Religious conversion in early modern English drama

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Cover design: Frank Stienen, frankstienen.nl

Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 12 november 2013
klokke 15.00 uur

door

Lieke Julia Stelling

geboren te Utrecht

in 1982

Promotor:	Prof. dr. P.Th.M.G. Liebregts (Universiteit Leiden)
Co-promotor:	Dr. J.F. van Dijkhuizen (Universiteit Leiden)
Overige commissieleden:	Prof. dr. J. Pollmann (Universiteit Leiden)
	Prof. dr. F.W.A. Korsten (Universiteit Leiden)
	Dr. H. Smith (University of York)

For my parents

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Note on texts and dates

Quotations from the Bible are taken from the King James Version, unless stated otherwise. Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and others (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008). In quotations from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, I retain original spellings, but modernise "long s," u/v and i/j, except in titles. Dates of plays, inserted parenthetically after the title, sometimes appear more precise than they are. I give the years when they were most probably first presented according to *Annals of English Drama 975–1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies & C.*, edited by Alfred Bennett Harbage, Samuel Schoenbaum and Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989). I try to present exact dates when relevant to my argument.

Introduction

> Beloved, you are *Actors* upon the same Stage too: the uttermost parts of the Earth are your *Scene*: act over the *Acts* of the *Apostles*: bee you a light to the *Gentiles*, that sit in darknesse.[1]

In this excerpt from his 1622 sermon on the Acts of the Apostles 1:8, John Donne likens the Honourable Company of the Virginian Plantations, his audience, to the proselytizing apostles of Christ. The term "acts" refers to the deeds performed by the apostles that incited people to embrace Christianity, including the delivery of sermons in native languages, miraculous healings and exorcisms. At the same time, Donne uses the verb "to act" and its derivates in their theatrical meaning of pretending or play-acting. Although to a modern audience the missionary acts of apostles and the performances of actors seem unrelated and could even be taken as contradictory, the Latin root of the verb "to act," *agere,* meaning, among other things, to "incite," "accomplish," "stage" and "perform," indicates their sustained common ground. This correspondence is further illuminated when we realize that fourteenth and fifteenth- century religious drama often featured biblical conversions and scenes serving as a moral example for audiences, who were invited to follow in the footsteps of stage converts. However, these late medieval stage conversions entailed a spiritual reformation, a rejection of sin, rather than the conversion from one religion to another which Donne must have had in mind when he preached to his countrymen who, like the apostles, were about to proselytize among the infidels in the far corners of the world. In other words, Donne's use of stage imagery suggests a late medieval understanding of the relation between conversion and the theatre. By the time Donne delivered his sermon, this relation had altered considerably. Although the theme of conversion as a change of religious identity had become popular on the stage, the aim of playwrights was by no means to encourage spectators to convert. Indeed, in contrast with Donne's desire that the colonists should rehearse and act out the apostles' acts of evangelism on the stage of the world, dramatists took pains to avoid depicting the full transformation of religious identity that is part of conversion. This was first and foremost because conversion constituted a problem.

This thesis explores the topic of religious conversion as represented on the early modern English stage. Its main contention is that despite the great and

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[1] John Donne, *A sermon vpon the viii. verse of the I. chapter of the Acts of the Apostles Preach'd to the Honourable Company of the Virginian Plantation, 130* (1622) A4v.

abiding interest of playwrights in conversion, and despite the importance of religious change and transformation on the stage (implicit, for instance, in play-acting itself and the performing of spiritual regeneration and moral degeneration), early modern playwrights did not conceive of conversion as a genuine, fundamental, or radical transformation of religious identity, that is to say, as an utter erasure of one's former Christian, Jewish, Muslim or pagan identity and a full adoption of a new faith.[2] To acknowledge that this was a genuine possibility would be to recognize that one's religious identity, far from being an inalienable part of the self, was in fact exchangeable. Dramatists appear to have been unwilling to embrace this possibility. Instead, they portrayed religious conversion in such ways as to confirm that religious identity is fixed, impermeable and encoded in one's very being.

This study is informed by early modern perceptions of conversion and the relation between conversion and the early modern theatre. It shows how and why conversion enjoyed sustained popularity with theatre audiences throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; how the meaning of conversion changed from an unambiguously positive and inspiring event to an act that was looked upon with suspicion; it explains the fundamental differences between these understandings of conversion and what they tell us about early modern thinking about religion; it describes in what respects the idea of genuine and radical transformation of religious identity was considered so disturbing and reveals how this collective anxiety took shape on the stage; how dramatists dealt with their need to celebrate embraces of Christianity on the one hand, and, on the other, their need to reassure audiences that religious identity is impervious to the disquieting effects of change; it argues why the "old," positive meaning of conversion was still deployed by playwrights and how this manifested itself on the stage in relation to its "new" variant; finally, it clarifies what the stage reveals to us about the early modern experience of conversion and its treatment of converts.

Spiritual and Interfaith Conversion

To clarify the above points, I make a distinction between spiritual and interfaith conversion. The term "spiritual conversion" is employed to refer to an intensification of religious devotion, for instance by entering a monastery, a turn of

[2] I use the words "faith" and "religion" interchangeably. The term "religious identity" I use in reference to a person's social, cultural and political allegiance to a collective religion. The word "self" is first and foremost employed in opposition to the concept of the religious "other" and less as an idea that implies introspection or reflection on one's subjectivity.

the soul towards God, or the repentant rejection of sin in favour of the pursuit of a life of godliness, that does not necessarily and explicitly involve the embrace or denial of an organized or institutionalized faith. I use the term "interfaith conversion" in the sense of the exchange of one denominational identity for another. Here, "denominational" refers both to confessions within a specific church, like Protestantism and Catholicism as forms of Christianity, and broader differences of religion, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and paganism. The distinction between Christian confessions on the one hand and Christianity and non-Christian faiths on the other may seem obvious to us, but, as we shall see, there is no fundamental difference between those categories in the early modern theatrical imagination. By far, most interfaith conversion plays revolve around conversions between Christianity and a single non-Christian church; only a small number feature Protestant-Catholic conversion.

Crucial to my approach to the two forms of conversion is that the one does not exclude the other. Conversions that are spiritual in the sense that they do not explicitly refer to a confession can sometimes be construed in denominational terms. Converts asserting that their spiritual regeneration is solely the will and work of God, for instance, are more likely to have embraced a Protestant denomination than Catholicism. More fundamentally, given that religious conversion is necessarily a personal experience, interfaith conversions are always modelled on the blueprint of spiritual conversion. The template of spiritual conversion verifies its denominational content. After all, without the profound personal conviction that defines spiritual conversion, the adoption of a particular religion can only be construed as opportunistic and disingenuous. Nevertheless, in most early modern plays, the question of whether a conversion is *predominantly* of an interfaith or spiritual nature is relatively easy to determine.

This specifically dual definition does not appear in scholarship on conversion. In his seminal study on the psychology of religion, first published in 1902, William James largely focuses on psychological experiences of moments of spiritual conversion and pays little attention to conversion as a change of religious identity.[3] Arthur Darby Nock's important investigation into conversion in classical antiquity, too, concentrates on spiritual conversion.[4] He draws a distinction between on the one hand the idea of conversion as a "great change" and a "reorientation of the soul," that is typically promoted within the prophetic

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[3] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 137-184.

[4] Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Boston and London: University Press of America, 1988 [1933]).

religions of Judaism and Christianity, and, on the other, the gradual "acceptance of new worships as useful supplements and not as substitutes" that we find in classical forms of paganism.[5] Lewis Rambo lists "intensification" of faith and "institutional transition" (or "denominational switching") among five "types" of conversion, which largely correspond with my definitions of spiritual and interfaith conversion respectively.[6] Michael Questier distinguishes between "the way in which sinful man is made regenerate by grace" and conversion "between ecclesiastical institutions, which takes on a political character."[7] This description overlaps with mine, but does not suggest that switches between "ecclesiastical institutions" were understood as exchanges of religious identity, which is crucial to my interpretation. This is also true of Molly Murray's division between "a change of church and […] a change of soul," that, in her view, accords with the opposition between "the ritual and the spiritual."[8]

The division between spiritual and interfaith conversion enables me to explore how on the early modern stage, the understanding of religion as a personal and spiritual relationship with God increasingly gave way to the conception of faith as a political factor and a social and cultural identity that was inextricably linked with other constituents of identity, such as gender and race. The religious pluralism of early modern England created a profound sense of uncertainty about the solidity and stability of religion. Competition between different (emerging) factions led to the politicization of religion.[9] Religion thus increasingly served as a tool to fashion national selves and barbarous others. In addition, interfaith conversion led to a disturbing sense that religious identity could be exchanged, a development that was fuelled by ideological framings of conversions as inauthentic and opportunistic.

Religion and Conversion in Early Modern England

In their article "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti argue that scholars of history and literature, New

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[5] Nock, *Conversion*, 7.

[6] Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993) 12-14.

[7] Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 3-4.

[8] Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 7.

[9] The politicization of religion, was, of course, not a new phenomenon. What is important is that it was *felt* as such by early moderns themselves.

Historicists in particular, have often failed to correctly recognize the meaning of early modern religion; rather than treating religious issues as matters of faith, they "quickly translated them into social, economic, and political language."[10] Focusing on studies of the early modern English culture of theatre, Jackson and Marotti add that some scholars also mistakenly adhere to the "the secularization thesis," which they describe as

> the contention that there was, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an accelerating process of secularization taking place in English culture in which issues and conflicts traditionally expressed in a religious vocabulary also came to be formulated in other language(s).[11]

Although Jackson and Marotti present examples of critical works that convincingly challenge this hypothesis, and although I agree with them that many of the approaches they contest are informed by a simplistic view of religion as a "form of 'false consciousness,' " and by a "relentless 'presentism,'" this thesis will demonstrate that early moderns *themselves* began to use languages of nationality, race, gender, economy and politics to characterize religion.[12] Indeed, the major change in the theatrical portrayal of faith that this thesis will uncover is that the emphasis on spiritual conversion gave way to a passionate interest in interfaith conversion. Spiritual conversion implies what Jackson and Marotti describe as "a deep psychological and emotional experience, a core moral commitment, a personally and socially crucial way of transvaluing human experience and desire, a reality both within and beyond the phenomenal world."[13] According to the two scholars, this is what many scholars fail to recognize about early modern religion in general. Interfaith conversion, however, accords with the confessionalization of religion, a process in which faith became politicized and increasingly tied up with formations of group identity.[14] As such, early modern dramatic approaches to

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[10] Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 167-90, 167.

[11] Jackson and Marotti, "The Turn to Religion," 172.

[12] Jackson and Marotti, "The Turn to Religion," 168.

[13] Jackson and Marotti, "The Turn to Religion," 169.

[14] The confessionalization thesis was first put forward by Ernst Walter Zeeden and elaborated on by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard, who used it to describe a process in which, after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, Catholic and Protestant confessions in Germany began to define themselves against each other with increasing vigour. See Ernst Walter Zeeden, "Grundlagen und Wege der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe," *Historische*

interfaith conversion are in fact closer to many New Historicist treatments of religion as politics than Jackson and Marotti seem to recognize.

The unprecedented confessionalization of religion in early modern England is rooted in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century developments that increased religious pluralism. The Protestant Reformation involved a dispute over the way in which Christianity ought to be practised and understood. This disagreement increasingly manifested itself in polarized socio-political terms, as a battle between Catholics and Protestants, and between conformists and dissenters, to name only the most obvious antagonists. In England, this battle was accentuated by the 30 years of instability in religious national identity, starting with Henry VIII's break with Rome, which was followed by a brief national return to Catholicism and yet another rejection of Papal authority under Elizabeth I. In addition to inter-Christian segregation along politico-religious lines, there was a growing number of English encounters with foreign Jews, Muslims and pagans, in London as well as abroad. This was a result of increasing commerce in Europe and of voyages of trade and discovery across the globe.

Not surprisingly, early modern religious pluralization implied an unprecedented rise in the number of doctrines and forms of piety it was possible to embrace or forswear. Firstly, interfaith conversion within Christianity became possiblity. As Michael Questier notes, it is difficult to provide exact numbers on how many people actually converted, but evidence suggests that "[d]uring this time, within the apparently rigid constraints of doctrinal formulation and political loyalism, flux in religion was the norm rather than the exception in religious experience, actually expected rather than regarded with astonishment."[15] Of course, not all cases of flux in religion can be understood as straightforward exchanges of denominational identity, but Questier convincingly demonstrates that a relatively large number did consist of conversions. Secondly, the Ottoman

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Zeitschrift 185 (1958): 249–299, Wolfgang Reinhard, "Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977): 226–251 and Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung: Eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühneuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1981). For a brief overview of the confessionalization thesis as put forward by Reinhard and Schilling, see Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) 13. Krstić shows how this thesis can be applied to early modern Islam. I use the term, too, in a sense broader than Reinhard and Schilling's thesis encompasses and which applies specifically to the development of Christian confessions as religious identities.

[15] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion,* 8 n17, 206.

Empire, the largest Islamic territory of early modern Europe, attracted impoverished Christians, often pirates, who managed to improve their worldly prospects significantly by striking deals with the Ottomans and "turning Turk." This was because the make-up of the Ottoman society allowed for social, political and economic mobility to a much greater extent than Christian societies at the time.[16] Renegades were able to join the army and even occupy important positions in administration.[17] At the same time, Islamic military forces managed to capture Christians in their European homelands, many of whom were reported to have converted to Islam under Ottoman pressure.[18] Finally, the European colonial expansion into Africa, Asia and the New World created an industry for the training of missionaries, with a central focus on methods of conversion. For Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, the sixteenth-century chronicler of the Spanish explorations in central and Latin America, proselytizing was the first objective that sprang to mind when he realised that indigenous peoples were, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "a tabula rasa ready to take the imprint of European civilization."[19] Martyr notes:

> for lyke as rased or unpaynted tables, are apte to receave what formes soo ever are fyrst drawen theron by the hande of the paynter, even soo these naked and simple people, doo soone receave the customes of owre Religion, and by conversation with owre men, shake of theyr fierce and native barbarousnes.[20]

English colonists nurtured missionary ambitions, too. The Virginia settlers deployed various strategies to convince the Indians of the Protestant truth. The Virginia Company went as far as to instruct its Governor to take away or even

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[16] Paul Coles, *The Ottoman Impact on Europe* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1968) 154. See also Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 28-29.

[17] Lois Potter, "Pirates and 'Turing Turk' in Renaissance Drama," in ed. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems, *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 124-140, 129.

[18] This phenomenon has been extensively investigated. See, for instance, Matar, *Islam in Britain,* 23-27, 31-49; and Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain in the Islamic World 1558-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 124-55. This chapter focuses in particular on the "captivity narrative" of Christians who had converted to Islam. See also Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 81-83.

[19] Quoted in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) 17.

[20] Quoted in Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, 17.

execute the Indians' "iniocasockes or Priestes."[21] Yet most conversion attempts were directed at children who had to be "procured and instructed in the English language and manner," which additionally shows the intimate relationship between early modern socio-cultural life and religious identity.[22]

The apparent straightforwardness of the above religious labels and interfaith conversions belies the fact that early modern religious identities were much more fluid than they are today. In the words of Jean-Christophe Mayer, there was a "constant obsession with labelling, ascribing religious identities" and "setting down differences."[23] As Peter Lake insightfully points out about Christian religious identities in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England,

> depending on their initially contingent but increasingly structural relationships with events, different ideological factions, groups and individuals told themselves and others different stories about where they were and how they got there, producing in the process much of the vocabulary, the categories of religious affiliation and classification – Puritan, Papist, Protestant, Catholic, Familist, Separatist, Conformist, Church Papist – that modern historians habitually use to analyze describe, or evoke the religious scene of Elizabethan England.[24]

To the Christian categories mentioned by Lake we can add Judaism and Islam. This is not so much because these faiths were in a process of *de facto* solidification, but because early moderns used them rhetorically and polemically to consolidate their own and attack other denominations.[25] Inevitably, this process rendered early modern Christian understandings of Judaism and Islam dynamic as well.

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[21] Rebecca Ann Bach, *Colonial Transformations: The Cultural Production of the New Atlantic World, 1580-1640* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 15.

[22] W. Stitt Robinson, "Indian Education and Missions in Colonial Virginia," *The Journal of Southern History,* 18.2 (1952): 152-168, 153-154. The asymmetrical power relations between colonizer and colonized, however, often proved an obstacle to successful proselytizing. For instance, in 1622, disturbed trade relationships between the native inhabitants and the English residents in Jamestown resulted in the killing of a quarter of the English inhabitants, which temporarily ended conversion efforts.

[23] Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 7

[24] Peter Lake, "Religious Identities in Shakespeare's England," in ed. David Scott Kastan, *A Companion to Shakespeare* (London: Blackwell, 1999) 57-85, 58.

[25] James Shapiro, in *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), describes how Judaism was construed for these ideological purposes; Daniel Vitkus, in *Turning*

In this climate, in which people were anxious to stabilize religious identity and verify the truth of their faith, interfaith conversion came to play an ambiguous role within religious polemics. While conversion to the "right" faith was preached by polemicists and clergymen, it also had a corrosive effect on the stability of religious identity. Christianization of Jews, for instance, was used by Protestants and Catholics for ideological purposes. From around the middle of the sixteenth century a belief developed that the conversion of the Jews would herald the Apocalypse.[26] Many Reformers, including Luther, believed that the Jews' adoption of (Protestant) Christianity "had awaited the preaching of the true Gospel."[27] Thus the conversion of the Jews, foreshadowed by Christianizations of individual Jews, served as a powerful argument in defence of Protestantism. Rome, in turn, responded to these ideas by forcing Jews to attend conversion sermons, hoping they would turn Catholic. At the same time, converts – of all denominations – became easy targets for accusations of opportunism and inconstancy. John Heywood, for instance, noted in his epigram "Of turning" that "Halfe turne or whole turne, where turners be turning / Turnying keepes turners from hangyng and burning."[28] The converts who became notorious for their multiple recantations created a climate for precisely these allegations.[29]

A Cross-Religious Approach

The effect of early modern confessionalization makes itself felt in the way modern critics approach representations of conversion in early modern English drama. Despite the vast literature on this subject, scholars chiefly focus on interfaith conversion, and, in doing so, restrict themselves to Christianity and a single non-Christian faith.[30] Stage depictions of Islamic-Christian conversion and the

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Turk, and Jane Hwang Degenhardt, in *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) do this for Islam.

[26] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* 132.

[27] Steven Rowan, "Luther, Bucer and Eck on the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985): 79-90, 10.

[28] John Heywood, *John Heywoodes Woorkes* (London: Thomas Powell, 1562) Sig. A4v. I thank Abigail Shinn for drawing my attention to this poem.

[29] See Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion*, 54-57.

[30] There are some exceptions, such as John W. Velz's article "From Jerusalem to Damascus: Bilocal Dramaturgy in Medieval and Shakespearean Conversion Plays," *Comparative Drama* 15.4 (1981): 311-26. I find Velz's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard III* as "conversion plays" somewhat tenuous. Alizon Brunning, in " 'Thou art damned for alt'ring thy religion:' The Double Coding of Conversion in City Comedy," in *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, ed. Dieter Mehl, Angela Stock and Anne-Julia Zwierlein

Christianization of Jews in particular have been extensively analysed. These studies have yielded invaluable insights into the way the early modern stage channelled anxieties over religious instability and contributed to the construction of group identities.

Pioneering work on the subject of Muslim-Christian conversion was done in the 1930s by Samuel Chew, who discusses a number of Turk plays in relation to early modern English knowledge of Islam that circulated in news reports and travel documents.[31] Although Chew does address the issue of conversion, and although many of his observations are still relevant today, most of his findings do not pertain to dramatic works. It was not until the 1990s that scholars started to show a renewed interest in the representation of relations between Christians and Turks on the early modern stage, and from then on the stream of publications on

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(Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004) 154-62, discusses the theme of (what I call) spiritual conversion in relation to sincerity in a number of Jacobean comedies. In her chapter " 'Return unto Me!' Literature and Conversion in Early Modern England," in *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion*, ed. Jan M. Bremmer, Wout J. van Bekkum and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006) 85-106, Helen Wilcox presents an overview of conversion in early modern English literature. Yet she focuses exclusively on "the idea of spiritual and personal metamorphosis," and ignores the concept of interfaith conversion altogether (86). Erin Evelyn Kelly explores the idea of individual subjectivity and identity using stage representations of spiritual and interfaith conversion in a small number of early modern English plays, in "Changing Everything: Religious Conversion and the Limits of Individual Subjectivity in Early Modern English Drama," diss. University of Maryland, 2003. Holly Crawford Pickett analyses the phenomenon of changing one's religious identity multiple times in an early modern English context, and pays special attention to the performativity of serial conversion. Her analysis includes a limited number of interfaith conversion plays, in "The Drama of Serial Conversion in Renaissance England," diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005. See also Lieke Stelling, " 'Thy Very Essence is Mutability:' Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama, 1558-1642," in *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*, ed. Lieke Stelling, Harald Hendrix and Todd Richardson (Leiden: Brill 2012) 59-83.

[31] Samuel Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937). Unless indicated otherwise, I follow Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), in using the term "Turk" not to refer to a nationality but to the broad early modern English conceptions of a Muslim (16). See the same author for a useful chronological list of plays produced between 1579 and 1624 with Islamic characters, themes or settings, (257-58). For a discussion of the role of the acting company in the development and success of the Turk play as a genre, see Mark Hutchings, "The 'Turk Phenomenon' and the Repertory of the late Elizabethan Playhouse," *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 16, 10.1-39 (2007), 13 December 2012 <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-16/hutcturk.htm>.

the subject has never diminished. Much valuable work has been done by Nabil Matar, who was the first to examine the renegade as a stock Renaissance character, "represent[ing] the internal evil that threatened Christendom" and "an Other in the midst of English society because he reminded priests and writers, urban theatergoers and village congregations of the power and allure of the Muslim empire."[32] Matar remarks that contrary to their historical counterparts, who happily lived ever after, fictional renegades either met with divine retribution to "inject fear about the consequences of apostasy," or repented.[33] He also points to the similarities between the stage and church rituals facilitating a return to Christianity for willing and repentant apostates.[34] Matar's publication has been followed by a large number of studies on early modern Anglo-Ottoman relations as represented on the stage.[35] A particularly influential example is Daniel Vitkus's *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*, which takes Matar's findings a step further by arguing for a generic approach to Christian-Islamic conversion plays, that is, by documenting patterns in conversion plots and their relation to the "powerful conjunction of sexual, commercial, political, and religious anxieties in early modern English culture."[36] As he demonstrates in his analysis of *Othello* (1604), Vitkus is particularly perceptive on the metaphoric significance of Christian-Islamic stage conversion, especially the trope of "turning" and its sexual and political connotations.[37] Jonathan Burton, Bernadette Andrea, and Jane Hwang Degenhardt, too, are interested in the wider economic, political, sexual and gender-related significance of dramatic conversions

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[32] Matar, *Islam in Britain,* 52, 72. For his analysis of the stage renegade see especially his chapter 2.

[33] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 58.

[34] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 52, 58-59, 69-70.

[35] See, for instance: Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London's Theatre of the East 1576-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Gerald MacLean, *English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sabine Schülting, Sabine Lucia Müller, and Ralf Hertel, eds., *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); and Chloë Houston, "Turning Persia: The Prospect of Conversion in Safavid Iran," in Lieke Stelling, Harald Hendrix and Todd Richardson (eds), *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 85-107. See for a comprehensive and critical overview of the literature on this subject up until 2009: Linda McJannet, "Islam and English Drama: A Critical History," *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama* 12.2 (2009): 183-93.

[36] Vitkus, *Turning Turk,*162.

[37] Viktus, *Turning Turk,* 84-85. See also his chapter four, on *Othello*.

to and from Islam.[38] Burton and Andrea complicate Vitkus's analysis by introducing the ignored viewpoints of early modern Muslims and women respectively, and showing how these perspectives, too, affected dramatic portrayals of Islamic-Christian conversion. Degenhardt pays special attention to proto-racial conceptions of Islamic identity and to the ways in which (the threat of) conversion to Islam was construed in terms of erotic seduction. She also shows how these presentations are inextricably linked to national debates about Protestant reform.

The other form of stage conversion that has received a great deal of scholarly consideration is that of the Christianization of Jews. Much of the criticism devoted to this topic, however, is limited to *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and to Shylock's conversion in particular, which is generally seen as the most notorious conversion of the Elizabethan stage.[39] In his important study *Shakespeare and the Jews*, James Shapiro has shed light on Shylock and Jessica's conversions by providing a rich overview of Elizabethan conceptions of national, racial and political identity and the questions these raised over the possibility of the

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[38] Burton, *Traffic and Turning*; Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*. See also Bindu Malieckal, " 'Wanton Irreligious Madness:' Conversion and Castration in Massinger's the Renegado," *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 31 (2002): 25-43; Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's The Virgin Martyr and the Early Modern Threat of 'Turning Turk,'" *ELH* (2006): 83-117; Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Catholic Prophylactics and Islam's Sexual Threat: Preventing and Undoing Sexual Defilement in the Renegado," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9.1 (2009): 62-92; and Dennis Britton, "Muslim Conversion and Circumcision as Theater," in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) 71-86.

[39] See, for instance, John F. Hennedy, "Launcelot Gobbo and Shylock's Forced Conversion," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15.3 (1973): 405-410; Camille Pierre Laurent, "Dog, Fiend and Christian, or Shylock's Conversion," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 26 (1984): 15-27; Martin D. Yaffe, *Shylock and the Jewish Question* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Heather Hirschfeld, " 'We all Expect a Gentle Answer, Jew:' *The Merchant of Venice* and the Psychotheology of Conversion," *ELH* 73.1 (2006): 61-81; Kenneth Gross, *Shylock is Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Marianne Novy, "*The Merchant of Venice* and Pressured Conversions in Shakespeare's World," in ed. Richard Fotheringham et al., *Shakespeare's World / World Shakespeares: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Brisbane 2006* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008) 108–118. See also Jeffrey Shoulson's *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), which does include a discussion of Jessica, but serves an example of the exclusive focus on Jewish-Christian conversion in early modern English drama.

conversion of Jews.[40] In addition, Shapiro's work has sparked a range of New Historicist analyses of Jewish conversion in Shakespeare's comedy and, to a much smaller extent, in other plays, such as Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589). As a rule, these studies redress a balance by paying special attention to Jessica as a female convert in *The Merchant of Venice*, and to the role of Elizabethan understandings of race in relation to her character. Examples are Janet Adelman's *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in* The Merchant of Venice, and Michelle Ephraim's *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage.*[41]

It is perhaps no surprise that early modern English dramatizations of forms of paganism have attracted little attention from scholars. To begin with, the category of paganism is diverse, including English understandings of Roman, Celtic and native American varieties of pagan faiths, which can be found, for instance, in Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), James Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland* (1639) and John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1621) respectively. In addition, these religions are less accessible and of less current interest for the Western critic. Although the number of plays featuring varieties of pagan-Christian conversion easily measures up to those presenting Jewish or Muslim converts, there is not a single book-length study on this topic. Nevertheless, recent studies of individual plays prove valuable for the study of conversion on the early modern stage. A case in point is Holly Crawford Pickett's analysis of *The Virgin Martyr*, which shows that the play's spectacular portrayal of conversion harks back to medieval drama that sought to provoke spiritual conversions of their audiences.[42]

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[40] Apart from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Shapiro is, however, remarkably silent on other early modern English plays that feature Jewish characters in relation to conversion, such as Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* (1581).

[41] See also Kim F. Hall, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Colonization and Miscegenation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992): 87-111, which, of course, preceded Shapiro's study; Mary Janell Metzger " 'Now by My Hood, a Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity," *PMLA* 113.1 (1998): 52-63; Lisa Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference: From Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Lindsay M. Kaplan, "Jessica's Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in the Merchant of Venice," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.1 (2007): 1-30; Brett D. Hirsch, "Counterfeit Professions: Jewish Daughters and the Drama of Failed Conversion in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*."*Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 19 (2009) 4.1-37 <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-19/hirscoun.html> 22 January 2013; Lara Bovilsky, " 'A Gentle and no Jew:' Jessica, Portia, and Jewish Identity," *Renaissance Drama* 38 (2010): 47-76.

[42] Holly Crawford Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*" *Studies in English Literature* 49.2 (2009): 437-62. See also Alison

Each of the above approaches employs conversion to shed light on early modern understandings of specific religions,[43] rather than elucidate conversion itself. It is only through a broad, cross-confessional and pan-religious study that we are able to comprehend the dynamics of early modern conversion. This is important because a solid understanding of early modern notions of conversion is crucial to deepening our knowledge of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social experiences of identity and religion: in combining questions of faith with concerns for identity and change, and in inviting a "before and after" comparison, conversion offered a compact narrative tool – eagerly picked up by playwrights – to examine some of the dominant questions of the early modern period. This thesis provides the first investigation into early modern stagings of conversion from a wide-ranging cross-religious perspective. It maps unmistakable patterns in the way dramatists presented conversion, patterns that come into view precisely through a cross-religious approach.

Conversion and Early Modern English Drama

Throughout the early modern period, conversion remained a popular dramatic topic. Between 1558 and 1642, playwrights wrote more than forty works about spiritual conversion, and about potential, feigned and genuine conversions between Christianity on the one hand, and Islam, Judaism and various forms of paganism on the other, and, in a few cases, between Catholicism and Protestantism. In addition, they frequently referred to conversion in figurative senses. The popularity of conversion as a dramatic subject can be explained by the reciprocal relation between conversion and the theatre. Spiritual and interfaith conversion made for compelling stories, spectacle, and tragic and comic entertainment. Conversely, drama enabled playwrights and audiences to probe the existential questions that were raised by interfaith and spiritual conversion.

Playwrights often included conversion in their works because it provided a powerful narrative frame to investigate personal change, and lent itself well to both tragic and comedic scenes. As the late medieval authors of mystery and miracle plays were well aware, conversions provided spectacle. This could be the spectacle of instantaneous insight, provoked by divine intervention, such as in the case of the Pauline persecutor of Christians in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin*

Searle, "Conversion in James Shirley's *St Patrick for Ireland* (1640)," in Stelling et. al. (eds) 199-223, who discusses Shirley's curious representation of paganism in relation to conversion in the context of early modern Irish religious politics.

[43] These need not necessarily be Islam, Judaism or forms of paganism. Many critics are aware of Catholic and Protestant overtones of dramatic representations of these faiths.

Martyr, or of a formidable and conversion-inducing confrontation with death, as is illustrated by the Duke of Florence in James Shirley's *The Traitor* (1631). However, plays such as Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1592) show that dramatic spectacle did not have to involve success in conversion, but could also follow from tragic failure in mending one's spiritual ways. Given that spiritual conversion is tantamount to a radical change for the better and, when presented as a miracle, did not require logical explanation, this form of conversion was also used as a plot device to provide a reassuring and festive ending for malicious characters. Examples are Oliver and Duke Frederick in *As You Like It* (1599). Interfaith conversion proved an attractive topic for playwrights due to its topical nature. People had converted themselves, knew converts, or learned about them through various genres of prose and verse, which rendered conversion an issue of strong contemporary interest. Finally, dramatists employed spiritual and interfaith conversion for their comedic effects, for instance by hinting at the implausible conversions of incorrigible rogues, grotesque Jews or pagans. The circumcision that renegades had to undergo was also made a source of uneasy laughter.

If the early modern theatre benefited from the remarkable versatility of conversion, conversion itself profited from dramatic treatments. That is to say, early modern theatre provided a medium for the analysis of the thorny problems entailed by conversion. One of the fundamental questions investigated in drama was whether and to what extent people were responsible for their own spiritual conversion. Protestant reformers questioned the active role of humankind in the process of conversion. Ascribing it fully to God's grace, they urged the laity and clergy alike to reconsider the human factors that had traditionally been seen as vehicles of conversion, such as the manner and form in which Scripture ought to be read, charity, mass, and sermons as well as images and devotional drama, such as saint plays and moralities. This meant that playwrights, who were used to employing drama as a tool for spiritual conversion, by means of instruction or emotive spectacle, now began to convey to spectators that conversion is beyond human endeavour. Dramatists such as William Wager and Nathaniel Woodes did so by staging failure in spiritual conversion for which humans were still considered responsible. Their plays nevertheless evince concern over the precise workings of reprobation and the awkward implications of double predestination in relation to conversion. This concern is perhaps most powerfully dramatized in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. In both versions of this play, Marlowe lays bare the disconcerting consequences of election doctrine for the experience of faith, yet without passing direct judgment on reformed theology or on his main character and without resolving the tension between predestination and human agency.

Interfaith conversion raised wholly different but no less fundamental questions that were addressed and explored in drama. These revolved around forms of collective identity. Early modern understandings of identity, notably involving religion, nationality, race, gender were dynamic and subject to conflict, confusion, as well as fascination. As literary scholars and cultural historians have shown, the early modern public stage was a prominent medium in the construction of group identities.[44] The imaginary world of plays allowed playwrights to draw on a wide range of discourses and make these converge in order to fashion social and communal identities. According to Vitkus, this process was by no means straightforward or consistent, but "[involved] a particularly violent set of contradictions about alien cultures and peoples. They are both demonized and exalted, admired and condemned."[45] Critics have argued that by exploring interfaith conversion playwrights responded to actual changes of religion by attempting to allay fears over the destabilizing effect of interfaith conversion on collective identity. Nabil Matar writes, for example, that "on stage, Islam had to be defeated, and those who converted to it had to be destroyed. […] The English public would be made to see the divine retribution for rejecting Christianity."[46] He also notes that "in the verse and prose of the seventeenth century, the renegade was vilified to Satanic magnitudes, and English writers either reconverted or executed him."[47] Daniel Vitkus takes a slightly more nuanced approach when he observes that

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[44] Indeed, since the late 1980s, much of the scholarship on early modern culture has been devoted to ways in which national, racial and religious concepts of identity were negotiated and constructed on the early modern stage. To name only a few examples: Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Ton Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642* (Rutherford NJ.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992); Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*; Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes*; Michelle Ephraim, *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Jane Pettegree, *Foreign and Native on the English Stage, 1588-1611: Metaphor and National Identity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[45] Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 22.

[46] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 58.

[47] Matar, *Islam in Britain,* 71.

> English anxieties about cultural pollution, miscegenation, or religious conversion were intense, but at the same time the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences were often embraced and internalized as English culture began to absorb and articulate those differences as part of its own process of self-identification. The playwrights who wrote for the Elizabethan and Early Stuart stage were shrewd observers of this aspect of their culture's development, and their plays offered performances of just those allegedly alien behaviors that were being emulated by the English.[48]

In asserting that concerns over real-life interfaith conversions were articulated and alleviated on the stage, however, scholars erroneously interpret *staged* interfaith conversions as fully-fledged transformations of identity. This error of interpretation arises from the fact that the classical paradigm of conversion that we find in Scripture is marked by radical change. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, for instance, it is described as a rebirth: "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." In addition, plays present *spiritual* conversions not only as sudden, but also as radical transformations. A case in point is *As You Like It*, where Oliver, when asked about his evil pre-conversion identity, expresses the paradox of continuity that such a conversion entails: " 'Twas I, but 'tis not I" (4.3.134). Oliver expresses his spiritual conversion in terms of a metamorphosis of identity, yet this identity is a moral and not a confessional one.

Another reason why critics read dramatic portrayals of interfaith conversions as transformations lies in the prominent role of transformation in drama: metadramatically, with actors turning into characters, on the level of the dramatic action, with characters undergoing a variety of changes, with men dressing up as women and vice versa, with tragic and comic cases of mistaken identity, and with allusions to classical myths about transformation, notably Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Thus, Jonathan Burton aligns play-acting with conversion: "in the theater, Christian actors were commonly 'converted' by means of make-up, props and costume into stage 'infidels' who, in turn, might be 'converted' into Christians before the eyes of their audiences."[49] Jane Hwang Degenhardt, too, uses conversion discourse to describe the theatre as a locus of transformation: "at its most basic level, the stage itself functioned as a technology of illicit conversion: it

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[48] Vitkus, *Turning Turk,* 22-23.

[49] Burton, *Traffic and Turning,* 29.

converted male actors into gentlemen and women, Christians into Turks, Moors, and Jews, and audiences into believers."[50]

However, as this thesis argues, early modern playwrights took pains precisely to counter the idea that interfaith conversion, as an exchange of identity, was possible. A close examination of plays reveals, for instance, that audiences were invited not to take seriously the Christianization of grotesque religious others, or the sincerity of stage apostates. Moreover, in those cases in which spectators were presented with serious portrayals of genuine Christianizations, the converting Muslim, Jewish and pagan characters do not resemble their stereotypical coreligionists, but are depicted as being equally as attractive and virtuous as many Christian characters. In some instances, these non-Christian figures anticipate their Christianization by showing interest in Christian theology or rescuing Christians from oppression at the hands of non-Christians. Even in the case of apostasy, and, specifically, Christians turning Turk, dramatists contested the understanding of this conversion as an exchange of Christian for Islamic identity. They did so by presenting the conversions of their apostatizing characters as insincere or even counterfeited, and as a spiritual lapse from godliness instead of an embrace of Islamic orthodoxy. In these ways, playwrights did respond to the subversive implications of real-life interfaith conversions, but precisely by avoiding the analogy between the metamorphic reverberations of the theatre and an interfaith convert's religious transformation. Indeed, unlike cross-dressing, abundantly shown and exploited for its meta-dramatic echoes, interfaith conversion was portrayed as a form of reassuring constancy and continuity. One of the most famous early modern stage converts best illustrates this point. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the lack of perceptible religious transformation in Jessica's conversion from Judaism to Christianity is in stark contrast with the visibility of her temporary appearance as a boy – the gender of the actor playing her – that is necessary for her elopement to marry and convert.

Sources and Methodology

This study focuses on plays performed in England between 1558 and 1642. This relatively long time span allows me to identify both the important changes and continuities in representations of conversion in early modern drama. I consider the year of Elizabeth's accession the beginning of Elizabethan drama. This was, moreover, the moment when England, after 30 years of religious instability, officially converted from Catholicism to Protestantism and embarked on a period

[50] Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 4.

in which it would develop a distinct form of English Protestantism. The theatres were closed by the Puritan government in 1642 (not to be reopened again in 1660), which is why this study ends in this year. During the time covered by this thesis, around 120 works were performed that feature conversion in a variety of ways, such as stagings of (near-) interfaith and spiritual conversions or converts, or references to religious conversion in a literal or figurative sense. These plays do not explicitly differentiate between interfaith and spiritual conversion.[51] Both the exchange of denominations and the transcendental turn to God and the rejection of sin are simply referred to as "conversion." Indeed, I consider a play relevant when it explicitly uses the term "conversion," its variant forms or synonyms, including "apostasy," "proselyte" or to "turn" Turk, Jew, etcetera.[52] Plays that specify the denominations involved I regard as portraying or alluding to interfaith conversion; plays that mention conversion without explicitly referring to an exchange of confessions or religions, by contrast, I categorize as spiritual, even though they are in most cases not entirely void of denominational clues. Since an important aim of this study is to identify dramatic patterns in depictions of conversion, I have tried to be as inclusive as possible in incorporating plays, regardless of their genre and geographic origin. Most works are tragedies, comedies or tragicomedies and were performed in London, where most of the public playhouses were established.[53]

The methodological approach of this thesis is in many respects indebted to the interpretative practice of New Historicism. In order to gain access to early modern English conceptions and experiences of conversion, I read drama in the context of a variety of contemporary non-literary sources, including sermons, pamphlets, travel writings and personal statements of conversion and recantation. In addition I pay special attention to literary aspects of non-dramatic sources, such as their use of figurative language. This approach is informed by an understanding of language "not as a transparent reflection of reality, but as a force which helps to

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[51] This number constists of nearly fifty works that feature spiritual and interfaith (near-) conversions, feigned conversions, (near-) converts, and works that thematize spiritual and interfaith conversion (see the appendix for a list of these works), and another 70 plays that occasionally use conversion in a metaphorical sense or employ tropes of conversion.

[52] My chief method of identifying "conversion plays" was to search the *Literature Online* database published by Chadwyck-Healy. Two exceptions are Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, which do not contain the word "conversion" or any of its derivatives, but, in my view, present enough evidence to establish their thematizing of religious conversion. I discuss this further in the relevant chapters.

[53] Exceptions are, for instance, Richard Zouche's university play *The Sophister*, which was probably performed in Oxford, and *St. Patrick for Ireland*, which was written and staged in Dublin. Its author, the Englishman James Shirley, spent most of his life in England.

constitute it."[54] Due to their capability to convey multiple, complex, and profound meanings, literary devices, or figures of thought and speech, play a fundamental role in constructions of reality. It is for this reason that they ought to be part of historical investigations. Thus, while Michael Questier's important study *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (1996) provides a wealth of detailed information about early modern English political and religious interpretations of conversion between Protestantism and Catholicism in early modern England, his disregard for literary texts and the literariness of texts leaves a gap in our knowledge of more fundamental questions regarding early modern understandings of religious conversion and how it was given meaning.

