andronicus*; in four of these cases it refers to the difficulty of communicating with the speechless and handless Lavinia. At once when she is dragged onto the stage by her violators she is associated with the language of the Protestant eucharist. Demetrius erroneously assumes that merely because her body will not in and of itself speak truth to Lavinia's friends – in the way in which the body of Christ in medieval iconography had symbolically embodied its own meaning – she will not be able to convey the truth. 'See how with signs and tokens she can scrowl,' he scoffs, ironically oblivious of the countless treatises and sermons teaching that 'Christ did represent the truth of his body and bloud by the bread and wine'.[187] Signs and tokens are, in the Protestant dispensation, the *only* way to represent the truth. Lavinia's family, however, cannot read the signs of her body. They have a great deal to say about her state, but they feel unable to gauge its true meaning: 'make some sign how I may do thee ease' (3.1.121), 'Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs' (3.2.12) and, utterly at a loss, 'What means my niece Lavinia by these signs?' (4.1.8). Truth is brought to light with the help of the 'Sad stories chanced in the times of old' (83) that Titus proposes to read with Lavinia.

The following scene, in which a book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* becomes instrumental in unlocking to Lavinia's family the horrible truth of her misfortune, presents, I believe, an analogy to the reformers' insistence that ceremonial objects and gestures only make sense when put into their proper authorised context. Only a detailed knowledge of the events of the Last Supper as set down in the gospels enables communicants to appreciate the meaning and the nature of the sacrifice they are commemorating. Participation in ceremonies one does not understand is at best fruitless, at worst blasphemous:

> Ceremonies have more in weight than in sight; they work by commonness of use much, although in the several acts of their usage we scarcely discern any good they do. And because the use they have for the most part is not perfectly understood, superstition is apt to impute unto them greater virtue than indeed they have. For prevention whereof when we use this ceremony we always plainly express the end whereunto it serveth, namely, for a sign of remembrance to put us in mind of our duty.[188]

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[186] Becon, *Displaying of the Popish Masse*, 15.

[187] Becon, *Displaying of the Popish Masse*, 190. – Dramatically speaking, Shakespeare's ancient Roman villains act within a fog of irony similar to that surrounding Milton's Satan. The narrator and the readers of *Paradise Lost* know that Christ has saved them, but Satan still thinks that he can do serious harm.

[188] Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, 342.

The Lord's Supper was a ceremony to commemorate Christ's sacrifice; it is to be conducted strictly according to historical precedent: 'whoever eateth of the bread in the supper of the Lord, according to Christ's institution and ordinance, is assured of Christ's own promise and testament.'[189]

The sign – Lavinia's speechless body or the sacramental bread and wine – only make proper sense when seen in the context of an 'old story', when interpreted according to what is written in a book of universal authority – Ovid or the New Testament. Casting herself as Philomel, Lavinia metamorphoses from sacrificial object into a source of Truth that can be made to communicate in letters and share with her family the names of her violators. The contrast is evident: *as a sign*, Lavinia's bleeding, speechless body is construed according to each beholders' private fancy, but *using signs*, Lavinia is in a position to direct the interpretation of her body along the lines of what she knows to be true. Shakespeare gives ample scope to the Roman (Catholic) rites of mourning that have been abolished during the Reformation, and he seems to allow the human impulse to link mourning with rituals of revenge/sacrifice. But mutilated Lavinia's story firmly corroborates reformed Protestant teaching on bleeding bodies and their powers of signification. The last two acts of *Titus Andronicus* show various ways out of the impasse created by revenge/sacrifice, and they also show how Titus is unable or unwilling to take them.

The last ritual that is performed on stage is the Andronici taking leave of their dead *pater familias*: 'O, take this warm kiss on thy pale cold lips' (153), 'Tear for tear, and loving kiss for kiss, / Thy brother Marcus tenders on thy lips' (156-7). Lucius reminds his son of the kisses of his grandfather when he was alive, and his uncle makes him kiss the corpse:

> How many thousand times hath these poor lips,
> When they were living, warm'd themselves on thine!
> O now, sweet boy, give them their latest kiss! (167-9)

It is a private, domestic scene, undisturbed by public politics and the obsessions of blood feud. In the late medieval communion service, the kissing of neighbours before receiving the eucharist had been replaced by the kissing of a tablet with a picture of the crucifixion, to which the term *pax* was transferred – a rite that in most regions of Northwestern Europe had altogether replaced the actual consumption of the host by the laity. So instead of kissing one another and instead of receiving the host/body, people passed around the *pax* – in strict order of precedence, of course – to kiss it.[190] This last scene of *Titus Andronicus* may or may not refer to this (suppressed) custom, but it does conclude the conflicts between sacrificial and sacramental impulses that drove the play's action. It renders in physical terms the contrast that had been felt from the start between Titus the family man and the unrelenting, brutal patrician-warrior.