A considerable part of this gap has been filled by Molly Murray's enquiry into the correlation between early modern English conversion and poetry. Murray shows how "particular formal qualities of poetry – its schemes and tropes, its distinctive styles of signifying – are used to confront the unsettling phenomenon of religious change."[55] Murray concentrates on the poetry of conversion as produced by poets who were converts themselves.[56] She observes that most playwrights are only interested in conversion "as insincere or inconclusive," as "not always faithful and not always final."[57] She suggests that dramatic representations are therefore also "satirical or ironical," which, she writes, is "to misrepresent'' conversion.[58] I find the term "misrepresentation" somewhat unfortunate, because it implies that there are objective criteria for what Murray intimates are correct representations of conversion. Besides, conversion is as much a social as a personal experience. That is to say, even if converts themselves felt that many dramatic approaches to conversion did not do justice to their transformative experience of faith, to state that drama misrepresents conversion disregards the fact that conversions were not isolated events but occurred within communities and social environments, and could have as profound an impact on the public as on converts themselves, particularly in a time of religious upheaval. It is precisely this impact that playwrights addressed when dramatizing conversion. For this reason, the versions of conversion that were offered by playwrights are at least equally important as

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[54] Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in English Drama, 1558-1642* (D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2007) 14.

[55] Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion*, 7.

[56] Indeed, I am not interested in attempting to align the lives of individual authors with their work. Despite the facts that some playwrights were converts themselves, such as Ben Jonson, or some appear to offer intriguing and ambiguous clues as to their own religious convictions, I do not believe it is possible to find biographical details in plays without much conjecture.

[57] Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion*, 29.

[58] Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion*, 29.

autobiographical accounts for the investigation of conversion as a social phenomenon, and certainly no less intriguing than the writings of converts themselves.

At the same time, this study intends to nuance a celebration of (dramatic) literature as a sanctuary for experiments of thought, a place where any imaginable reality can be staged, and a site that first and foremost served to play out fantasies. According to Kevin Sharpe, for instance, "the stage offers a laboratory for the examination of a difficulty, displaced – but not too far – from reality. On the stage in Jacobean England therefore we find plays that lack closure, as dramatists dared to imagine their world without meaning."[59] Similarly, Kirsten Poole notes that "the spatiality of the theatre offered the opportunity for enacted thought experiment," and she celebrates early modern drama as "the cultural equivalent of imaginative quantum foam – the chaotic, metamorphic, wonderful manifestation of the micro-activity of individual beliefs, fears, desires, fantasies, sensations, words."[60] Another case in point is Catherine Belsey's plea for the revaluation of literature.[61] She writes that "exploiting the power of the signifier to conjure worlds in their absence, fiction can treat any topic, record any point of view, however unpalatable, defy all propriety. Since nothing is outlawed, fiction can make the unseen visible, inscribe the unspeakable, and thus render it sayable."[62] This is in many respects true, but the practice of early modern conversion theatre reminds us that playwrights at the same time functioned within tight ideological constraints that precisely prevented them from portraying the "unseen" and "unspeakable" aspects of conversion. No playwright depicted or endorsed the possibility of the exchange of religious identity, which was one of the most urgent social phenomena of the early modern period. Indeed, many New Historicist studies tend to focus on a small number of plays or literary texts, which invites a relatively positive understanding of them as *the* creative, complex and ambiguous counterparts of non-literary texts. It is only when we investigate an extensive range of plays that their parameters reveal themselves, and that it becomes clear that playwrights exploited the creative

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[59] Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 63. See also, for instance, Jean-Christophe Agnew who writes that "the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre furnished a laboratory of representational possibilities for a society perplexed by the cultural consequences of its own liquidity," in *The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 54.

[60] Kirsten Poole, *Supernatural Environments in Shakespeare's England: Spaces of Demonism, Divinity, and Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 21.

[61] Catherine Belsey, *A Future for Criticism* (Chichester, etc.: Wiley Blackwell, 2011).

[62] Belsey, *A Future for Criticism*, 123.

freedom of the stage precisely to convey the same ideological message about the possibility of conversion. In other words, when Belsey writes that literature has "no necessary agenda, no obligation to lay out a programme or defend a cause," this does not mean that playwrights therefore did not *follow* an agenda. [63] Early modern playwrights adhere to a consistent pattern of avoiding the full implication of interfaith conversion as a transformation of identity, that is, the genuine embrace of a new doctrine expressed through a radical change of manner and appearance. By the same token, they employ conversion precisely to consolidate religious identity as encoded in one's being. These dramatic solutions indicate the inherent problem of interfaith conversion, which is the disturbing thought that an exchange of religious identity also affects its stability. If there was one thought experiment of conversion that playwrights carried out on the stage it was showing a collective interest in conversion while at the same time attempting to contain its subversive implications.

Outline

This study is divided into two parts. The first four chapters are devoted to spiritual conversion, the following four to interfaith conversion. Chapter one shows how conversion came to be part of medieval and later of early modern English culture. In pre-Reformation England religious conversion was mainly defined in spiritual terms. As such, the word was used to denote an embrace of the monastic life or to refer to spectacular and iconic moral transformations, notably those of Mary Magdalene and Paul of Tarsus. In drama, spiritual conversion, and, to a lesser extent, interfaith conversion were staged as *exampla* with the aim to bring about the spiritual reformation of audiences. I discuss three late medieval and reformation plays that are clearly rooted in his tradition: the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (1461-1500) the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* (*c.* 1480-1520) and *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (*c.* 1550-1566) by Lewis Wager. At the same time, these plays foreshadow patterns in the way conversion is staged in the last decades of the sixteenth and the first of the seventeenth century. Chapters two and three treat the changing conception and role of spiritual conversion in the context of the confessional polemics of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The former contends that Church of England preachers began to equate repentance with spiritual conversion and to describe it as the kernel of Protestant Christianity, a process that I call the Protestantization of spiritual conversion. As part of this process, many Protestant preachers condemned play-acting as the negative and

[63] Belsey, *A Future for Criticism*, 97.

inauthentic inversion of spiritual conversion. This hostility towards the theatre was fuelled by a rivalry — felt by preachers — between preachers and playwrights in drawing audiences.[64] These concerns were justified in the sense that in the course of the Elizabethan era the theatre began to flourish as never before. At the same time, the Protestantization of spiritual conversion forced playwrights to reconsider the manner in which spiritual change can be staged. The way in which playwrights responded to this question is shown in chapter three. This chapter reveals how the conflict between the didactic purpose of the popular morality play and the deterministic doctrine of election inspired dramatists to portray failed attempts at conversion, resulting in the (tragic) damnation of the protagonist. By way of illustration, it discusses four major conversion plays that were performed in the first decades of Elizabeth's reign: William Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* (1559) and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* (1560), the anonymous *King Darius* (1565), and *The Conflict of Conscience* (1572) by Nathaniel Woodes. I also argue that Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* must be read in the context of this tradition of failed spiritual conversion plays, and that it presents a dramatic culmination of concerns over predestination. After 1580, when interfaith conversion began to make its way onto the stage, successful spiritual conversion was revived in drama, yet never reaching the high level of prominence that it was given in medieval drama. Chapter four firstly traces three new theatrical significances that were given to successful spiritual conversion in this period: it was used as a plot device to arrive at unexpected happy endings for wicked characters, and it was employed as a source of romance and nostalgia. What these meanings have in common is that they present conversion as an ideal that is far removed from the realities of religion outside the theatre. At the same time, these meanings involve an emptying out of the religious significance of spiritual conversion. Secondly, the chapter shows how sinister implications of this development are explored in John Webster's tragedy *The White Devil* (1612), which is a scathing attack on aspects of contemporary religion, particularly the manipulation of faith in conversion. The play demonstrates that this abuse is facilitated by the loss and marginalization of spiritual meaning and by the politicization of early modern faith. Chapter five discusses how interfaith conversion gained currency in the early modern English society, and how it became a factor of disquiet and subversion. This was because it first and foremost

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[64] See, for instance, Martha Tuck Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 15-25; and Ineke Murakami, *Moral Play and Counterpublic: Transformations in Moral Drama, 1465–1599* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011) 63-64.

denoted an exchange of religious identity. As such, it conflicted with the desire for religious constancy, which was perceived as a reassuring confirmation of the stability of religious identity. This conflict is illustrated in two ways: firstly in sermons that by promoting the Christianization of Jews and Muslims paradoxically made a stronger case in favour of religious stability and against the conversion of their Protestant audiences. Secondly, interfaith converts themselves made various attempts to dispel suspicion of their being opportunistic and changeable. Chapters six and seven explore how the theatre used conversion to channel anxieties over religious instability, notably and ironically by celebrating religious constancy. The former focuses on the ways in which plays condemned or ridiculed forms of interfaith conversion, including apostasy and the Christianization of unlikely converts, such as racial caricatures of Jews and Indian cannibals. Chapter seven argues that even the seemingly positive and gratifying conversions of non-Christians to Christianity were either problematized or could not be shown as conclusive transformations of religious identity. Indeed playwrights, I argue, effectively employed conversion to present religious identity as an inherent part of the self that could not be shed or assumed.

Although most chapters explore similarities in representations, and therefore treat multiple plays, I seek to do justice to the specificity of individual plays as much as possible. Given the exceptional position Shakespeare's *Othello* takes up in conversion drama, I dedicate the final chapter to this work. This tragedy not only combines notions of interfaith with spiritual conversion, but is also unique amongst conversion dramas in that it revolves around the adventures of an interfaith convert *after* his Christianization. Providing the first analysis of this play in a broad context of conversion theatre, chapter eight argues that Othello's downfall is not so much the result of his racial or perceived religious difference (like the Venetians, Othello is a Christian), or, indeed Venetian (racist) xenophobia itself, but the tragic consequence of his success as a convert who fully adopts and internalizes Venetian understanding of religious identity as an inherent part of the self.

PART 1: Spiritual Conversion

CHAPTER 1 'Be by Me Converted:' Conversion in Medieval and Reformation Drama

From the arrival of Christianity in England onward, the term "conversion" was used to denote interfaith and spiritual conversion. In fact, the very establishment of Christianity was defined by both meanings. In 597, the Roman monk Augustine began his mission to procure the interfaith conversion of Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity, beginning with King Aethelberht. At the same time, Augustine founded a monastery in Canterbury, which enabled English men, and later women to adopt a monastic life of spiritual contemplation and live according to the rules of their order. Indeed, it was the act of embracing the cloister that became the most common meaning of the word conversion throughout the Middle Ages.[1]

Augustine of Canterbury also introduced the Rule of Saint Benedict into England. This set of instructions was composed by St. Benedict of Nursia (480–547) as a spiritual and practical guide to managing and living according to the rule of a cloistered community, and was soon adopted as a founding text for Western monasticism. In addition to stability and obedience, the third of its tripartite vows was that of the *conversatio morum suorum*, literally meaning "the lifestyle of one's character," or, in the context of the Rule, "the monastic life of one's character."[2] Several times in his Rule, Benedict uses the term *conversatio* in specific relation to the turn towards monasticism, for instance in 58.1: "Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry," and in 73.1: "The reason why we have written this rule is that, by observing it in monasteries, we can

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[1] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London: Penguin, 2009), 342.

[2] It is likely that this syntactically problematic phrase was a medieval idiom and "no doubt clear to St. Benedict's contemporaries." Timothy Fry, ed. *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1981) 459. The term *conversatio* came to be amended to *conversio* by copyists. This was probably because they failed to recognize the meaning of *conversatio*, which in combination with the almost synonymous *morum* looks a little peculiar, and because they understood *conversio* as a key component of Christian life, Fry, *RB 1980*, 459–61; Terrence Kardong, ed. and trans., *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville MN: The Order of St. Benedict, inc., 1996), 24. Today, editors have re-adopted the word *conversatio*. The vow can be regarded as the promise to abide faithfully and to the best of one's ability by the rules of the order. It cannot be separated from the vows of stability and obedience, because the newcomer promises to remain constant in his newly adopted holy life as a Benedictine monk and to observe the rules of the monastic community. The root of *conversatio*, *convert-*, is still visible in the notion that the monastic life involves a change, a conversion to it. See Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, 465.

show that we have some degree of virtue and the beginnings of monastic life." At the same time, Benedict envisioned the monastic life as a sequence of spiritual conversions by means of the continuous effort to serve God in the ways laid out in his *Rule*. This is illustrated by his assertion in 49.1,4 that the "life of a monk ought to be a continuous Lent," something that requires "refusing to indulge evil habits and by devoting [oneself] to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart and self-denial."

It was not only monastic culture that rendered conversion an important part of everyday life; the theatre did so too. Liturgical drama, mysteries, interludes and moralities featured conversions and were designed to edify audiences. By staging the conversions of saints, biblical and ordinary characters, spectators were invited to follow their examples. Morality plays, which constitute a dramatic genre rooted in the thirteenth century, for instance, typically "promote the path of righteousness and demonise the morally wrong paths a Christian might take in the familiar journey through life."[3] Playwrights relied on a variety of techniques to encourage audiences to become better Christians. In addition to the thematizing of conversion itself, these included attempts at triggering the audience's emotional and physical involvement with various degrees of immediacy, for instance, by staging spectacular tableaux of the Crucifixion, conversion and miracles.

The present chapter is devoted to the analysis of three late medieval and reformation conversion plays that were performed in the time leading up to the period of this study: the mid-fifteenth century *Play of the Sacrament*, The Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* (*c.* 1480-1520) and the morality *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (*c.* 1550-1566) by Lewis Wager. These works allow me to illustrate the spiritual nature of stage conversions in pre- and early-Elizabethan drama, as well as their strategies to bring their audiences to conversion. In addition, *The Conversion of Saint Paul* and *The long Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* allow me to discuss the way in which Paul and Mary became the most important figureheads of conversion in the medieval period. Although all three plays are clearly rooted in either medieval or Reformation theatrical traditions, they anticipate patterns in the staging of conversion that we find in Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline drama. *The Play of the Sacrament* invites its audience to intensify their faith in Christ by presenting the conversion of a Jew and a lapsed Christian merchant. Their changes of heart are provoked by a dramatic spectacle

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[3] John C. Coldewey, "From Roman to Renaissance in Drama and Theatre," *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, vol. 1, eds. Jane Milling and Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–69, 54.

involving the appearance of Christ after the Jew's maltreatment of a consecrated host. Unlike Elizabethan and later drama, the play fully stages the conversion of the Jew, but, as Lisa Lampert points out, the Jew's conversion and baptism do not result in his inclusion in the Christian community.[4] In this way, the *Play of the Sacrament* foreshadows early modern English drama that refrains from presenting interfaith conversion as a transformation that enables religious others to become part of the (Protestant) Christian community. The Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* is well-known for its stage directions that invite its audience to follow the character Paul to different locations, and thus to imitate his conversion as a journey. The play presents Paul's conversion above all as a spiritual rejection of sin, but a number of clues hint at an interfaith interpretation of this change. Critics have established that these were added to the original pre-Reformation text by an anonymous editor and advocate of the Protestant Reformation. The clues suggest that Paul converts not only from Judaism to Christianity, but also from Catholicism to an early form of Protestantism. *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* was written and performed when the Reformation was well on its way. This Protestant reworking of a Saint play presents Marie's spiritual conversion to incite its audience to internalize the Reformed faith and reject Catholicism. In this way, the play anticipates the confessionalization and politicization of religion and religious identity that we find in later drama.

The Play of the Sacrament

The Play of the Sacrament was composed after 1461, the year of a historical conversion on which the play itself claims to be based, and staged in Croxton in Suffolk.[5] Performing it for an audience a hundred years later would in many respects have been inconceivable. The most obvious reasons lie in the liturgical and Catholic nature of the play. It confirms, for instance, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In addition, it is likely that the costumes of the bishop who presides over a baptism were sacred garments provided by the church, and

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[4] Lisa Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference: From Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 117.

[5] *The Play of the Sacrament from Croxton*, in David Bevington, ed. *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975) 756–88. This year is mentioned in the play (l. 58). The only surviving manuscript, however, is of the "mid-sixteenth century." Elizabeth Dutton, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 55–71, 56.

the props for this scene probably included a real font.[6] The play also could have ended with religious rites in an actual church.[7] Between 1535 and 1575 different governments made various efforts to frustrate "the Catholic stage […] and ultimately directly forbade its continuance."[8] Moreover, in the 1570s government authorities made rules that "suppressed" biblical drama and the staging of any part of the Trinity.[9] A less obvious aspect of this play that would become equally unimaginable to perform for Elizabethan and succeeding generations of audiences is the authentic and complete Christianization of a Jew.

The Play of the Sacrament is an East-Anglian miracle play that revolves around the conversions of Jonathas the Jew and his four coreligionists, and of Aristorius, a blaspheming Christian merchant. According to the Banns, the public announcement of the play spoken by two Vexillators, the play is a retelling of an event that took place in Aragon in 1461, which also provides its setting. Determined to prove that the "beleve of […] Cristen men" in the Eucharist is "false," because "the[y] beleve on a cake", Jonathas and his companions persuade the wealthy and covetous merchant Aristorius to steal a host from the church in order to test it (ll. 199–200). Echoing the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, Aristorius agrees to thieve the host for a hundred pounds. When Jonathas and his fellow Jews receive the Eucharist, they first repudiate the truth of Christianity as manifested in the miraculous birth of Christ, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, after which they proceed to desecrate the host. In so doing they decide to reenact the crucifixion of Christ: "with owr strokys we shall fray him as he was on the rood" (l. 455). With their daggers they inflict five wounds that correspond with the five sacred wounds that Christ suffered on the cross. The sacrament then suddenly begins to bleed, which prompts the Jews to boil it for three hours in an oil-filled cauldron. However, before they have the chance to do so, the host clings to Jonathas's hand. When they attempt to remove the sacrament by nailing it to a post, the hand comes loose from his body and sticks to the crucified host. Jonathas throws both the host and the hand into the boiling oil which then begins to appear as blood. As a final torment, the Jews decide to put the sacrament in an oven. According to the

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[6] David Bevington, *The Play of the Sacrament* from Croxton, in Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 754-56, 755.

[7] Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 755.

[8] Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300–1660: Volume One 1300–1576* (London: Routledge, 2002) 117.

[9] Alexandra Johnston, "Tudor Drama, Theater and Society," ed. Robert Tittler and Norman Jones, *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (Malden MA, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell, 2004) 430–47, 431.

stage direction "*Here the ovyn must rive asundere and blede owt at the cranys, and an image appeare owt with woundys bleding*." The image is that of Christ (referred to as "Jhesus"). Christ begins to speak to the Jews, asking them why they refuse to accept his teachings and put him "to a newe tormentry" (l. 732). This prompts the Jews to accept Christ and beg forgiveness. Jhesus instructs Jonathas to wash his "hart with grete contrition" and place his arm in the cauldron (l. 775). Jonathas's faith is verified by the miraculous healing of his hand. Aristorius, too, comes to see the error of his ways and expresses his repentance over his blasphemous act of selling the Lord's body. A bishop tells Ariostus and the Jews that they can redeem themselves by "fasting and pray[i]ng and othere good wirk" (l. 917). The Jews are then baptized "*with gret solempnité*" by the bishop. The play concludes with Jonathas's announcement that he and his fellow-converts will leave the country and "walke by contré and cost" to restore their "wickyd living" (ll. 964–65). Aristorius, by contrast, declares he will go to his unspecified country ("Into my contré now I will fare") to amend his wicked life and "teache this lesson to man and wife." (l. 972, 975).

According to David Bevington, *The Play of the Sacrament* "aims both at the penitent recovery of wayward Christians and at the conversion of non-believers."[10] Given the pervasiveness of Christian faith in late medieval England, it is not likely, however, that the play addressed many non-Christians. After their expulsion from England in 1290, there were hardly any Jews left in England and it is improbable that there were any of them among the audience. Some critics argue that the play's depiction of doubting Jews targeted members of the Lollard movement that attacked, among other things, the doctrine of transubstantiation.[11] Lisa Lampert argues that this view does not rule out the relevance of Jonathas's Jewish identity.[12] She reads the play in the context of the play's Spanish setting and the fifteenth-century Spanish persecution of Jews which led to their mass conversions, and shows how these events could have been known to an English audience.[13] Regardless of their precise denomination, the play certainly strove to edify and enlighten the doubting or depraved members of its audience. It does so by means of a plot that rewards and celebrates its main characters for their conversion. Aristorius' spiritual conversion teaches the playgoers that even grave

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[10] Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 754.

[11] See, for instance, Cecilia Cutts, "The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5.1 (1944): 45–60; Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison and Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 74; and Dutton, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," 57.

[12] Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference*, 108–22, 110.

[13] Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference*, 108–22, 110–11.

sins can be expiated through honest and full confession, repentance and a great deal of praying, fasting and performing acts of charity. This is also true for the conversion of the Jews, but in the case of Jonathas, the miraculous healing of his arm serves as an extra acknowledgement of his newly adopted faith in Christ. By the same token, the disintegration of Jonathas's hand after his profanation of the host could be seen as a warning against sacrilege. In this respect *The Play of the Sacrament* corresponds to Stephen Hawes's long poem, entitled *The Conuersyon of Swerers* (1509). Like the play, this poem presents a speaking Christ, and it aims to convert people who commit crimes that smack of those carried out by Jonathas and the other Jews. The poem's speaker Christ exhorts kings and rulers to "refourme" their servants on pain of punishment so that they refrain from the swearing by which they "crucify" him again.[14] Christ extensively and graphically describes the wounds he suffers at the hands of those who "lyveth yll and wrongfully."[15] In pre-Reformation fashion and like *The Play of the Sacrament*, Hawes's speaker suggests that sinners are their own agent of reform. If people refuse to amend, Christ will "take vengeaunce," and if they spend their lives well, they will be rewarded with celestial joy.[16]

Both *The Play of the Sacrament* and *The Conuersyon of Swerers* present themselves as instruments of conversion. Hawes's speaker urges its readers, for instance, to "print" the poem in their minds.[17] In addition, the poem, which for the most part consists of seven-line rhyming stanzas, contains a woodcut image of Christ rising from his grave and an accompanying shape poem which tells the reader "Be by me converted."[18]

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[14] Stephen Hawes, *The Conuersyon of Swerers* (London: Wyllyã Copland, 1551), sig. A3r, B3r.
[15] Hawes, *The Conuersyon of Swerers*, sig. B1r.
[16] Hawes, *The Conuersyon of Swerers*, sig. B3r.
[17] Hawes, *The Conuersyon of Swerers,* sig. A3v.
[18] Hawes, *The Conuersyon of Swerers*, sig. A4v, fig. 1.

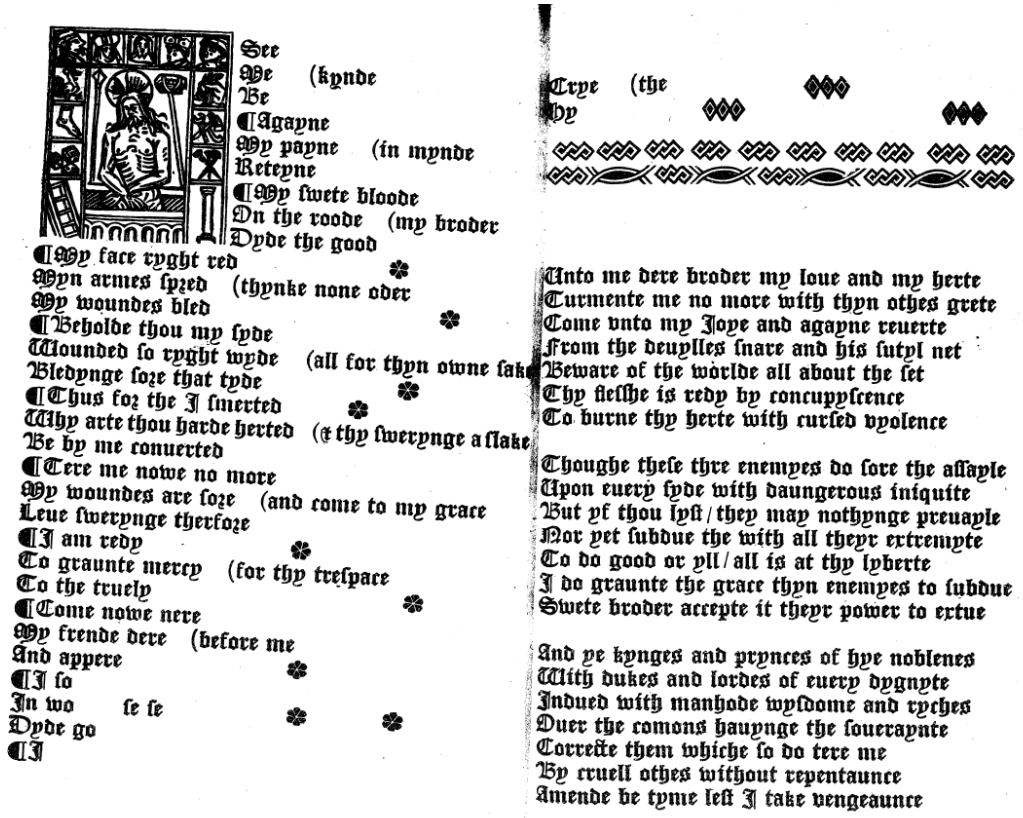

Figure 1. Stephen Hawes, *The Conuersyon of Swerers* (London: Wyllyã Copland, 1551), sig. A4v-A4r.

The Play of the Sacrament functions as an instrument of conversion when the audience is confronted with the transformation of the host into Christ. As Heather Hill-Vásquez observes about this moment, the "belief" of the audience "transfigures the disbelief of the Jews and enables miracle. As a speaking image that offers forgiveness and redemption, physical and spiritual healing, the Christ image is a miraculous incarnation of the audience's recognition, driven by their belief, of the parable of the physician."[19]

According to my definition of spiritual and interfaith conversion, the Christian merchant Aristorius's change of heart accords with the former and that of Jonathas with the latter. That is to say, Aristorius's conversion takes place within a single denomination and is tantamount to "a stronger embrace of the faith."[20] Jonathas, on the other hand, undergoes an exchange of religious identities. His Jewish identity is predicated on anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as

[19] Heather Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players: The Politics of Response in the Middle English Religious Drama* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 98.
[20] Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference*, 115.

bloodthirsty and callous killers of Christ, and probably expressed through his costume. The fact that the Jewish characters worship "Machomete" or "Machomyght" (l. 209, 332) illustrates that contemporary Christians perceived of Jews and Muslims in generalized terms.[21] To these Christians, non-Christianness rendered the distinction between different non-Christian denominations largely irrelevant. Jonathas's genuine and authentic embrace of Christian truth implies a shedding of his grotesque Jewish identity. This is confirmed in the term of address that Jhesus adds to his name, "Ser Jonathas," after his baptism (l. 770).

The way in which *The Play of the Sacrament* portrays the Christianization of the Jews is salient, because it is absent in the drama performed between 1558 and 1642. As will become clear in the course of this thesis, interfaith conversions, regardless of the faiths involved, are hardly ever fully depicted onstage, and if they are, they do not involve a radical change of identity, or they are presented in an ironic manner. Virtually nowhere in Elizabethan and later drama do we find stereotypically evil Jews like Jonathas, or Muslims or Pagans who undergo a plausible transformation into sincere Christians. By the late sixteenth century, playwrights had become suspicious of the possibility of interfaith conversion and begun to portray it in ways that precisely confirmed religious identity as an inherent part of one's self. Conversions of non-Christians were ridiculed, or these religious others were portrayed as highly sympathetic and attractive, and effectively already Christian, before their Christianization.

At the same time, *The Play of the Sacrament* anticipates the early modern dramatic trend of denying the possibility of interfaith conversion as a radical exchange of identity by preventing the Jews' absorption into the Christian community. Jonathas's announcement that he and his fellow converts embark on a life of travelling implies that they lose the possibility to "fix [their] identity." [22] More importantly, their plan suggests that it is impossible for Christianized Jews to substantiate their Christian identity in its most effective way: by becoming part of a Christian society. As Lampert observes, "the Christian community,

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[21] The perceived association between Judaism and Islam was quite common in the late medieval period. According to Ania Loomba, this can be explained by the "interlocking history" of Jews and Muslims in Spain. "Their expulsions and forced conversions had provoked analogous anxieties about the nature of religious and racial identity. Some of those associations spilled over into England, which had its own worries about English conversions to Islam as well as Jewish conversions to Christianity." Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 146–47.

[22] Dutton, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," 58.

despite a basis in universal inclusion through conversion, seems unable to completely absorb Jewish particularity."[23]

The Conversion of Paul and Its Rendering in the *Digby Play*

The Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* is a late medieval mystery play that stands in a long tradition of celebrations of Paul as the most important biblical convert. Before I turn to an analysis of this play, it is worth considering the conversion of Paul itself, as there is an important dichotomy between the way in which this conversion is described by Paul himself and how it has come to be understood in Christianity. This contrast corresponds with the distinction between spiritual and interfaith conversion. Paul only very briefly touches upon the most famous moment of his reformation and does not use a term that directly translates as "religious conversion." Most specifically, he describes his experience as a revelation of Jesus Christ and as a divine call inciting him to abandon his zealous persecution of the followers of Christ to spread Christ's gospel (Gal.1:11–16). The absence of the word "conversion" in the narrative can partly be explained by the fact that "conversion" is hardly a biblical term. As Frederick Gaiser reminds us, "readers of the English version of the Bible will run across terms like 'conversion' or 'convert(s)' or 'to convert' only rarely […]. Yet definitions abound, and the phenomenon – the unconditional turning of the human toward God – is seen as fundamental to biblical religion."[24] Many of these definitions relate to the concept of repentance, a word that does occur regularly in Scripture. Three terms in the Old and New Testament frequently understood as conversion are the Hebrew *shubh* and the Greek *epistrefein* and *metanoein*. *Shubh* literally means "return," but is often glossed as "repent," for example in Jeremiah 3:14: "Turn [*shubh*], O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." *Metanoein* is most often translated as "to repent," *epistrefein* as the act of turning oneself to a person or God. Examples of both terms can be found in Acts 26: 20, which describes Paul's efforts at converting the Gentiles after his own spiritual transformation:

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[23] Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference*, 117.

[24] Frederick Gaiser, "A Biblical Theology of Conversion," in ed. Henry Newton Malony and Samuel Southard, *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1992) 93–107, 93.

> But [he] shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent [*metanoein*] and turn to [*epistrefein*] God, and do works meet for repentance [*metanoias*].

In her compelling 1986 article, Paula Fredriksen explores the way in which the conversion of Paul has been anachronistically explained, in the terminology of this thesis, as an interfaith conversion from Judaism to Christianity, while historically it is more properly considered as a spiritual conversion. As she writes, it is essential to realize that Paul's conversion, what he himself called a "prophetic call," took place in 34, a year so quickly after the crucifixion that, instead of a "Christian" belief, it only witnessed a "Jesus movement" that consisted of Jewish adherers.[25] Paul's conversion has nevertheless come to be known as the legendary transformation of a violent persecutor of Christians, who exchanged Judaism for the Christian religion. The reason for this, Fredriksen argues, must be sought in Acts, which was written by Luke, and in Augustine. As opposed to Paul's own description of the conversion, Luke's gives the impression that the latter indeed converted from Judaism to Christianity. This is due to the "constant and terrible Jewish hostility to Christianity," the "theme" of Luke's text, which is "crucial to his concept of Paul's conversion and already important in his Gospel."[26] Fredriksen furthermore notes that Augustine played a vital role in disseminating the interpretation of Paul's divine experience as an interfaith conversion. Presenting his own conversion narrative, Augustine heavily relied on Luke's account of Paul:

> Through Luke and the Pastorals, Augustine can appropriate Paul, his prototype of the sinner saved despite himself because God so willed [...]. The New Testament canon thus serves as a sort of chamber for this mythic feed-back system, where Augustine the convert interprets Paul's conversion through his own, and his own through what he sees as Paul's. Taking his cue from Luke, Augustine holds Paul's conversion as the hermeneutic key to Pauline theology – identical, for him, with Catholic tradition.[27]

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[25] Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions and the Retrospective Self," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37.1 (1986): 3–34, 9, 15–16. Although Fredriksen does not use the terms interfaith and spiritual, the distinction she makes, between what she considers conversion proper and no conversion respectively, is the same.

[26] Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine," 9.

[27] Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine," 27.

During the Middle Ages Paul's conversion was understood both as an interfaith and a spiritual conversion. At the time of the crusades, for instance, artists depicted Paul's reformation as a transformation into a combatant fighting against pagans in the name of Christianity.[28] We also find an interfaith interpretation in the *Conversio Beati Pauli Apostoli*, a play that was performed on the occasion of the annual Festival of the Conversion of St. Paul on 25 January. The preserved text of this play is from the late twelfth-century *Fleury Playbook*, of which there are no surviving early Latin manuscripts in England. Due to their similarities, it is nonetheless likely that the *Conversio Beati Pauli Apostoli* served as a source for the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul*. The *Conversio Beati Pauli Apostoli* is closely based on the account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9: 1–31. It opens with Saul explicitly lashing out against "Christians," whom he considers deceivers.[29] After his blinding by God and encounter with Ananias, Paul "as if now believing" preaches to people who are explicitly described as "Jews" about their unwarranted refusal to recognize Christ as the Messiah.[30] Jacobus de Voragine's immensely popular thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives *The Golden Legend,* translated into English by William Caxton in 1483, also describes Paul's turn as an interfaith conversion. Paul is said to be a persecutor of "Christians," and God is quoted to condemn Paul's "*Jewish* way of judging things," which means that he thinks of God "as being dead."[31] Nevertheless, De Voragine notes that Paul's conversion serves as the ultimate example for sinners, thereby interpreting the conversion in spiritual terms: "no sinner, no matter how grievous his sin, can despair of pardon when he sees that Paul, whose fault was so great, afterwards became so much greater in grace."[32] This line recurs in the sermon on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul in most popular sermon collection of the late Middle Ages: the *Festial*, a book of homilies for all the principal holidays of the year, composed by the Augustinian prior John Mirk (*fl.*

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[28] Anne Granboulan, "Paul, Apostle: Iconography," *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 ed. André Vauchez, trans. Adrian Walford (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2000),1100–1, 1101.

[29] *[The Service] for Representing the Conversion of the Blessed Apostle Paul: (Ad Repraesentandum Conversionem Beati Pauli Apostoli* from Fleury in Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 164–68, ll. 1–16.

[30] "*Tunc surgat Saulus et quasi iam credens, et praedicans alta voce, dicat:* Cur, Judaei, non resipiscitis? / Veritati cur contradicitis? / Cur negatis mariam Virginem / peperisse Deum et hominem?" in *Ad Repraesentandum Conversionem Beati Pauli Apostoli,* ed. Bevington, ll. 61–64.

[31] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, with an introduction by Eamon Duffy, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 120. My emphasis.

[32] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 120.

1382–1414).[33] Mirk's description of the conversion, too, is largely in spiritual terms:

> he was converted from a curset tyrand ynto Goddys servant, from an hegh man and a prowde ynto a meke man and a devot, and from þe devellys dyssypull ynto Goddys holy apostoll. Soo, for þis man was so yturnet from all wyckednesse ynto all goodnesse, yn gret strengþe and helpe to holy chyrch, þerfor holy chyrch halewoþe his conversyon.[34]

Mirk's reference to the "chyrch," as well as his assertion that Saul persecuted "crysten men and woymen," on the other hand, point to an interfaith reading of Paul's conversion.[35]

Like the above sermons and plays, The Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* contains elements of both spiritual and interfaith conversion. However, in this play the two interpretations are likely to have served audiences of different periods. That is to say, the play's confessional clues are part of a section that was added two to five decades later. Besides, the interfaith conversion in question is not so much between Judaism and Christianity as between a precursor of Protestantism and Catholicism.

The play consists of three "stations," the first introducing Saul[36] as a relentless persecutor of "all rebellious" who are "being froward and obstinate/ Agains [their] lawes" (ll. 135–36). He is ordered by the Priests Caiphas and Anna to go to Damascus where he should subdue the adherents of Christ. In the second station, Saul experiences his miraculous conversion (though it does not mention Saul's change of name). According to the stage directions, "*Saule faulith down of [f] his horse.*" He then hears God's voice who tells him that he will save Saul. God also instructs Ananias to find Saul and cure his blindness. Ananias carries out God's command and baptizes Saul. Unlike the first two stations, the third station, that is believed to be an addition, does not draw on the New Testament story of the conversion. Here, Caiphas and Anna are confronted with Saul's "rebellious treytory," as they call it, and ordered by the two devils Belial and Mercury to kill Saul. Meanwhile, Saul presents a sermon on the seven deadly

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[33] John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk)*, part 1.ed. Theodor Erbe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1905), 55.

[34] Mirk, *Mirk's Festial*, 52.

[35] Mirk, *Mirk's Festial*, 52, 53.

[36] The character is consistently called Saul throughout the play. For this reason I will be using the same name.

sins. When he learns that his life is at stake, he decides to escape the city with the aid of the disciples. In the epilogue, the Poeta, a character that comments on and explains the action, informs the audience that Saul has safely arrived in Jerusalem.

Paul's physical and spiritual journey in the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* is possibly one of the strategies with which this play invites the audience to join him in his conversion. Audiences were supposed to walk in procession from the first location of the play representing Jerusalem to the second, Damascus. Thus, after the first of the three "stations" of the play, the Poeta invites the spectators to "folow and succeed / With all [their] deligens this generall procession" (ll. 157–58).[37] According to John Velz, this means that in so doing, the audience "would be miming Saul's morally significant movement from one locus to the other; figuratively they would undergo conversion and fulfill a high purpose of the play."[38] However, in the right margin of the Poeta's request to move to a new playing space, we find the phrase "*si placet*," meaning "if desired." According to Heather Hill-Vásquez, this comment was inserted by a reformist editor who wanted to criticize the participation of spectators "while nevertheless leaving the processional intact as an archaic oddity of Catholic practice and performance ritual," and to denounce it "as an earlier misuse of the play." [39]

The reformist interpolations in *The Conversion of Saint Paul* have a stronger and more obvious effect on the play's portrayal of Saul's conversion itself. The turning point of Saul's conversion is presented in the second station and portrayed first and foremost as an edifying spiritual regeneration.[40] When Saul first reflects on his divine experience, he describes it as an experience of profound repentance: "From sobbyng and wepyng I can not refrayne / My pensyve hart full of contryccyon: / For my offencys, my body shal have

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[37] Bevington glosses this line as follows: "seemingly, the audience is to march in procession to the next 'station,' unless *procession* means 'process of argument' " 670.

[38] John W. Velz, "From Jerusalem to Damascus: Bilocal Dramaturgy in Medieval and Shakespearian Conversion Plays," Comparative Drama 15.4 (1981/1982): 311–326, 314. See also Scherb, *Staging Faith*, who notes that "processional movement, where the audience progresses with the chief actor from station to station, allows the audience to participate physically in Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, but also serves as an emblem of the spiritual movement within both Paul and the audience" (97).

[39] Heather Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players: The Politics of Response in the Middle English Religious Drama* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007) 68–69.

[40] *The Conversion of Saint Paul* in Bevington, 664–86. There is one passage that could be referring to the notion of interfaith conversion, and is spoken by Ananias when he baptises Saul: "I cristen yow with mind full perfight, / Reseiving yow into *owr religion*" (ll. 325–26, my emphasis).

punycyon" (ll. 301–3). The idea that this change involves a rejection of Jewish and an embrace of Christian identity is virtually absent in the first two stations.[41] Unlike *The Play of the Sacrament*, for instance, the *Conversion of Saint Paul* does not portray Saul as a stereotypical Jew. In fact, it does not even mention terms that indicate religious identities, such as "Jew" or "Christian." Before his conversion, Saul refers to the adherers of Christ not as Christians but in the much more elusive terms of the "rebellious" and "the discipulys" (l. 142, 170). The only moment that intimates that Saul undergoes an interfaith conversion is when Ananias says that in baptizing Saul, he receives him "into owr religion" (l.326). Yet as opposed to the first two stations, the third clearly invests Saul's conversion with confessional significance. Saul, for instance, explicitly differentiates between Judaism and Christianity when he speaks of "the religion /And templys of the Jues" and describes them as "very hedious" (ll. 584–85). Yet it is not the distinction between Christianity and Judaism that the play foregrounds. The third station is of a strong-anti-Catholic nature which, in the words of Hill-Vásquez, makes it possible to "interpret Paul's religious awakening […] as a proto-conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism."[42] She demonstrates that the added scenes are between twenty and fifty years newer than the main text and are therefore approximately contemporary with the writings of the early reformers.[43] For this reason, "Paul's conversion, along with the struggles between the old and the new faiths portrayed in the *Saint Paul*, could become for some reformists divinely sanctioned prefigurations of their own activities and beliefs."[44] A case in point is when the devil Belial refers to the priests Caiphas and Anna as "my busshopys" and "prelates" (l. 418, 419). Belial here "draws a parallel between Catholic religious authorities and diabolical forces that characterized the thinking of a number of Reformation advocates and Protestants who connected the overturning of Old Testament religion with the subversion of Catholicism."[45] For this reason, and because Churches often sold their clerical vestments to producers of plays during the Reformation, it is moreover likely that Caiphas and Anna were dressed in Catholic robes, and not, as Scherb suggests, in Jewish garments.[46]

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[41] There is one passage that could be referring to the notion of interfaith conversion, and is spoken by Ananias when he baptises Saul: "I cristen yow with mind full perfight, / Reseiving yow into *owr religion*" (ll. 325–26, my emphasis).

[42] Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, 60.

[43] Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, 54.

[44] Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, 53.

[45] Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, 55.

[46] Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, 57. Scherb, *Staging Faith*, 97.

It is important to note that the advent of the Reformation did not encourage all theatre producers to employ Paul's conversion for the Protestant cause. In his discussion of a mid-sixteenth-century Dutch version of the play, *De Bekeeringe Pauli* (*The Conversion of Paul*), Bart Ramakers argues that its primary goal was to bring its audience members to an expression of a personal relationship with God that is experienced inwardly.[47] Significantly, this purpose lacked the (proto-) Protestant ideology that we find in the English play. As Ramakers notes: "insofar as the playwright wanted to engage in propaganda, he did so for an attitude to faith that transcended contemporary religious controversy, and that, due to its intimate, individual nature, was not directly connected with, let alone dependent on, any theological persuasion, denomination, or church."[48]

The coexistence of spiritual and interfaith conversion in the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* can be explained by additions that were made during the Protestant Reformation. The portrayal of Paul's conversion in spiritual terms chimes with the interests of audiences before the Reformation. By the same token, the interpolated sections carry anti-Catholic overtones and include an explicit reference to Judaism. Indeed, the possibility of conceiving of Paul's change as a rejection of Jewish and adoption of Christian identity, an understanding that was not unheard of during the Middle Ages, provided reformers with a template that allowed them to construct tentative notions of Catholic and Protestant identity, perhaps even to picture them in an interfaith conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism. The next play that will be discussed, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, shows that even a conversion which before the Reformation could *only* be interpreted in spiritual terms could serve as a model for the adoption of Protestant identity.

Mary Magdalene and Reformed Conversion in Lewis Wager's Morality

During the Middle Ages Mary Magdalene came to be known as an archetypical convert despite the absence of Biblical evidence. Scripture identifies her as the follower of Christ who was present at the crucifixion and burial, as well as the first to see Christ after his resurrection. In Luke 8 and Mark 16 Christ performs an exorcism on Mary, and casts seven demons out of her, an event which does

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[47] Bart Ramakers, "Sight and Insight: Paul as a Model of Conversion in Rhetoricians' Drama," *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*, ed. Lieke Stelling, Harald Hendrix and Todd M. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 341–72.

[48] Ramakers, "Sight and Insight," 368.

invoke the idea of a conversion, but resists a complete equation with it.[49] The late sixth-century pontiff Gregory the Great was the first to identify Mary Magdalene with, among others, the nameless woman in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and John 12, who venerates Christ by anointing his head with expensive perfume, and the repentant sinner who wets Christ's feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair, in Luke 7. It is this humble act of repentance that led Magdalene to be regarded as an exemplary convert, a paragon of "'hope and repentance' for all sinners," and it was Gregory's depiction of her that determined the cult of the Magdalen "for the entire Middle Ages and well beyond."[50]

In addition to Gregory's interpretation, *The Golden Legend* also contributed significantly to the dissemination of Mary's status as a repentant convert. This work portrays her as the embodiment of spiritual conversion:

> Mary is called Magdalene, which is understood to mean 'remaining guilty,' or it means armed, or unconquered, or magnificent. These meanings point to the sort of woman she was before, at the time of, and after her conversion. Before her conversion she remained in guilt, burdened with the debt of eternal punishment. In her conversion she was armed and rendered unconquerable by the armor of penance: she armed herself the best possible way – with all the weapons of penance – because for every pleasure she had enjoyed she found a way of immolating herself. After her conversion she was magnificent in the superabundance of grace, because where trespass abounded, grace was superabundant.[51]

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[49] Although exorcism does involve an obvious spiritual transformation from evil to good, the presence of evil is not so much part of a person's identity (which is the case for converts), as a separate and external entity, for instance the devil. What is more, an exorcism often renders a subject more passive than a conversion, which requires active repentance for former sins.

[50] Katherine Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 35.

[51] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 375. "[…] Magdalene is as moche to saye as abydyng culpable; or Magdalene is interpreted closed or shette, or not to be ouercomen, or ful of magnyficence. By whiche is shewed what she was to fore her conuersion, and what in her conuersion, and what after her conuersion. For to fore her conuersion she was abydyng gylty by oblygacion to euer lastyng payne; in the conuercion she was garnysshyd by armour of penaunce – she was in the best wyse garnysshed wyth penaunce, for as many delyces as she had in her, so many sacryfyses were founden in her – and after her conuersion she was praysed by ouer haboundaunce of grace, for where as synne habounded, grace ouer habounded, and was more, etc." David A. Mycoff, ed., *A Critical Edition of the Legend of Mary*

In the *vita* that follows Mary is described as a woman of rich stock and notorious for her lewd behaviour, "so much so that her proper name was forgotten and she was commonly called 'the sinner.'"[52] Having shown her devotion to Christ by wiping his feet and anointing his head, Mary is said to arrive in Marseilles after her expulsion from the Holy Land by unbelievers. She converts its people as well as the governor and his wife to Christianity. Mary herself spends thirty years as a hermit, devoid of food, but nourished with spiritual delights that she receives during her diurnal visits to heaven. After Mary's death, her relics are brought to a monastery at Vézelay in France. The story ends with accounts of miraculous healings and the forgivings of repentant sinners praying to Mary and visiting her tomb.

Medieval culture identified Mary Magdalene's spiritual transformation to a greater extent with repentance than Paul's conversion. As medieval contemporaries saw it, her contrition was specifically articulated in her humble and perceived feminine tending of Christ's body. According to their standards, her tears and hair, the two crucial physical components of her act of penitence, rendered Mary's reformation an essentially female conversion. Katherine Jansen notes that women were considered to be more prone to mystical experiences and penitential conversion because from a humoral perspective, their bodies were considered to be cold and wet and therefore more suitable to shed tears of remorse. These tears were thought to cleanse them simultaneously of their sins: "medieval science in the service of theology […] explains why Mary Magdalen, a woman, rather than Peter or Paul, penitents both, became the exemplar of perfect penance."[53] Moreover, both a means of female seduction and an instrument of repentance, Mary's long hair became a powerful emblem of her transformation from a wanton to a saint.

After the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene became the most important saint in England with more than 60 medieval hospitals, 172 parish churches and a college devoted to her, and her image was venerated in a wide range of cultural genres, including plays,[54] poetry, sermons and church art work.[55] As a convert in

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Magdalena from Caxton's Golden Legende *of 1483*, diss., Universität Salzburg, 1985, Elizabethan & Renaissance Studies 92.11 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1985)118, ll. 32–48.

[52] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375.

[53] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 210–11.

[54] Among the works that featured characters who were modeled after Mary Magdalene we can include a large number of early modern plays that presented stories of reformed prostitutes. As Daniel Vitkus notes, these were particularly popular in the first decade of the

particular, the Magdalene figure had a special place in the discourse of the Protestant Reformation. In her study *The Maudlin Impression*, Patricia Badir writes that Mary Magdalene escaped the Protestant and post-Tridentine purge of the medieval cult of the saints because she was considered to be a biblical figure. She explains how the figure of Mary Magdalene functioned as a "site of memory," both to commemorate the medieval religious past and to "formulate the look and feel of English Protestantism."[56] Indeed, as the "examplar of perfect penance," Mary was a particularly suitable convert for the encapsulation of Protestant conversion doctrine. A case in point is the morality play *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* by Lewis Wager

A brief look at a pre-reformation dramatic version of Mary Magdalene's conversion allows us to understand how Wager adapted Mary's conversion to suit the agenda of reformers. One of the most popular plays about Mary appearing before Wager's work is the *Mary Magdalene* from the Digby manuscript. The Digby *Mary Magdalene* (*c.* 1480-1520) is like the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* a Medieval Saint play, both being the only surviving English examples of their genre.[57] *Mary Magdalene* presents the story of Mary's entire adult life until her peaceful death and portrays her conversion as an exemplum of spiritual conversion. It is the longest and most complex of the surviving Digby plays, interweaving three plots: the (minor) story of Tiberius Caesar, Pilate and Herod's mutual efforts to suppress the rebels against Roman paganism, Mary Magdalen's degeneracy induced by vices and devils and her subsequent conversion and exorcism by Christ in the house of Simon the Leper, and thirdly, Mary's missionary activities in Marseilles where she performs miracles and converts the king and queen (from paganism) to Christianity. Unlike their becoming "a Cristeyn," Mary's conversion is of a spiritual nature and virtually synonymous with the rejection of sin and repentance. As Mary puts it herself:

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seventeenth century and include Thomas Middleton's *Blurt, Master-Constable* (1602), *Michaelmas Terme* (1607), *Your Five Gallants* (1608), and *A Mad World, My Masters* (1608); Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Woman Hater* (1607); and Edward Sharpham's *The Fleer* (1607); John Marston's *Dutch Courtezan* (1605) and Thomas Dekker's *Honest Whore* (1604). *Daniel Vitkus, Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 89. Since many of these plays are too far removed from the theme of *religious* conversion, I do not discuss them in this thesis.

[55] Patricia Badir, *The Maudlin Impression: English Literary Images of Mary Magdalene, 1550–1700* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 6, see also Jansen, 111.

[56] Badir, *The Maudlin Impression*, 3–4.

[57] Coldewey, "From Roman to Renaissance in Drama and Theatre," 54.

Grace to me [the Lord] wold never denye;
Thowe I were nevyr so sinful, he seyd, "*revertere*!"
O, I, sinful creature, to grace I woll aplye.
The oile of mercy hath helyd min[e] infirmité. (ll. 756–59, original emphasis)

Although it is not certain if the Digby *Mary Magdalene* served as a direct source for Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, the latter play is clearly a Reformation revision of the popular medieval Catholic saint play, like the Digby *Mary Magdalene*.[58] Wager's morality was probably first performed during the reign of Edward VI, which saw the establishment of Protestantism as a national religion. The play's portrayal of Mary's conversion is based on the conflation of Luke 7:36–50, where a woman named Mary washes Christ's feet with her tears when visiting the house of Simon the Pharisee, and Luke 8:1–3, which mentions Mary Magdalene, from whom Christ had exorcised seven devils.[59] Like the author of the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, Wager portrays Mary as a penitent prostitute. Yet *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* has an unmistakable Reformation agenda which is most apparent in its treatment of Mary's conversion, followed by her "perversion" by a number of Vices. Instead of a single and sudden turn to God, the conversion comprises different stages, each also personified by a Virtue. These Virtues, such as Repentance, Love and Iustification are presented in a way that confirms the teachings of Calvin as they can be found in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.[60]

Marie's process of conversion commences when she encounters the character of The Lawe, who confronts her with the notion of original sin and the reprobation of all offenders against God's will. A little later Knowledge of Synne also appears to side with The Lawe. Although Marie realizes that she will be

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[58] Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 82. White adds that the Digby author, like Wager, based himself on the stories of Mary in Luke 7 and 8 (82). See also Patricia Badir, " 'To Allure vnto their loue': Iconoclasm and Striptease in Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*'" *Theatre Journal* 51.1 (1999): 1–20. Badir takes this notion as a starting point to investigate Wager's portrayal of Mary as in the words of Barthes " 'the dialectic between iconiphilia and iconophobia'" which is "now recognized as integral to the propagation of Protestant culture," (1).

[59] Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, ed. Frederic Ives Carpenter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904).

[60] For an overview of resemblances between passages of Wager's play and Calvin's *Institutes*, see White, "Lewis Wager's Life."

damned because of her profligacy, the effect of their words is bitter cynicism rather than a change of heart:

> If there be no more comfort in the lawe than this,
> I wishe that the lawe had never ben made.
> In God I see is small mercy and Iustice,
> To entangle men and snarle them in such a trade (ll. 1139–42)

The Lawe then explains to her that if she believes in the Messiah, her sins will be forgiven by him. Soon after this Christ appears to her in person and reiterates that there is still a path to salvation in the form of true repentance. In addition, Christ casts seven devils out of Marie. Certain of the saving power of God's grace, Marie prays for the consolidation of her still "waveryng and insufficient" faith (l. 1325). This is the moment the characters of Faith and Repentance make their appearance, clarifying that their virtues are "joyned continually" (l. 1388). Throughout these scenes the Vices interfere in the discussions and attempt to remove Marie from the sphere of influence of the Virtues, for instance by claiming that the term "man" in Scripture only applies to men and not to women, but their efforts are eventually in vain. The remaining part of the play is devoted to the well-known allegory in which Marie washes the feet of Christ, in Luke 7. Marie, now "sadly appareled" and asserting that she is "converted from hir impietie," expresses her sincere regret over her past behaviour (l. 1682). It is then indicated in the stage directions that Marie "doe[s] as it is specified in the Gospell;" she washes Christ's feet with her tears and anoints them with precious oil. After this, Christ declares that Marie's faith "hath saved [her]" (l. 1855). The play ends with declarations of faith by Marie, Justification and Love, the latter recapitulating the different stages of Marie's conversion.

The order in which the different Virtues appear strongly suggests a Reformed soteriology. To begin with, the play emphasizes God's vital role in the fulfillment of Old Testament law. As Christ explains,

> blessed are they, as the Prophete doth say,
> Whose sinnes are forgiven and covered by God's mercy;
> Not by the dedes of the lawe, as you thinke this day,
> But of God's good will, favour and grace, freely. (ll. 1832–34)

Also significant is that the characters of Faith and Repentance are presented to Marie by Christ *after* he has exorcised her and Marie has asserted her belief in the "omnipotent" God, asking him for help. As Paul White reminds us,

> faith and repentance, then, like the other spiritual benefits of regeneration, are not the causes, but rather the consequences of man's salvation. In accordance with Calvinist doctrine, they do not originate in man, but are bestowed on him by God.[61]

What is more, "while others in the Reformed tradition assumed that man must repent of sin before faith is possible, Wager, like Calvin, consistently places faith before repentance in the process of conversion."[62] Insisting on this strict sequence of spiritual virtues, Calvin underlined the more generally Protestant doctrine of man's complete dependence on God's grace for salvation. Marie explicitly confirms this when she says "O Lorde, without thy grace I do here confesse / That I am able to do nothyng at all" and "I am not able to doe sufficient penance, / Except thy grace, good Lord, do helpe me therto" (ll. 1379–80, 1701–2)

The Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, justification by faith alone, is expressed by the character of Christ when he tells Marie "thy faith hath saved thee." Moreover, Faith himself takes pains to avoid the impression that Mary acquired belief as a result of her own effort, stressing St. Augustine's assertion, which was revived in the Protestant Reformation, that faith "is the gyft of God" (l. 1395). The character of Justification, who appears after Faith and Repentance, claims: "it were a great errour for any man to beleve / That your love dyd deserve that Christ shold forgeve / Your synnes or trespasses, or any synne at all" (ll. 1973–75), and "by faith in Christ you have Justification / Frely of his grace, and beyond man's operation" (ll. 1997–98).

It is somewhat ironic that Marie's conversion is not only set off against her perversion in the first half of the play, but also against her changeability. Marie's instability is accentuated by the ease with which she is perverted, her trouble in accepting God's saving faith, but also by the Vices who time and again relate Mary's unsteady character to her female identity. According to Infidelity, "the promise of maidens" are "as stable as a weake leafe in the wynde; / Like as a small blast bloweth a feather away, / So a faire word truele chaungeth a maiden's mynd" (ll. 122–25), while elsewhere Malicious Iudgement asserts that "Women's heartes turne oft as doth the wynde" (1529). Although Marie's turn to God also implies (yet) another change of character, Wager counters the suggestion that she might relapse into impiety by presenting her conversion as a consolidation of faith. Thus, Repentance declares that "true repentance never turneth backe again" (l. 1375), and Marie's treatment of Christ's body is presented as proof of

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[61] White, "Lewis Wager's Life," 512.
[62] White, "Lewis Wager's Life," 512.

her sincerity. Moreover, the very Protestant suggestion that Marie's conversion is the work of God rather than herself adds to the idea that her change of heart is not the symptom of an inconstant character.

In discussing its transitionary characteristics, scholars have shown how *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* retains and reworks many features of the Saint play to convey a Protestant message. Like the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul*, the play can also be seen, however, as an early manifestation of a transition from spiritually to denominationally oriented conversion drama. The play presents Marie's spiritual conversion with a denominational purpose: to incite its audience to renounce Catholicism and internalize the Protestant faith. Although Catholicism and Protestantism are not explicitly named, various clues indicate that Marie's rejection of sin and turn to God form a conversion from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. For instance, the play opens on a "parody of the Catholic service" with Infidelitie chanting Latin phrases that audiences would have recognized as allusions to the Catholic mass.[63] The vices are also in other ways presented as Catholic enemies in other ways, since they are on good terms with bishops and priests; these clergymen, moreover, are consistently bracketed together with "pharisees" to make them appear even more disingenuous. Finally, and most importantly, Christ's evangelic message has strongly Calvinist overtones, while he himself is also portrayed as the bringer of Protestantism as the only true faith.

Conclusion

Spiritual conversion formed an intrinsic part of late medieval English culture. Often determined by monastic life, it meant to enter the monastery, to reject worldliness, as well as to reach deeper levels of spirituality while living according to the rule of a specific order. Like monasticism, the medieval theatre was closely identified with spiritual conversion and played an important role in the way it was perceived. It did so by staging the reformations of characters and by aiming at the spiritual edification of its audiences. Spectators witnessed spiritual and sometimes interfaith transformations of ordinary people, but particularly popular were the lives of Paul of Tarsus and Mary Magdalene – figures whose conversions were widely honoured in medieval culture. While stage conversions offered entertainment, they also served to provoke conversions in audiences. Since spectators were Christians to begin with, this can best be considered as, in the words of Lisa Lampert, "bringing the audience to a fuller,

[63] Ives Carpenter, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, 89 (note 2–4).

deeper, renewed belief in Christian truths."[64] The three plays that I have discussed in closer detail give us clues as to how they could have furthered this aim. Conversions did not only constitute the climax of dramatic narratives, they were also presented as spectacles of wonder, thus eliciting immediate emotional responses from the audience that were aimed at triggering their spiritual reformations. In addition, plays caused audiences to physically reenact stage conversions by inviting them to take part in (church) processions and move between places that correspond with different stages of characters' conversions. Finally, reformation plays presented spiritual conversions in ideological terms, thereby encouraging audiences to internalize reformed values and beliefs.

While *The Play of the Sacrament*, the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* and *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* are clear examples of medieval and reformation drama for the reasons mentioned above, each of these plays contains elements that are typical of Elizabethan and later conversion drama. The earliest of the three, *The Play of the Sacrament* anticipates a development that will be discussed in the chapters six and seven: the reluctance of playwrights to suggest that religious identity is transferable by presenting interfaith conversion as radical change of faith. Thus, unlike the play's spiritual convert, the Christianized Jews are not allowed to become members of a Christian community, but forced to live a roaming life. The strong interest of early modern playwrights in interfaith conversion at the expense of its spiritual variant is heralded in *The Conversion of Saint Paul* and *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*. Both works adapt spiritual conversions to push a reformist agenda, and in doing so they portray these changes as proto-conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism. The next chapter looks in detail at the way in which reformers appropriated spiritual conversion and how they defined precisely the theatre as its negative inversion.

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[64] Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference*, 102.

CHAPTER 2 'The Whole Summe of Christianitie:' Spiritual Conversion in Protestant Sermons

The present chapter builds on the changing understanding of spiritual conversion that we saw in *The Digby Conversion of Saint Paul* (*c.* 1480-1520) and *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (*c.* 1550-1566): the translation of spiritual conversion into reformation and Protestant propaganda. I will show how late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Protestant preachers identified spiritual conversion with repentance and described it as the kernel of Christianity, a process that I will call the Protestantization of spiritual conversion. Despite this appropriation, and despite the fact that the same homilists also used conversion to differentiate between what they saw as Protestant truth and Catholic error, much of the Protestant definition of spiritual conversion inevitably and clearly originated from Catholic tradition, was based on Catholic writing, and was therefore not considerably different from Catholic understandings of conversion. In the homiletic writings of many Puritans, however, spiritual conversion is described in strongly anti-theatrical terms, an approach that we do not find in Catholic interpretations. This hostile sentiment was furthermore fuelled by the conviction of preachers that playwrights drew audiences away from church services, a concern that was rooted in the unprecedented success of the commercial theatre in the Elizabethan era. In addition to thus exploring the prominent role of theatre discourse in Protestant definitions of conversion, this chapter provides the context for the next chapter, in which I will investigate how the Protestantization of spiritual conversion affected its representation on the Elizabethan stage.

Protestant preachers felt the need to redefine spiritual conversion as a God-given capability of true repentance[1] and core of Protestant Christianity. This need was shared by preachers of all sorts. The divine John Udall (1560–1592/3), for instance, does this in his exegesis of Peter's exhortation, in Acts 2:38, to "amend your lives."[2] The original word for this activity, he notes,

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[1] Of course, repentance was often mentioned as an important and sometimes even essential aspect of conversion before the Reformation, but the penitential character of conversion is never absent in Protestant descriptions of spiritual transformation.

[2] John Udall, *Amendment of Life: Three sermons, vpon actes 2. verses 37. 38. conteining the ture effect of the worde of God in the conuersion of the godly: and the manner how it changeth their harts, and reformeth their liues, which is the true worke of regeneration* (London, 1584).

> is commonlie translated repent, and the matter called repentance, which is a turning of our lives unto GOD, proceeding from a true feare of hys judgementes for sinne, imbracing God his promises in Jesus Christ, & reforming the life according to the prescript rule of gods word.[3]

Udall also reminds his readers of the importance of spiritual conversion to true faith: Peter's counsel contains "the verie substance of all religion, and the whole summe of Christianitie."[4] The Church of England clergyman John Preston (1587–1628), too, equated repentance with conversion, writing that "repentance" is "a turning of the heart and casting of a man into a new mould, the setting of the heart in a right way."[5] The Church of England divine Nehemiah Rogers (1593–1660) did the same in his sermon entitled *The True Convert,* which is an examination of the meaning and workings of repentance – a term he uses more often than conversion – as expounded in the parable of the prodigal son. His motto to the sermon, Acts 3:19, is illustrative of the same point: "repent you therefore and be converted, that your sinnes may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."[6] In a sermon on the conversion of Salomon, the divine and "loyal defender of the Church of England"[7] John Dove (1561–1618) contended that conversion "signifieth repentence of them which have fallen away from the truth of Religion or heresie, or Idolatrie, or from vertue to sinne, and afterward turne back againe unto God."[8]

What makes Dove's sermon particularly interesting in the light of this study is that it explicitly distinguishes between "two sorts" of conversion in a way that resembles the difference between interfaith and spiritual conversion. In the first sense "it signifieth regeneration when a man is effectually called and

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[3] Udall, *Amendment of Life,* sig B1v.

[4] Udall, *Amendment of Life*, sig. B1v.

[5] John Preston, *The Remaines of that Reverend and Learned Divine, John Preston* (London: 1637) 295.

[6] Nehemiah Rogers, *The true convert, or an exposition vpon the whole parable of the prodigall* (London: Edward Griffin, 1620) title page.

[7] Will Allen, "Dove, John (1561–1618)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 13 Feb. 2013 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7948>.

[8] John Dove, *The conuersion of Salomon A direction to holinesse of life; handled by way of commentarie vpon the whole booke of Canticles* (London: W. Stansby, 1613) 3.

converted to the Faith."[9] As examples Dove gives the conversions of Paul and Barnabas, and of the Gentiles who "were made Christians."[10] The second "sort" is conversion not from Judaism or paganism to Christianity, but as repentance and that is also what Dove considers to be the conversion of King Salomon. Due to the growing prominence of interfaith conversion, Dove and his contemporaries were increasingly faced with the distinction between the two types of religious change. This development will be analysed in closer detail in chapter five.

In identifying conversion with repentance, Protestant preachers followed the example of the prominent early Protestant reformers. William Tyndale offered in his 1534 translation of the New Testament a fourfold meaning of the scriptural Greek term *metanoia*: "confession […] to God in the heart," "contrition," "faith" and "amends-making [to] […] the congregation of God."[11] That he considered *metanoia* synonymous with conversion becomes clear from his concluding remark:

> Wherefore now, whether ye call this *metanoia*, repentance, conversion or turning again to God, either amending and etc. or whether ye say repent, be converted, turn to God, amend your living or what ye lust, I am content so ye understand what is meant thereby, as I have now declared.[12]

In his *Sermon of Repentance*, the Reformer and martyr John Bradford (1510–1555) proposed a tripartite meaning of repentance. Its definition first contains "a sorowynge for our synues," secondly "a truste of pardonne, whyche otheryse maye be called a perswasion of Gods mercy, by the merits of Christe, for the forgevenesse of our synnes," and thirdly "a purpose to amende, or conversion to a newe lyfe."[13] Yet although Bradford largely identified repentance with spiritual conversion, he did recognize a difference between the two, arguing that spiritual

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[9] Dove, *The Conversion of Salomon*, 3.

[10] Dove, *The Conversion of Salomon*, 3.

[11] William Tyndale, *Tyndale's New Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989) 9–10.

[12] Tyndale, *Tyndale's New Testament*, 10. Tyndale disagreed with Thomas More over whether the scriptural Greek *metanoia* should be translated as repentance or penitence, the latter also carrying the significance of the Catholic sacrament. See for an analysis of this issue James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge MA, etc.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 73–76.

[13] John Bradford, *A Sermon of Repentaunce* (London: 1553) sig. B4r – B5v.

conversion is an "effect" of the first two parts of repentance.[14] We do not find this distinction in John Calvin's description of repentance in his *Institutes* (1536) first translated into English in 1561):

> The name of repentance in Hebrue is derived of convertinge or returninge, in Greke of changing of the minde or purpose, & the thing it selfe doth not ill agree with either derivations, whereof the summe is, that we departing form our selves should turne unto God & puttinge of our old minde, should put on a new.[15]

As these Protestant reformers also reminded their readers, the cause of the semantic affinity between spiritual reformation and contrition can be traced to the books of the Bible in which repentance is presented as a *conditio sine qua non* for a turn towards God.

The reason why repentance is dominant in Christian understandings of conversion is that it is directly linked with Christian soteriology: salvation requires repentance, which in turn presupposes (original) sin. Christ was sent to earth to save mankind from damnation by inciting people to repent. Indeed, many New Testament conversion stories testify to the fact that Christ is not so much interested in those who are already righteous as in the degenerate as potential penitents. This is not only explicitly stated in the Gospels – "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," for instance rings through the New Testament – but is also an underlying message in many conversion stories in Scripture. The parable of the lost son, for instance, presents the possibility of repentance and conversion as a better point of departure than the lack of it. It explains that it is wrong of the elder brother to complain about his father's warm and generous reception of his prodigal brother while he himself has remained faithful all the time. It is the joy over the return of the penitent son, like a dead person who becomes alive again, that makes one merciful. The purport of this and the other well-known parables in Luke 15 is that "joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15.7). For this reason, Christ surrounded himself with sinners like tax collectors and public women because he could still turn them to repentance.

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[14] Bradford, *A Sermon of Repentaunce*, sig. B5v.

[15] John Calvin, *The institution of Christian religion vvritten in Latine by M. Iohn Caluine, and translated into English according to the authors last edition, by Thomas Norton.* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1578) fol. 241v.

Given the prominence of remorse in Scripture, it is not surprising that homiletic conversion discourse was imbued with a rich variety of biblical metaphors, aphorisms and parables of conversion. Widespread descriptions of conversion as a turn from blindness to sight, insight or enlightenment echoed Paul's transformation on the road to Damascus. Congregations were also reminded of scriptural healing miracles when conversion was put in terms of a cure, and the biblical idea of a "hardened heart" was evoked, a pre-conversion situation that rendered one unsusceptible to faith and repentance. Among the conversion parables that we typically find in sermons are the call and repentance of Zaccheus (Luke 19:1–10), the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40), the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16: 25–34) and the conversion of the city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5–10). The most inspirational, however, proved to be those of the prodigal son and of Mary Magdalene's anointment of Christ. Her appeal and popularity manifested itself in the fact that Protestant preachers adopted her as an icon of conversion despite the lack of scriptural support for this. Still, not all of them let this issue go unnoticed. The dean of York George Meriton (*d.* 1624) claimed that the repenting woman in Luke 7:37–38, to whom his sermon "a Sinner's Conversion" is devoted, was indeed Mary Magdalene, but that her name remained unmentioned probably because she had lost it through her utter sinfulness.[16] But it could also have been to "teach others a lesson, that when wee are about to publish the defects of men, we should conceale their names" for "our hatred must be against the sinnes of men, and not the men themselves."[17]

In explaining conversion, clerics seized the chance to emphasize the crucial importance of the Word, the medium of preaching it, and thus their own profession. For instance, the Church of England clergyman William Attersoll (*d.* 1640), who contended that "the conversion of sinner is […] the *onely* miracle of the Gospell," wrote that "God worketh repentance and the conversion of a sinner by the Preaching of the Word," and "there is no ordinary means under heaven to convert sinners, and to worke faith in us, than the Ministery of the word." [18] According to the Church of England preacher Richard Rogers (1551–1618),

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[16] This explanation is also given by Jacobus de Voragine in *The Golden Legend*. See chapter 1.

[17] George Meriton, *The Christian Mans Assvring House and A Sinners Conuersion* (London: Edward Griffin, 1614) 36.

[18] William Attersoll, *Three treatises Viz. The conversion of Nineueh. 2. Gods trumpet sounding the alarum. 3. Physicke against famine* (London, 1632) 63, 62, 29. See also Thomas Cooper, who wrote: the "*matter and meanes* of Conversion" are "the word of GOD, applied and made effectuall, by the operation of the spirit of God." Thomas Cooper, *The Blessing of Japheth* (London: 1615) 12.

> many become beleevers in Christ, by companie and acquaintance with Preachers; who being appointed by Christ to be fishers of men doe shew the love to them, that Christ shewed to themselves before […] they will lay open tot them their treasures, which they have gathered out of the hoard of the Gospell, and impart the same unto them.[19]

Likewise, the Church of England clergyman Henry Smith (1560–1591), also known as the Silver-Tongued Preacher, asserted that "faith comes by hearing the worde of God."[20] John Donne explained the fundamental value of the Word of God on the basis of the conversion of the thief on the Cross (Luke 23):

> it is not unseasonable now, to contemplate thus far the working of [Christ's passion] upon this condemned wretch, whose words this text is, as to consider in them, First, the infallibility, and the dispatch of the grace of God upon them, whom his gracious purpose hath ordained to salvation: how powerfully he works; how instantly they obey. This condemned person who had been a thief, execrable amongst men, and a blasphemer, execrating God, was suddainly a Convertite.[21]

The quotation from Donne above touches on another key assignment for Protestant preachers, which was to mitigate the role of free will in conversion, or even deny human agency in this respect altogether. Attersoll, for example, conceded that the importance of the Word does not downplay God's divine power in converting people: "God is able to convert us, and to give us to believe without the meanes of his word, because he is not tyed thereunto: but he hath tyed us, and left us no other way."[22] According to John Udall, conversion is purely an act of God because "all the imaginations of the heart of man are altogether evill" and "our faith leaneth upon the sole and only mercy of God for

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[19] Richard Rogers, *Certaine Sermons* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1612) 21–22.

[20] Henry Smith, "The Sinners Conuersion" in *Two Sermons preached by Maister Henry Smith* (London: 1605) sig. A3r–B3v, A6v.

[21] John Donne, "A Lent Sermon Preached at Whitehall, February 20, 1617," *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, vol. 1 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1953) 252–267, 254.

[22] Attersoll, *Three treatises Viz. The conversion of Nineueh*, 71.

our salvation."[23] Indeed, in the words of the temporary convert to Catholicism and Church of England clergyman Theophilus Higgons (1578–1659), "it is *God* that quickeneth us, raiseth us &c. not *Angels*, not *Man*, not his owne *Works*, not his owne *Will*. […] God is the only Agent in this great, and glorious worke."[24] Still, for some preachers it was difficult to let go of the convert's agency altogether. Nehemiah Rogers contended that "in the very act of conversion, the will of man is not idle, nor without all motion and sence, but it followeth, the spirit of God, that draweth it far more, and the same moment God mooveth and boweth the will and causeth us to be willing indeed."[25] John Dove, too, argued a case for a contribution of the human will in conversion, albeit an extremely modest one:

> God worketh in us the will without our selves, and yet when we are willing, and so willing, that to our will is also joyned the issue and performance, he worketh joyntly with us, and yet we can doe nothing that is good, without he doe both worke in us the will, and worke joyntly with us when we are willing.[26]

Another important aspect of the Protestant understanding of conversion was the idea that spiritual conversion is a continuous, if not lifelong, process of critical self-examination, rejecting sinfulness and worshipping God. Conversion "must be constant and continued, not flitting or starting backe like a deceitfull bow, or vanishing like the morning dew," William Attersoll wrote.[27] William Perkins observed that "the conversion of a sinner is not wrought all at one instant, but in continuance of time."[28] A more elaborate description of continuity in conversion can be found in Richard Sibbes's *The Brvised Reede and Smoaking Flax* (1630). Examining Matthew 12:20, the Church of England clergyman Sibbes (1577?–1635) argued that the state of a contrite sinner troubled by his own wickedness and craving God's mercy is like that of a "bruised reed." This bruising is inflicted by God or "a duty to be performed by us" and "required before conversion that so the spirit may make way for it selfe into the heart […] and come home to ourselves with the Prodigall."[29] Yet, the bruising is not simply

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[23] Udall, *Amendment of* Life, sig. Dv.
[24] Theophilus Higgons, *A Sermon preached at Pauls Crosse the third of March* (London, 1611) 7.
[25] Nehemiah Rogers, *The true convert*, p. 225.
[26] John Dove, *The Conversion of Salomon*, 22.
[27] Attersoll, *Three treatises Viz. The conversion of Nineueh*, 128.
[28] William Perkins, *A Graine of Musterd-seed* (London: Thomas Creed, 1597) 11.
[29] Richard Sibbes, *The Brvised Reede, and Smoaking Flax* (London: 1630) 33, 13.

a definitive means to conversion: "nay, after Convversion wee neede bruising, that reedes may know themselves to be reedes, & not Oakes."[30] That is, the bruising functions to remind us of our humility and of our dependence on Christ, "who was bruised for us."[31] We find a similar idea in Thomas Cooper's *The Converts First Love*. In this work Cooper (1569/70–1626), a Church of England divine, states that even the "saints of God" have been "subject to infirmities, and that not before their conversion only, but even after also."[32]

Many churchmen devoted special attention to the particular stages of continuous conversion. According to John Dove, conversion consisted of six steps that, like Jacob's Ladder, would eventually lead the convert to God: "from sinne to repentance, from repentance to works, from works to judgement, from judgement to mercie, from mercie to glorie. And there is God on the toppe of the ladder."[33] The Church of England preacher John Gaule (1603/4–1687), however, seemed to argue for speedy conversion when he wrote in a sermon on the conversion of Paul that "that the Holy Ghost but shines upon us is enough both to humble, and instruct us. Great is the efficacy of saving Grace; that do no sooner approach, but convert; scarce touch, ere change us."[34] Despite this description, which suggests that Gaule interpreted Paul's conversion as an instant transformation, Gaule at the same time considered it to be a gradual process that can be broken down into different steps: "from Contrition, to Confession, and so to satisfaction." That is to say, "[Paul's] contrition and humilitation is, he fals to the earth: for his Confession, both is it annuated by his silence, and convicted by his speech: And so his Obedience, as the best satisfaction, answering so readily, and so chearefully bestowed."[35]

It is telling that Protestant, and notably Puritan preachers took their cue precisely from popular Catholic devotional literature when writing about spiritual conversion. An example of a Catholic author whose works on spiritual conversion were widely read among Protestants, including Puritans, is the Spanish Dominican friar Luis of Granada (1505–1588). Granada was probably best known for his spiritual exercises in his *Of Prayer and Meditation*, but also for his conversional works *A Memorial of a Christian Life*, *A Sinner's Guide* and *The*

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[30] Sibbes, *The Brvised Reede*, 16.

[31] Sibbes, *The Brvised Reede*, 18.

[32] Thomas Cooper, *The Converts First Love Discerned, Iustified, Left, and Recouered* (London: F. Kingston, 1610) 2.

[33] John Dove, *The Conversion of Salomon*, 25.

[34] John Gaule, *Practique theories: or, Votiue speculations vpon Abrahams entertainment of the three angels Sarah, and Hagars contention […] Pauls conuersion* (London: 1630) 352.

[35] Gaule, *Practique theories*, 354.

Conversion of a Sinner (published as part of the *Sinner's Guide* in the original Spanish edition) that went through multiple editions in English translation. According to Maria Hagedorn, the popularity of his meditative work can be explained by the absence of Protestant meditation books until the 1580s, by his lack of outspoken doctrinal and polemical language and his eloquent and accessible style.[36]

The Protestant conception of conversion in many respects resembled Granada's understanding of it. For him, too, spiritual conversion was synonymous with repentance and he also uses the terms interchangeably.[37] As he notes in an appendix with "profitable contemplations," "a Christian man which covetteth to come unto God, must make his enterance through the gate of compunction, generally confessing all his offences."[38] In addition, Granada often referred to election doctrine. However, to Granada predestination meant that humanity is first and foremost destined to be saved. As John Moore writes, his description of predestination "does not deny free will," but

> he does not try to explain or even acknowledge the problem of reconciling the theological antinomy between predestination and free will. He simply tells his reader that it is God's will for him to be saved and that he should be moved to seek virtue in gratitude to Him.[39]

Thus, while Granada, in Francis Meres' translation of *The Sinner's Guide*, writes that "true repentance is properly the worke of God," he argues on the same page that "God requireth the liberty of thy will" in conversion.[40] Although Granada's understanding of predestination has a rather different emphasis than that of Reformed Protestants, who focused on damnation and humanity's lack of free will, the way in which Granada used the terms "predestination" and "election" did not directly contradict Protestant teachings and could even be read as confirming Protestant doctrine. Thus, "the benefit of Predestination," Granada

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[36] Maria Hagedorn, *Reformation und Spanische Andachtsliteratur: Luis de Granada in England* (Leipzig: Verlag von Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1934) 7, 99–105.

[37] See Luis de Granada, *A Memoriall of a Christian Life* (Rouen [i.e. London]: 1599) passim.

[38] Luis de Granada, *The Conversion of a Sinner* (London: Thomas Creede, 1598) sig. I5r.

[39] John A. Moore, *Fray Luis de Granada* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1977) 46,

[40] Luis de Granada, *The Sinners Guyde* (London: Iames Roberts, 1598) 281. "presupongamos primero lo que sant Augustín y todos los doctores generalmente dicen: conviene saber, que así como es obra de Dios la verdadera penitencia, así la puede El inspirer cuando quisiere."278.

wrote, "is the first and greatest of all benefits and which is merely given gratis without any precedent merit. The greatnes therefore of this benefit, and all those things which pertaine thereunto, greatly provoke a man to serve God, and to be dutifull unto him [Del sexto título por donde estamos obligados a la virtud, que es el beneficio inestimable de la divina predestinación. A todos estos beneficios se añade el de la elección, que es de solos aquellos que Dios ab eterno escogió para la vida perdurable]."[41] What is more, like Protestant preachers, Granada argued that conversion ought to be considered a sign of election: "for as amongst the signes of justification, amendment of life is not the least, so amongst the signes of election the greatest is perseverance in good life. [Porque *dado caso este secreto esté encubierto a lo ojos de los hombres, todavía come hay señales de la justificación, las hay también de la divina elección. Y así como entre aquéllas la principal es la emienda de la vida, así* entre éstas lo es la perseverancia en la Buena vida]."[42]

Nevertheless, the Catholic origin of Granada's work can easily be traced, even in the English translations. *The Sinner's Guide*, for instance, exhibits the Catholic dogma of particular judgment upon death:[43] "After death, followeth the particular and speciall judgement of every man [...] Many matters are to bee considered in this judgement, but one of the cheefest, is, to mark of what things we must give a reckoning."[44] Furthermore, Granada's contempt for the world, as opposed to the spiritual life, is reminiscent of the monastic convert's motives for entering the monastery: "as soone as a man hath tasted the sweetnes of spiritual things (saith Saint Bernard) he despiseth the flesh, (that is, all the goods and pleasures of this world) and thys is the principall reason of this error, which so much blindeth the men of thys world." He added "what goods (I pray you) are founde in the whole worlde, which are not false?"[45] Granada's sparing references to purgatory, however, were omitted in most English translations.

Another striking example of a Catholic treatise on spiritual conversion that avoids taking up an explicit confessional position is *A Looking Glasse of Mortalitie* (1599) which promises its readers to treat "all such things as appertaine

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[41] Luis de Granada, *The Flowers of Lodowicke of Granado. The first part. In which is handled the conuersion of a sinner* (London: 1601) fol. 55r. The corresponding passage in the original Spanish version is the beginning of chapter six, in *Obras Completas: Tomo VI, Guía de Pedadores (Texto definitivo)* ed. Herminio de Paz Castaño (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española Dominicos de Andalucía, 1995) 75.