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[189] *Cranmer on the Lord's Supper*, 29.

[190] Shakespeare may have read about this tradition in Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book I, preface.

Considered as moments of ritualised communion, the death of Coriolanus, a figure of comparable public identity, is that of a sacrificial animal, torn to pieces by a livid crowd. The focus at the end of Shakespeare's first Roman tragedy, however, is not the death but the dead body of his protagonist. Titus's corpse is shifted to a later place in the ritual of communion, to *after* the sacrifice. As in the communion service, the obscene eating of dead bodies - to the reformers the idea of consuming Christ's flesh was as repugnant as the 'pasties' Titus prepares from human flesh[191] - has given way to non-consumption and to a sacramental kiss of a symbolic receptacle of Christ, the *pax*. The time for sacrifice/revenge is over, and the necessity to embark upon otherwise destructive rituals of mourning is dissolved. The dead person is to be remembered for the intimacy he shared with others and then left to rest in peace. This is Marcus' advice to the next generation: 'Bid him farewell, commit him to the grave, / Do them [i.e. Titus's lips] that kindness, and take leave of them' (170-1). This, Shakespeare seems to try to teach his audience, is what reformed, Protestant mourning might look like.

REVENGE IN THE SPANISH TRAGEDY

The Scrivener in the Induction to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* scoffs at '*Jeronimo*' and '*Andronicus*' as two of the hoary old favourites that still appealed to the 'understanders' in Jacobean playhouse yards. Kyd's was almost certainly the earlier play, and although Shakespeare undoubtedly learnt much from it, he did not cast his own revenge tragedy in *The Spanish Tragedy*'s tragical-parodical mould. As will become clearer in the next chapter, this refusal to parody the Roman Catholic Mass added to Shakespeare's outsider position among his fellow playwrights.

Huston Diehl reads the play-within-the-play at the end of *The Spanish Tragedy* as a lecture about 'a dangerous and fraudulent kind of theatricality – a 'Catholic' theatricality'. Kyd teaches his audience to demystify and distrust 'the devotional gaze' that does not distinguish between external show and true substance.[192] It is indeed very likely that Kyd meant his audience to understand that Hieronimo revenges himself on the murderers of his son by staging a show that is like a popish Mass. Like the Latin of the old liturgy, the different languages bewilder: 'But this will be a mere confusion, / And hardly shall we all be understood,' Balthazar objects when Hieronimo explains that each of the amateur actors will speak a different language.[193] Like the 'apish priest' at his altar, Hieronimo will 'with a strange and wonderous show besides, / That I will have there behind a curtain, / […] make the matter known' (4.1.185-7). In a theatrical performance of a tragedy, the literalisation of a trope – Christ's statement that 'This is my body' – turns figurative sacrifice into real murder.

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[191] '[If] we eat Christ corporally, then you must confess that we either swallow up Christ's flesh, or chew and tear it with our teeth […], which St Augustine saith is a wicked and heinous thing,' *Cranmer on the Lord's Supper*, 26.

[192] Diehl, *Staging Reform*, 114-15.

[193] Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Philip Edwards, London, 1959, 4.1.180-1. – Note that the playlet is, in fact, presented in English throughout, '*for the easier understanding to every public reader*' (4.1.10SD4-5).

There is disagreement among critics whether Hieronimo does, in fact, 'make the matter known' at the end or not. Philip Edwards has suggested that two alternative endings might have found their way into the printer's copy (xxxvi), which would account for some of the confusion. While his royal audience are still applauding their children's acting skills, Hieronimo pretends to switch from Greek to English and explains that the 'fabulous counterfeit' was real. Like the priest officiating at Mass, he produces a real dead body, his son's corpse. Allusions to the body of Christ may be heard in Hieronimo's description of how he went into his garden, 'Where hanging on a tree I found my son' (111). Preachers were fond of rendering Christ's passion figuratively; the idea of the Cross on Golgotha as a 'tree' of pain was familiar. The famous woodcut of Horatio hanging in the 'arbour' shows a wooden frame that may have already have stirred recollection of images of the Crucifixion in the audience.[194] The climax of Hieronimo's speech brings another visual allusion, this time to Christ lying dead in the sepulchre: it is to be assumed that he produces Horatio's body by pulling back the curtain in front of the discovery space, which would have made a substitute tomb. His sacrificial tragedy – like the Mass but unlike the Lord's Supper – centres on his son's (or God's Son's) dead body; and Hieronimo jeers at his audience with awful irony: 'See here my show, look on this spectacle' (89). Like *Titus Andronicus*, this play 'revolves around a series of burials, high-lighting the pre-eminent controversy of memorial effects' [195]. Hieronimo and other characters repeatedly lament the unhappy plight of the dead who have not been properly – that is, ritually – mourned: 'What savage monster, not of human kind, / Hath […] left thy bloody corpse dishonoured here'? (2.4.81-3). Crazed by grief and impotent fury, Hieronimo seeks to 'honour' Horatio with the commemorative play of revenge that he stages before the court and its guests. Denied his rights as a father and a loyal subject, Hieronimo decides to commemorate his son with a vengeance.