[42] De Granada, *The Flowers of Lodowicke of Granado*, fol. 57r. The original Spanish is from *Obras Completas*, 76 (original emphasis).

[43] The dogma of particular judgment is implied in the Union Decree of Eugene IV (1439).

[44] Granada, *Conversion*, sig. B3r.

[45] Granada, *The Conversion of a Sinner*, ed. 1601, fol. 122v, fol.122r.

unto a Christian to do, from the beginning of his conversion, untill the end of his perfection."[46] Some terms and names appear to disclose the anonymous author's Catholic sympathies: his self-chastisement compared to that of "Katherine of Sienna," his exhortation to "Redeeme your sinnes with Almes-deedes," and his grievance over Christian laxity in faith: "O keycold Catholike! ô negligent Christian! […] Shall Infidels that know not God teach thee to live like a Christian?"[47] Yet at the same time, the author incites his readers to observe the Lord's "Saboths," a term which has a Puritan ring to it.[48] His specific formulation of the reception of the "representation of the Lords body," moreover, suggests an attempt at being doctrinally neutral and circumventing confessional polemic.[49] The author's possible desire for a universal Christianity is most clearly expressed when he writes about conversion. Unlike the Catholic and Protestant polemicists of his day, he plays down Catholic-Protestant difference by suggesting that there are several right and truthful ways of preaching conversion. Instead, he laments that none of them have been particularly successful: "so many preachers there are, so many books, so many voices, and so many reasons, which doe all call us unto Almightie God. And how is it possible then, that so many callings as these are, so many promises, and threatnings, should not suffice to bring us unto him? "[50] Elsewhere, he suggests that "infidels that know not God" may prove better teachers of spiritual conversion and learn his readers to "live & die well" than Christians themselves.[51]

Works on spiritual conversion that are simultaneously Roman Catholic and universalist, like *A Looking Glasse of Mortalitie* clarify why many Protestant preachers felt the necessity to engage in denominational polemics in their conversion sermons. While glossing over the ideological character of their own understanding of conversion, they warned "true Christians" against "popishness," the "Roman antichrist" and his "papist" adherers. The Protestantization of spiritual conversion thus also manifested itself in the fact that preachers embedded their denomination-free descriptions of spiritual conversion in sermons permeated with anti-Catholic diatribe. This shows that authors of spiritual conversion sermons were in fact deeply concerned about interfaith conversion between Protestantism and Catholicism. Hugh Dowriche,

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[46] *A Looking Glasse of Mortalitie* (London, 1599) title page.
[47] *A Looking Glasse,* 36,38,8.
[48] *A Looking Glasse*, 119.
[49] *A Looking Glasse*, 155.
[50] *A Looking Glasse* 148.
[51] *A Looking Glasse*, 8.

who was worried about the "lack of progress in the purification of the Reformed English Church,"[52] lamented, for instance, that

> the Papists […] are not yet reclaimed; the Atheists, Brownists, Anabaptists, Libertines, and carnall, carelesse, and dissolute professors, that are for their sinne suffered to be led into heresies, are not yet contented to joyne in one godly unitie to worship and serve the Lord in the mount of Jerusalem , the vision of peace.[53]

John Wilson, writing on the spiritual regeneration of Zacheus, expressed his concern over contemporary conversions to Catholicism as follows: "we being fallen into those times wherein Popery increaseth, new errors are sprowting up, and old heresies are called up out of their graves, and represented under the deceiving showes of received truths."[54] This did not mean that there was no hope for Catholics; although "Papisme saves none […] some among Papists may bee saved."[55] Nevertheless, for preachers like Dowriche and Wilson, appropriating spiritual conversion did not suffice to define, consolidate and stabilize Protestant identity. Realizing that the border between Protestantism and Catholicism was highly permeable, they resorted to violent anti-Catholic language.

Spiritual Conversion and Antitheatricalism

A topic that did mark and even widened the divide between Protestants and Catholics was the theatre. Where Jesuits, for instance, embraced drama as a means of pious instruction,[56] many Protestant preachers regarded the stage as a

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[52] Aughterson, Kate. "Dowriche , Anne (d. in or after 1613)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford: OUP, 2004, Online edn, ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2011. 15 Sept. 2011 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7987>.

[53] Hugh Dowriche, *The iaylors conuersion Wherein is liuely represented, the true image of a soule rightlye touched, and conuerted by the spirit of God* (London: Iohn Windet, 1596) sig. A4v.

[54] John Wilson, *Zacheus converted: or The rich publicans repentance. Restitution In which, the mysteries of the doctrine of conversion, are sweetly laid open and applyed for the establishing of the weakest. Also of riches in their getting, keeping, expending; with divers things about almes and restitution, and many other materiall points and cases insisted upon.* (London: T.Cotes, 1631) sig. A8r.

[55] Wilson, *Zacheus converted*, 547.

[56] Spanish missionaries in mid-sixteenth-century Central America even went so far as to blur the line between acting conversion in the theatre and actual conversion. During a performance of *La conquista de Jerusalén* (1543), which was written and directed by Franciscan friars, Indian actors who played Turkish troops "prepared for baptism and, after they were defeated, they were actually baptized onstage" (33). Likewise, the performance of "*La*

spiritual danger as well as a threat to their business. They deemed they were drawn into a rivalry with playwrights in attracting and captivating audiences. In this competition for popularity, playwrights appeared to have a clear lead over preachers, or so it was felt by various clerics. It was one of the major concerns of the Puritan polemicist William Prynne, for instance. In his infamous thousand page diatribe against the theatre, *Histrio-mastix*, he lamented the perceived exodus from the churches to the playhouses, or, in his words, the "Synagogues of the Devill":

> now alas in stead of calling upon one another to heare Sermons, and of these encouragements to goe up to the house of the Lord to blesse and prayse his Name […] we heare nought else among many who professe themselves Christians; but *come let us goe and see a Stage-play: let us heare such or such an Actor; or resort to such and such a Play-house:* (and I would I might not say unto such a Whore or Whore-house;) *where we will laugh and be merry, and passe away the afternoone*: As for any resort to such or such a Lecture, Church, or pious Preacher; it's a thing they seldome thinke, much less discourse of. Alas that any who professe themselves Christians should be thus strangly, (that I say not atheistically) infatuated, as to forsake the most sacred Oracles, the soule-saving Word, the most blessed Sacraments, house and presence of their God; to runne to Playes and Play-houses.[57]

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natividad de San Juan Bautista (The nativity of St. John the Baptist; 1538) which was preceded by a mass […] ended with the baptism of an eight-day-old child called John" (26). Adam Versényi, *Theatre in Latin America: Religion, Politics and Culture from Cortés to the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See especially the first chapter for a description of the phenomenon of the theatrical performance of real conversions. I thank Rob Carson and Ingrid Keenan for drawing my attention to this material.

[57] William Prynne, *Histrio-mastix The players scourge, or, actors tragaedie, divided into two parts. Wherein it is largely evidenced, by divers arguments, by the concurring authorities and resolutions of sundry texts of Scripture ... That popular stage-playes ... are sinfull, heathenish, lewde, ungodly spectacles, and most pernicious corruptions; condemned in all ages, as intolerable mischiefes to churches, to republickes, to the manners, mindes, and soules of men. And that the profession of play-poets, of stage-players; together with the penning, acting, and frequenting of stage-playes, are unlawfull, infamous and misbeseeming Christians. All pretences to the contrary are here likewise fully answered; and the unlawfulnes of acting, of beholding academicall enterludes, briefly discussed; besides sundry other particulars concerning dancing, dicing, health-drinking, &c. of which the table will informe you.* (London: 1632) fol. 531v. Original emphasis. For Prynne, even plays that were not being performed posed a threat: "many hundred prophane ones in this age of light […] [read] over three Playbookes at the least, for every Sermon, for every Booke or Chapter in the Bible" (fol. 531r).

The anonymous author of *An Alarme to Awake Church-sleepers*, too, complained about the fact that churchgoers lacked the stamina to "watch one houre in hearing Gods word" but had no difficulty "seeing a Play, or some vaine show."[58] Henry Smith wrote in a similar vein that "the common people in our time, are more readie to follow their sport and pastime, then to come to the church to heare of Christ," this, as opposed to Christ's contemporaries who "were so desirous to follow Christ, that neither lameness, nor blindness, nor sicknes, could stay them from comming to him."[59] The poet and essayist Owen Felltham also observed that playwrights saw their audiences grow at the expense of the pulpit. Yet unlike Prynne, he was keen to emphasize that the problem did not lie in human depravity, but in the simple fact that sermons lacked the aspect of acting, and as such, the key to affecting people and holding their attention:

> the waighty *lines* men finde upon the *Stage*, I am perswaded, have beene the *lures*, to draw away the *Pulpits followers*. Wee complaine of drowsinesse at a *Sermon*; when a *Play* of a doubled length, leades us on still with alacrity. But the fault is not all in our selves. If wee saw *Divinitie* acted, the *gesture* and *varietie* would as much invigilate. But it is too high to bee personated by *Humanitie.* The *Stage* feeds both the *eare* and the *eye*: and through this *latter sence*, the *Soule* drinkes deeper draughts. Things *acted*, possesse us more.[60]

Preachers were sensitive to Felltham's argument, as becomes clear from Prynne's reluctant discovery about their sermonizing habits: "I have heard some stile their texts […] a Play or Spectacle, dividing their texts into Actors, Spectators, Scenes,&c. as if they were acting of a Play, not preaching of Gods Word."[61]

Protestant anti-theatrical sentiment was not only fed by jealousy and the sense that plays proved better equipped to captivate an audience and hold their attention, but also by a profound conviction that the very idea of theatrical performance subverted true religion, and, more specifically, sincere conversion. Prynne, for instance, largely defines the business of the stage against spiritual conversion. According to him, acting and watching plays are anathema to

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[58] *An Alarme to Awake Church-Sleepers describing the causes, discovering the dangers, prescribing remedies for this drowsie disease* (London: 1640) 96.

[59] Smith, "The Sinners Conuersion," sig. A6r.

[60] Owen Felltham, *Resolves or, Excogitations. A Second Centvrie* (London: 1628) 64–65. Original emphasis.

[61] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 935 (note).

conversion, and forms of spiritual perversion: "alas, all the time that you have already past in Play-haunting, and such delights of sinne, hath beene *but a time of spirituall death*, wherein you have beene worse then nought in Gods account."[62] Elsewhere, he quotes the fifth-century presbyter of Marseilles Salvian, who contended that "in Stage-Playes, […] there is a certaine Apostasie from the Faith, and a deadly prevarication, both from the Symboles of it, and the heavenly Sacraments."[63] Moreover, plays cause the "Angels" to "lose […] *their joy, in our conversion*, […] *their office, in our protection*," and "*their happinesse in our Salvation*."[64] This is because attending plays "*is contrary to our Christian vow in baptisme*, *to forsake the Devill and all his workes, the pompes and vanities of this wicked world and all the sinfull lusts of the flesh*," an idea that Prynne restates over and over again throughout his work.[65] In addition to having a corrupting effect on the soul, the theatre also renders people impervious to devout regeneration, because "Stage-playes indispose men to the acceptable performance of every religious duty: be it prayer, *hearing, and reading of Gods word*, receiving the Sacraments, and the like."[66] It is not surprising then, that Prynne exhorted his readers to repent "*before it be too late*" and "Hell" has "devoured" them.[67] Prynne went as far as to consider it a sign of true conversion if people abandoned the stage, approving of Prudentius' claim that "Christians after their conversion, returne backe no more to Playes and Theaters."[68]

William Prynne's objections against the theatre and acting were not new. In *Histrio-mastix*, Prynne refers to the Church of England clergyman Stephen Gosson, a self-proclaimed former actor and playwright, who had written a similarly vigorous though much less extensive attack on the theatre, entitled *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). His contemporary Anthony Munday recognized, like Prynne, an inversely proportional relationship between conversion and theatrical festivities. He considered buying a theatre ticket, a "purchase" of "damnation," and noted "repentance is furthest from you when you are nearest such maiegames."[69] Furthermore, as Jonas Barish points out,

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[62] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 990. Original emphasis.
[63] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 51.
[64] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 44. Original emphasis.
[65] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 911. Original emphasis.
[66] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* fol. 522v–r.
[67] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 990. Original emphasis.
[68] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* fol. 561r, 562v.
[69] Anthony Munday, *A second and third blast of retrait from plaies and theaters the one whereof was sounded by a reuerend byshop dead long since; the other by a worshipful and zealous gentleman now aliue: one showing the filthines of plaies in times past; the other the abhomination of theaters in the*

Protestant anti-theatrical sentiments, may very well have been anticipated as early as the late fourteenth century.[70] A case in point is *A tretise of miraclis pleyinge*, an anonymous sermon from this period that was written in the tradition of the proto-Protestant Lollard movement, which argues that miracle plays are blasphemous.[71] According to its author, in this type of drama the miracles of God are abused to satisfy the public's desire to be entertained. Unlike the "worschipe of God, that is bothe in signe and in dede," plays are "onely syngnis of love withoute dedis."[72] Like Prynne, the author felt that acting, and, more specifically, reenacting the Passion of Christ procures the opposite of conversion, as it "benemeth men their bileve in Crist."[73] Indeed, "the develis instrument to perverten men," miracle plays cause the "verré apostasye" from him, and they reverse "penaunce doying."[74] If the "word of God" nor "his sacramentis" enable people to convert to God "how shulde pleyinge worchen, that is of no vertue but ful of defaute," the homilist asked rhetorically.[75] One of the author's key objections against the theatre is that it involves feigning, or "sygnis withoute dede," and is therefore "fals conceite."[76] This notion of dissimulation extends to those who contend that they have been converted by a miracle play, because this "is but feynyd holynesse."[77]

More than two centuries later, Prynne, as well as some of his contemporaries, showed themselves equally concerned about the idea of dissimulation in faith, which, they believed, was encouraged by the theatre. According to Prynne, "[God] requires that the actions of every creature should be

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time present: both expresly prouing that that common-weale is nigh vnto the cursse of God, wherein either plaiers be made of, or theaters maintained. Set forth by Anglo-phile Eutheo. (London: Henrie Denham, 1580) 66. See also William Rankins, *A mirrour of monsters wherein is plainely described the manifold vices, &c spotted enormities, that are caused by the infectious sight of playes, with the description of the subtile slights of Sathan, making them his instruments* (London: Iohn Charlewood, 1587). Despite this fierce diatribe against the theatre, Rankins later changed his mind and became a playwright himself.

[70] Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982) 67–68.

[71] Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 67–68.

[72] "A Sermon Against Miracle-Plays," *Reliquiae Antiquae: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts*, ed., Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell, vol. 2 (London: John Russell Smith, 1843) 42–57, 46.

[73] "A Sermon Against Miracle-Plays," 53.

[74] "A Sermon Against Miracle-Plays," 52, 53, 43.

[75] "A Sermon Against Miracle-Plays," 48.

[76] "A Sermon Against Miracle-Plays," 46, 49.

[77] "A Sermon Against Miracle-Plays," 49.

honest and sincere," but "the acting of Playes" causes actors "to seeme that in outward appearance which they are not in truth: therefore it must needs bee odious to the God of truth."[78] To bolster his argument, he quoted the original Greek meaning of the word hypocrisy:

> for what else is hypocrisie in the proper signification of the word, but the acting of anothers part or person on the Stage, or what else is an hypocrite, in his true etimologie, but a Stage player, or one who acts anothers part [...] we must needs acknowledge, the very acting of Stage-playes to be hypocrisie [...] and so an abominable and unchristian exercise.[79]

In Protestant conversion sermons we find a similar concern over hypocrisy, which becomes evident from warnings against feigning conversion that are put in theatrical terms, and in a fixation on the distinction between outward appearance and inward piety. Like Prynne, the clergyman Thomas Shepard, who later became a minister in America, alluded to the Greek origin of the term hypocrite: "cast by all Hypocrites, that like stage players in the sight of others, act the parts of Kings and honest men; when looke upon them in their tyring house, they are but base varlets."[80] Other clergymen were concerned about what they perceived as the ease with which people could pretend to have embraced a life of holiness. As the clergyman William Perkins (1558-1602) understood it, this capability is an inherent aspect of humanity: "the wickedness of mans nature & the depth of hipocrise is such that a man may and can easily transforme himselfe to the counterfeict & resemblance of any grace of God."[81] For Thomas Cooper, this also works the other way around in the sense that people are easily deceived by outward virtue: "*is not the seeming good which by natures benefit shewes forth in the world, accounted currant holinesse, and thereby exludeth the true power of well-doing?*"[82] Indeed, preachers were fascinated by the difference between inward and outward faith. Without exception, they contended that

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[78] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 159.

[79] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 159.

[80] Thomas Shepard,*The Sincere Convert, Discovering the Pavcity of True Beleevers; and the great difficulty of Sauing Conuersion* (London: Thomas Paine, 1640) 127.

[81] Perkins, *A Graine of Musterd-seed*, 42. Thomas Cooper was of a similar mind: "Is not here a glorious maske for sincerity and religion, where outward honestie in a ciuill calling becomes a warrant of uprightnesse, seeing our faith is shewed by workes?" Thomas Cooper, *The Converts First Love*, "To the reader," sig. A2r.

[82] Cooper, *The Converts First Love*, sig. Av. Original emphasis.

conversion is essentially an inward change and warned against the danger of empty ostentation in faith:

> For what is all our praier but lip-labour and sacrifice abominable in his [the Lord's] eares? or what is all our outward fasting and abstinence, but meere hypocrisie which his soule abhorreth, unlesse they be accompanied with faith in his promises, and with repentance from dead workes?[83]

Much of this "contemporary obsession with dissimulation," as Peter Lake puts it, was fuelled by the Elizabethan settlement "which saw outward obedience, conformity, and compliance as the highest political (if not religious) virtues."[84] Thomas Cooper cautiously addressed the problem that he saw with the religious administration of his employer: "policy" or "that wisdome which civill government discovereth in managing it [sic] affaires" could violate truthfulness "when it stands more upon the forme then the power of godlinesse" and when it "excludes the substance of religion for the outward complement thereof."[85] Of course, the regime's emphasis on outward conformity was also considered a problem that concerned confessional identity. Protestants became increasingly anxious about what they perceived as coreligionists, converts in particular, who shrouded their true Catholic sympathies. In some cases, these worried Protestants were converts themselves. Knowing that it would not harm his credibility, the former Catholic John Copley, for instance, wrote that

> there are in this realme many dissembling Protestants, which outwardly doe all the acts of Religion belonging to this Church of England, either to stay in their places in the common-wealth, or to avoyde their penal lawes; and yet in their hearts are resolved beleevers of the Roman Faith, egregiously dissembling both with God and men, and practising most notorious equivocation, aswell in matters of faith as manners.[86]

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[83] Attersoll, *Three treatises Viz. The conversion of Nineueh*, "epistle dedicatory," sig. A4v- A4r.

[84] Peter Lake, "Religious Identities in Shakespeare's England," *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) 57–84, 64.

[85] Cooper, *The Converts First Love*, 17.

[86] John Copley, *Doctrinall and Morall Observations Concerning Religion* (London: 1612) "Advertisements to the Reader", sig. Av.

In chapter five, I will discuss in further detail the accusation of dissimulation that was typically leveled at interfaith converts, as well as the strategies converts used to refute them.

It should be noted that the preachers mentioned above belong to one end of the Protestant spectrum. On the other, we find people such as the Archbishop William Laud. In the late 1630s, he formalized and standardized the reintegration of repentant renegades into the Church community by composing a *Form of Penance and Reconciliation of a Renegado or Apostate from the Christian Religion to Turcism* (1637). In a ritual that was "drawn from the practice of the Roman Catholic Church and the Inquisition" and was "a quasi-drama of return, a kind of ritual of reacceptance," the repentant renegade should wait in the porch of a church for a few weeks, dressed in white and "his head uncovered, his countenance dejected, not taking particular notice of any person that passeth by him; and when the people come in and go out of the church, let him upon his knees humbly crave their prayers, and acknowledge his offence."[87] According to Michael Questier, although there was no "specific printed format for such recantations from Rome," it is "virtually certain that Elizabethan and Jacobean bishops used a Protestant equivalent of the Episcopal liturgical ritual in the roman *Pontifical* [in which] the conformist was made to look as if he was making a thorough religious conversion from a heretical to a true Church."[88]

Conclusion

From the beginning of the Elizabethan era, there were two distinct developments in the understanding of spiritual conversion. Firstly, it became a favourite subject of Protestant preachers. While religious drama of an overtly moralizing and confessional polemical nature started to fade in popularity in the last decades of the sixteenth century, the pulpit became the chief site for teaching about conversion. Many Protestant preachers perceived a rivalry between the play and the sermon in drawing audiences. In their attempts to claim the pulpit as the major site for reflection on conversion, Puritans increasingly dismissed the theatre altogether. Secondly, like Reformation playwrights such as Lewis Wager, Church of England clergymen began to define spiritual conversion as an inherently Protestant event and the essence of true Christianity. Spiritual conversion, in other words, became Protestantized. In a typical sermon it was thus argued that conversion is not an act stemming from the human will but a

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[87] Quoted in Matar, *Islam in Britain* 69–70.

[88] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 110–111.

gift granted by God. It was also seen as tantamount to sincere repentance, a claim supported by the analysis of conversion parables from Scripture. Preachers, furthermore, explained the different stages of penance at length, showing that it was a life-long process with dangers of relapse and mistake, rather than an instant and single moment of insight. While many of them explicitly contributed to the confessionalization of traditional Christianity by lashing out against Catholics and Roman doctrine, most preachers avoided defining conversion itself in the same ideological terms and carefully concealed the ideological character of Protestantized spiritual conversion. In addition, Protestant spiritual conversion was often defined as fundamentally anti-theatrical, with hypocrisy and the distinction between inward as true and outward as corrupt faith as stock themes of conversion sermons.

The Protestantization of spiritual conversion created new opportunities for playwrights. While the pulpit was consolidating its role of propagating conversion, the commercial theatre started losing interest in spiritual conversion from a didactic perspective, but developed a range of new approaches that were inspired by the emergence of Protestantism. These include the exploration of the knotty relationship between election doctrine and spiritual conversion, which will be the topic of the next chapter, and the response to the loss of medieval forms of spiritual conversion that will
be discussed in chapter four.

CHAPTER 3 'My Heart is Hardened Quight:' Election Doctrine and the Staging of Conversion

In response to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, playwrights began to concentrate on failure in conversion. Pre-Reformation medieval theatre typically encouraged audiences to follow the path of saintliness, a task that corresponded with the late-medieval view that people contribute significantly to their own conversion towards holy deliverance. Moralities, for instance, present the Everyman character as "a ruler over his own destiny, endowed with the decisive power of free will."[1] Tempted by vices but instructed and corrected by virtues, this character eventually chooses to mend his ways and enters a state of grace. This narrative pattern altered when double predestination became a widely accepted doctrine in England.[2] If the storyline of the pre-Reformation morality play moves "with the relentlessness of tragedy [...] toward a happy ending,"[3] Protestant moralities consider damnation a more fitting outcome of the protagonist's sin-ridden life, leaving audiences with a rather gloomy outlook on the possibility of conversion. As the present chapter will show, this change in the depiction of spiritual conversion was a response to the Reformed understanding of the will as fully bound by original sin. It will moreover illustrate how writers of morality plays struggled with the challenge of incorporating a doctrine that flatly contravened free will as the tenet of dramatic didacticism – a problem that is brought into the sharpest focus precisely in stage representations of conversion.

Champions of the Catholic faith used conversion to define the idea of free will. Erasmus, for instance, described free will as "a power of the human will by which man may be able to direct himself towards, or turn away from, what leads to eternal salvation."[4] He supported his argument with multiple biblical exhortations to convert, claiming that "nearly the whole of Scripture speaks of nothing but conversion, endeavour, and striving to improve."[5] The view proposed by Erasmus was famously attacked by Luther, who argued that in

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[1] Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play: Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 41.

[2] See Susan Doran and Christopher Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People: The Church and Religion in England, 1500-1700*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003) 25.

[3] Potter, *The English Morality Play*, 57.

[4] Desiderius Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio, Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 76: *Controversies*, ed. Charles Trinkaus, tr. Peter Macardle, annotated by Peter Macardle, Clarence H. Miller, and Charles Trinkaus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 21.

[5] Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio,* 36.

matters of God free will "belongs to none but God alone,"[6] and who was crucial in shaping the Protestant conviction that people are wholly dependent on God's grace for their salvation. In England, however, a somewhat different strand of Protestant thinking would gain widespread currency. This was the belief, generally associated with Calvin, that people are predestined not only to salvation, but also to damnation.

Protestants, too, used spiritual conversion to explain how they understood the nature of the will in God's scheme of redemption. This is illustrated in William Perkin's explanation of why people can still experience a sense of agency. Perkins, possibly "the most significant English theologian of his age," who can be seen as an example of a "moderate Puritan,"[7] argued that true piousness is *felt as acts of one's own volition*. Clarifying "the true difference betweene us [the Church of England] and the Church of Rome in [the] point of free will," Perkins claimed that if perceived free will is deployed righteously, it is effectively the result of wholly divinely bestowed conversion:

> every man by nature [is] […] as one that lieth rotting in the grave, not having any ability or power to moove or stirre; and therefore he cannot so much as desire or doe any thing that is truly good of himselfe, but god must first come and put a newe soule into him, even the spirit of grace to quicken and revive him: and then beeing thus revived, the will beginneth to *will* good things at the very same time, when god by his spirit first infuseth grace.[8]

Protestant conversion is also entwined with a sense of certainty of one's election. In his *The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven: Wherein every man may cleerely see, whether he shall be saved or damned*, reprinted throughout the seventeenth century, the Church of England clergyman Arthur Dent (1552/3–1603) contended that "he, that knoweth not in this life that he shall be saved, shall never be saved after this

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[6] Martin Luther in *Erasmus and Luther: Discourse on Free Will*, trans. and ed. Ernst F. Winter (London: Continuum, 2006 [1961]) 103.

[7] Michael Jinkins, "Perkins, William (1558–1602)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn. ed. Lawrence Goldman. May 2007. 30 Jan. 2013 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21973>.

[8] William Perkins, *A reformed Catholike: or, A declaration shewing how neere we may come to the present Church of Rome in sundrie points of religion: and vvherein we must for euer depart from them* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1598) 18. My emphasis. See chapter two of this study for more examples of the relationship between Protestant understandings of free will and conversion.

life," and explained that the most trustworthy signs of redemption included conversion, or, in his words, "Sound Regeneration, and Sanctification."[9] To those who felt that the doctrine of election relegated people to a condition of utter passivity Perkins retorted that Christians are obliged to live and act according to their faith by trusting that they will be saved: "every faithful man must believe that he is elected. It is Gods commandment that we should believe in Christ. John I:23. Now to believe in Christ is not only to believe that we are adopted, justified, and redeemed by him, but also in him elected from eternity."[10] Writers of spiritual conversion moralities embraced as a new subject precisely this challenge of believing in one's election – and behaving accordingly – whilst being fully aware of sins committed in the past. In so doing they remind us that in practice this task was formidable if not impossible.

Playwrights of conversion drama dealt with election doctrine in different ways. Some employed stage narratives to explain Protestant doctrine and, specifically, to tackle the urgent question of how to convert if God has already decided on one's faith. The best example of this approach is undoubtedly Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (discussed in chapter one) which very specifically addresses Marie's problem with this issue. Nevertheless, this play is one of the last conversion moralities that explore election doctrine by means of a *successful* conversion. Lewis Wager's colleagues, including his son William, began to experiment with unsuccessful conversion that resulted in damnation. Examples are William Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* (1559), *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* (1560) the anonymous *King Darius* (1565), Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience* (1572) and Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1592).

There are two reasons for Reformation playwrights' interest in failed conversion. One is that this topic chimes with the pessimistic outlook on the possibility of redemption that election doctrine entails. After all, double predestination was based on the assumption that original sin renders humankind fundamentally unworthy of salvation and utterly incapable of redeeming itself. This was more easily voiced by means of a protagonist who fails to convert than by staging successful conversions, particularly those of (biblical) Saints, who are

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[9] Quoted in Martha Tuck Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 43. *The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven* was first printed in 1601. The quotations are from the 1607 edition.

[10]Quoted in Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 43. The passage is quoted from Perkins' *A Golden Chaine: or The Description of Theology* (London, 1635).

already known as true penitents and as members of the elect.[11] Secondly, the topic of failed conversion allowed playwrights to explore the unnerving question of how to deal with one's inherent passivity in conversion and the uncertainty regarding one's salvation. As we have seen above in the examples of Perkins and Dent, these questions were also addressed in sermons, but playwrights were not restricted by the confines of homiletic edification that incited preachers to formulate unambiguous answers. Rather, the theatre's way of easing anxieties was by acknowledging and channelling them in stagings.

The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*

William Wager's moralities *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* are the two earliest surviving examples of Reformation drama that enact a fruitless attempt at conversion.[12] Both works assume an indecisive stance towards election doctrine, which shows that Wager was treading a new and delicate line between endorsing unconditional election and encouraging audience members to assume responsibility in amending their lives.

The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art presents the life story of the foolish Moros, who is a young boy at the beginning of the play, and, at the end, an imprudent old man who is eventually carried to the Devil.[13] The middle part of the plot is devoted to the virtues' attempts at converting him and to the successes of the vices in keeping him in a state of degeneracy. In some respects the play rules out human agency in securing salvation and suggests that Moros is damned from the very start. For instance, the audience is informed by Discipline that foolishness is a matter of nature, rather than nurture (ll. 26–27), and by the

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[11] Indeed, Reformation moralities contrast sharply with their medieval counterparts that, in the words of Robert Potter, present a world that "imitates the orderly Scholastic universe in which man has a high appointed place. He is made in the image of God, to know and serve and love God. Rational yet sentient, man is the crucial link in the chain of being. He is, in himself, a microcosm. He is the appointed ruler of the Earth, carrying out the will of God on Earth," in Potter, *The English Morality Play,* 40.

[12] Very little is know about the life of William Wager, who was also a Church of England clergyman and "almost certainly the son of the playwright Lewis Wager," Peter Happé, "Wager, William (1537/8?–1591)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 31 Jan. 2013 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28395>.

[13] William Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* in The Longer Thou Livest *and* Enough Is as Good as a Feast*,* ed. R. Mark Benbow (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) 1–78.

Prologue that "nothing, God except, is so strong as nature / For neither counsel, learning nor sapience / Can an evil nature to honest men allure" (ll. 44–46).[14] Moros is introduced as the representation of people who are "past cure," for whom there is "nothing" that can correct their corrupt nature (ll. 47–48). In addition, the play's title, *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art*, carries a deterministic significance. From the above examples and from the fact that the play does not offer a redemptive ending, Martha Tuck Rozett concludes that the play is "freed from its instructive duties" and "anticipates the development of a tragic drama which is seldom amoral but is no longer primarily didactic," for "the logic of the doctrine of election undermines the basic didactic principle that one can learn by example."[15]

Although Rozett is right in detecting a new trend in the purpose of the morality play, she too readily dismisses the "instructive duties" of *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art*. Wager's audiences, for instance, must have had difficulty interpreting *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* as fully deterministic. Time and again the Virtues suggest that there is still hope for Moros. Piety tells him that he should not be distracted by his name, meaning "fool," because he will be given "wisdom" by God if he prays and serves God diligently (ll. 271–74). Elsewhere, Exercitation contradicts the Prologue's claim about the superiority of nature by asserting that a child may be "instruct[ed] whereto you will by might" (l. 25). Finally, even as the middle-aged Moros is nearing his end and God's Judgment has struck him with his "sword of vengeance," God's Judgment appears to give Moros a final opportunity to reform himself:

> If thou hast grace for mercy now call,
> Yet thy soul perchance thou mayst save;
> For his mercy is above his works all,
> On penitent sinners he is wont mercy to have (ll. 1799–1802)

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[14] Ineke Murakami, in "Wager's Drama of Conscience, Convention, and State Constitution," *Studies in English Literature* 47.2 (2007): 305–29, however, points out that this remark does not so much indicate a "passive reflection of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination" as the conviction that "ethical training begins in the home, years before a child encounters the 'good schoolmasters' who will guide him 'to [his] own and other men's utility' " (309–10). This idea is supported by Moros, who, on various occasions, boasts of the paltry upbringing he received from his parents.

[15] Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 88.

Moros does not make the least effort, which leads God's Judgment to the conclusion that "indurate wretches cannot convert / But die in their filthiness like swine" (ll. 1805-6). Moments later, Moros is taken to his infernal destination. Although the failure of the Virtues to impede Moros from treading the path of sin may be interpreted as a sign of his inherent damnation, it is difficult not to see their efforts in an instructive light. Besides, it is none other than God's Judgment who assures Moros of his possibility of deliverance, thus voicing the play's recognition of human responsibility in salvation.

Like *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art*, William Wager's other conversion play, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, has a Reformed outlook but is not entirely deterministic. An important difference is that the latter work contains a successful conversion, albeit a temporary one.[16] This short-lived conversion is fully and unambiguously accredited to God, unlike the relapse that follows at the end. Indeed, while at the end of the play the protagonist is punished for the sins he committed during his life, the specific manner in which he dies suggests that God prevents the protagonist from turning to him and may have precluded any lasting conversions throughout his life.

Enough Is as Good as a Feast portrays the spiritual conversion of Worldly Man who soon afterwards relapses into impiety under the influence of the vices and is finally carried to Hell on Satan's back. Although Worldly Man's conversion is surprisingly quick and does not involve a process of repentance, as is promoted, for instance, in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, there are no indications that he is being insincere or that the conversion should not be taken seriously for any other reason. After his change of heart, Worldly man reminds himself and the audience of God's agency in his conversion:

> To have gotten money I studied to deceive high and low.
> But thanks be to God the father of all might,
> Which will not the death of sinners as Scripture doth say,
> It hath pleased him to open unto me the true light
> Whereby I perceive the right path from the broad way. (ll. 657–61)

Elsewhere, Worldly Man tells Precipitation, who remarks how "wonderfully changed" he is, that he gives "God the glory" for it (l. 712, 714).

Like Moros's embrace of sin, Worldly Man's final relapse is partly presented as a consequence of his self-chosen actions. He falls into the trap of the

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[16] William Wager, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* in Benbow, 79–146.

vices, taking them for the positive euphemistic names they have created for themselves in order to deceive Worldly Man. Moments after it has become clear that the protagonist has fallen back into his old ways, Worldly Man's foil, Heavenly Man, points to the causal relation between his lapse into wickedness and God's punishment: "behold how quickly his promise he hath broke, / Whereby he kindleth God's wrath against him to smoke" (ll. 961–62). In a nightmare that anticipates his damnation, Worldly Man faces the Plague of God who is ready to strike him with a sword. When Worldly Man inquires about his assailant's motivations, the Plague answers that he is "a transgressor of God's laws" (1304). The idea that Worldly Man himself is responsible for his ruin by having elicited God's wrath with his greed is reiterated by Contentation after the unfortunate protagonist has been dragged to Hell:

> Pythagoras saith that a man of covetous desire
> Cannot be contented neither with abundance,
> For the more he hath the more still he doth require,
> Wherfore such persons provoke God to vengeance;
> Example of the Worldly Man, late of remembrance,
> Whose wicked life offended the Lord so exceedingly
> That his heavy plagues came upon him suddenly. (ll. 1507–13)

Nevertheless, the story of Worldly Man's downfall and death is more in line with the doctrine of unconditional election than the characters' endorsements of Worldly Man's accountability seem to suggest. Indeed, the way in which Worldly Man is suddenly deprived of his life after a moment of divine castigation suggests that William Wager did not believe in the possibility of true repentance for people who had already given testimony of their reprobation. Briefly before he dies of the torments of God's Plague, Worldly Man attempts to dictate his will to Covetous and Ignorance in order to safeguard his possessions for his wife and children. Having said "in the name of," the first four words of the "common opening formula of a will […]: *in the name of God. Amen*," Worldly Man suddenly collapses, not to wake up again. This relatively abrupt death, as well as its timing suggest that it is God himself who thwarts Worldly Man's attempt to address Him. If audiences retrospectively applied this idea to Worldly Man's life, they would be confirmed in believing that Worldly Man was damned from the start and would never have been able to sustain his conversion. There are several clues that endorse this view. It is precisely the plays' vices who are sympathetic towards the possibility of self-chosen conversion, for instance. As Covetous tells Temerity, "Know you not that whensoever a sinner doth repent / That God forgiveth him his wickedness incontinent?" at which Inconsideration

replies: "True indeed as heretofore hath been seen; Many have been made heavenly that worldly have been" (ll. 405–8). That these words are spoken by the same characters who do not hesitate to swear by "God's arse" also invites the audience to interpret them ironically. Another endorsement of election doctrine is the presence of the play's second protagonist, Heavenly Man, who represents the elect and serves as a foil to Worldly Man, who symbolizes reprobation.[17] Heavenly Man, expectedly, behaves in an exemplary manner and, at the end of the play, is given the promise of the "joys" of repose, "Which are prepared for the heavenly from the beginning" (ll.145).

King Darius

Of all surviving Elizabethan morality plays, *King Darius* is possibly the least sympathetic to conversion.[18] The reason for this must be sought in the peculiar way in which it deviates from other Protestant moralities: this play presents as a potential convert not an everyman character, but a vice. Since this wicked figure is defined by a single and static quality that rules out any form of change, his failure to convert comes as no surprise.

King Darius has a dual plotline, one part presenting the endeavours of the personified virtues Charity, Equity and Constancy to convert the vice character Inequity and his comrades Importunity and Partiality, and the other staging an apocryphal tale about the virtuous King Darius of Persia. Unlike Wager's moralities discussed above, the objects of proselytization in *King Darius* do not even come close to conversion. When Equity announces that he has come to "turn [the vices] from [their] errour," and prays for their conversion, Inequity, Importunity and Partiality respond by showing their utter revulsion at the preaching of their antagonists and by threatening to torture and kill Equity if he does not leave immediately. At the end, Iniquity, the greatest villain of the play, is cast into damnation.

The curious decision of the anonymous playwright to stage a vice as a potential convert raises questions about his purpose. Inequity could be interpreted as a radical personification of a reprobate, whose inability to convert is patently obvious from the start. Yet this throws the attempts of the virtues to

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[17] See Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 89–94, for an analysis of this and other "dual-protagonist play[s]" that appeared as a consequence of Calvinist doctrine.

[18] *A Pretie new Enterlude both pithie & pleasaunt of the Story of Kyng Daryus, Beinge taken out of the third and fourth Chapter of the thyrd booke of Esdras* (London: Thomas Colwell, 1565).

convert him in a strange light. Why would they even try? At one point Equity appears to realize that his endeavours are futile:

> that thyng that spryngeth not of Equytie
> Is cleane dampnacyon and syn it selfe
> and no remedy at al can there be found you to help
> If that with syn you be once intangeled
> From it you will never be converted (B4r)

Nevertheless, his conclusion undermines his own point about Inequity's imperviousness to conversion: "For the eyes of god sayth the Prophyt Jerymy / Doth alwayes behold Justyce and Equytie / Therfore repent & clayme fayth for your owne" (sig. B4r).

The reason for *King Darius's* staging of a vice as a potential convert becomes clear when we realize that this play is less interested in the workings of election doctrine than in anti-Catholic propaganda. As David Bevington argues, the fight between the virtues and vices in *King Darius* is a "polemical allegory of England's religious struggle," adding that "the antics of the vice figures satirize Papist corruption and hypocrisy, and the discomfiting of these villains is a victory for the Reformation."[19] Thus, Inequity, the character who is reassuringly sent to damnation at the end of the play, asserts that he is in fact the son of the Pope, and hastens to emphasize his father's absolute authority: "All at hys commaundement are / And agaynst not to moue they dare" (sig. E2v). Elsewhere, Equity attempts in vain to save Iniquity "from Antichryst / And his papysticall lyne" (sig. E3r). Like *The Play of the Sacrament*, discussed in chapter one, *King Darius* foreshadows a striking pattern in the staging of conversion in later drama that will be discussed at length in chapter six: the reluctance of playwrights to present the radical conversion of religious others to (Protestant) Christianity as a genuine possibility. By identifying Inequity with the Pope, the play not only hints at the idea of his interfaith conversion to Protestantism, but at once suggests that the conversion of Pope is as ludicrous – undesired even – as that of Inequity. By the same token, the attempts of the virtues to reform Inequity and his henchmen primarily serve to prove that the reprobation of the pontificate manifests itself in stubborn persistence in evil.

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[19] David Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) 76.

The play's celebration of constancy must be seen in the same anti-Catholic light. In an epilogue, for instance, Constancy praises one of the characters in the other plot who "dyd remayne in constancye and kepe the same" (sig. H4v). It is clear that constancy comes off as the most important value in the play. By celebrating the virtue of constancy, *King Darius* represents the English Reformation as a continuation of English religious identity that was merely disturbed by the Catholic enemy, but restored with the arrival of Elizabeth I. The play's insistence on constancy, however, simultaneously reveals a cultural anxiety over the maintenance of this stability, a fear that is also attested to by Constancy, who in a concluding prayer asks God to send Queen Elizabeth "cleare sight" and "his worde / That from here ennemyes she may be restorde" (sig. H4r).

The Conflict of Conscience

Of all Elizabethan conversion moralities, Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience* is most torn between an endorsement of free will and predestination. This is due to the fact that the play, published in 1581, comes in two versions, which are largely identical except for their fundamentally different endings. The first closes on an account of the protagonist's death and damnation; the second, published only a few months later, with the statement that he died upon a successful conversion to God, who "in mercy great hath eased him of his payne."[20] The play narrates the story of the Protestant Philologus who sinks into a state of spiritual agony, having been forced to convert to Catholicism. The plot is based on the biography of the Italian Protestant Francesco Spiera (or Spira) (b. 1502) who became suicidal after he had been forced publically to recant his Protestant convictions.[21] He starved to death in a condition of despair in 1548.

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[20] Nathaniel Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience*, ed. Herbert Davis and F.P. Wilson, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952 [1581]) ll. 2424 (second edition). The major differences between the two versions include variant title pages and the omission of the reference to Francis Spiera on whose life the story was based. See for an overview of the differences between the two versions William Jackson, "Woodes' *The Conflict of Conscience,*" *TLS*, 7 September 1933, 592.

[21] Spiera's story became widespread in England. See for a discussion of the influence of one of the most popular versions of it on the construction of Protestants selves, Michael MacDonald, "The *Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira*: Narrative, Identity and Emotion in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 32–61. See also Celesta Wine, "Nathaniel Wood's *Conflict of Conscience*," *PMLA* 50.3 (1935): 661–78; and Kenneth Sheppard, "Atheism, Apostasy, and the Afterlives of Francis Spira in Early Modern England," *The*

The "conflict of conscience" refers to the protagonist's apostasy as well as his struggle with his conviction that he is a reprobate. The morality opens with a discussion on the purpose of suffering between Philologus, acting as a teacher, and his pupil, Mathetes. After Philologus has explained that God imposes hardship on people to warn them against sin and to enable them to prove their constancy and faithfulness, he is put to the test himself. The imaginary country of the play has come under the authority of the Pope, and Philologus is taken prisoner for refusing to accept Catholic doctrine. In prison, Spirit and Conscience attempt to put courage into Philologus, but he is eventually tempted into renouncing Protestantism by Sensual Suggestion. Philologus is then released and rewarded with worldly prosperity by the Pope. Soon, however, Philologus meets with divine punishment for his apostasy, and is visited by Horror, a character who is "assigned" by God to "correct impenitents" by causing "confusion and horror of the mynde" (ll. 1968-69). Accordingly, Philologus realizes that he is unable to pray, which throws him into a state of anguish. Philologus struggles in particular with his deep conviction that he is a "reprobate." His friends, Theologus and Eusebius, try to explain that God's mercy is much greater than Philologus is willing to admit and that there is little doubt he will be saved, but Philologus falls into despair. Indeed, Theologus and Eusebius' words merely provoke Philologus to convince them of his damnation. He asserts that he is a reprobate and that his "heart is hardened quight" (l. 2116, 2151). Likewise, when he says the Lord's Prayer, to the delight of his friends, Philologus immediately adds that he has only "spoke[n] the wordes in deede" and that his heart is "replenished" with "rancor, spight, and gall" (ll.2146–47). The first version of the play ends with a messenger who informs the audience of the "dolefull newes" that "Philologus by deep dispaire hath hanged himselfe with coard […] And his owne hand, now at the last, hath wrought his endless paine" (first edition, l. 2412, 2424). On the last page of the second edition, the messenger has a rather different message: the "ioyfull newes" that "Philologus, that would have hanged himselfe with coard, Is nowe conuerted unto God, with manie bitter teares" (second edition, ll. 2411–13).

It is important that *only* the endings of the play's editions differ significantly from each other. The alteration in the second edition casts the above claims of Philologus and his friends about the former's chances of deliverance in a completely different light. With Philologus' final damnation, the play either puts Philologus in the right, suggesting that it is possible to know if one is

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Seventeenth Century 27.4 (2012) 410-34. Strangely, Sheppard does not mention *The Conflict of Conscience* in his article.

reprobate, or advocates William Perkins's view, discussed earlier in this chapter, that it is a capital sin not to believe in the possibility of one's election. Yet by including a relatively happy ending with a successful death-bed conversion, the morality supports the idea that it is never too late to repent. Moreover, the messenger of the happy ending appears to indicate that the conversion is at least partly the result of Philologus' own effort. He is said to have remained constant after his conversion "full thyrtie weekes [...]," a period during which he was unsuccessfully force-fed and which ended with God releasing him from pain (second edition, ll. 2417–18). At the same time the messenger stresses that "By godly councell [Philologus] was woon, all prayse be to the Lorde" (second edition, l. 2414). It can therefore be concluded that the adaptation of the ending in the second version conveys doubt about how election doctrine should be interpreted and translated into behaviour.

Doctor Faustus

There is a critical consensus that *Doctor Faustus* is heavily indebted to the morality tradition. As Rozett notes, the play

> draws upon some of the oldest, most traditional elements from the morality play – The Good and Bad Angels, the Heavenly Man-Worldly Man dual-protagonist scheme unevenly embodied in the Old Man and Faustus, the spectacle of the Seven Deadly Sins, and the dragon, devils, and traditional gaping hell beneath the stage.[22]

Scholars often illustrate this indebtedness by referring to the similarities with Woodes's *Conflict of Conscience*.[23] Nevertheless, *Doctor Faustus* has not specifically been examined as a conversion play and has not been compared to morality

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[22] Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 209.

[23] Potter, for instance, writes that *Doctor Faustus* "begins where a Calvinist biographical like *The Conflict of Conscience* leaves off, probing the mind of a believer whose God is terrible, just, and unforgiving to the unsatisfied," in *The English Morality Play*, 129. See also, for instance, Lily B. Campbell, "*Doctor Faustus* a Case of Conscience," *PMLA* 47 (1952): 219–239; Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe*; Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962); Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 235; John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 99.

drama as such.[24] In the present section I will show how this approach further sharpens our understanding of the tragedy and, more specifically, its presentation of the duality between free will and the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election.

Central to the plot of *Doctor Faustus* is the unresolved issue of whether Faustus brings damnation on himself, as a self-fulfilling prophecy, or whether the divine hardening of his heart causes him to embrace sin and denies him the capability of true repentance. This is a question which targets precisely the crippling uncertainty that was generated by the doctrine of election. In the words of Jonathan Dollimore, *Doctor Faustus* "seemsilli always to represent paradox – religious and tragic – as insecurely and provocatively ambiguous or, worse, as openly contradictory."[25] Alan Sinfield writes in a similar vein: "the theological implications of *Faustus* are radically and provocatively indeterminate."[26] Dollimore and Sinfield's use of the term "provocatively" suggests that the cause of Faustus's damnation is ambiguous on purpose. Indeed, it is my argument that *Doctor Faustus* features the same contradiction that we also find in the conversion plays by William Wager and Nathaniel Woodes: the contrast between a didactic acknowledgement of individual responsibility for spiritual conversion and a dutiful adherence to Calvinist determinism. Yet whereas Wager and Woodes waver uneasily between the two, Marlowe employs this conflict deliberately and intensifies it to illustrate the unnerving and indeed tragic implications of the Reformed teaching that conversion is beyond one's power.

Unlike the plays discussed above, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* does not literally speak of its protagonist's failure to "convert." The word conversion or any of its derivatives are not mentioned in the two versions of this play, known as the A- and B-text.[27] However, the tragedy revolves around the question of whether Faustus is capable of "repentance," a word that does appear regularly

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[24] An exception, to some extent, is Susan Snyder, who argues that *Doctor Faustus* must be seen as an inverted version of a Saint's life, a "didactic biography" that often contains "conversion to God," in "Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' as an Inverted Saint's Life," *Studies in Philology*, 63.4 (1966): 565-577, 566. That is to say, "*Doctor Faustus* turns the whole pattern upside down to tell the story of a man who after an orthodox early life is 'converted' to the devil and seals his pact with a diabolic sacrament" (566). Snyder, however, does not relate her interpretation to any of the moralities that could also be considered inversions of saint's lives, such as *The Conflict of Conscience*.

[25] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984) 109.

[26] Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines,* 234.

[27] The A-text was published in 1604, the B-text in 1616.

and that was used as synonym for conversion in the early modern era.[28] In addition to contrition over submitting to the Devil, the term, in this play, also indicates a general return to God. What is more, *Doctor Faustus* resonates with the grave difficulties posed by spiritual conversion according to Protestant theology as they are expressed in the above conversion moralities. These include the dangers of ignorance, particularly reading the Bible with an ignorant mind, and of despair.

Faustus's failure to convert bears multiple resemblances to the miscarried conversions of Moros, Worldly Man and Philologus, as well as with some of Marie's weak moments in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*. Like William Wager's Moros, Faustus suffers from scriptural illiteracy and a lack of inquisitiveness, which contribute to his downfall.[29] This is signalled at the outset of the tragedy, when Faustus dismisses divinity as a fatalistic subject on the basis of reading only the first half of Romans 6.23, "the reward of sin is death," in combination with 1 John 1.8: "if we say that
we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us."[30] This makes him jump to the conclusion that humanity is preordained for damnation, and denounce this principle as a "doctrine" of *Che serà, serà* (1.1.47). However, in so doing, Faustus ignores an important, if not the most fundamental message of Scripture in the second half of the verse: "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Faustus's inference is reminiscent of that of a cynical Marie in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* when she has just been confronted with the law and feels that there is little mercy and justice in God.[31] Yet whereas Marie corrects her erroneous interpretation with the help of Christ, Faustus decides to turn to sorcery and sell his soul to the Devil. Faustus, ironically, never uses his newly acquired power to expand his knowledge or to rule the world, as he announced before his infernal transaction, but rather to entertain himself and others. Like Moros, he becomes an incorrigible fool.

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[28] For a discussion of the synonymous use of repentance and conversion in Protestant sermons see the previous chapter.

[29] I agree with Walter Cohen, who notes that *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* as a form of "homiletic tragedy [...] strikingly anticipates *Dr. Faustus*." Yet Cohen does not elaborate this point any further. Walter Cohen, *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) 128.

[30] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005) 1.1.36–44. References are to the A-text unless stated otherwise. Both the A-text and the B-text are from the same edition.

[31] See chapter one for a discussion of this moment.

Doctor Faustus also echoes William Wager and Nathaniel Woodes's moralities by not giving a definitive answer to the question of whether it fully endorses Elizabethan theological orthodoxy – the idea that Faustus was born a reprobate – and leaves open the possibility that the protagonist is personally responsible for his own damnation. This ambiguity not only arises from differences between the A-text and the B-text, but also from a general absence of indisputable proof of Faustus's damnation. In the A-text the Good Angel, for instance, assures Faustus that it is "never too late, if Faustus *can* repent" (2.3.75 my emphasis), but in the B-text the Angel uses the word "will" instead of "can" (2.3.80). The A-text therefore intimates that Faustus's capability of repentance has been preordained, whereas the B-text appears to presents a more Pelagian view that Faustus himself can decide whether he will repent or not.[32] Nevertheless, nowhere in the A- or B text can we determine with certainty if Faustus sells his soul because he is damned or *vice versa*. Faustus himself appears utterly convinced of his reprobation, but this view is challenged repeatedly by characters who suggest otherwise and encourage him to reform. Like Philologus in *The Conflict of Conscience,* Faustus believes that his "heart is hardened" and that he therefore "cannot repent" (2.3.18). By the same token, the fruitless attempts of the Old Man and the Scholars to convince Faustus of the opportunity to repent bear close comparison with the passage in Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience*, where Philologus refuses to heed the exhortations of his friends to recognize God's infinite grace. The efforts of the Old man and the Scholars are, moreover, as futile as the signs of warning that appear when Faustus sells his soul. His blood congeals while he attempts to sign the devilish contract with it, and when the words "*Homo, fuge!*" appear on his arm just after he has made his pact, he dismisses them because "God" will "throw [him] down to hell" (2.1.77). Finally, when his death is imminent, Faustus appears to lose all sense of relativity and divine justice, and exclaims that "the serpent that tempted Eve," the creature that brought sin into the world, "may be saved, but not Faustus" (5.2.15–16).

Doctor Faustus assumes the same equivocal stance on predestination that we find in William Wager and Nathaniel Woodes's conversion moralities, but contrary to these works, the ambiguity in Marlowe's play is deliberate and purposeful. This can be inferred from the different ways in which *Doctor Faustus*

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[32] See, for instance, Frederick Kiefer, *Writing on the Renaissance Stage: Written Words, Printed Pages, Metaphoric Books* (Cranbury, London: Associated University Presses, 1996) 84; and Lisa Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe: Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) 31.

underlines the cruelty of election doctrine. *Doctor Faustus* suggests that not only the principle of election doctrine itself is distressing, but also what it generated: a harrowing sense of uncertainty about its truth and the snare of a soteriological double bind. As Alan Sinfield poignantly observes, Marlowe answers this "trap," "set by God for Faustus," by laying one "for God," and exposing the enormity of Faustus's suffering which makes it difficult to perceive of the Reformation God as just, let alone merciful.[33]

The indifference of Marlowe's God manifests itself in different ways. Shortly before Faustus dies, the Old Man, for instance, points out to Faustus the contrast between his own happy fate and Faustus's desperate situation. Having exchanged words of encouragement and hope for inappropriate triumphalism, he invites Faustus and his fellow "ambitious fiends," the devils who have just entered, to "see how the heavens smiles / At [their] repulse and laughs [their] state to scorn" (A-text, 5.1.116–17). The Old Man then departs, redundantly stating: "Hence, hell, for hence I fly unto my God" (A-text, 5.1.118). We do not find this passage in the B-text, yet this version ends with the macabre proof of both the mental and physical torment that Faustus has suffered. In the last scene of the A-text, the scholars contemplate the "fearful shrieks and cries" that were produced by Faustus and discover his "limbs / […] torn asunder by the hand of death" (5.3.6–7). No less disturbing than this scene are the responses to Faustus's appeals to Christ for mercy. When Faustus asks Christ to "save" his "distressèd […] soul," for instance, it is not Christ, but Lucifer who appears, telling him that Christ's righteousness prevents him from saving Faustus's soul (2.3.81). This moment foreshadows what is probably the most unsettling moment of the A-text: Faustus's last outcry of anguish: "My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!" (5.2.113). As scholars have pointed out, the phrase evokes comparison with Christ's own anguished outcry on the cross "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[34] It is, indeed, ironical that the consequence of sin as presented in *Longer Thou Livest, The More Fool Thou Art*, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* and *The Conflict of Conscience*, all plays with a strong didactic purpose, is mild and compassionate compared with Faustus's damnation.

The idea that *Doctor Faustus* translates the indecision as manifested in Wager and Woodes's dramatic treatment of election doctrine into a cruel and

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[33] Sinfield, *Faultines*, 237.

[34] See, for instance, A.D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 46-48. In the B-text, the phrase "My God, my God" was replaced with "O mercy, heaven!" According to Nuttall, this "suggests strongly that contemporaries of Marlowe noticed the biblical echo and were made uncomfortable by it" (46n.).

tragic paradox is confirmed in its classification as a tragedy. Like *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art*, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* and *The Conflict of Conscience, Doctor Faustus* has many comedic features, and is, in the words of Stephen Orgel, "a strange combination of great poetry and clowning."[35] By the same token these plays share the tragic overtones that we find in *Doctor Faustus*. Mark Benbow sums up the thrust of *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art*, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, for instance, by observing that "for Wager and for the Reformation the fact of reprobation was a tragic possibility."[36] Yet contrary to these plays, *Doctor Faustus* is not labelled as a comedy. By presenting the play as a tragedy, Marlowe dismissed the didactic purpose of preceding moralities as something that is at odds with election doctrine.[37] More importantly, by emphasizing its tragic nature, Marlowe exposed what he presented as the spiritual fall-out of election doctrine.

Election Doctrine and Interfaith Conversion Drama

As we will see in the last four chapters of this study, the early modern theatre does not generally address the problem of predestination and free will in relation to interfaith conversion. Exceptions are Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* (1610) and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624). In the first we meet the titular hero and fearless pirate Ward who turns Muslim out of erotic desire for a woman.[38] At the end of the play he dies a horrible death as a consequence of his apostasy. Like Faustus at the onset of the tragedy, Ward criticizes Christianity for curtailing people's freedom: "The slavery of man, how this religion rides us! / Deprives us of our freedom from our cradles, / Ties us in superstitious bondage" (7.201–3). Earlier, Ward had complained about the absence of free will:

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[35] Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare: And Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002) 224.

[36] Benbow, introduction, in Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest*, xx.

[37] *Doctor Faustus* is, of course, one example of a general shift from the morality play to tragedy in the Elizabethan era. As Rozett writes, "when it had evolved to the point that its traditional comic ending was no longer inevitable, the morality play had ceased to fulfill its original function of reassuring its audience. At this point, its didactic motive could give way to something else. What followed was the emergence of tragedy," in *The Doctrine of Election*, 77.

[38] Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk*, in Daniel Vitkus (ed.), *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 149-231.

We have no will to act –
Or not to act – more than those orbs we see
And planetary bodies, which in their offices
Observe the will of fate. The difference is:
They are confined; we are not. They are stars fixed,
We wandering. Run on thou purple line
That draw'st my life's fate out. Thou that dost frown
Upon the births of men – now Saturn smile!
Those under milder planets born live servile, good.
Mars called our birth; my race shall be through blood.
(4.40-49)

Although Ward draws heavily on classical concepts and imagery in this instance, his struggle is a Calvinist one. Indeed, the Reformed thrust of his words becomes clear when we realize that Ward, like Faustus and Philologus, is convinced that his apostasy is irredeemable and will inevitably lead to damnation. This he expresses when he says:

Should I confess my sin,
There's not an ear that can with pity hear
A man so wicked miserable. Should I bear up
Outlook my crimes, I want means to support me.
To die I dare not: the jaws of hell do yawn
To swallow me. Live, I cannot: famine threats,
And that the worst of poverty – contempt and scorn.
Never on man Fate cast so black a frown.
Up I am denied to fly, unpitied down. (13. 108–116)

A similar situation emerges in *The Renegado*, where the Christian pirate Grimaldi repents after his defection to Islam:

I must downward, downward! Though repentance
Could borrow all the glorious wings of grace,
My mountainous weight of sins would crack their
pinions
And sink them to hell with me. (3.2.69–72)[39]

[39] Philip Massinger, *The Renegado, or, The Gentleman of Venice* ed. Michael Neill (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010).

Yet unlike *Doctor Faustus*, *A Christian Turned Turk* and *The Renegado* do not convey a critical view of predestination doctrine. *A Christian Turned Turk* suggests that Ward's damnation is completely deserved. In a lost attempt to escape at the hands of the Turks, the pirate commits suicide, realizing that by selling his soul to the Turk he "exchanged [his] heaven with hell" (16.264) and that "heaven is just" (16.320). *The Renegado*, on the other hand, presents a radically different and surprisingly Catholic solution to the utter despondence of its renegade pirate. Aided by the spiritual council and repeated encouragements of the Jesuit priest Francisco, Grimaldi comes to see that he can redeem himself by performing a good deed.[40] The play thus draws to a happy conclusion with Grimaldi helping his Christians escape from a Tunisian prison

Conclusion

The principle of Reformed faith, the notion that God's saving grace operates independently from human agency, changed the understanding of conversion from a partly human endeavour into a matter of divine election. This posed a problem for preachers and many playwrights, who were concerned with exhorting audiences to mend their lives and turn to God. Protestant clergymen answered this issue by redefining free will as an experience bestowed by God. In addition, they appealed to people's sense of agency by insisting that believers should trust that they will be saved and assume an active role by behaving accordingly. Early Elizabethan moralities reveal, however, that these solutions were difficult to fully comprehend or put into practice and did not eliminate the inherent contradiction between the responsibility instinctively attached to a person's sinful behaviour and the idea that damnation is preordained. This becomes clear from a shift in the portrayal of spiritual conversion. While pre-Reformation moralities are largely defined by a hazardous but successful journey towards conversion, their Elizabethan counterparts are interested in the failure and damnation of their protagonists. What is more, unlike preachers, most playwrights did not attempt to solve any theological and practical problems raised by double predestination. Indeed, by wavering between the ideas that

[40] See for an analysis of and explanation for the play's sympathetic portrayal of Catholicism, including a highly positive depiction of a Jesuit, Claire Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580-1630: English Literature and Seaborne Crime* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 185-192. According to Jowitt, this rendering must be read against the political situation of 1624, when the Duke of Buckingham, who, in some respects served as a model for Francisco, paved the way for the marriage between Charles and the Catholic Henrietta Maria.

damnation is the effect of reprobation or provoked entirely by individuals themselves, dramatists acknowledge the difficulty of subscribing wholeheartedly to the doctrine of unconditional election and putting it into practice. *King Darius*, the play that is most sympathetic to election doctrine, is also the least interested in it, employing the idea of reprobation merely to make a political point and slander the Pope.

Critics have often pointed to the unique position *Doctor Faustus* takes up in the history of early modern English drama: it is a work firmly rooted in the morality tradition, yet departs from it, ironically, by rejecting its didacticism.[41] It is surprising, though, that *Doctor Faustus* has not been interpreted specifically as a conversion play and compared with conversion moralities other than *The Conflict of Conscience.* Doing this helps us to gain a better understanding of Marlowe's reworking of the dramatic portrayal of election doctrine. While *Doctor Faustus* presents the same paradox of election doctrine in conversion that we find in the conversion plays of Nathaniel Woodes, William and Lewis Wager, it departs from them by showing how the desire for conversion in a world touched by the Reformation could turn tragic.

[41] See, for instance, Potter, *The English Morality Play*, 125-29; Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 209; Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe*, 245-62; Una Ellis-Fermor, *Shakespeare's Drama*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1980) 162; Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, 109; Chloe Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism* (Arden Shakespeare: London, 2012) 161.

CHAPTER 4 'Licentious Religion' and Nostalgia: Dramatic Responses to the Erosion of Spiritual Conversion

In the epistle dedicatory to his translation of Luis de Granada's *A Memoriall of a Christian Life,* the Catholic exile Richard Hopkins (*c.* 1546- *c.*1596) complains about Protestant reformers who "have maliciously endeavoured, by procuringe Schismatical innovations in Religion in divers Countreis of Christendom [...] to found a new devised politik licentious Religion, consisting of manyfould different sectes."[1] These sects, Hopkins asserts, "are not ashamed openlie to protest, that their doctrine is to professe and use divers variable formes of Government of their new Churches, in every Countrey and State, conformablie to the divers, and several variable formes of Government, used in every Commonwealth in Christendome."[2] This emergence of different denominations and mingling of religion with political affairs could only result in endless religious instability; these new sects "shallbe evermore totteringe, & wavering, in altering, & changing, diversly, & variably, the formes of governement of their Churches, in every Countrey, and State [...]."[3]

In this description of what he sees as a "corrupted age," Hopkins argues that the Protestant faith, in all its "divers variable formes" has become interchangeable with national politics. Hopkins's concern was met with similar anxieties by Protestants who, accusing Catholics of political scheming, engaged in denominational politics with equal zeal. He was not alone in his fear that faith was tainted by political interests either. The religious polemics triggered by the Protestant and Catholic reformations made it increasingly difficult for early moderns to perceive of faith in impartial and purely spiritual terms. Despite the fact that early moderns contributed to this development themselves by lashing out against confessional enemies, the undermining effect of religious politicization on spiritual devotion did not go unnoticed. It is significant, for instance, that Hopkins's epistle was composed as an appendix to his translation of Granada's guide to spiritual piety and conversion. As I have explained in chapter two, Granada's spiritual writings lacked polemical language and were embraced by Catholics and Protestants alike. By translating and commending

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[1] Richard Hopkins, "The Translatours Dedicatory Epistle" in Louis De Granada, *A Memoriall of a Christian Life wherein are treated all such thinges, as appertaine vnto a Christian to doe, from the beginning of his conuersion, vntill the end of his perfection* (S. Omers: 1625) 3-31, 6-7.

[2] Hopkins, "The Translatours Dedicatory Epistle," 7.

[3] Hopkins, "The Translatours Dedicatory Epistle," 7.

Granada's guide, Hopkins attempted to rescue what he saw as true Christianity from the realm of factional politics.

Dramatists, too, responded to the politicization of religion. The ways in which they did so become particularly clear in their treatment of conversion. Most obviously, from the 1580s onwards, playwrights began to lose interest in spiritual conversion and started to focus on its interfaith variant. It is significant, however, that spiritual conversion did not disappear entirely from the stage. As this chapter will show, depictions of spiritual conversion that we find occasionally in drama until 1642 reveal a wistful longing for a pre-Reformation past of what was construed as honest and simple religiosity. In addition, they suggest that this nostalgia arose from the contemporary climate of religious politicization and polarization, which stripped faith of its spiritual content and turned it into an instrument of secular power.

The same stagings of spiritual conversion differ significantly from those in morality drama (discussed in the previous chapter) in that conversion was now marginalized and no longer presented in terms of a failed attempt or an unattainable goal. These changes can be explained by the fact that the new and commercial form of drama, that emerged after the first public theatres were opened in the 1570s, required a less didactic approach to matters of spiritual faith. Examined in the previous chapter, *Doctor Faustus* (1592) is an illustrative example of this new theatre in that it abandons religious moralism. At the same time, Marlowe's tragedy is the last work that revolves around spiritual conversion and investigates its theological significance. Indeed, in works performed during and after the last decade of the sixteenth century, spiritual conversions generally take place offstage, are relegated to subplots, used as plot devices rather than key themes, or spiritual conversion is only alluded to in the form of imagery. As a plot device, it is always conceived of as successful and employed precisely for its celebratory, marvellous and redemptive qualities. It is presented as an unnamed and mysterious force that makes for unexpected plot twists, for instance to arrive at romantic and happy endings for wicked characters. Contrary to what we saw in morality plays, spiritual conversion is thus not used to explain faith or to address theological concerns, but applied as a solution to – often secular – problems. A particularly illustrative example is Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599), but we find similar portrayals of conversion in a variety of other works, including James Shirley's *The Witty Fair One* (1628) and *The Traitor* (1631), and William Habington's tragicomedy *The Queen of Aragon* (1640). While all of these plays, to various degrees, dissociate spiritual and theological content from religion, this development is particularly well illustrated in the common metaphorical use of spiritual conversion. This was

often used to define aspects of romantic love, but some dramatists also evince an awareness that this usage involved an erosion of religious meaning.

The same playwrights who use conversion as a joyful plot resolution also present it as the adoption of a hermit's life of solitude and sobriety, and associate it with the spectacle of medieval drama that functioned to engender spiritual conversions of audiences. In this way, they betray a longing for the past of their parents and grandparents that they imaginatively reconstruct as a time when conversions were not yet politicized and were still chiefly determined by spiritual interests. Indeed, the theatrical use of or allusions to spiritual conversion in this period must be seen as sudden eruptions of "old-fashioned" belief in a religious landscape dominated by vitriolic polemical debates. A work that elucidates this point further, but defies the unproblematic portrayal of spiritual conversion that we find in *As You Like It*, is John Webster's tragedy *The White Devil* (1612). With its treatment of conversion, *The White Devil* touches an open nerve of early modern English religion. Rather than playing off different denominations against each other, it registers how spiritual faith and conversion, turned into rhetorical devices and into profane means of unjust oppression, lose their religious significance. By presenting male characters as manipulators of faith and women as its defenders, and by associating women with oppressed and marginalized religion, Webster's tragedy, moreover, acutely depicts the marginalization of spiritual conversion as a social problem.

As You Like It

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* presents spiritual conversion in a way that is typical of its marginalized portrayal in contemporary and later drama. Although there are two important figures who convert, the conversions themselves are sketchy and strikingly uncomplicated in comparison with those of late medieval and reformation stage characters. This is due to the fact that they carry hardly any theological significance; the change is straightforwardly from evil to good. The malignancy of the first convert, the wicked son of the deceased Sir Rowland the Boys, Oliver, manifests itself in denying his brother Orlando his rightful patrimony. At the moment of his conversion, his wickedness is represented by a serpent and a lioness preying on his sleeping body.[4] When Orlando sees that his

[4] As John K. Hale, notes, the lion and the serpent were traditional symbols of evil that originated from Psalm 91 verse 13: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." Hale furthermore writes that "just as the deceitful snake recalls Oliver's earlier duplicities, so the fight becomes Orlando's struggle

brother is in danger, he fights the lioness with his bare hands to save him. Impressed by the fact that Orlando did not take just revenge on his brother, Oliver experiences a change of heart. This event is not acted out, but recounted by Oliver himself, who explains his experience as a "conversion," and an awakening "from miserable slumber" (4.3.135, 131).

Oliver's spiritual transformation foreshadows the similarly uncomplicated change of the usurper, Duke Frederick. This character sets the plot in motion by banishing the play's protagonists from the court. Like Oliver's, Duke Frederick's reformation is not staged. In an unexpected announcement at the end of the play, it is divulged that the Duke, having conversed with "an old religious man" (5.4.149), "was converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world" (5.4.150-1), to have "put on a religious life / And thrown into neglect the pompous court" (5.4.170-71). Oliver's conversion in particular has Biblical echoes and resonates with Christian conversion language. As Marjorie Garber notes, "Oliver's 'conversion' accords with the Christian doctrine of salvation; like the late-arriving laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16)."[5] In addition, Oliver describes his regeneration as something "sweetly tast[ing]" (4.3.136), a way of capturing the experience of turning to Christ through a proper understanding of the Gospel that we typically find in the writings of reformers.[6] In addition, John K. Hale observes that the biblical significance of Oliver's conversion is anticipated in the brief allusion to the Prodigal Son (1.1.32).[7]

Nevertheless, the conversions of both Oliver and Duke Frederick lack any soteriological complications, for instance in the form of the concerns over predestination that we find in conversion moralities. As such, they act out a fantasy of reformation that first and foremost enables the play's festive ending. In Oliver's case it paves the way for his marriage to the friend of the play's heroine, Celia; in Duke Frederick's it serves to enhance the comedic celebration

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with his own natural anger towards Oliver." John K. Hale, "Snake and Lioness in *As You Like It*, IV.iii," *Notes and Queries,* 47.1 (2000): 79.

[5] Marjorie Garber, "The Education of Orlando," *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations:* As You Like It, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publications, 2004) 58-72, 68.

[6] See Peter Marshall, "Evangelical Conversion in the Reign of Henry VIII," *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 14-37, for a discussion of how early modern reformers used the notion of sensual "sweetness" to capture the experience of understanding the Gospel and turning to Christ (25-27). Marshall, writes, for instance, that "in his account of the early career of Martin Luther, Foxe noted that those hearing his sermons 'received good taste of this sweet doctrine' and began to understand the difference between the law and the gospel" (26).

[7] Hale, "Snake and Lioness," 79.

of reconciliation.[8] The straightforwardness of the reformations confirms, moreover, the pastoral significance of the Forest of Arden as a space that guides and takes care of the soul.

What adds to the fanciful, romantic nature of the conversions in *As You Like It* is the fact that they are presented as radical transformations of character. Duke Frederick, who is chiefly known as the usurper of his brother's dukedom converts by rejecting the court and every aspect of life that is associated with it. Oliver, whose wickedness is defined by his spiteful maltreatment of Orlando, comes to love his brother. This is something he moreover explains as a change of person. When Celia asks him if he really is Orlando's malicious brother, he cryptically answers "'Twas I but 'tis not I" (4.3.134). This emphasis on the transformative nature of Oliver's conversion chimes with the metamorphic imagery and Ovidian allusions that permeate the play.[9]

Conversion and Nostalgia

Critics have argued that many early moderns felt nostalgia for the monastic religious culture of their ancestors, a sense famously captured in Shakespeare's "Sonnet 73": "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."[10] English monasticism was largely destroyed by Henry VIII, who passed his first act to dissolve the monasteries in 1536. Yet just as the (ruined) buildings and foundations of the friaries and convents continued to define the English landscape, monastic meanings of conversion were preserved in early modern discourse of conversion. We have seen in chapter two, for instance, that Benedict's insistence on conversion as a continuous process and mode of life returned as a key theme in Protestant conversion sermons. In addition to this, playwrights continued to celebrate the exchange of a worldly life for the pursuit of spiritual holiness in drama.

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[8] Duke Frederick's moment of sudden spiritual enlightenment is, in this respect, faintly echoed in *The Tempest*, where Caliban, in his last speech, regrets his mistake of worshipping Stefano and Trinculo as idols and reveals his intention to "seek for grace" (5.1.299-301).

[9] See for a discussion of conversion in relation to metamorphosis in this play, Alan Brissenden, introduction, *As You Like It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1-86, 18-23.

[10] See, for instance, Peter Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 78; Eamon Duffy, "Bare Ruined Choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare's England," *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrain Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 40-57; and Arthur F. Marotti, "Shakespeare and Catholicism," in Dutton, Findlay and Wilson, *Theatre and Religion*, 218-41, 228.

Both *As You Like It* and William Habington's tragicomedy *The Queene of Aragon* include a nostalgic glance at the past by staging a liberating embrace of eremitic solitude. In the first work, the spiritual conversion of Duke Frederick is emphatically portrayed as something of a bygone day. It is provoked by a conversation with an "old religious man," an image that evokes former times because of the use of the word "old," and because the figure in question is suggestive of a hermit or a monk. This idea is heightened by the Duke who is said to have "put on a religious life" – a phrase that conjures up the image of putting on the habit. As Arthur Marotti observes, the mysterious religious man "recalls the older Marian clergy in hiding in the Warwickshire of Shakespeare's youth."[11] Significantly, *As You Like It* not only invites comparison between Oliver and the Duke's conversion, but embeds the Duke's life-changing encounter with the alleged hermit in a framework of similar stories that elicit new conversions. Thus, the Duke's reformation is foreshadowed in the remark of Rosalind, here posing as Ganymede, to Orlando that she was "taught to speak" like a courtier by an "old religious uncle" (3.2.311-312). It was the same uncle, Ganymede asserts, who instructed him to cure a man's love by driving him "from his mad humour of love to a living humour of madness, which was to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic" (3.2.373-75). At the end of the play, when the characters are informed of the Duke's sudden spiritual withdrawal from the world, Jacques not only expresses his esteem for the Duke's spiritual turn, but suggests that it is worth imitating – "To him will I. Out of these convertites / There is much matter to be heard and learned (5.4.173-74). Jacques confirms his determination when he announces that he will follow in Duke Frederick's footsteps by taking up lodgings in the "abandoned cave" that had been used by the benevolent brother of Duke Frederick, Duke Senior (5.4.185). It is significant that it is Jacques who is portrayed as a potential convert, as he is presented as the most contemplative character of the play, reflecting on the follies of the courtly life. While Duke Frederick and Oliver's regenerations are presented as transformations from evil to good, Jacques's desire for reclusion identifies spiritual conversion with a spiritual homecoming. Indeed, as the play's melancholic outcast, Jacques is going to join what might turn into a community of kindred spirits. In this way, his spiritual conversion is a form of continuation and, as such, in line with Benedict's understanding of the monastic life, discussed in chapter one.

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[11] Marotti, "Shakespeare and Catholicism," 228. See also Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background,* 37.

Around forty years after *As You Like It* was first performed, William Habington presented his tragicomedy *The Queen of Aragon*, that carries some striking (verbal) echoes of Shakespeare's depiction of spiritual conversion. Decastro, the general of Aragon, is said to have vowed to "Forsake the flattered pompe and businesse of / The faithlesse world."[12] After a reversion to old habits, he reconverts and reports the reconversion of his friend Ossuna, who, at the time, made the same declaration. Part of the play's closure involves a return to this vow and both pledge to "observe [it] religiously" (sig. I2v). Like Jacques, Decastro announces that he desires to live in a cavern: "To a Cave / Some undiscover'd Cave, to which no path / Doth leade the wandring Lover, I have vowed / The remnant of my dayes" (sig. I2v). What is more, like the Duke's conversion, that of Decastro immediately proves contagious, inspiring Florentio, general of the forces of Castile, to follow his example: "A strange conversion, / And 'twill behoove my fate to follow him" (sig. I2v).

Another way in which dramatists revived spiritual conversion as experienced by their ancestors was by associating it with spectacle. As I have shown in chapter one, in miracle and saint plays, the spectacle of wonders and miraculous conversions served as theatrically self-conscious devices to exhort audiences to turn away from sin or to internalize Reformed faith. Shakespeare, in *As You Like It* and James Shirley, in *The Witty Fair One* and *The Traitor*, allude to this practice by showing that spiritual reformation is caused by a miraculous experience. More specifically, they stage characters who convert after a formidable confrontation with mortality, such as Shakespeare's Oliver who suddenly repents of his cruelty after his narrow escape from death.[13]

The Witty Fair One not only employs death to provoke conversion, but presents it as a doubly meta-theatrical device. That is to say, it *stages the staging* of a death spectacle to induce conversion. This event is part of the subplot and of a hoax played on Fowler, a young libertine and the fiancé of the virtuous Penelope. The latter desires Fowler's reformation because she has good reason to suspect that Fowler will fail to remain faithful to her when they are married. Assisted by her friends, Penelope provokes the conversion of her profligate lover by means of a trick in which everybody pretends that Fowler has died. Before his own

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[12] William Habington, *The Queene of Arragon*, London, 1640, sig. H2r.

[13] In her article on Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*, a play featuring interfaith conversion between Christianity and Paganism, Holly Crawford Pickett shows that this spectacular dramatic representation of conversion is not restricted to plays that strictly feature spiritual conversion only. Holly Crawford Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*" *SEL* 49.1 (2009): 437-462.

funeral service begins, Fowler reads the elegies written for him and hears Penelope encouraging his reformation. She does so by hypothesizing out loud what his conversion would involve – aware that Fowler overhears her:

> But wert thou now live againe with us
> And that by miracle thy soule should with thy
> Body have second marriage, I beleeve
> Thou woo'dst study to keepe it a chast Temple, holy
> Thoughts like fumes of sacred incense hovering
> About this heart, then thou wo'dst learne to be
> Above thy frailties, and resist the flatteries of
> Smooth-fac'd lust.[14]

The trick comes to an end when Penelope no longer pretends Fowler is dead and tells him that he is only "dead" to her if he does not profess his true love for her by reforming his life:

> Y'are dead to virtue, to all noble thoughts
> And till the proofe of your conversion
> To piety winne my faith, you are to me
> Without all life [...]. (sig. J4r)

This prompts Fowler to convert as well as propose to Penelope: "revive me in my thoughts / And I will love as thou hast taught me nobly / And like a husband" (sig. J5v).

While both *As You Like It* and *The Witty Fair One* use conversion for comedic purposes and the latter presents it, and even its trigger of death, with a great deal of playfulness, James Shirley demonstrates in *The Traitor* that spiritual conversion was no less appropriate for tragedy.[15] Indeed, *The Traitor* fully exploits the dramatic overtones of a near-suicide that sparks the conversion of the wicked and lecherous Duke of Florence. The Duke, in love with Amidea, the sister of the quick-tempered Sciarrha, has agreed with Sciarrha to meet Amidea in her apartment. Sciarrha's initial purpose was to kill the Duke, but Amidea promises her brother that she will deal with the Duke in a way that will save his life. When the Duke attempts to rape Amidea, she draws a poniard, but instead of striking him, she wounds her own arm, warning him that she will kill herself.

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[14] James Shirley, *The Wittie Faire One: A Comedie* (London, 1633), Sig. J3r.
[15] James Shirley, *The Traitor*, ed. John Stewart Carter (London: Edward Arnold, 1965).

Amidea thus becomes a Christ-like figure, willing to sacrifice herself to redeem the sins of another person. She tells the Duke that the wound she intends to inflict upon herself will "weep" for him, and, "extol" her death if it "may teach [the Duke] to correct [his] blood" (3.3.101-3). Upon this the Duke immediately repents: "I am sorry, sorry from my soul" (3.3.109), begging Amidea for mercy: "Again I ask Forgiveness. / In thy innocence, I see / My own deformity" (3.3.119-21). Afterwards, various characters refer to this moment as the Duke's "conversion."[16]

Conversion as Dramatic Imagery

In addition to staging it as a (sub)plot device, late Elizabethan and later dramatists also relied on spiritual conversion as a trope. Numerous works testified and added to the extraordinary expressiveness of spiritual conversion by deploying it in a figurative sense. Yet this use is also telling of the marginal position of spiritual conversion in drama, as well as its theological erosion. Its frequent appearance in metaphors and similes teaches us that spiritual conversion had become a natural part of early modern English vocabulary, but in this way spiritual conversion was often only briefly mentioned and no longer highlighted and explored as a component of dramatic action. It was, moreover, stripped of much of its complex theological significance and reduced to a vehicle to illuminate or convey a secular tenor.

The secular concept most commonly described in terms of spiritual conversion was romantic love. The overwhelming emotions generated by the yearning for a lover, or promises of faithfulness were powerfully expressed in terms of a complete and unconditional submission to what was perceived as a divine Other. A case in point is presented by Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), who finally learns that she can marry the object of her infatuation, Bassanio. After Bassanio has qualified himself to become Portia's husband by choosing the right casket in a contest, Portia says of herself and to Bassanio in joy:

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[16] In *Staging the Old Faith: Queen Henrietta Maria and the Theatre of Caroline England, 1625-164* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), Rebecca A. Bailey interprets the play, and particularly its language and "image of regicide" in the light of the perceived threat of (recusant) Catholics. In the Duke's conversion by Amidea after she has threatened to kill herself, Bailey notes, "Shirley stages the possibility of displaying loyalty to both temporal and spiritual rulers" (99).

> Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed
> As from her lord, her governor, her king.
> Myself and what is mine to you and yours
> Is now converted. (3.2.163-67)

Portia employs the idea of spiritual conversion not only in her explicit use of the verb "to convert" but also by asserting that her "spirit" "commits itself" to the authority of "her lord, her governor, her king." As M.M. Mahood reminds us, the last three words are also uttered by Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* when she makes her well-known plea for the submission of women in matrimony (5.2.142).[17] Mahood adds that "the Elizabethans would have approved [this line] with a text: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord' (Eph. 5.22, BB)."[18]

The identification of religious faith with love was itself not new. Indeed, by using spiritual conversion to describe secular love, playwrights inverted a common practice of capturing conversion in amorous terms. As we have seen in chapter one, in Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (*c.* 1550-1566) the character named Love plays a crucial role in Marie's elaborate conversion process, emerging "as a testification / Of God's mercy and her justification."[19] In addition, Peter Marshall observes that in the early years of the English Reformation, the description of conversion experience was "often sensual, somatic, sometimes even sexual in its emphasis."[20] As examples he mentions the courtier George Zouche, who "was reported to be '[…] ravished with the spirit of God' upon reading a copy of Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man,*" and Archbishop Cranmer, who "spoke of the need to 'allure men to embrace the doctrine of the gospel.'"[21] The Church of England clergyman Thomas Cooper (1569/70–1626) described true conversion and the best way to persevere in it with an extended metaphor of romantic love. In his meaningfully entitled treatise *The Converts First Love Discerned, Justified, Left, Recovered* he précised conversion as falling in love, out of love and then recuperating this first love so as to make it stronger:

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[17] M.M. Mahood, ed. *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 120.

[18] Mahood, *The Merchant of Venice*, 120.

[19] Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, ed. Frederic Ives Carpenter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904) ll. 2047-48.

[20] Marshall, "Evangelical Conversion," 25.

[21] Marshall, "Evangelical Conversion," 25.

> every convert hath a first love, that is, when God hath revealed his love unto him in Christ, and by the spirit of God, it is *shed abroad in his heart*, then is the heart of a sinner inflamed to love God againe, then is it inlarged with joy unspeakable and glorious.[22]

Like Zouche, Cooper did not shun sexual metaphors, conceiving of conversion also as "being ravished with the sweetnesse of the love of Christ."[23]

Some playwrights who used the conversion-as-being-in-love metaphor did not simply reverse it, but showed an awareness of the problematic nature of this inversion, too. In Thomas Heywood's comedy *The Fayre Mayde of the Exchange* (1601-2), for instance, a character who is madly in love is scorned by his brother for worshipping a woman instead of God:

> A man as free as aire, or the Sunnes raies,
> As boundlesse in his function as the heavens,
> The male and better part of flesh and blood,
> In whom was powrde the quintessence of reason,
> To wrong the adoration of his Maker,
> By worshipping a wanton female skirt,
> And making Love his Idoll: fie dotard, fie,
> I am ashamde of this apostacie.[24]

Indeed, for this character, loving a woman constitutes a mirror image of true faith and resembles the lapse into pagan idolatry. A more subtle critical commentary on the identification of conversion with romantic love can be found in Portia's declaration of love that was quoted above: "Myself and what is mine to you and yours / Is now converted." Perceptive members of Shakespeare's audience would have appreciated the meaning of conversion as an economic transaction, too.[25] This serves as the play's ironical comment on Bassanio's

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[22] Thomas Cooper, *The Converts First Love Discerned, Iustified, Left, and Recouered* (London: F. Kingston, 1610) 13.

[23] Cooper, *The Converts First Love*, 14.

[24] Thomas Heywood, *The Fayre Mayde of the Exchange* (London: 1607) sig. C3v.

[25] The OED registers 1607, after the first publication of *The Merchant of Venice*, as the first time when "conversion" is used in a monetary sense. That is, as a "substitution of or exchange for something else; esp. of one kind of property for another. spec. The change of an issue of public securities, of bonds, debentures, stocks, shares, etc., into another of different character, or with an altered (generally reduced) rate of interest." "Conversion, n." def. 3.16,

prevailing interest in Portia's wealth, as well as Portia's own inability to express her love in terms other than of finance. Indeed, Portia's announcement of her figurative conversion is anticipated in the same speech by her metaphorical transformation into a sum of money: "I would be trebled twenty times myself, / A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich, / That only to stand high in your account" (3.2.153-55). Thus, although the religious meaning of conversion invests Portia's loving submission to Bassanio with exalting spiritual significance, this process is simultaneously undermined by the monetary echoes, resonating throughout her speech, that reduce Portia to her worldly possessions. This emptying out of the meaning of religious conversion is presented and explored as a key problem in John Webster's tragedy *The White Devil*.

The White Devil

The White Devil is a highly acerbic commentary on what the play presents as early modern manipulations of faith. Its story is based on Italian accounts of a real-life scandalous liaison of a Duke and a gentlewoman in Rome and its bloody outcome, which took place thirty years before the play was first performed. The plot revolves around the secret love affair between the Venetian Lady Vittoria Corombona and the Duke of Brachiano which leads to a series of retaliations started off by Brachiano's wife Isabella. An inherent part of this tale of passion and violent revenge is the unscrupulous exploitation of faith for political ends, something that is particularly well expressed in its portrayal of spiritual conversion.

While *The White Devil* does not stage any conversions, the issue is explored in three particular instances. In the first, the married couple Brachiano and Isabella use conversion imagery to withdraw their love from each other; in the second, conversion marks the climax of a trial scene where the accused Vittoria is sentenced to confinement in the local house of "convertites;" and, in the third, two murderous characters pose as capuchin monks and are aided by a third conspirator who invents for them a personal history that is saturated with

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OED Online, March 2013, Oxford University Press. 31 March 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40773?redirectedFrom=conversion>. Still, the verb "to convert," and its cognates were used in a non-religious sense to describe a turn or change, before and during the early modern period. It is for his reason, as well as the fact that Portia refers to the conversion of her property – "what is mine" – that we can interpret her use of the term "convert" as part of the economic imagery interspersed in her speech.

sham conversions. What these three cases have in common is that they point to the erosion of religious significance in spiritual conversion, as well as the politicizing of faith, something that is also underlined in several of the characters' comments on religion in general. What is more, the tragedy confirms and illustrates the erosion of an apolitical theological conception of faith in its depiction of female characters. The most prominent victims of the subversion and manipulation of faith, the women are also shown to fight this abuse. Although they are unable to win this battle, these female acts of resistance mark the rhetorical and dramatic culminations of the play. This not only turns the tragedy into a polyphonic comment on developments in early modern religion; it also effectively thematizes the marginalization of spiritual faith at the expense of religious politics, by associating this marginalization with the suppression of women.

In a discussion about their marriage Brachiano and Isabella give yet another turn to the above love-as-conversion metaphor, a twist that is indicative of a general corruption of faith that pervades the society of *The White Devil*. Having first falsely accused her of adultery, Brachiano informs his chaste and devout wife Isabella that he does not love her anymore and uses apostasy imagery to explain his point. In a scene that can best be described as a perversion of a marriage vow, Brachiano swears on her wedding ring that he will "ne'er lie" with her (2.1.195). [26] He means that he will no longer share the marital bed, but the word "lie" also suggests that Brachiano, by sleeping with her, has only *pretended* to love his wife. When Isabella protests, Brachiano claims that her love for him prevents her from recognizing the truth:

> Let not thy love
> Make thee an unbeliever. This my vow
> Shall never on my soul be satisfied
> With my repentance. (2.1.200-4)

Brachiano ironically suggests that Isabella's love for her husband, ratified in a marriage vow, clouds her judgment and even turns her into an "unbeliever," because she is unable to understand that he has chosen not sleep with her anymore, a decision he frames as the Christian Truth.

Isabella, however, is unwilling to be victimized. In an unexpected change of character, she dramatically takes control of the situation by declaring that she will take on a male role and "make [herself] the author of [Brachiano's] cursed

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[26] John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. Christina Luckyj (London: Methuen, 2008).

vow" (2.1.216-17). She does so in the presence of her brother Francisco, the Duke of Florence, by declaring never to sleep again with her husband, and by scornfully echoing Brachiano's words:

> Let not my former dotage
> Make thee an unbeliever; this my vow
> Shall never on my soul be satisfied
> With my repentance: *manet alta mente repostum*. (2.1.259-62)

The Latin phrase – "it shall be treasured up in the depths of my mind" – from Virgil's *Aeneid* (I.26), betrays her repressed anger.[27] This anger is not only directed at double standards that allow men more freedom in marriage but also at their capacity for brutality, making her desire to be a man herself: "O that I were a man, or that I had power / To execute my apprehended wishes, / I would whip some with scorpions" (2.1.242-44). Nevertheless, with a pun on her radical conversion, her brother Francisco, who considers husbands' acts of adultery "slight wrongs," considers her a "foolish," "mad" and "jealous" woman: "What? Turned fury?" (2.1.263-4, 244). By turning the metaphorical use of conversion inside out and upside down, Brachiano, Isabella and Francisco prefigure the debasement and exploitation of religion that will dominate the action in the rest of the play, including Vittoria's show trial.

Like Isabella, Vittoria is falsely accused of sexual license, in this case of prostitution, and like Isabella, Vittoria defiantly re-appropriates the discourse of spiritual conversion that is employed to silence her. After having encouraged Brachiano to kill Isabella and her own husband Camillo, so that they can enjoy a life together, Vittoria is arrested for murder. In addition, she is accused of being a whore, an allegation that is never substantiated and exposes the sexism that is deeply ingrained in the Roman society of the play. Vittoria expresses her anger at this, like Isabella, by adopting a male form of aggression. Alluding to Perseus' heroic and "masculine" deed of cutting off Medusa's head, she notes:

> […] my modesty
> And womanhood I tender; but withal
> So entangled in a cursed accusation
> That my defence, of force, like Perseus
> Must personate masculine virtue to the point. (3.2.132-36)

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[27] The translation is from Luckyj, ed. *The White Devil*, 40.

Although there is no evidence against her, the misogynist cardinal Monticelso sentences her unto a "house of convertites," adding that it is a house "for penitent whores" (3.2.264, 267). Webster's audiences were probably familiar with this institution. According to Christina Luckyj, they may have been reminded of Bridewell, the "Jacobean London [...] 'house of correction' for reformed prostitutes;" in addition, it was suggested in a contemporary report translated by John Florio that the historical Vittoria was "put into a monasterie of Nunnes." [28] The house of convertites has its roots in a long tradition of female repentance and conversion that came to be personified by the figure of Mary Magdalene.[29] *The White Devil* shows how its institutionalization has a corrupting effect on repentance as conversion. It signals, for instance, the unstable distinction between the sinfulness and saintliness of the women living in the institution (an ambiguity that is also exploited by Hamlet when he urges Ophelia to enter a "nunnery"). Vittoria uses this point against the court authorities when she sarcastically asks if the place was established by the "noblemen in Rome" for "their wives" (3.2.67-68). In addition, the cardinal presents the house in a way that subverts the essence of spiritual conversion as a form of repentance, since Vittoria is forced to become penitent for a crime she has not committed. To emphasize this wrong, she depicts her conviction by the cardinal as his "rape" of "Justice" (3.2.274). Just before she is taken away, Vittoria realizes that inner conviction is her only weapon against institutionalized injustice, and announces her plan to reinvest the house of convertites with spiritual truth with the force of her religious conscience:

> It shall not be a house of convertites.
> My mind shall make it honester to me
> Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable
> Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal (3.2.289-92)

This passage, that is literally at the centre of the plot and determines the tragedy's moral climax, contains two major detrimental consequences of the awareness of the politicization of faith in post-Reformation England: a perceived loss of sincerity and of peacefulness. These consequences are further explored in the denouement of the plot.

The fifth act includes the most blatant case of religious corruption that, eventually, leads to the brutal deaths of all of the surviving major characters. The

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[28] Christina Luckyj, ed. *The White Devil*, note to 3.2.164.

[29] See chapter one for a discussion of Mary Magdalene as a figure of conversion.

Count Lodovico and his friend Gasparo disguise themselves as Capuchin monks as part of a scheme to murder Brachiano and Vittoria. The bitter cynicism of their crime is underscored by their co-conspirator Flamineo, who provides Brachiano's officer with an account of their supposed religious careers.[30] Flamineo relates that the two were Hungarian noblemen and commanders who,

> contrary to the expectation of the court entered into religion, into the strict order of the Capuchins: but being not well settled in their undertaking they left their order and returned to court: for which being after troubled in conscience, they vowed their service against the enemies of Christ; went to Malta; were there knighted; and in their return back, at this great solemnity, they are resolved for ever to forsake the world, and settle themselves here in a house of Capuchins in Padua. (5.1.13-22)

Flamineo portrays Lodovico and Gasparo as conscientious monks in order to convince their hosts of their sincerity and peaceful intentions. Their alleged spiritual purity is also suggested in the name of the monastic order they have entered, as the Capuchin order was founded to re-establish St. Francis's rules of penance, poverty and solitude. Yet, as Luckyj notes, the account could still have been intended to "arouse suspicion in the minds of the audience" due to the figures' conspicuous waverings between religious and military service.[31] Indeed, what Flamineo presents as their unproblematic shifts in loyalty between worldly and spiritual institutions serves as yet another illustration of the spiritual erosion of religion.

In portraying religion as an instrument of profane power, Webster appears to foster anti-Catholic and anti-Italian sentiments among his audiences. After all, the Catholic setting of the crime-ridden play is unmistakable. Playgoers would, moreover, have typified many of the play's actions as Machiavellian, after the Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli who was famously portrayed in early modern England as advocating the exploitation of religion as an instrument of

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[30] In respect of the corruption of religion, it is also telling that Lodovico (wrongfully) believes he has the blessing of the Pope to murder Brachiano, when he is given a thousand ducats and is told they were sent by the Pope. This happens just after the Pope in person had ordered him to refrain from bloody deeds. It was Francisco who provided the sum and arranged the trick to secure Lodovico's participation in the conspiracy.

[31] Luckyj, ed. *The White Devil*, note to l. 5.1.16.

power.[32] Yet this does not imply that *The White Devil* is simply anti-papal or uncritical of the way faith was practiced in England. The Roman setting of the tragedy largely serves to expose the corruption of religion in a much more general sense that could easily be translated to the English post-Reformation context which had witnessed a tightening relation between religion and politics. This is illustrated in Flamineo's remark about "religion" in general when he pretends to be mad to save himself from suspicion of murder: "Religion; oh how it is commeddled with policy" (3.3.35). Flamineo uses the word "policy" in the now obsolete sense of "cunning."[33] In doing so, he defines the unsettling effect of the erosion of spiritual and religious content. It is tellingly ironic, moreover, that Flamineo expresses this truth precisely as a symptom of his own cunning, his feigned madness. A further indication of the play's impartial stance towards specific Christian denominations is given in the same scene, when Flamineo is approached by Brachiano's Ghost carrying a skull. Like Hamlet, Flamineo wonders if the silent ghost resides in heaven or in hell (5.5.120-21). To make him speak, Flamineo mentions a Catholic doctrine to the Ghost: "Our Italian Churchmen / Make us believe dead men hold conference / With their familiars" (5.5.131-33). Significantly, the play here simply registers a Catholic principle without judging it, even suggesting that Flamineo himself is not certain about what he should accept as true. That Flamineo is desperate to know what he should believe or which doctrine to embrace, is suggested earlier in the same passage, when he asks the Ghost: "Pray, sir, resolve me, what religion's best / For a man to die in?" (5.5.122-23). The Ghost responds with disturbing vagueness by throwing earth upon him and showing him the skull.

Conclusion

Despite their obvious differences in genre, content, and even in their portrayal of conversion, *As You Like It* and *The White Devil* in their use of conversion convey a concern about the corrupting effect of religious polemics on spiritual piety. For many of Shakespeare and Webster's contemporaries, the meaning of spiritual conversion as a complete submission to an undenominational God was overrun by the pervasive politicization of faith. *The White Devil* registers how this

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[32] An illustrative example of this conception is Christopher Marlowe's character and prologue Machiavel in *The Jew of Malta*, who turns out to be a source of inspiration for many of the plays' characters.

[33] "policy," n.5 *OED Online*, March 2013. Oxford University Press. 17 April 2013 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146842?rskey=Bs6h5n&result=1&isAdvanced=false>.

development paves the way for religious scheming. It points to the danger of faith that has lost its spiritual substance and has thus become the ideal instrument of manipulation and opportunism. *As You Like It* presents another dramatic response by portraying a highly stylized and idealized version of spiritual change to conjure up an old religious world in which people were still able to make a strict separation between the world and spirituality. What is more, contrary to its pivotal role in morality drama, spiritual conversion is of marginal importance to Shakespeare and Webster's plots. This is partly due to the fact that it is employed as a device, rather than explored for its own (theological or spiritual) sake, yet the two plays do so with different purposes. In *As You Like It*, it is Shakespeare who uses spiritual conversion as a secular dramatic tool to bring the plot to its comedic closure. This is in some respects analogous to the metaphorical use of spiritual conversion, which enables playwrights to express forcefully notions of love. In Webster, spiritual conversion is wielded as a secular instrument by the *characters*. This allows Webster to expose and problematize the manipulation of faith. Indeed, by identifying the corruption of spiritual conversion with the unjust suppression of women, and making the same women speak out against the abuse of faith, Webster presents the evisceration of spiritual worship as a social injustice.

PART II: Interfaith Conversion

CHAPTER 5 'More Stable and Perfect Faith:' Religious Pluralization and the Paradox of Interfaith Conversion

In 1641, an anonymous pamphleteer complained about his discovery of "29 sects" in London, "all of which, except the first" he considered "most divelish and damnable."[1] His list includes "*Protestants, Puritans, Papists, Brownists, Calvinists, Lutherans, Fam. of love, Mahometans, Adamites, Brightanists, Armenians, Sosinians, Thessalonians, Anabaptists, Separatists: Chaldaeans, Electrians, Donatists, Persians, Antinomeans, Assyrians, Macedonians, Heathens, Panonians, Saturnians, Junonians, Bacchanalians, Damassians, The Brotherhood*."[2] What follows are brief derogatory and sneering descriptions of each sect. The members of the Family of Love, for instance, are said to believe that "a man may gaine salvation by shewing himself loving, especially to his neighbours wife."[3] Although the mocking tone of some of these characterizations as well as the inclusion of fictional sects (such as the "Electrians" and the "Damassians") suggests that the pamphlet was written with some satirical intent, it does express a genuine and widely shared concern over the co-existence of a variety of what the author perceives as false sects. "The Puritan," for example, is accused of "striving to poison, as neare as he can, the truth with his true-lyes" and said to hold with "conventicles and private meetings."[4] In addition to scorning the 28 sects, the author expresses his wish that all of their members embrace Protestantism, a "Diamond, which, though it bee cast to the Dung-hill, loseth not a jot of its splendor," and hopes that "*the ignorant Professors of the rest may see the light, which seemes more glorious to those who have walked so long in darknesse*."[5]

The above pamphlet exemplifies two interrelated developments in the early modern perception of faith. Firstly, it illustrates the experience of an unparalleled increase in the number and prominence of different religious denominations. This caused people, to a greater extent than they had done before, to identify religious truth and falsehood with religious group identities. Veracity, as well as heresy, profanation and dissent were defined along the lines of denominations, and people were identified, and identified themselves, with their religion. Secondly, religious pluralization gave an unprecedented urgency

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[1] *A Discovery of 29. sects here in London* (London, 1641).
[2] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 1.
[3] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 4.
[4] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 2-3.
[5] *A Discovery of 29 sects*, 2. Original emphasis.

to interfaith conversion. The increasing prominence of religious difference brought about an upsurge in the number of conversions from one denomination to the other. These did not only include shifts between Catholicism and Protestantism, but also conversions from Christianity to Islam that were reported to have occurred in the Ottoman territories. In addition, early moderns were presented with accounts of English endeavours to Christianize native pagans in the New World.

Interfaith conversion raised different problems and challenges than its spiritual variant. While spiritual conversion amounted to a change of persuasion, made visible in adjusted behaviour and actions, interfaith conversion first and foremost entailed a change of *being*, that is, of one's religious identity. At the heart of the concerns over interfaith conversion was conflict between the conception of religious identity as an inherent and inalienable part of the self on the one hand, and the desire that religious others reject their erroneous belief and convert to (the right version of) Christianity on the other. This ambiguity also occurs in the above pamphlet. The author may articulate a desire for interfaith conversion, but it is not likely that he would accept as new Protestants people he previously dismissed as "more mad, ignorant" and "impious than the rest" (the Bacchanalians) or as resembling "*whoring rogues*" (the Brotherhood). Besides, his advice to readers to apply themselves to Protestantism and "*hate and eschew all*" other sects indicates a readership that is already Protestant and belies a genuine desire of conversion.

The present chapter explores the early modern paradox of interfaith conversion: the desire to convince members of other faiths of the truth of one's own while also striving to demarcate and render impermeable the boundaries of religious identity, which involved questioning or even denying the possibility of conversion. It shows that this contradiction went beyond denominational boundaries and affected every type of interfaith conversion, within Christianity, as well as between Christian and non-Christian faiths. An important part of this contradiction was the concern over the politicization of conversion. As we have seen in the previous chapter, conversion was perceived as being emptied of its theological or spiritual content and deployed as a tool for various secular purposes. This chapter explores interfaith conversion as an aspect of this politicization of faith. Homilists, for instance, used biographical accounts of the rare Christianizations of Jews and Muslims to polarize between Catholicism and Protestantism. While it seems as if these accounts were deployed in sermons as tools for proselytization among non-Christians, closer scrutiny of these sermons as well as of their implied audience reveals that they first and foremost served to polarize between Protestant and Catholic doctrine and identity and to demarcate their boundaries. This is illustrated in John Foxe's *Sermon Preached at the*

Christening of a certain Jew (1578) and Meredith Hanmer's *The Baptizing of a Turke* (1589). The first text was presented at the baptism of Yehuda Menda, who was christened Nathanael, at Alhallowes Church in 1577. Hanmer's homily takes as a point of departure the Christianization of Chinano of Nigropontus, a Turkish slave who had been rescued from a Spanish galley. At first glance, these texts are straightforward accounts of the ways in which converts had wandered in Jewish or Islamic ignorance before they became aware of the Christian truth, but a closer look reveals that the authors are more interested in the idea that the conversions are triumphs of Protestantism, serving as classic examples of anti-Catholic propaganda. Since the sermons were preached to a Protestant audience, the interfaith conversions of the Menda and Chinano were thus effectively used to advocate against interfaith conversion and promote Protestant steadfastness.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the integration of converts into their new religious environment. Its susceptibility to political interpretations rendered interfaith conversion suspect and the acceptance of new adherents of a faith problematic. Converts were accused of opportunism, which compromised their assimilation. In addition, they were accused of being inconstant, an allegation against which they could hardly defend themselves.[6] This challenge was more pressing for converts who changed their religion more than once. Recanters and serial converts negatively affected the general opinion of all converts, moreover. Concerns about inconstancy reveal a collective anxiety about the stability of religious denomination itself. Indeed, the increasing importance that was attached to the virtue of constancy – glorified, for instance, in accounts of martyrdom – must be seen as a response to this anxiety.

Interfaith Conversion as an Instrument of Denominational Politics

While the vast majority of interfaith conversions in early modern England were between Catholicism and Protestantism, reports of Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian changes of faith played a significant role in inter-Christian polemics. They were used to shape the understanding of religious identity and of the exchange of religious identities in interfaith conversion.

Conversions from Judaism to Christianity in early modern England were exceptional. In 1290, all Jewish inhabitants had been expelled from England and Jews were only readmitted to the country in 1655. According to James Shapiro, "there were Jews in Shakespeare's England, though probably never more than a

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[6] See also Michael Quester, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 55-56.

couple of hundred at any given time in the whole country, a very small number in a population of roughly four million."[7] A part of the English inhabitants of Jewish descent was from Spain and Portugal, their ancestors having been banished from their native countries or forced to convert. Despite the near-total absence of Jews, the English explored the idea of their Christianization with much fascination, as it helped them place in sharper focus their intimate and conflicted historical relationship with Jews.

English Christians were ambivalent towards Judaism. They were familiar with Deuteronomy 7.6, which reminds Jews of their special status as God's elect: "for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." At the same time, Christian understandings of Judaism were informed by the idea that Jews stubbornly refused to accept Christ as their Messiah. In addition, Jews were seen as responsible for the crucifixion, which fostered an endless range of myths about their cruel nature; they were thought to poison wells, to circumcise Christian men and ritually murder children.[8] The confusion produced by the complex scriptural status of Jews fuelled a desire for unmistakable tokens of Jewish otherness, which were typically found in the body. Pre-expulsion English attempts to separate Jews from Christians by forcing them to wear distinctive clothing[9] bear witness to an awareness that is was impossible to make physical distinctions between Jews and Christians, but this was not enough to prevent the cultivation of the racialized Jew with a typically dark complexion, hooked nose and red hair. In fact, as M. Lindsay Kaplan asserts, "thirteenth-century English culture gave rise to the concept of an immutable Jewish racial identity, corresponding to a modern definition of race, that was construed in religious, class, somatic, hereditary, and gendered terms," adding rightly that it is "the site of conversion" that "provides the context in which these emerging assumptions become clear."[10] Indeed, defining Judaism as a race rather than a religion was as much as saying that Jews could never fully become Christians. In Spain, the so-called pure blood laws were used to determine the extent to which someone was of pure Christian blood and to prevent any descendant of a convert from becoming a member of Christian society. The laws provided a means to re-establish these boundaries on the

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[7] James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 76.

[8] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, passim.

[9] See Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 95-96.

[10] M. Lindsay Kaplan, "Jessica's Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58 (2007): 1-30, 2.

grounds of race rather than faith, as "it was maintained that degenerate Jewish blood was impervious to baptism and grace."[11] Some English advocates of racial description of Judaism found creative ways also to argue for the possibility of conversion. Some believed that Jews produced a certain stench called *foetor judaicus*, while at the same time various legends recount that the power of baptism could remove the odour.[12] Others, like Sir Thomas Browne, did not take this seriously. With characteristic irony, he refuted the *foetor judaicus* on the grounds of the very possibility of Christianization: "as though aromatized by their conversion, [Jews] lost their scent with their Religion, and smelt no longer then they savoured of the Jew."[13] Rather than providing a sense of certainty, the racial understanding of Judaism raised disturbing questions about the possibility of conversion.

The Sermon Preached at the Christening of a certain Jew, by the Protestant martyrologist John Foxe (1516/17-1587), is an illustrative example of the early modern contradictory conception of Jews as both desired converts and as impervious to Christianization. A considerable part of the sermon is devoted to portraying Jews as enemies of Christ, "whome they trayterously murthered and hanged on tree."[14] Foxe does so by consistently depicting them as a "nation" or a "race" that is defined by their reprobation. According to Foxe, a principal characteristic of Jewishness is unbelief. This manifests itself in the fact that they "wittingly" refuse to "acquaint themselves with the trueth" and "cruelly persecute the same in al maner of outrage, slaughter, blood, blasphemies and most despiteful execrations," an attitude that is part of the natural make-up of Jews:

> this […] unbeliefe, which being more noisome then any pestilent botch may rightly and properly be called the Jewish Infidelitie, and seemeth after a certaine matter their inheritable disease, who are after a certaine sort, from their mothers wombe, naturally carried

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[11] Jerome Friedman, "Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18.1 (1987): 3-30, 3, 5, 11, 16.

[12] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945) 48-49.

[13] Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) quoted in David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 170.

[14] John Foxe, *A Sermon Preached at the Christening of a Certain Jew, at London* (London: Christopher Barker, 1578) sig. B4v.

> through perverse frowardnes, into all malitious hatred, and contempt of Christ and his Christians.[15]

For this reason, Jews are, in Foxe's eyes, collectively punished for their deeds: "God" must avenge "his welbeloved sonne […] upon the whole nation, and roote out the remnant of the whole race altogether."[16]

It is significant that Foxe regularly addresses Jews directly while it is unlikely that there were any Jews present in the audience. He lashes out at them: "why do you so vylanously persecute your naturall kinseman, beyng likewise a Jewe borne, and why have you slayne him so cruelly," and "Does thou not see, how thy mischievous practises recoyle back upon thine owne head."[17] As Janet Adelman explains, Foxe, in this way, "[brings] the context into the present moment in England, thus allowing Foxe to represent himself as heroic in the face of a contemporary danger, boldly defending the claim of "the nations" – his underdog "Gentiles" – who are threatened by what amounts to an imaginary invasion of Jews."[18] Foxe's evocation of the fictional presence of Jews not only exposes the construction of religious group identity as a process of the imagination, but also as something that was stimulated significantly with dramatic techniques. Indeed, in the next two chapters I will show the great extent to which plays served to fashion and solidify notions of religious difference. Foxe suggests that his sermon essentially is about conversion – the occasion of a specific Christianization and the hope that this will set an example for "the whole remnant of the circumcised race […] to be desirous of the same communion" and turn Christian. Yet much of the sermon and especially his remarks to the imaginary Jews portray them as inherently different and inspire hatred against them. This irony is augmented when Foxe, in the heat of his resentment, even encourages Jews to continue in their monstrous atrocity "(thou cursed Jewe) thou art duly charged with the guilt of innocent blood: englut therefore thy greedie guts with goare."[19]

Although much of Foxe's sermon is devoted to portraying Jews as inherently evil and inconvertible, at times Foxe does acknowledge that they are capable of change and could be entitled to God's mercy:

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[15] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. B3r.

[16] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. B4v.

[17] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. C7r, L4v.

[18] Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in* The Merchant of Venice (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 28.

[19] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. L3r.

> as there are very many Jewes (as I saide before) which do confesse and professe Christ (as is this one Jewe whome ye see here present at this time) so is the Lord mightie, and of power to have compassion upon the remnant, and rayse them up, which are yet forsaken, and troden under foote.[20]

Like Calvin, Foxe was convinced that God's "casting away apperteined not to the whole nation of the Jewes, but to some portion of them onely."[21] He therefore takes pains to expose what he perceives as the stubborn ignorance of the Jews by meticulously pointing out to them the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in the gospels.

At the end of his sermon, it becomes clear that Foxe's remarks about the Jewish capability of conversion are only superficially aimed at making converts, but serve mainly to discredit another religious enemy: the Catholic Church. Catholic idolatry, Foxe argues, has obstructed the conversion of the Jews, because Judaism is antipathetic to image worship:

> what marvel was it if the Jewes (they were taught by the prescript rule of gods law to abhorre worshipping of images) entering into the churches of christians, and beholding the walles, pillers, and al the corners thereof, bedaubed and painted, and carved idoles, besides innumerable other bables of imagery, […] what marvel was it (I say) if they being offended with this open idolatrie, did so long refraine form us, and from the discipline of our faith.[22]

These ideas echo Luther's treatise *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523), which was written in the conviction that the Jews' adoption of Christianity "had awaited the preaching of the true Gospel."[23] It denounces the way in which "popes, bishops, sophists, and monks" have treated Jews:

> They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them they show them nothing of

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[20] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. M6r.

[21] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. B5r.

[22] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. M8r.

[23] Steven Rowan, "Luther, Bucer and Eck on the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16.1 (1985): 79-90, 10.

> Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and monkery.[24]

For both Foxe and Luther, the Christianizations of individual Jews foreshadowed the Apocalypse and served as powerful arguments in defence of Protestantism.[25] Foxe continues by claiming that the future of Protestantism looks bright, as the "ancient puritie of christian profession" is taking "good footing" and the elements "that may minister just occasion of offence to the Jewes" have disappeared from "our religion" and "doctrine."[26]

At the end of his Preface, Foxe explicitly reveals his interest in propagating Protestant constancy: "although my meaning was at the first, to have the [treatise] directed to the behoof of the Jewes chiefely, yet (I trust) it wil not be altogether unprofitable to the Christian readers."[27] This is because for some Christians, their faith has not "taken roote in their heartes."[28] And even if it had and "a man stande assured and stedfast in the certeintie of his faith," Foxe writes, human faith is always open for improvement: "what faith is there so sure, constant and unvanquishable, but may be made more stable and perfect?"[29] Foxe may claim that his text is directed chiefly "to the behoof of the Jewes," but the rhetorical weight of his argument is placed, paradoxically, on his message for his fellow Protestants that Protestantism has not yet reached a level of complete stability and perfection yet. His chief purpose is thus to encourage his coreligionists to intensify and consolidate their faith.

Although the exceptional status of Jews in the history of Christianity suggests that Protestant propagandists were interested particularly in Jewish converts, early modern Christianizations of Muslims were followed with similar

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[24] Martin Luther, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* [1523], in Martin Luther, *The Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader*, ed. Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2012) 76-83, 78.

[25] As Diarmaid MacCulloch writes, "having originated as the writings of oppressed people facing great crisis, apocalyptic has always had a ready appeal when crisis has reappeared for the Church, and the cataclysm of the Reformation was an obvious moment for it to come into its own; the figure of Antichrist which was a recurrent feature within apocalyptic writing could be identified with Roman error, and thus serve to explain how the pure New Testament Church had gradually been corrupted before the return of full truth with the Protestant Reformation." Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) 79.

[26] Foxe, *A Sermon*, sig. M8r.

[27] Foxe, *A Sermon*, "The Preface to the Reader," sig. ¶7r-¶8v

[28] Foxe, *A Sermon*, "The Preface to the Reader," sig. ¶8v

[29] Foxe, *A Sermon*, "The Preface to the Reader," sig. ¶8v.

zeal and even employed to make the same points about Catholic error and Protestant truth in order to encourage steadfastness among Protestants. This was because these converts provided rare and treasured counterexamples to the alarming numbers of renegades, Christians who had "turned Turk." Whereas there were hardly any Muslims who gave up their faith to become Christians, conversions to Islam were a common phenomenon. A significant number of renegades consisted of captives who adopted an Islamic identity during or after their enslavement.[30] The other and more unsettling category of renegades included impoverished Christians who were able to find employment in the Ottoman Empire and its territories when they converted to Islam. In English accounts, all conversions to Islam were reported to have been motivated by secular and opportunistic reasons: because enslaved compatriots were forced to apostatize or because they were seduced by the sexual freedom that Islam was said to offer. As Matar and Burton remind us, the lack of accounts describing religiously motivated conversions to Islam does not mean that these did not occur.[31]

Like efforts at baptizing Jews, successful English attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity were scarce and readily exploited for domestic and international religious politics.[32] The first account of a Muslim convert to Christianity is part of a sermon that, in the vein of Foxe's homily, utilizes the Muslim's change of faith to address inter-Christian controversies of doctrine. In *The Baptizing of a Turke* (1586), the Church of England clergyman Meredith Hanmer introduces the convert as Chinano of Nigropontus, noting at the end of his sermon that he will be christened William at his own request. Hanmer explains that William had been taken captive at the age of 15 by the Spaniards among whom he spent 25 years in slavery.[33] In "Carthagina" he was "found" by Sir Francis Drake who, sent by God, acted as a "deliverer, not onely for the present sorrowes and miserye, but to his endlesse joy and solace in Christ."[34]

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[30] For indications of the numbers of enslavements on the basis of biographic and autobiographic travel documents, see Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 5-10, 34-39. For descriptions of British women captives, see his *Britain and Barbary, 1589-1689* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006) 92-108.

[31] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 41; Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005) 16.

[32] See Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 125-37.

[33] Meredith Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke A sermon preached at the Hospitall of Saint Katherin, adioyning vnto her Maiesties Towre the 2. of October 1586. at the baptizing of one Chinano a Turke, borne at Nigropontus* (London: Robert Waldegrave, 1586) sig. E3r.

[34] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig. E4v.

During his years in Spanish captivity, a friar had tried to convert him but he had refused for two reasons – the Spaniard's "cruelty in shedding of bloud and his Idolatry in worshipping of Images."[35] "If there were not a God in England, there was none nowhere," William claimed according to Hanmer.[36] Unlike the conversion of Foxe's "certaine Jew," William's Christianization itself is hardly doctrinally or theologically motivated. Jacqueline Pearson points to the irony that Hanmer likens Catholicism to Islam as a corrupt faith, yet also describes William's conversion in "a phrase that might later seem dangerously legalistic if not popish", since "he is converted not by 'holie wordes, but workes.'" This is to say, "by the example of his rescuers and the kindness of (Protestant) strangers."[37] The manner of his conversion is not surprising, however, as William did not speak English, and, as Hanmer suggests, was aided by an interpreter during the baptism service.[38]

Like Foxe, Hanmer expresses the hope and the expectation that the brethren of the converts will follow the example of their former coreligionist, but spends a considerable part of the sermon on factional polemic. William's conversion is presented as the final argument and crowning touch of a long anti-Catholic, anti-Islamic and even anti-Jewish diatribe. Hanmer pays most attention to the genesis of Islam and the biography of the prophet Mohammed, which he curiously weaves into the history of Judaism and Catholicism. Thus, in a fashion reminiscent of the 1641 pamphlet on the discovery of 29 sects referred to in the introduction of this chapter, Hanmer claims that

> Mahomets law is no true religion, hee patched togeather his Alcoran of the lawes of and doctrines of Heathens, Indians, and Arabians, of superstitious Jewes, of Rechabits, of false Christians and Heretickes, as Nestorians, Sabellians, Manichees, Arrians, Cerinthians, Macedonians, Eunomians, and Nicolaits, of illusions, and inventions of his owne braine: and lastly for further credit be borrowed some out of the old and new Testament.[39]

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[35] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig. E4r-E5v.

[36] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig. E4v.

[37] Jacqueline Pearson, " 'One *Lot* in *Sodom*:' Masculinity and the Gendered Body in Early Modern Narratives of Converted Turks," *Literature & Theology* 21.1 (2007): 29-48, 35.

[38] Hanmer, *The baptizing of a Turke,* sig.A8v-A8r.

[39] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. Dv. The same passage can be found in *God's Arrow Against Atheists* by the Church of England divine Henry Smith, in which he unfavourably compares a large number of religions with the Church of England as the only true faith. The treatise first appeared in 1593 and was republished throughout the first three quarters of the

Hanmer uses the same argument as Foxe to explain why Muslims so far had not en masse converted to Christianity, considering the Catholic worship of images an obstruction to the conversion of non-Christians including that of William: "this is the credite these Images have brought into the Church, this was a stumbling blocke in the waye of this Saracen that he would not be baptized in Spain."[40] Hanmer follows Foxe's line of reasoning also when he claims that the Reformation, as the recovery of the true Church, has finally enabled the conversion of non-Christians:

> If either Heathen, or Jew, or Saracen, speake of the christian faith, immediately he hath Rome in his mouth. […] And for that they knowe not the puritie of religion in the reformed Churches […] There are many nations no doubt that if the truth were opened unto them they would most willingly receave the christian faith.[41]

Hanmer's instistence on William's geographic origins is part of the same argument. As Matar writes, the defeat of the (Catholic) Venetians at Negropont and the fall of the city in 1470 had been viewed in Christendom as an ominous sign of the growing power of the Turks. By referring to the Turk's birthplace, Hanmer showed that although the city was lost to the Muslims English Protestants were now reclaiming its inhabitants by the power of their faith.[42] Hanmer continues his argument by blaming Catholicism for the existence of Islam, claiming that God had brought Islam into the world as a scourge to punish mankind for papacy: "The Church of Rome beganne to lift up her selfe in pride and abhomination, the Pope calling himselfe universall Bishop. God was highly displeased with this wickednes, and suffered Mahomet to rise as a rod or scourge to whippe his people."[43]

Like Foxe, Hanmer did not preach his sermon to the people whose conversion he desired and commended, but to a congregation of fellow Protestants. This meant that the ostensible celebration of conversion in actual fact served to prevent conversion and encourage religious steadfastness. Hanmer's ambiguous appreciation of conversion is also clear from the fact that he gives

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seventeenth century. Henry Smith, *Gods arrow against atheists. By Henry Smith*, (London : G[eorge] M[iller]) 1628) 51.

[40] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. Fr.

[41] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. F2r-F3v.

[42] Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 126.

[43] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. E2v.

almost equal rhetorical weight to William's refusal to turn Catholic. Indeed, most of what is quoted from the convert relates to his brutal treatment at the hands of the Spanish Catholics. By the same token, Hanmer is remarkably silent on the status and future of his new convert. The sermon concludes with five confessions of faith that William pronounces, including his desire that "hee might be received as one of the faithfull Christians, and bee baptized in the faith of the blessed Trinitie, promising from henceforth newness of life, and fruits according unto this profession,"[44] yet we do not learn anything about the way William intends to fulfill this promise. The question as to why William himself chose the name William remains equally unanswered. It is furthermore telling of Hanmer's lack of interest in his convert as a person that he most of the time refers to him as "the silly Turke," and "silly Saracene," epithets that do not contribute to a smooth integration into Christian society.