It is indeed puzzling why the stunned spectators still seem to be puzzled when all is done: 'Why hast thou done this undeserving deed?' (165). In order to argue, as Diehl does, that 'his stubborn insistence on silence, like his polyglot play, assures that the spectacle of bodies and blood he has so elaborately staged will retain its primacy over the interpreting word', one has to ignore almost 80 lines of accusation and lament that seem to leave nothing whatsoever in the dark. I would suggest that Philip Edwards' theory of two alternative endings having been mixed up is supported by disentangling the play's tokens or markers of religious affiliation. The Hieronimo who cannot let go of the dead to let God take care of them and who keeps (and idolises) his son's handkerchief as a relic, is an unreformed Roman Catholic: he stages his revenge as a bloody sacrifice to satisfy his own craving for ritualistic and ceremonial atonement. The Hieronimo, however, who realises in his encounter with the Old Man that

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[194] As, indeed, might Hieronimo's rushing onto the stage after the murder. He says he heard 'ourcries' that were directed at him personally (2.5.1 and 4). It is unlikely that Horatio actually called out 'Father, why hast thou forsaken me?', but the echo is there.

[195] Rist, *Commemoration in Reforming Drama*, 31.

human fellowship and God's grace are the only source of solace in times of grief, shows a reformed disdain of form and ceremony: he stages his revenge (which he knows will land him in hell) as a bitter and sardonic literalisation of a discredited doctrine. This 'Protestant' Hieronimo refuses to justify to men what cannot be justified to God and takes refuge in a desperate act that might have recalled to the audience John Foxe's reports of martyrs who had their tongues cut out rather than recant their heresies. Foxe quotes a victim's comment: 'Seeing I do not stick to give my body, shall I stick to give my tongue? No, no.'[196] Hieronimo speaks of a 'thing' that he has 'vow'd inviolate' (188), and although it is clear that he is not talking about religious doctrine, it is also – even supposing his long soliloquy was cut in this version – not entirely clear what the big secret at the end of this play should be.

Like Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus*, Kyd was keenly aware of Reformation controversies about signs, ceremonies and the 'presencing' of that which is absent. Shakespeare would have realised how Kyd wrought the motifs and fed the emotional tensions of the religious reformation into his tragedy: the contest between the old customs and the new ones structures both plays, but neither necessarily advocates one or the other. These tragedies, written and performed around 1590, are no longer interested in Reformation *propaganda*. They engage in deep and complex ways in the *exploration* of reformed religious practice and theology. That is why it is futile to take the occurrence of Catholic or Protestant ideas in a play as evidence of the playwright's religious leanings: in order to explore them, you have to dramatise – that is, present and embody – these ideas on stage.

[196] Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 4, 432.

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Lebenslauf

Mein Name ist Angela Stock. Ich wurde am 19. Januar als Tochter des Hans-Jürgen Stock und der Rosemarie Stock, geb. Egles, in Stolzenau/Niedersachsen geboren und bin in Nienburg/Weser aufgewachsen. 1974 wurde ich in die Grundschule in Holtorf eingeschult und erlangte am 26. Mai 1987 die Allgemeine Hochschulreife. Im Oktober 1988 begann ich das Lehramtsstudium an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität in Münster mit den Fächern Englisch und Geschichte. Im November 1995 erlangte ich das 1. Staatsexamen für die Sekundarstufe I und II. Nach Förderung durch die Graduiertenförderung des Landes NRW und der Tätigkeit als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Englischen Seminar in Münster, schloß ich im Februar meine Promotion in Anglistik mit dem Rigorosum ab (Nebenfächer: Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte).

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