While there is no evidence of William's post-conversion life, the experiences of other converts show that they were aware or must have been aware of the ambiguous attitude of their new coreligionists towards interfaith conversion. In the section that follows below, I will largely focus on the position of converts. Their statements imply that there was a pervasive resistance to accepting them as full members of the community, something that affected converts of any religion, albeit in different ways.

The Social Acceptance of Converts

After his Christianization, Foxe's convert Nathanael Menda did not integrate into the Christian community, but spent the next thirty years of his life in the *Domus Conversorum*, a house for baptized Jews that was founded in 1232 by King Henry III and located in London.[45] Menda's lack of assimilation is also reflected in his "Confession of Faith," that was enclosed with Foxe's sermon. Menda repeats Foxe's point about Catholic "Idolatry" that thwarts the conversion of Jews and rejects Jewish theology as perceived by Christians – "that false looking for an other Christ" – but he consistently writes in the *first* person to refer to the Jewish nation: "*our* Lawe teacheth *us* that our God Jehovah is all sufficient, and that all treasures are in his hands."[46] He continues to explain:

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[44] Hanmer, *The Baptizing of a Turke*, sig. F4r.

[45] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 70, 68.

[46] Nathanael Menda, *The Confession of Faith, Which Nathanael a Jewe Borne, made before the Congregation in the Parish Church of Alhallowes in Lombard Streete at London* (London: Christopher Barker, 1578) sigs. B8v, B7v. My emphasis. As Janet Adelman observes, despite its ostensible English Protestant audience, the document attributed to Nathanael initially

> the man Jesus Christ [...] is the undoubted Meshiach promised to *our* fathers for the redemption and deliverie of us his people out of the captivitie wee are in: which is not the captivity of Egypt of Babylon, or the captivitie of the Romanes Empire, which *we* have justly deserved by the shedding of his innocent bloud through betraying and delivering him into the handes of the wicked to be crucified.[47]

This is all the more striking since in stating that he has changed his name – "as I have received a new gift from the Lord, so in token thereof I may be called Nathanael" – Menda suggests that he has already become a member of Christian society and can legitimately use the first person to refer to fellow Christians.[48] It is furthermore telling of his post-conversion status as an alien that he signed his receipts for the *Domus Conversorum* with his Christian name in Hebrew.[49]

It is impossible to establish Menda's motives for apparently maintaining a Jewish identity in his own writings, but converts were aware of the reluctance their new coreligionists felt in admitting new believers into their congregation. This reluctance was not so much based on the religious origin of converts as on their status as converts, which is exemplified by the considerable variety of terms used to capture and label new coreligionists, including apostate, convertite, marrano, renegade, turncoat, and proselyte. The epithets not only reveal the urge to categorize converts as a separate category in its own right, but the derogatory nature of many of the words also suggests a suspiciousness of people who had changed their religious identity.

A document that provides insight into the other major allegations that were levelled against converts is the translated testimony of the Frenchman M. du Tertre, Lord de la Motthe Luyne, who was a Capuchin preacher before he turned to the reformed Church of France. Although Du Tertre's introductory

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addresses itself to an audience of newly converted Jews: 'Men and brethren, to whom God hath revealed in these later dayes the secrete of his sonne which was hidden from you many ages, it is not unknowen unto you how that in the dayes of our forefathers God chose us to be a precious people unto himself above all the people that are upon the earth.' (B1r). Only one-third of the way through his lengthy confession does the referent of 'you' shift to 'you the Gentiles' presumably his audience (B4r)." Adelman, *Blood Relations*, 149 n73.

[47] Menda, *The Confession of Faith*, sig B8r. My emphasis.

[48] Menda, The *Confession of Faith*, sig. B8v.

[49] Michael Adler, *Jews of Medieval England* (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1939) 332.

epistle is "directed to those of the Church of Rome," the Church of England clergyman and translator of the text Edward Meetkerke (1590-1657) wrote in his introductory letter (dedicated to William Goodwin, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford) that he considered the account "a very profitable worke for the Church [of England]," as it could be instrumental in the "bringing home of such, of whom there is yet good hope they may be reclaimed."[50] Meetkerke furthermore notes that Du Tertre's arguments for embracing Protestantism are well-known, but their formulation precisely by a former member of the Capuchin order invests them with persuasive force. This is because monks are not simply Catholics, but have "with a nearer bond, and as it were an apprentiship for terme of life bound themselves never to depart," their order being the "quintessence as it were of religion."[51] In a declaration, that is remarkably empathetic to his former coreligionists who look upon his conversion with suspicion, Du Tertre recapitulates the negative responses from his environment:

> When you heard of, knew, and saw my departure, God knowes what sinister opinions I ran into in regard of many amongst you; some taking my designe to be but a lightnesse, inconstancie, and inconsideratenesse of minde; others thinking it to have proceeded from a matter and occasion of disquietnesse and discontent received from them, from whom I am departed; others from a desire of greater libertie and more licentious life; and many other the like: but all in generall esteeming it a manifest disloyaltie and notorious treacherousnesse to your societie and company.[52]

After Du Tertre has explained that his conversion was "purely and simply to no other end, then to the glory of [his] God, and the assurance of [his] salvation," and before he enters into a detailed explication of his arguments against Catholicism, he draws attention to the problematic aspect of change in conversion.[53] His forsaking of Catholicism might appear "strange" to the reader,

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[50] Edward Meetkerke, "The Epistle Dedicatorie," *A declaration and manifestation, of the chiefe reasons and motiues of the conuersion of Master M. du Tertre, Lord de la Motthe Luyne late preacher amongst the order of the Capucins, vnder the name of F. Firmin &c. Together with his conformitie vnto the reformed churches of France* (London: Edward Griffin, 1616) sig. A2r.

[51] Meetkerke, "The Epistle Dedicatorie," A3v.

[52] M. Du Tertre, *A declaration and manifestation, of the chiefe reasons and motiues of the conuersion of Master M. du Tertre, Lord de la Motthe Luyne*, trans. Edward Meetkerke (London: Edward Griffin, 1616) 1-2.

[53] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 2.

Du Tertre notes, but he will try and make "this change more familiar."[54] Du Tertre continues by saying that his conversion could be considered strange because "every alteration and change of religion is simply so of it selfe" since "we ought to end in that wherein we have begun."[55] To counter this view, Du Tertre, mentions the conversions of pagans that, he believes, his (Christian) audience must have welcomed, rhetorically asking his readers if they preferred to see the religious steadfastness of non-Christians too:

> what then I pray will become of those among the Jewes, Turkes, the men of *Japan*, of *Margaia*, and other barbarous and strange nations, which have changed and daily doe change their owne religion, and that of their fathers, in the which they had beene nurtured and brought up, for to make themselves Christians, to wed themselves to the law and faith of our Saviour, and to professe his religion?[56]

Trying to convince his former fellow-Catholics of the sincerity of his religious transition, Du Tertre touches on two accusations that were leveled at converts, by former and new coreligionists alike, and that came to determine their collective image. One is the motivation quoted above to embrace a faith out of an opportunistic "desire of greater libertie and more licentious life." The other is the more fundamentally problematic notion that his conversion could be seen as a form of "inconstancie," that in and of itself was strange.

Accusations of Opportunism and Inconstancy

The suggestion that people converted to satisfy their lust was one of the most commonly made allegations against converts, particularly against Christians who had embraced Islam. Preachers and travel writers typically portrayed the prophet Muhammad as a seducer luring Christians into his cursed sect by picturing Islam as a faith celebrating sexual and other liberties.[57] For instance, in his *The Manners, Lawes, and Customes of all Nations*, translated by Edward Aston, Joannes Boemus suggests that the "incredible allurement" of the Muslim faith could be explained by the fact that Mohammed was "giving to his people free liberty and power to pursue their lustes and all other pleasures, for by these

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[54] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 6-7.
[55] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 7.
[56] Du Tertre, *A declaration*, 7.
[57] Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) passim; and Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, passim.

meanes, this pestilent religion hath crept into innumerable Nations."[58] This did not mean that licentiousness was exclusively associated with Islam. New Catholics were accused of similar offences. Sir Francis Walsingham remarked about Anthony Tyrrell, Francis Shaw, Richard Sheldon and John Copley, all converts to Catholicism, for instance, that their motives were "good fellowship, good cheare, loose life and women."[59]

Interfaith converts were said to have changed their faith for other material reasons as well. As the examples of Foxe and Hanmer's sermons show, conversions were exploited for strategic religio-political purposes, and in order to make converts in each other's camps, Protestants and Catholics held out the prospect of material rewards to potential new coreligionists. Career prospects formed one of the most important lures. The English state took great pains to compensate financially clerics who had converted from Catholicism, even when they had been coerced into conversion, so that they would not relapse.[60] Some converted clerics received a pay rise and became royal chaplains, and Catholic priests who had been arrested were sometimes offered benefices by the Church of England if they turned from Rome.[61] A similar thing happened in Catholic circles. In his attempt to coax a Protestant minister into changing his religion and working for a Catholic congregation, George Brome argued that if he joined his cause the minister would "lacke neither golde nor Silver."[62] Not surprisingly, measures like these heightened the suspicion of converts' ulterior motives and inspired accusers to compare the embrace of the enemy's religion to acts of fornication.[63]

However vehement and scalding the charges of expediency, a more challenging allegation converts were faced with was that of inconstancy. It was an accusation made by believers who saw their coreligionists defect to another faith, but the worry that converts may have given proof of their inconstancy was also shared by a convert's new religious community. This is indirectly evidenced by the fierce condemnation of inconstancy in a variety of contexts and the

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[58] Edward Aston, *The Manners, Lawes, and Customes of all Nations* (London, 1611) 137.

[59] Quoted in Michael Quester, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 44. In William Rowley's Tragedy *All's Lost by Lust*, the nobleman Antonio expresses his desire to be "perswade[d]" to "turne Turk, or Moore Mahometan," because " by the lustfull lawes of *Mahomet* " he "may have three wives more." William Rowley, *All's Lost by Lust* (London: Thomas Harper, 1633) D4v.

[60] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 45.

[61] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 45.

[62] Quoted in Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion* 44.

[63] Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 84.

according great moral importance that was attached to the value of constancy, precisely when interfaith conversion became more common and visible. As Katherine Rowe writes, "early seventeenth-century English writers did not invent the idea of inconstancy but they wielded it with a particular urgency."[64] She adds that innate changeability, for instance "unpredictable changes of opinion, [...] figures importantly in a variety of discourses in the period: discourses of ethnicity, nation, political organization, medicine, psychology, and domestic life, to name a few."[65]

Just as fickleness was recognized and denounced in a range of social and cultural domains, the virtue of constancy was celebrated and associated with a wide variety of merits. Ranking steadfastness among the most important graces, poets sang the praise of constancy as the ultimate means to happiness, as a synonym for (religious) courage and sincerity and as the proof of wisdom and true love. The fourth grace in Nicholas Breton's *The Soules Immortall Crowne Consisting of Seaven Glorious Graces* (1605) is constancy, described as a key quality of lovers: "the locke upon the heart of love;" a form of wisdom: "the learning of the wisest wits instruction;" and feature of Divine grace: "the seate where Mercy sits in Majestie." [66] Robert Aylett's *Peace with her Foure Garders* (1622) presents constancy as "the Souldier, that the towne would winne, / Fights stoutly, till he conquers all within" and the "lustre of whose face, / Both heav'nly *Love*, and all her Peeres for ever grace."[67] Particularly important about constancy was the notion that it proved someone's honesty. If an inconstant character denoted unreliability, steadfastness was associated with sincerity. This is illustrated in George Herbert's poem "Constancy" (1633), which hardly explicitly refers to its title, but revolves around the question propounded in the first line "Who is the honest man?" According to Herbert's speaker, the honest man has "Vertue" as "his Sunne" and "his words and works and fashion too" are "all of a piece and all are clear and straight."

The early modern preoccupation with steadfastness specifically in matters of religion was intensified by converts who proved their inconstancy by returning to their original faith. Recantations were damaging to the

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[64] Katherine Rowe, "Inconstancy: Changeable Affections in Stuart Dramas of Contract" in eds. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 90-102, 90.

[65] Rowe, "Inconstancy: Changeable Affections in Stuart Dramas of Contract," 90.

[66] Nicholas Breton, *Soules Immortall Crowne Consisting of Seauen Glorious Graces* (London: 1605) sig. F4v, F4r.

[67] Robert Aylett, *Peace with her foure garders Viz. fiue morall meditations: of concord, chastitie, constancie. Courtesie. Grauitie* (London: 1622) 25, 23

trustworthiness of those who converted only once. Indeed, with examples of recanting converts, it became much harder to for people to convince their new coreligionists that they would not relapse into their despised original faith. Clergy in charge of readmitting regretful converts into the Church showed themselves aware of the difficulty of welcoming recanters as reliable believers. The group of reconverting apostates they treated with special caution consisted of renegades who had returned home from the ports of Barbary or Ottoman cities. [68] In addition to being accused of expedience, they were also considered highly inconstant. "Among us," the Church of England divine Edward Kellet wrote, "such as are to choose Religion: *Ambo-dexters, Nulli-fidians*, such *Amphibia*, as can live, both on Land and Water, or such as have stayned their soules with some blacke sinnes: these are the Chamelions which will change colour with euery ayre, and their beliefe, for matters of small moment."[69] Despite his concern over the treacherous changeability of renegades, Kellet and other clergymen encouraged the readmission of people to the Church once they had repented their tergiversations. To consolidate former renegades' Protestant identity, the preachers dwelled extensively on the heinousness of their crimes and the importance of being sincere in their repentance. On top of that, and despite the fact that this came obviously too late for repenting renegades, they spent a considerable part of their homilies on what they considered to be the ultimate form of religious constancy: martyrdom.

Although there is no reliable evidence of Turks violently coercing conversion to Islam, English clergy explained in gruesome detail the pressure to which they believed Christians in the Ottoman empire were be exposed in order to emphasize the heroism of those who remained steadfast in their faith. As Henry Byam noted, "I have read of some, and those some of the valiantest the world did see within their age, who, after all kinde of ignominy and Turkish crueltie practiced upon them, were fleaed alive by little and little, for fifteene dayes together."[70] He went on to describe at length the specific agonies they suffered, such as the pulling out of eyes and the making of holes in necks to "drawne" tongues "out backward."[71] The Christians did not budge from their faith, however. "Yea," Byam wrote, "the persecutors themselves were astonished to see their constancy, and how they went to their Martyrdom […] they went to

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[68] See Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 63-72, for a discussion of this phenomenon.

[69] Edward Kellet, *A Returne from Argier* (London: 1628) 35.

[70] Henry Byam, *A Returne from Argier* (London: 1628) 56. Kellet and Byam delivered a sermon on the occasion of a renegade returning to the Church of England that were both published under the same title.

[71] Byam, *A Returne from Argier*, 56.

the fire as to a feast, as to a dainty feast, as to their bridall bed."[72] All of these descriptions served to make the point there is "no greater Sacrifice to our Master" no better way of achieving "happinesse" and "no better example to others" than religious martyrdom.[73] Likewise, Kellet wrote that "a Martyr is a Seale and Signet on the finger of the All-mightie."[74] William Gouge, a Church of England divine who wrote a sermon "at the receiving of a Penitent Renegado into the Church," explained in terms similar to those of Byam and Kellet that "the anguish of a tormenting conscience is much more intolerable then of scourges, whips, bastenadoes, strapadoes, racks, or any torturing instruments on the body."[75] Therefore, "it is better to live and die in despaire, then to live and die in an impudent remorselesnesse."[76] What is more, Gouge provided his listeners and readers with series of "directions for constancy in the Christian faith," which included the advice to "take an unalterable and invincible resolution before hand to stand to thy faith" and to "set [ones] heart on Christ and on his Gospell," this because "a Christian well rooted and grounded in the Articles of his faith, will sooner have his limbes pull'd one form another, and his body and soule severed, then drawne from his faith, and renounce his profession thereof."[77] Nevertheless, a Christian must realize, Gouge warned his audience, that constancy proceeds from God's grace and is not the result one's own efforts; in fact, "self-conceit is a forerunner of Apostacy."[78]

Whereas there are virtually no personal recantation statements of renegades, statements of former defectors to Rome were widely disseminated. William Chauncie, who was "long tyme misled in Poperie" assured his readers on the title page that his confession was "written with his owne hand as an evident witnesse of his undoubted Resolution."[79] William Tedder wrote "my desire is, that all her Majesties Subjects whersoever, though they heard me not, shold have if it please them, a copie of my Recantation in theyr hands. First to peruse for their satisfaction. Secondly to prayse God myne effectuall

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[72] Byam, *A Returne from Argier*, 57.
[73] Byam, *A Returne from Argier*, 57.
[74] Kellet, *A Returne from Argier*, 28.
[75] William Gouge, *A recovery from apostacy Set out in a sermon preached in Stepny Church neere London at the receiving of a penitent renegado into the Church* (London: George Miller, 1639) 26.
[76] Gouge, *A Recovery from Apostacy*, 28.
[77] Gouge, *A Recovery from Apostacy*, 58, 60.
[78] Gouge, *A Recovery from Apostacy*, 59-60.
[79] William Chauncie, *The Conversion of a Gentleman Long Tyme Misled in Poperie, to the Sincere and True Profession of the Gospell of Christ Iesus* (London, 1587).

conversion."[80] Among the recanters who had shifted between Christian Churches was a small but particularly notorious group of serial converts. "Extreme" serial converts included John Nicholls and Anthony Tyrrell. They resembled each other in the sense that most of their turns and returns to the Roman fold coincided with visits to Catholic bastions such as Rome, Rheims and Douai, and that their imprisonment in various places elicited reconversions. Having travelled to Rome, John Nicholls (1555-1584) converted to Catholicism, a change he soon renounced after his return to England when he was detained in the Tower. During another imprisonment in Rouen, however, he became a Catholic once again, which he remained until his death. The Catholic priest and Church of England clergyman Anthony Tyrrell converted no less than six times, three times of which in prison. In addition to the statements of their countrymen, the English public was also presented with various published recantations, often combined in single publications, that were translated from French, Dutch and German originals and narrated (re)conversions to the Reformed Church.[81] It is likely that these were distributed with the same purpose as that of Foxe and Hanmer, to boost confidence in the steady growth of Protestantism.

Converts anticipated accusations of inconsistency by bringing up the allegation themselves and attempting to convince their readers of the definitiveness of their change. In so doing, they often relied on Biblical passages. Although the books of the Old Testament state that those who have first been converted to God and then apostatize cannot be reconverted: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened […] if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Hebrews 6: 4-6), they could easily refer to Christ's clemency in the New Testament and tap into a variety of biblical conversion allegories that celebrate the return of lost people, animals or items. Recanters thus encouraged their readers to hail their reconversions as the return of the prodigal son or the discovery of the lost coin. Most commonly cited in conversion statements were the shepherd narratives, such as the parable of the

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[80] William Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell, *The recantations as they were seuerallie pronounced by VVylliam Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell* (London, 1588) sig. A3r.

[81] See, for instance, *The confession and publike recantation of thirteene learned personages* (London, 1602); *The Voluntarie recantation of foure learned men of France lately conuerted from poperie, to the true religion* (London: 1615), and Jean Haren, *The repentance of Iohn Haren priest and his returne to the Church of God; publickly by him recited in the French Church at Wezell, in the presence of the senate, conposed of the ministers and the people assembled togeather vpon the 7. day of March, Anno 1610* (London: W.White, 1610).

lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7 and that of the shepherd's duty to protect his flock in John 10:11-17. The popularity of these tales in particular can be explained by the fact that the herd was a powerful metaphor to describe the true Church and allowed (repentant) converts to portray the Protestant faith to which they had turned or returned as Christ's own fold. The Augustinian friar turned Protestant Godefrid Raben, for instance, used as a motto to his conversion statement John 10:11-17, in which Christ presents himself as a good shepherd who takes care not only of the sheep in his fold, but adds his "other sheep," so there will be "one fold, and one shepherd." [82] As a former Catholic, Raben identified himself with one of "the other sheep" of Christ, suggesting that the Protestant Church is the heart and future of Christianity. Likewise, having returned to Protestantism, the former Catholic John Harding asked God in his recantation sermon to lead him "in the truth […] Albeit I have erred and strayed like a lost sheepe."[83] To further endorse the sincerity of their embrace of Protestantism, recanting converts noted as a rule that God was fully responsible for their reformation and added to their narrative a list of arguments against Catholic doctrines.

Other ways to underline the definitiveness of their conversion included a reasoned account of the converts' temporary lapse into degeneracy that concluded with the suggestion that the latest change of faith marked the end of a period of doubt and inconstancy. In their mutual epistle dedicatory to the Queen preceding their recantation statements, William Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell compared their Catholic periods to the inconstancy of sea waves: "How miserablie we have beene tossed on the sourges of schismes and devisions, howe sore we have beene overwhelmed with the waves of heresies, and overflowen with the floods of Idolatrie and superstition."[84] Similar wording was used by an anonymous Protestant turned Catholic who wrote to his father that "mortall waves tossed [his] unstedy barke," but the "influence" of "that unmoving Pole," had "touched [his] heart."[85]Tedder noted that he had never been "fully persuaded" of the real presence of Christ's body in the sacrament, adding "now I renounce it, craving pardon of God, for defending that which I always doubted

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[82] Godefrid Raben, "A Recantation done on the second Sonday after Easter" in *The confession and publike recantation of thirteene learned personages* (London, 1602) sig. ¶3r.

[83] John Harding, A *recantation sermon, preached at the gate-house at Westminster, the 30. day of Iuly 1620* (London; 1620) 24.

[84] William Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell, *The recantations as they were seuerallie pronounced by Wylliam Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell* (London: John Charlewood and William Brome, 1588) 2.

[85] *An epistle of a Catholicke Young Gentleman, (Being for his Religion imprisoned)* (Doway, 1623) 8.

of."[86] Godefrid Raben simply promised to remain constant in Protestantism: "I will not depart from this pure doctrine and knowne trueth, neyther through joy nor sorrow, neyther through hunger nor miserie, neyther through good nor ill successe; but as before I have sayd, will abide constant to my end: whereunto God assist me with his holy Gospell." [87]

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, interfaith conversion posed different challenges than spiritual conversion. If spiritual conversion was affected by questions of agency (see chapter three) and by an emptying out of spiritual meaning (see chapter four), interfaith conversion raised issues about the very possibility and desirability of conversion. This was because interfaith conversion involved an exchange of religious identity, while religious identities themselves were still very much in the process of definition, formation and stabilization. Virtually all early modern texts quoted in this chapter exhibit concern over the solidity of denominational identity. Indeed, it was precisely the idea of the exchangeability of religious identity – or, in the words of our discoverer of the 29 sects, the "Dung-hill" of religious pluralization – that polemicists used to disparage denominations other than their own. The pamphleteer insisted that the "splendor" of the "Diamond" of Protestantism was in no way affected by the dunghill in which it had been cast, but this demonstrates above all the concern religious controversialists had about the steadiness of their own religious identity. It is ironic that in precisely this climate of perceived instability polemicists relied on interfaith conversion to invest their faith with unshakeable truth. Although it seemed a good strategy to publicize how religious enemies had come to see the light and the error of their own faith, the very fact of their exchange of religious identity was in itself disturbing.

The conversion texts discussed in this chapter reflect this concern over the destabilizing effect of interfaith conversion. The conversion sermons by Foxe and Hanmer appear to promote and celebrate conversion, but closer inspection of the homilies and of their intended audiences suggest that they served rather to ward off new conversions. Converts themselves met with the ambivalent appreciation of their change in different ways. Jews could be physically excluded from society and locked away in house for converts; others could experience forms of verbal

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[86] William Tedder, "The Recantation of William Tedder," in *The recantations as they were seuerallie pronounced by Wylliam Tedder and Anthony Tyrrell*, 7-23, 15.
[87] Raben, "A Recantation done on the second Sonday after Easter," sig. A2r.

exclusion and be branded as turncoats, Marranos or apostates. In addition, converts were suspected of opportunism and inconstancy. That these accusations were also made by converts' new coreligionists becomes clear from the statements by converts themselves, in which they emphasized the prominent place of repentant sinners in the gospel, argued that they wanted to be (re)admitted to Christ's flock, and averred that their conversion was genuine and marked the end of a period of inconstancy.

The next three chapters explore the ways in which the theatre reflected on interfaith conversion. The considerable number of plays that represent or refer to a variety of interfaith conversions – between Judaism, Islam and Paganism on the one hand and Christianity on the other, and between Protestantism and Catholicism – bear witness to the great dramatic appeal of interfaith conversion. At the same time, as will come become clear, the theatre was also a space par excellence for the construction and consolidation of religious identities. The tensions between the desirability of interfaith conversion and fear over its unsettling effect is perhaps nowhere more insightfully illustrated than in the imagined worlds of playwrights, where interfaith conversion was subject to strict narrative patterns that hardly any playwright wished to break.

CHAPTER 6
'False Runagates' and 'Superlunatical Hypocrites:' Securing Religious Identity on the Stage

The year 1576 is crucial in the history of the early modern English theatre. It marked the establishment of the first permanent playhouses and thus the beginning of the commercial presentation of plays in London, and it was also the year when the government decided to "suppress performance and publication of all drama of an overtly religious character."[1] Yet this type of religious drama did not include interfaith conversion plays.[2] Indeed, in the last two decades of the sixteenth century and the first part of the seventeenth century, playwrights showed a considerable interest in interfaith conversion. This was because it proved a highly suitable topic for the commercial theatre. To make a profit, playwrights needed to appeal to the taste of people from every stratum of society, and an effective way of achieving this was to address issues of current interest.[3] As is demonstrated in chapter five, if early moderns had not converted themselves, they had relatives or acquaintances who had adopted a new religion; they had heard or read about Christianizations, apostasies and recantations in sermons, news pamphlets, travel reports or personal statements of converts. This growing visible presence of interfaith conversion helps to account for the success of interfaith conversion as a dramatic subject.

Interfaith conversion had more to offer than just familiar or topical narratives, however. It presented ample opportunity for spectacle, suspense, farce and satire. Besides, it was a useful instrument to respond to the issues that I have introduced in the preceding chapters: concerns over the unsettling effect of conversion on the stability of religious identity. Interfaith conversion provoked theatre-makers and audiences to formulate answers to the questions of whether and under what conditions religious others could convincingly transform into coreligionists. Chapters six and seven explore the ways in which the theatre reflected on these questions. Both chapters show that dramatists were unwilling to depict a full exchange of religious identity as a genuine possibility. The

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[1] Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300-1660: Volume Three: Plays and Their Makers to 1576* (London: Routledge, 1981) xix.

[2] By "all drama of an overtly religious character" Wickham refers to Christian religious drama that presented re-enactments of the sacraments, such as mystery and miracle plays (115-116).

[3] Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 4.

present chapter does so by focusing on the ways in which plays condemned or ridiculed forms of interfaith conversion, including apostasy and the Christianization of unlikely converts, such as racial caricatures of Jews and Indian cannibals. The following chapter does this by showing that even the ostensibly positive and gratifying conversions of non-Christians to Christianity were either problematized or could not be shown as conclusive transformations of religious identity.

In response to the rapid and unsettling growth of religious pluralism, discussed in chapter five, playwrights made a concerted effort to confirm and consolidate religious otherness. They created binary distinctions in religious identity by contrasting benign, clever, reliable or attractive Christians with wicked, foolish, crooked or repulsive non-Christians. Indeed, theological or doctrinal difference hardly mattered in these constructions. Instead, playwrights reverted to ideological ideas of moral, cultural and physical dissimilarity to distinguish between (Protestant) Christians on the one hand and Muslims, Jews, pagans and Catholics, on the other. The religious identities of these believers were consolidated in depictions of interfaith conversion as artificial and disingenuous, for instance because their conversions were conditioned by worldly opportunism. We find this approach typically in works that thematize apostasy, such as Turk plays.[4] Martyr and saint's plays often stage vain attempts by pagans to enforce apostasy through torture. In so doing, these works celebrate Christian constancy and highlight the moral differences between cruel pagans and heroic Christians. In addition, playwrights ridiculed the idea of non-Christian characters embracing Christianity by presenting these conversions as highly implausible or downright preposterous. These non-Christian characters are always broad stereotypes of religious others, and by satirizing their (near-)

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[4] In early modern England the terms "Turk" and "Muslim" were interchangeable. Nevertheless, as Jonathan Burton observes, "[f]ew Englishmen would have recognized the terms 'Muslim' or 'Islam.' Islam was more commonly known as 'Mahumetanism' or 'Mohammedanism,' misnomers based upon the misconception that Muslims deify the prophet Muhammad in the same way Christians centralize Jesus Christ," in *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005) 260, n. 15. When I use the term "Turk" I am not referring to a nationality but to the broad early modern English conceptions of a Muslim. See Burton for a useful chronological list of plays (produced between 1579-1624) with Islamic characters, themes or settings, *Traffic and Turning*, 257-58. For a discussion of the role of the acting company in the development and success of the Turk play as a genre, see Mark Hutchings, "The 'Turk Phenomenon' and the Repertory of the late Elizabethan Playhouse," *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 16, 10.1-39 (2007), 11 July 2009 <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-16/hutcturk.htm>.

Christianizations playwrights confirmed that these others could never become plausible Christians. In this way, playwrights endorsed the understanding of religious identity as anchored in one's very being, and created a reassuring sense of religious stability, certainty, and clarity.

As will become clear throughout this chapter, physical marks play a major role in interfaith conversion and the construction of otherness. This is because circumcision and racial features and even the threat of rape prove effective means of illustrating and concretizing the elusive relationship between faith and identity, and of confirming religious identity as an inherent and unchangeable part of the self. It should be noted, though, that the way in which the body is employed in conversion discourse is not necessarily logically consistent. Circumcision is presented as an issue for Christians turning Turk. It is largely referred to as a source of bawdy jokes and ridicule, illustrating the emptiness of Islamic conversion rituals. Yet it also symbolizes the apostate's irrevocable damnation. Jews are often caricatured in racist terms, which renders their Christianizations ironic, but this only happens in the case of male Jews. In pagan-Christian conversion, the threat of rape of Christian women is used to illustrate the irrevocable and damning effect of apostasy on a woman's identity. Most Christian women heroically resist forced apostasy under the menace of sexual violence with the exception of one. In this case, it is precisely conversion in the form of entering the monastery and vowing celibacy that saves her soul.

The first part of this chapter is devoted to the ways in which playwrights portrayed apostasy. Although apostasy was commonly understood as a renunciation of Christianity, substituting Protestant for Catholic allegiance was, by Protestants, also seen as a form of apostasy. Indeed, the very first play that revolves around interfaith apostasy discusses Catholic-Protestant conversion. This is Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience* (1572). Woodes puts great effort in showing that the protagonist's renunciation of Protestantism in favour of Catholicism is not based on religious motivations but provoked by the wickedness of the Catholic characters. In the only other extant dramatization of Protestant-Catholic conversion, Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624), the Protestant who turns Catholic is presented as a highly unsympathetic character from the start. This is explained by the facts that his original faith was Catholicism and he had turned Protestant before the action of the play. Unlike Woodes's convert, he is grotesque and mocked for his inconstancy. Similar portrayals of apostates can be found in Turk plays, such as Thomas Kyd's *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* (1592) and Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* (1610). These works channeled and assuaged fears over renegades through theatrical plots that ridicule the Islamic ritual of circumcision. In addition, they present all conversion to Islam as insincere and as a form of treason that could

only result in damnation. As I will show, Turk plays furthermore reveal the intimate connection between early modern conceptions of national and religious identity. The other major category of plays that thematize apostasy consists of martyr and saint's plays, and include Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier* (1618) and James Shirley's *St Patrick for Ireland* (1639). These works are not so much interested in the spectacle of apostasy as in the spectacular display of pagans using (the threat of) torture in attempts to force Christian characters to give up their faith. I will pay special attention to the dramatic use of rape, which is portrayed as a violation of both bodily and Christian integrity. In this way, preserved chastity becomes a metaphor to portray Christian identity as an inalienable part of the self. In virtually all cases, both the impending rape and the turn to paganism are warded off by the heroic constancy of the Christians.

The second part of this chapter discusses the ways in which playwrights used Christianization to put religious others in their proper place and confirm their inherent otherness. An important category of works that follow this pattern is that of plays featuring Jews. As I have explained in the previous chapter, Jews were known to be God's chosen people whose Christianization should be welcomed, if only because their mass conversion would herald the Second Coming. However, the persistent stereotype of Jews as enemies of Christ and the early modern idea of Jewishness as a racial stigma inspired playwrights to ridicule Jewish characters embracing Christianity and to reinforce Jewish-Christian difference. In addition to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589) and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), I consider relatively unknown plays featuring Jews, such as James Shirley's *The Constant Maid* (1638). Christianization is also satirized in plays presenting native Indians who turn Christian or whose Christianization is thwarted, as in Philip Massinger's *The City Madam* (1632). As this play demonstrates, the difference between Christians and heathen natives is so obvious that the implausibility of Christianization could be used to make satirical points about issues outside the realm of interfaith conversion. The final category of conversion that is discussed in this section takes us back to inter-Christian polemics, that is, between Puritans and non-Puritans. Although Puritanism was not a religious identity based on a distinct faith, playwrights largely follow the principles of ridiculing Christianization that I have mentioned above. I discuss the way in which Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) uses the "conversion" of the Puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy to mock Puritans for their priggishness and sanctimony and thus confirm the metaphorical religious otherness of Puritans.

Part I: Mocking Conversion and Celebrating Constancy in Apostasy

In the preceding chapters of this thesis I have argued that during the early modern period, conversion increasingly came to be understood in interfaith terms at the expense of its spiritual denotations. Significantly, however, the meaning of the term apostasy did not change. That is to say, rejecting Christianity in favour of a non-Christian faith was considered an act of spiritual damnation, a form of relinquishing one's soul. It was one of the worst crimes imaginable, not only affecting the soul of the individual but society as a whole. For this reason, clerics wrote sermons and tracts that instructed people to recognize and prevent apostasy.[5] The fact that conversion from Christianity was commonly described in terms of spiritual apostasy teaches us that many early moderns appeared unwilling to conceive of a Christian's conversion to a non-Christian faith as a religiously motivated decision. Instead, these conversions were presented as opportunistic, regardless of the specific non-Christian religion that was adopted.

Interfaith conversion plays portrayed apostasy in such a way as to counter the idea that Christians could shed and exchange their Christian identity. Apostatizing characters are thus depicted as not being genuinely interested in the faiths they convert to, but only in the worldly benefits that ensue from the conversion, such as financial rewards or the fulfillment of erotic desire, or indeed their life, in case the convert is being tortured into apostasy. The apostasy itself is not so much portrayed as an exchange of religious identity, but rather as a rejection of Christ and a form of spiritual self-destruction. Conversely, the resisting of forced apostasy was celebrated as the ultimate victory of Christianity and confirmed Christian identity as an inherent part of the self. This is essentially the same for all non-Christian religions to which characters convert, but portrayals of apostasy to different faiths varied according to the probability of such apostasies happening in reality. For instance, converting to Judaism only existed as an imaginary concept. No playwright considered it interesting enough to fully dramatize it, but there is a number of works in which a character hints at a conversion from Christianity to Judaism in a metaphorical and often jocular way, such as in the phrase "or I will turn Jew." Because of the great unlikelihood of Christians embracing Judaism, this phrase was used to emphasize the

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[5] See, for instance, William Pemble, *Fiue godly, and profitable sermons concerning 1 The slaverie of sinne. 2 The mischiefe of ignorance. 3 The roote of apostasie. 4 The benefit of Gods service. 5 The Christians loue* (Oxford: John Lichfield, 1628) and John Meredyth, *The Sinne of Blasphemie* (London: Edward Allde, 1622).

improbability of a certain event.[6] More likely was the act of turning Turk, which was considered an alarming form of apostasy precisely because of the perceived large numbers of actual renegades.

Before we turn to stage renegades, it is worth looking at the only two plays that present apostasy as the exchange of Protestantism for Catholicism. Although this was technically not apostasy, the politicized religious climate of the early modern period encouraged polemicists to label conversions within Christianity as apostasy too.[7] The first is an early Elizabethan work that was the first early modern dramatization of interfaith apostasy and served as a model for the staging of spiritual agony of renegades who had turned Turk.[8] This is Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience* (1570-1581).[9] The other play is Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*. This political satire disguises its portrayal of historical Protestant-Catholic converts with the thin veneer of a chess match between black and white pieces, representing the Spanish and the English respectively. It was banned after a few performances precisely for its recognizable religio-political content. Despite the time span of almost half a century between the plays and many obvious differences in their subject matter, both works register the threat of the Catholic enemy ready to seize power over England. In both cases, this apprehension is informed by religio-political developments that gave the English the impression that the Protestant settlement established by Elizabeth I and continued by James I was less stable than it looked.

The Conflict of Conscience is set in an unnamed land that finds itself in the grasp of Rome. The precise date of first performance cannot be determined with certainty, but it must be between 1548 and 1581 and it is likely that it was in the early 1570s.[10] According to Celesta Wine, Woodes's play probably "had its place

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[6] Examples of plays in which this expression is used are Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Honest Whore, part I* (1604), John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Prophetesse* (1622), Shackerley Marmion's *Holland's Leaguer* (1631), James Shirley's *A Contention for Honour and Riches* (1632), and John Fletcher and James Shirley's *The Night-Walker* (1633).

[7] As Michael Questier notes, "the strict canonical meaning of apostasy is the defection of the baptised from the Christian faith." In addition, in the early modern period converts "tend to be called apostates by those they are leaving behind because the polemical tendency is for the controversial writer to identify as closely as possible the institutional structure to which he belongs with the true Church, visible and invisible," *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625*, 70.

[8] See also chapter three.

[9] For a discussion of this work as a spiritual conversion play, see chapter three.

[10] Celesta Wine, "Nathaniel Wood's *Conflict of Conscience*," *PMLA* 50.3 (1935): 661-678, 662.

in [a] stream of anti-Catholic literature," that was produced after "the Northern Rising of 1569, the excommunication of 1570, the coming of the first Catholic missionaries in 1574, [and] the menace of Mary, Queen of Scots."[11] Accordingly, *The Conflict of Conscience* portrays Catholic identity as a negative inversion of Protestant identity. It features a corrupt and degenerate Cardinal who calls Philologus, the Protestant protagonist, a "Heretike."[12] The play also contains abundant anti-Catholic diatribe, for instance when Sathan considers the Pope his "darlyng deare" (l. 87). Furthermore, Philologus wins a debate between him and the Cardinal on moot points of doctrine, such as transubstantiation and the legitimacy of the Pope. It is therefore not surprising that Philologus' embrace of Catholicism later in the play is not motivated by doctrinal but utterly pragmatic considerations.

The Conflict of Conscience takes pains to portray Philologus' adoption of a Catholic identity as the result of wicked Catholic scheming. Having rejected the authority of the Pope and denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, Philologus is imprisoned and tortured. In prison, the Cardinal promises Philologus freedom and worldly prosperity if he turns Catholic, and threatens to kill Philologus if he does not obey.

> I promise thee Philologus, by my vowed chastity,
> If thou wilt be ruled by thy friendes that be heere,
> Thou shalt abound in wealth and prosperitie:
> And in the Countrie chiefe rule thou shalt beare,
> And a hundred pounds more thou shalt have in the yeere
> If thou will this curtesie refuse,
> Thou shalt die incontinent, the one of these chuse. (ll. 1578-84)

This makes Philologus give in. Although the Cardinal rewards him with prosperity (which is somewhat surprising given his dubious oath on his "vowed chastity"), Philologus is unable to enjoy it because he is tormented by a bad conscience. To stress that Philologus' apostasy is not religiously motivated, the play puts his apostasy in spiritual, rather than in denominational or doctrinal terms: a "kill[ing]" of the "soull," and a change from believing in heart to taking "the faith of Christ, for lybertie to sinne" and losing faith altogether (ll. 1301-2,

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[11] Wine, "Nathaniel Wood's *Conflict of Conscience*," 662.

[12] Nathaniel Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience*, ed. Herbert Davis and F. P. Wilson (The Malone Society Reprints. Oxford: Oxford University Press1952), l. 1072.

2223). In one of the alternative endings, Philologus is accordingly punished with damnation.

A Game at Chess opens with a speech by Ignatius Loyola who expresses his determination to rule the world including a little "angle" that has not yet turned Catholic (1.1.1).[13] Error, who has been sleeping at the foot of the Jesuit priest, wakes up and recounts the dream he had about a chess match between their side and the English. The story of the chess match that follows revolves around the controversial negotiations over the proposed marriage between the Prince of Wales, Charles, and the Spanish Infanta, in the early 1620s. Like Woodes, Middleton thus addresses a dreaded – and, according to some, likely – possibility of a national conversion to Catholicism.

The most striking difference in approach to conversion between *The Conflict of Conscience* and *A Game at Chess* is in their portrayal of individual converts. While *The Conflict of Conscience* focuses on the spiritual crisis of a relatively sympathetic character after his enforced adoption of Catholicism, *A Game at Chess* targets the problem of opportunism and inconstancy in Catholic-Protestant conversion, epitomized in a notorious historical serial convert. Another difference between these plays reflects the change in concerns over religious (ex)change that form the basis to this thesis. This is the shift from spiritually oriented conversion, which raised questions about the meaning and role of election doctrine, represented in Woodes's play, to interreligious exchange that provoked alarm over the stability and exchangeability of religious identity, shown in Middleton's work.

In *A Game at Chess* we come across the Fat Bishop, easily recognizable as the serial convert Marc Antonio Duke Dominis, archbishop of Spalato (1566-1624). De Dominis was known for his shifting allegiance both to Rome and to the Church of England. Educated as a Jesuit, he became a bishop in Croatia but moved to England when he came into conflict with the Catholic Church for criticizing its organization in 1616. He was welcomed by James I, who made him Dean of Windsor. Disappointed by the heresy within the Church of England and knowing that his friend, the newly elected Pope Gregory XV, would facilitate a reintegration, he returned to Rome.[14] When Gregory died, De Dominis was imprisoned by the inquisition and said to have relapsed to Protestantism briefly

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[13] Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, ed. T.H. Howard-Hill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

[14] W.B. Patterson, "Dominis, Marco Antonio de (1560–1624)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Jan. 2008. 11 May 2012 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7788>.

before he died of natural causes in 1624.[15] *A Game at Chess* portrays De Dominis as a lecherous and gluttonous careerist who decides to "make a bonfire" of his "books immediately" when he learns that he can become the new Pope (3.1.47).[16] This involves a shift from his present employers, the White pieces, back to his original side of the black house. The prospect of becoming Pope is part of a scheme hatched by two black pieces who want to take revenge on him. Yet the Fat Bishop's downfall is brought about by his own attempt to capture the innocent White Queen. He is discovered by the White Bishop and the White King, apprehended and sent to the bag, the allegorical hell of the play. This is also the final destination of the White King's pawn, who is exposed as turncoat and impostor. As the Black Knight puts it, "this whiteness upon him is but the leprosy / of pure dissimulation" (3.1.259-60). Critics agree that the White King's pawn served to ridicule crypto-Catholicism in general and, more specifically, several of King James's courtiers, including Sir Toby Matthew (1577-1655) and Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Middlesex (1575-1645).[17] The latter was believed to side with the Spanish, as he opposed war against them.[18] After his conversion to Catholicism, Matthew was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1614. In 1623 he was sent to Spain to negotiate the Spanish match on behalf of James. Ben Jonson refers to Middleton's portrayal of De Dominis in his *The Staple of News* (1626) when a character responds to the question as to whether there are any new plays to be performed:

> Oh, yes.
> There is a legacy left to the King's Players,
> Both for their various shifting of their scene
> And dext'rous change o'their persons to all shapes
> And all disguises, by the right reverend
> Archbishop of Spalato.[19]

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[15] Patterson, "Dominis, Marco Antonio de (1560–1624)."

[16] De Dominis was known to be a prolific writer of defences of both the Catholic and the Protestant Church and personal statements of recantations.

[17] T.H. Howard-Hill, *A Game at Chess*, 89, note to 1.1.308, and Gary Taylor, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1789, note to l. 337.

[18] T.H. Howard-Hill, *A Game at Chess*, 89, note to 1.1.308.

[19] Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News,* ed. Anthony Parr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 3.2.200-205.

This passage clearly identifies the conversions and schemes of De Dominis and other characters with theatrical performance and acting.[20] This idea of apostasy as a form of acting recurs in Turk plays.

Like *The Conflict of Conscience* and *A Game at Chess*, Turk plays equate apostasy with expediency and describe it in terms of a destruction of the soul. In addition, the embrace of Islam was also seen as a rejection of Englishness. Possibly even more so than in the case of turning Catholic, turning Turk impinged on the sense of a stable national identity that was being cultivated at the same time. Various religious and political developments contributed to this intensified preoccupation with English nationhood. The threat that the Ottoman Empire posed to Christendom and the English nation became more acute and defined each time English renegade privateers entered into agreements with Turkish rulers. These apostates were reputed to side with the Turks against their own country and provide them with nautical and military intelligence.[21] The fictional world of the Turk play lent itself well to assuaging these concerns, promoting English national identity and channeling anxieties over its perceived instability.

The motif of the betrayal of one's native country through faith is standard in Turk plays featuring renegades or would-be renegades. An early example is Robert Wilson's morality play *The Three Ladies of London* (1581), in which the sly Italian merchant Mercatore threatens to become a Turk to dodge the penalty for not repaying his loan. The Judge acknowledges the law that waives the debts of people who turn Muslim but attempts to argue Mercatore out of converting and puts the latter's abandonment of "his faith" in the same category as the rejection of his "king" and "country." [22] In Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), the servant Gazet, too, presents the forsaking of faith and country as essentially the same thing:

> I would not be confined
> In my belief: when all your sects and sectaries
> Are grown of one opinion, if I like it
> I will profess myself – in the mean time,
> Live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva:

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[20] *The Staple of News* also criticizes Middleton's " poor English play" (3.2.209) by suggesting that the Count of Gondomar who served as a model for the Black Knight, wiped " his posteriors" with *A Game of Chess* (3.2.211).

[21] See Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen* 52, 59-63

[22] Robert Wilson, *The Three Ladies of London*, ed. H.S.D. Mithal (New York and London: Garland, 1988) ll. 1711-12.

I'm of that country's faith.[23]

What makes this passage even more disturbing is that it shows the ease with which, according to figures like Gazet, religions (and national loyalties) can be discarded and donned.

Another example of an apostatizing traitor of his country is presented in *A Christian Turned Turk*, which relates the fictionalized adventures of the historical English pirate John Ward and, to a lesser extent, the Dutch corsair Dansiker. The historical Ward was probably the best-known and most notorious renegade in England. After his conversion he became known under the name Issouf Reis, Captain Wardiyya, and various sources testify to the wealth Ward acquired with his exploits as a convert.[24] Daniel Vitkus has observed that although Ward was considered a despicable apostate who lived in disturbing affluence, the way he was portrayed in news pamphlets also revealed a certain admiration for his accomplishments.[25] The most striking difference between the historical and fictional Ward is that the post-conversion life of the former was filled with prosperity, while the latter soon dies a miserable death as a consequence of his apostasy. The manner in which Ward confirms his decision to apostatize reveals the great extent to which the expression "to turn Turk" had obtained the connotation of betraying one's king and country:

> What is't I lose by this my change? My country?
> Already 'tis to me impossible.
> My name is scandalled? What is one island
> Compared to the Eastern monarchy? This large,
> Unbounded station shall speak my future fame (scene 7. 179-83)[26]

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[23] Philip Massinger, *The Renegado,* ed. Michael Neill (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010) 1.1.32-37. See the next chapter for a further analysis of this passage.

[24] David R. Ransome, "Ward, John (c.1553–1623?)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online ed. ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 18 May 2012 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28690>.

[25] Daniel Viktus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 147.

[26]Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk*, *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England*: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk, *and* The Renegado, ed. Daniel Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 7. 179-83. It is interesting that even in trivializing the might of his country and expressing the fear over Ottoman domination, Ward himself by means of a synecdoche, assumes power over Scotland and Wales by referring to England as "one island."

After his conversion, when Ward's treacherous behaviour has turned against him and he himself is deceived by his wife and the Turks, the play emphasizes the great danger to Christianity that has been averted. Scorning the Turks for their ungratefulness toward him, he exclaims: "he that hath shown you / The way to conquer Europe – did first impart / What your forefathers knew not, the seaman's art" (16. 300-2). The play immediately assures the audience that eternal punishment can be the only consequence of his crime; he pronounces the words while dying from the stab wounds he has inflicted on himself.

What the above-mentioned examples of conversion as a form of betraying one's country have in common is that the apostatizing characters in question think lightly of their switch of nationality and religious identity. Although they themselves do not consider this a form of treason, it is precisely this indifference that render them unscrupulous traitors. By exchanging their nationality as if it were a mere commodity, these characters subvert any attempt at constructing a stable national identity.

Playwrights visualize the apostasy of renegades by showing their characters in Islamic dress after their turns to Islam. The two plays that make the most extensive use of clothing in portraying apostasy are Thomas Kyd's *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* and Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* (1610). Both works present their apostates wearing a turban, which, as Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar write, "served as a gauge of England's attitude to Islam" and "became the most dominant, the most feared, and the most awe-inspiring symbol of Islam."[27] With the stage renegade's alarming external metamorphosis of exchanging Christian dress for Muslim garments, Kyd and Daborne come dangerously close to suggesting that Christian identity was exchangeable. However, they also deploy heavy theatrical artillery to refute this suggestion. Dramatists adopt three specific strategies for this purpose. Their first is to show that their characters turn Turk not out of theological convictions but erotic desire or other opportunistic motivations. The second is to ridicule the circumcision ceremony, and the third to point out that shedding one's Christian identity is tantamount to the destruction of one's soul.

The renegades in both *Soliman and Perseda* and *A Christian Turned Turk* are presented as highly expedient. In the first play, the foolish braggart knight Basilisco abandons Christianity out of love for Perseda (though she is

[27] Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 214-215.

unattainable to him), but the opportunism of this motivation is soon exposed by an even more pragmatic rationale: turning Turk will keep his Turkish captors from murdering him. In *A Christian Turned Turk*, Ward's conversion to Islam is triggered by erotic urges. His object of desire is the Islamic Voada, sister to the captain of the janissaries in Tunis. She is an alluring beauty, but, as Burton observes, her "rampant sexuality exceeds the restrictions of a Muslim culture."[28] She encourages her sister to cuckold her husband and unashamedly expresses her sensual desire for a slave boy who is really a disguised woman; this renders Voada "morally depraved and unfit as an object of desire."[29] In personifying both the immediate cause of apostasy and the Islamic faith as an alluring and deeply degenerate woman, Daborne succeeds at once in castigating Islam and providing a plausible reason for turning Turk without justifying it.[30]

The second strategy of Kyd and Daborne to dispel the idea that Christian identity could be traded for Islam is to explore in detail the circumcision rite that Basilisco and Ward must undergo to become Muslims, in order to ridicule it. Although playwrights were often wide of the mark when it came to describing Islamic practices, it was widely known that Muslim men were circumcised, like Jews, and that a conversion to Islam required circumcision. In his *The Policy of the Turkish Empire* (1597), the English diplomat Giles Fletcher spends ten pages on the ceremony, expounding the similarities and differences between Jews and Muslims in their observation of it, and frequently condemning the rite, describing it as a garish show to prove one's courage.[31] Comparing the two religions, Fletcher shows a slight preference for the Jewish observance of the rite. He considers Turks and Jews equally "vaine in the idlenesse of their own imaginations," but he notes that Turks are much less deferential about

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[28] Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 134.

[29] Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 134.

[30] *A Christian Turned Turk* also presents an interesting variant on the erotic motivations for apostasy in the character of Benwash. Reversing the standard motive for turning Turk out of love or lust, the wealthy Jewish merchant Benwash explains that he "renounced" the "law of Moses" and "turned Turk" to prevent himself from becoming a cuckold, to "keep / [his] bed free from these Mahometan dogs" (6, 74-76). Yet the measure does not have the desired effect, Benwash is betrayed by his wife, and eventually killed. While dying, he declares his reconversion: "though I lived a Turk, I die a Jew" (16, 212-13). Benwash thus functions as an alternative parody of the expedient and inconstant renegade (who was already the butt of satire).

[31] Giles Fletcher, *The Policy of the Turkish Empire. The First Booke* (London, 1597) sigs. G3v, Hv-Hr.

circumcision than Jews, and use it as an excuse to revel.[32] In addition to a pretext for faithless debauchery, circumcision was also associated with the humiliation of emasculation. Some Turk plays seem to hint at this idea by featuring eunuch renegades, who, as sexually harmless slaves, served the harem of the sultan.[33] I agree that sometimes Turk plays implicitly present circumcision as an assault of one's manliness, but I would not go as far as some critics who speak of the "common conflation of conversion with circumcision and castration."[34] Contrary to what these scholars suggest, the many (joking) references to the gelding of these eunuchs are never directly equated with the circumcision they had undergone. In fact, the exchange by these stage eunuchs of a Christian for an

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[32] Fletcher writes: "the Jews did never bring any to be circumcised, but they did it with singular reverence and solemnity, and with great religion and devotion, esteeming it as a most holy and sacred ceremonie or sacrament: and as a parte of their divine service to be performed towards God, and using it as a visible and assured sign of his grace, love and favour towardes them: whereas the Turkes (although they repute and take it as a speciall marke of their religion, and of their duetie and service to MAHOMET their Prophet,) yet in the doing thereof they shewe little or no devotion: neyther doe they take it as a signification of any speciall benefite expected from God: but they marke it rather as an occasion to satisfie their owne delights and pleasures, by feasting, banqueting, and such like kinde of triumphes: and for an outward shew and bravery in a glorious ostentation of their sect, and to grace it in the eye of the worlde, more than for any holinesse or religion which they imagine or conceive in it" (sigs. G3v, Hv-Hr). It is significant that Fletcher here writes about Jews in the past tense, which suggests that he is only referring to Old Testament Jews. When English Christians wanted to reveal a positive side of Jews, they often referred to their common scriptural past and to its pre-Christian Jews that could not have been accused of refusing to accept Christ as the Messiah.

[33] See Lewis A. Coser, "The Alien as a Servant of Power: Court Jews and Christian Renegades," *American Sociological Review* 37. 5 (1972): 574-81, 580. *All's Well that Ends Well* alludes to the eunuch renegades when the old Lord Lafeu denounces the lords' treatment of Helen: "Do all they deny her? An they were sons of mine I'd have them whipped, or I would send them to th' Turk to make eunuchs of" (2.3.82-84). See also Matar for a discussion of the eunuch as "a stage type, serving the purpose of entertaining Britons while defining for them Muslim society in terms of castration and physical violence," *Islam in Britain*, 53.

[34] Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Catholic Prophylactics and Islam's Sexual Threat: Preventing and Undoing Sexual Defilement in *The Renegado*," *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9.1 (2009): 62-92, 68. Burton, too, claims that circumcision "[was] often confused with castration, *Traffic and Turning*, 153. Ania Loomba makes the same point in *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): "Christians viewed [circumcision] as a sort of castration" (126). Bindu Malieckal, " 'Wanton Irreligious Madness:' Conversion and Castration in Massinger's *The Renegado*" *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 31 (2002): 25-43, has a more nuanced approach to this issue, observing that "In *The Renegado* […] the convergence of circumcision and castration is minimal" (36).

Islamic identity often remains implicit and it is only through clues such as the mentioning of the eunuch's native country that the audience may assume that he has converted.[35]

Kyd and Daborne eagerly exploit the circumcision rite in their dramatic plots in order to point to the baseness and absurdity of their coreligionists' conversions to Islam and make much of the gaudiness and shallow nature that we also find in Giles Fletcher's description of the Turkish version of the rite. Basilisco's ludicrous account of the conversion ceremony reveals that he sees his change of faith hardly as a religious experience but as an endorsement of his prestige and power. He boasts that the Turks carried him on their shoulders, as they have "forehard of *Basiliscoes* worth" and that he is taken "in procession" to the Church, "[a]s [he] had been a second Mahomet."[36] He goes on to brag: "I, fearing that they would adore me for a God, / Wisely informed them that I was but a man" (4.2.16-17). Basilisco adds that the circumcision is followed by more display, inappropriately comparing himself to a towering Roman political figure and, ironically, also to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

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[35] Examples are Carazie in *The Renegado* and the clown Clem in Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West Part I and II*. Carazie is the only English character in the play and slave to Donusa, the niece of the Ottoman emperor. He reproachfully tells her that "he was made lighter / By two stone weight at least to be fit to serve you" (1.2.25-26). In a comic interlude, Carazie explains to the servant Gazet that his profession allows him to sleep with the beautiful Donusa, which prompts Gazet to want to become a eunuch too. The comic effect is intensified by the fact that despite the double entendres – he has, for instance, to part with "[a] precious stone or two" – Gazet remains completely ignorant of the physical sacrifice he has to make (3.4.42-58). Nevertheless, Gazet is aware of the physical consequences of a conversion to Islam. When his master asks him whether he would turn Turk, Gazet answers him in the negative: " No! – so should I lose / A collop of that part my Doll enjoined me / To bring home as she left it" (1.1.38-40). The remark is reminiscent of a joke one of the characters makes about the circumcision of Daborne's Ward. Referring to the painful operation, he suggests that Ward is unable to consummate his marriage and has to fall back on a passive role in the "Italian practice of anal sex" (Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays* 238). As the character says: "poor fellow, how he looks since Mahomet had the handling of him! He hath had a sore night at 'Who's that knocks at the backdoor?' Cry you mercy, I thought you were an Italian captain" (scene 13, 52-55). Jibes like these testify to the English sensitivity to the emasculating effect of circumcision. Like Carazie, Clem in *The Fair Maid of the West Part I and II* is an English servant who attempts to climb the social ladder in an Islamic country by becoming a eunuch. References to Clem's castration, too, are permeated with double-entendres. Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II*, ed. Robert K. Turner (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) 91-197.

[36] Thomas Kyd, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda*, in Frederick S. Boas, ed., *The Works of Thomas Kyd* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901) 161-229, 4.2.12-15.

They set me on a milke white Asse,
Compassing me with goodly ceremonies.
That day, me thought, I sat in *Pompeyes* Chaire,
And viewd the Capitoll, and was Romes greatest glorie. (4.2.26-29)

Basilisco furthermore endorses Giles Fletcher's assertion that the ceremony is also an occasion to show one's "bravery," though Basilisco's heroism is again ridiculed in his inappropriate and counterproductive imagery. He describes his circumcision as a "triall of [his] valiancie" and presents himself as a Christlike figure by hinting at the flagellation of Christ who was bound to a column for this purpose:

Amidst their Church they bound me to a piller
[…]
They lopt a collop of my tendrest member.
But thinke you *Basilisco* squicht for that?
Even as a Cow for tickling in the horne. (4.2.21-25)

A Christian Turned Turk also depicts the Turkish circumcision rite as highly ostentatious, mentioning in the stage directions that it involves "a confused noise of music, with a show."[37] Before the show begins, the chorus tells the audience that he wishes the rite was simple fiction and did not involve "the acts of men," referring to the historical renegade pirate John Ward on whom the play is based. He then adds that it cannot be staged in full due to the scandalous nature of the event. What follows is a dumb show. Ward enters in Christian apparel on an ass, and is then dressed in a robe and turban. He is sworn in on a head of Mahomet, upon which he jettisons his Christian identity by throwing away a cup of wine received from a Christian. The show ends with the departure of a richly clad Ward on the ass (8, d.s.). The chorus subsequently adds that he "forswears" his Christian "name" (we do not learn, however, what his new Muslim name is). However, it immediately comes to light that Ward deceived the Turks by slyly offering them the end of an ape's tail instead of his foreskin. This action is described by one of the characters as Ward "play[ing] the Jew" with the Turks, a pun on the stereotypical image of Jews as deceivers. In this way the circumcision rite is not only ridiculed, but also rendered utterly empty. The insincerity of Ward's conversion is furthermore illustrated by the fact that he is

[37] Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk*, in Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays* 149-231.

called a "false runagate" (13.27) by his Muslim fiancée when she is turning her back on him.

The revelation that Ward cheated at his circumcision does not mitigate the severity of his crime. To make absolutely clear that religious identity could not be exchanged, playwrights show, as a third strategy, that their characters' embrace of Islam, feigned or not, amounts to the perdition of their soul. In Ward's case, this moment of perdition is marked by suicide and anticipated by Ward's agonizing crisis of conscience.[38] In his dying words he curses the Ottoman Empire and expresses his wish for Christian unity and retaliation:

> May all your seed be damned!
> The name of Ottoman be the only scorn
> And by-word to all nations […]
> O may the force of Christendom
> Be reunited and all at once requite
> The lives of all that you have murdered. (16, 304-11)

Contrary to Ward, Basilisco, in *Soliman and Perseda*, does not undergo a spiritual crisis. This can be explained by the fact that he announces his reconversion to Christianity. However, this conversion is presented as rash and opportunistic, and ridicules his faulty understanding of conversion as an exchange of religions. Only a few lines after his description of his turn to Islam, Basilisco learns that Perseda is not available for him, as she has married her lover. This makes him decide that he "will be a Turke no more" (4.3.74). Not surprisingly, one of the characters reminds him of the permanent mark of his conversion. In admitting that this operation cannot be undone, Basilisco at the same time trivializes the operation: "Indeed I was a little cut in the porpuse [prepuce]" (5.3.5). In addition, Basilisco suggests that the "naturall meanes" by which has become a Christian again rescind the meaning of unnatural circumcision, an argument that was often used by historical repenting renegades.[39] According to Basilisco, he is supported by "the old Cannon," which "Saies very pretily: *Nihil est tam naturale, / Quod eo modo colligatum est:* / And so foorth" (5.3.16-19). This translates as "nothing is so natural as what in this way is bound together." Basilisco believes he is quoting a maxim from canon law, but he gives a misquotation of the correct maxim: "Nihil tam naturale est, quam eo

[38] See chapter three.
[39] See chapter six.

genere quidque dissolvere quo colligatum est."[40] This translates as "nothing is so natural as to dissolve a thing by the same kind of means by which it was bound together," and could be explained as "it is very natural that an obligation should not be dissolved but by the same principles which were observed in contracting it." Basilisco attempts to clarify the quotation by adding "So I became a Turk to follow her; / To follow her, am now returned a Christian" (5.3.20-21). The point seems to be that Basilisco has a shallow understanding both of canon law, which he fails to cite correctly, *and* of apostasy. After all, Basilisco believes that renouncing Christian identity is reversible, and, worse, as simple as returning to Christianity. From the observation of one of the characters that Basilisco is not wearing his "turkish bonnet" anymore, we learn both that Basilisco's embrace of Islam was also marked by change of costume and that this external transformation is shallow and reversible. As a punishment, Basilisco is slaughtered by the Turkish emperor.[41]

In Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* we find yet another approach to undermining conversion to Islam. At first, the play appears to introduce the most scandalous form of apostasy that has ever been presented on the early modern English stage, as the convert in question is not a shady pirate or a foolish figure but a virtuous Christian virgin who unexpectedly announces her voluntary embrace of Islam. However, it soon turns out that this conversion is feigned.[42] The character in question, Paulina, is at that moment still a captive of the viceroy of Tunis Asambeg, and simulates a desire to marry Asambeg who loves her desperately. As a favour Paulina asks for temporary reprieve for her brother and his fiancée who are about to be executed. This allows the couple and the other Christians to escape Tunis and thus ensure the happy end of the comedy. Indeed, this instance shows that counterfeiting conversion in itself was not necessarily condemned and could even be considered a profoundly Christian act if it was deployed for the Christian good.

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[40] Patrick Mac Chombaich De Colquhoun, *A Summary of the Roman Civil Law, Illustrated by Commentaries on and Parallels from the Mosaic, Canon, Mohammedan, English and Foreign Law*, vol. 4 (London: V. and R. Stevens and Sons, 1860) 47.

[41] Other stage characters who shift their religious allegiance to and from Christianity out of sheer opportunism and who are punished with death include: Ithamore in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Hircius and Spungius in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr.*

[42] Erroneously, Bernadette Andrea, in her *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), writes that Paulina "has been pressured into converting to Islam," 5. Andrea is also mistaken about Vitelli's religious constancy, as she notes that he, like his sister "also converts to Islam," 6.

As Jonathan Burton reminds us of the dramatization of apostasy in plays like *The Renegado*, *Soliman and Perseda* and *A Christian Turned Turk*,

> [the Turkish plays] tend to emphasize the 'staging' of apostasy. The plays call attention to the artificiality of transformation in repeated scenes of false conversion. Whereas Muslim women may be brought to Christianity in sincere acts of conversion, no representation of a Christian man or woman's genuine conversion to Islam exists in the canon. Instead, we repeatedly find Christians *acting* the part of the apostate.[43]

In fact, as we have seen in *The Conflict of Conscience* and *A Game at Chess*, this holds true not only for stage embraces of Islam but for other forms of apostasy, too. No stage apostasies are motivated by sincere considerations. According to Burton, by drawing attention to the artificiality of apostasy, plays "appropriate the analogy [between acting and apostasy] in the interest of defending the theater."[44] The theatre was often attacked by clergymen who argued "that imitation could lead to identification, that playing evil persons corrupted the actor who, in turn, became an agent of the devil, corrupting youthful minds."[45] Thus, Burton notes, by "separating a counterfeitable ritual from a sincere and damning change of heart," plays distinguished "performance from life."[46] I would argue, however, that this is not the only reason for presenting apostasy as false conversion. A more fundamental reason is that playwrights did not want to suggest that interfaith-conversions were possible as radical transformations of identity, as this would undermine the idea of religious identity, including Christian identity, as an inherent aspect of one's nature. For the same reason, and as we will see below, dramatists spent much effort praising religious constancy.

By celebrating constancy of faith playwrights supported the comforting conception of religious identity as securely anchored in persons. This approach is typical of martyr and saint's plays, works reviving traditions of pre-Reformation miracle drama and of sixteenth-century Protestant martyrdom. They feature martyrs, often saints, who remain steadfast under extreme violence that is aimed at making them renounce Christianity. Martyr and saint's plays go back to the

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[43] Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 30.
[44] Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 30.
[45] Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 29.
[46] Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 31.

religious spectacle of the medieval play, in which saints served as moral examples and their constancy as trigger of hoped-for instantaneous conversions. They also borrow from Protestant martyrologies, including John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*.[47] With their graphic emphasis on physical violence, and their portrayals of divine interventions, these works are the most spectacular of the interfaith conversion plays. Examples of martyr and saint's plays are: William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (1608); Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*; *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjurer* (anonymous, 1622); Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier* and James Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland.* Although these works, unlike Turk plays, hardly ever stage apostasies, their plots are based on anxieties over apostasy. They typically feature Christian characters who are being tortured for refusing to submit themselves to pagan deities or for having rejected paganism in favour of Christianity. Thus, if Turk plays in their stagings of apostasy focus on the weakness of its Christian characters, martyr and saint's plays spotlight Christians as heroes of religious constancy. By the same token, the excessive violence employed by pagans serves to portray them as dangerous religious others.

A strikingly common form of torture in martyr and saint's plays is rape or the threat of rape.[48] Given the cardinal importance of virginity in female sanctity, it is not surprising that we find forms of sexual abuse in works that stage the fortunes of female saints and martyrs. As Corinne Saunders notes, "because the lives of the female saints depend upon the intersection of virginity and holiness, the possibility of rape takes on enormous symbolic import, and the figure of the saint threatened with rape focuses the question of female holiness and the cult of virginity."[49] In Protestantism, virginity acquired a different importance. Marriage

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[47] Dorothea, in *The Virgin Martyr,* and Justina, in *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjurer*, are mentioned in the first volume John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (London: John Daye, 1570) 115, 129; Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier* alludes to this work when King Genzerick tells his nobleman: "unclaspe that booke, / Turne o're that Monument of Martyrdomes: / Read there how Genzerick has serv'd the gods, / And made their altars drunke with Christians blood," Henry Shirley, *The Martyred Soldier* (London: J. Okes, 1638) sig. B2v.

[48] A similar observation is made by Lucy Munro, who discusses *The Virgin Martyr*; *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjuror*; *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*; *The Martyred Soldier* and *St. Patrick for Ireland* in the light of their performance at the Red Bull theatre. However, she does not explain the connection between (potential) conversion and this form of sexual violence. Lucy Munro, "Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages," *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007) 186-89.

[49] Corinne J. Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 120.

and subsequent childbearing becoming the chief goals of life for a Protestant woman, her deflowering – by her husband – marked the important transition from virgin to wife and mother. According to Theodora Jankowski, "the premarital virgin woman was, thus, a transitional stage – currently the property of one man (her father), she was eventually to become the specifically sexual property of another man (her husband)."[50] In this context, rape would subvert this paradigm and was a form of theft. Associating rape with coerced apostasy, these plays conceptualize forced conversion as an assault causing irreparable damage physically and, as a violation of chastity, also spiritually.

Models of rape narratives with a pagan context were, moreover, readily available. Playwrights could draw from a vast amount of popular and much-adapted classical literature that fostered early modern associations of paganism with (attempted) rape, including Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Livy's *History of Rome* where pagan deities and mortals ravish women. Indeed, the (Roman) pagan settings of the literature that prominently features rape, such as Thomas Heywood's tragedy and Shakespeare's poem both entitled *The Rape of Lucrece*, as well as *Titus Andronicus*, testify to the early modern conceptions of rape as a particularly heathen and unchristian act of otherness.

In Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*, which relates the martyr's death of Dorothea, a character based on the fourth-century Saint Dorothea of Caesarea who became a victim of the Diocletian persecution, Dorothea's body is repeatedly in danger of violation.[51] Sapritius, the Governor of Caesaria, orders his son Antoninus to "make her" his "Whore." (4.1.75). Antoninus refuses because he is a secret admirer of Dorothea, which earns him the scorn of his father. Sapritius' second attempt at commanding a subordinate to ravish Dorothea is equally futile. For this reason, a British slave is ordered to molest Dorothea. The slave, however, considers the act bestial and refuses too. This particular refusal is doubly effective, as it also serves to contrast "British" civil masculinity with unrestrained pagan savagery. When Sapritius has asked for ten slaves to be called in to carry out the cruelty, he suddenly faints, and Dorothea is

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[50] Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) 11-12.

[51] Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr* in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964-70) 365-480. As Holly Pickett notes, the play is based on Protestant as well as Catholic accounts of Dorothea's fortunes, including John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and the Catholic *Flos Sanctorum*. Holly Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*" *SEL* 49.1 (2009): 437-462, 439. See also Julia Gasper, "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*," *RES* 42. 165 (1991):17-31.

finally saved from rape. Dorothea's near-rape is echoed in *The Martyred Soldier*. This play presents the oppression of Christians by Vandal, while loosely basing itself on the fifth-century persecution of Catholic Christians by the Arian Christian Vandal King Hunneric.[52] In this play we come across the near rape of Victoria, the wife of Bellizarius. When the latter is imprisoned for turning Christian, Victoria follows him in his conversion and both are tormented to death for their apostasy. The Vandal King also tries to have two camel drivers rape Victoria in front of her husband's eyes, but her honour is miraculously saved when they turn mad and blind respectively. Both *The Virgin Martyr* and *The Martyred Soldier* may have taken their cue from *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (1608). This work is set in fourth-century Kent, ruled by the Roman emperors Diocletian and Maximian (Dioclesian and Maximinus in the play).[53] In this play, the Roman emperor Maximinus says he will "prostitute" the "body" of the Christian Queen he has just captured "to some slave" (1.1.191). In the same play, the Christian captive Winifred expresses her fear of being raped: "Let not my body be a villain's pray; / But since I am a queen and spotless virgin, / Let me choose my death" (4.3.87-89). A less violent attempt at ravishing a Christian virgin is presented in *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Coniurer* (1622).[54] Justina, the Christian princess of Antioch, is almost sexually assaulted by the pagan conjurer Ciprian. He develops a lust for Justina and tries to rape her when he spots her asleep. He does so by enlisting the help of devilish spirits, but her faith, represented by a prayer book she is holding in her hands, protects her against an actual assault. As Ciprian's disappointed spirit-servant notes, "Her prayers have prævaild against our spells" (5.2.1799). An interesting fabulous variant to the staging of near-rape can be found in John Kirke's *The Seven Champions of Christendome* (1635). In this play, the daughters of the King of Macedon are saved from being deflowered by the giant Brandon when each of them is "converted to

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[52] Arthur Melville Clark, *Thomas Heywood: Playwright and Miscellanist* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1931), notes that it is "doubtful" if the author of this play "had any other source than a very hazy knowledge of the Vandal persecution under Hunneric (A.D. 477-84) of the African Catholics; what he owes to Procopius *De Bello Vandalico* or to Victor Uticensis *De Persecutione Vandalica* or to any of the post-classical historians is negligible," (295).

[53] William Rowley, *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, ed. Trudi Darby (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002 [1638]).

[54] *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjurer*, ed. Rebecca G. Rhoads (London: The Malone Society, 1930). *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjurer* is a manuscript of the MS. Egerton 1994 collection.

a Swanne" by their "prayers."[55] The use of the word "converted" could either suggest that they simultaneously embrace Christianity at this moment, or anticipate their Christianization at the end of the play when their father accepts Christianity and they miraculously return to their human forms. I will discuss these conversions to Christianity in closer detail in the next chapter.

St. Patrick for Ireland is the only play that presents an actual rape. The heathen girl Emeria has her virginity violently taken from her by the evil brother of her lover.[56] He manages to force himself on her by posing as a God that Emeria venerates. When she discovers the deity intends to rape her, it is too late. Later, Emeria reveals the incident to her lover and attempts to "cure" herself "of her dishonour" by trying to kill herself (4.1.172). The play endorses the misogynist idea that the rape is condemnable only for making Emeria unfit for marriage. As her lover remarks, a "cruell man forbid my happinesse" (5.1.246). Yet Emeria's honour is saved by a conversion. Patrick seals her fate proclaiming her the first Irish nun.[57]

By drawing parallels between rape and forced apostasy, martyr and saint's plays suggest that coerced renunciation of Christianity equals a violation of a woman's greatest virtue. In the same vein, withstanding the threat of rape, Justina, Dorothea and Victoria prove their religious constancy in the most powerful way a female character is capable of. In the case of Victoria, this is particularly effective, as it also serves to prove her firmness in her newly adopted faith in Christ. An actual victim of rape, Emeria is a special case in point. Shirley here combines a Protestant perception of virginity, the rapist "stealing" a potential wife, with a Catholic solution, conversion in the form of vowed chastity.[58]

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[55] John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, ed. Giles Edwin Dawson (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1929) 5.2560.

[56] The Celtic pagans in this play are devoted to Irish and Roman deities. Referring to two characters impersonating idols, one of the pagan characters in this play emphasises their religious opportunism: "these be new Dieties, made since yesterday; / We shift our gods, as fast as some shift trenchers," James Shirley, *St. Patrick for Ireland*, ed. John P. Turner (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979) 2.2.1-2.

[57] For an analysis of Christianizations that are presented as genuine and authentic, like Emeria's, see the next chapter.

[58] For an insightful discussion of the role and functions of Catholicism and Protestantism in *St. Patrick for Ireland* see Alison Searle, "Conversion in James Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland* (1640)," *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*, ed. Lieke Stelling, Harald Hendrix and Todd M. Richardson (Brill: Leiden, 2012) 199-223.

Part II: Stigmatizing Others in Satirical Depictions of Christianization

Portraying religious identity as an essential part of one's being could also be accomplished in presentations of conversions *to* Christianity. If stage apostates focus on the self and emphasise that Christianity is an inalienable part of one's self-identity, satirical depictions of Christianizations target religious alterity and confirm that religious others are incapable of shedding their non-Christian identity. By hinting at the (possibility of) Christianization of broad stereotypes of Jews, Muslims or pagans, playwrights achieve several goals at once. These portrayals of Christianization are coated with a thick layer of parody and thus become a source of laughter. In addition, they emphasize the invariable and absolute alterity of non-Christians, as well as the impossibility of conversion as an unsettling transformation of identity.

We find satirical depictions of Christianization typically in drama featuring Jews. The Jew was the classic religious other against which Christians had always defined themselves, yet at the same time a number of important factors promoted the idea of Judeo-Christian kinship and encouraged Christians to celebrate the baptism of Jews. Playwrights responded to this contradiction by depicting stereotypical Jews as essentially inconvertible. Christians were conscious of the profound relevance of Judaism for both the Christian past and its future. For instance, Hebrew was recognized as God's language, which prompted a great interest in Judaic studies.[59] This interest was, moreover, inextricably linked with the conviction that their apocalyptic mass conversion would herald the Second Coming. [60] It is therefore not surprising that conceptions of Jews based on readings of the Old Testament are relatively sympathetic, and certainly more so than those inspired by interpretations of the New Testament. This was already the case for the depictions of Old and New Testament stories in medieval miracle plays. These plays undeniably portray Old Testament Jewish characters, such as Noah, Moses and Daniel as Jews, but also as typological champions of the Christian faith. By contrast, Christ's Jewish contemporaries, notably Judas, are both comical and demonic figures.[61] Their diabolical image was informed by the idea that Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. As I have shown in chapter five, their devilish nature was,

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[59] David Katz writes that "by the mid-seventeenth century, after much discussion, most Englishmen agreed that God spoke Hebrew." David S. Katz, *Philo-semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 44.

[60] See also chapter five on this point.

[61] See Harold Fisch, *The Dual Image: The Figure of the Jew in English and American Literature* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971) 15-20.

moreover, captured in proto-racial terms, which problematized a credible conversion to Christianity.

Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1592) exploits the image of the abhorred Jew whose ancestors were deemed responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. The name of its Machiavellian protagonist Barabas, for instance, was a reminder of the Jews' resolution to have Christ put to death instead of the convict Barabbas. Moreover, the indirect participation of the Jewish crowd in the crucifixion was eagerly construed as a direct responsibility – an understanding alluded to by the speaker of John Donne's Holy Sonnet 11: "spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side, / Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee [...] My Sinnes, which passe the Jewes impiety: / They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I / Crucifie him daily, being now glorified."[62] A Christian belief developed that Jews, as crucifiers of Christ, also ritually nailed infants Christians to crosses. This idea is invoked by Friar Jacomo when he learns that Barabas has committed a horrific crime: "what, has he crucified a child?" (3.6.49). *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice* both allude to the curse that Jews were said to have called upon themselves by insisting on the crucifixion of Christ. At the beginning of *The Jew of Malta* the Governor of Malta decides to levy on the property of the Jews to repay the Turks ten years of tribute money. When Barabas objects, a Knight retorts:

> If your first curse fall heavy on thy head
> And make thee poor and scorned of all the world
> 'Tis not our fault but thy inherent sin.[63]

Editors of the play have observed that the Knight here hints at the moment the Jews call for the crucifixion as described in Matthew 27:25: "then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." A reference to the same biblical text is made in *The Merchant of Venice* when Shylock, having learned that he has been robbed by his daughter, exclaims: "the curse never fell upon our nation till now" (3.1.77-78). The Geneva Bible points out that the retribution extended to contemporary Jews, glossing Matthew's verse: "if his death be not lawful, let the punishment fall on our heads and our children's, and as they

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[62]John Donne, *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, ed. Charles M. Coffin (New York: The Modern Library, 2001) 263. The actual purpose of the speaker in this sonnet is to show himself guiltier than the Jews as crucifiers of Christ.

[63] Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe, Doctor Faustus *and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 1.2.108-10.

wished, so this curse taketh place to this day."[64] It has been observed, moreover, that the courtroom scene in *The Merchant of Venice* is reminiscent of the crucifixion.[65] Antonio serves as a Christlike figure, willing to sacrifice himself for the good of his neighbour, while Shylock embodies the bloodthirsty Jewish nation demanding the death of Christ when he says: "my deeds upon my head!" (4.1.202). A similar idea is evoked when Shylock states in an aside "I have a daughter – / Would any of the stock of Barabas / Had been her husband, rather than a Christian," alluding to the Jewish preference of Barabbas to Christ (4.1.291-93).[66]

The reluctance among playwrights to stage genuine Christianizations of their Jewish characters is inextricably connected not only with their perception of Jews as the enemies of Christ, but also with their understanding of Judaism in terms of somatic features. These were, of course, not removed by baptism. A case in point where the proto-racial idea of Judaism converges with a theological understanding is *The Insatiate Countess* (1607), which portrays its supposed Christianized Jew as a typical redhead. Early moderns would have associated red-headed people with Judas, as this is how he was characterized in North-European late medieval art.[67] The character in question in *The Insatiate Countess* is suggestively named "Rogero" (hinting at the word "*roggio*," Italian for russet or reddish) and is said to wear a red beard.[68] To ensure that nobody misses the similarity between Rogero and the betrayer of Christ, Rogero's wife remarks that her husband's beard could be a sign of his treacherousness: "I ever thought by his red beard he would prove a Judas" (2.2.36). Another example of a physical feature that typified stage Jews was a hooked nose. Alluding to the distinct shape of his nose, Hornet's niece in *The Constant Maid* says that her uncle resembles "a Hawke," and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* is said to be "bottle-nosed," something

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[64] Quoted in Jay L. Halio, ed., *The Merchant of Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 162.

[65] Barbara K. Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* The Merchant of Venice*: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Sylvan Barnet (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 33-54, 49.

[66] Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*" 49.

[67] See Ruth Melinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, vol.1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 147-59, especially 150-54 on Judas's red hair.

[68] Melchiori does not seem aware of the connection between red hair and Judaism, as he only observes the Italian and not the "Jewish" significance of Rogero's name, p. 53.

for his slave Ithamore to poke fun at: "I worship your nose for this," and "God-a-mercy, nose!" (2.3.174, 4.1.24).[69]

It is perhaps no coincidence that the conversions, or near-conversions of Barabas, Rogero and Hornet, Jewish characters that are explicitly associated with a racial Judaism, have strong ironic overtones. Their exterior marks of Judaism not only stress their caricatural status, but also heighten the preposterousness of their existing or announced Christianizations. The miserly Hornet in *The Constant Maid* is fooled into believing that he will be knighted and summoned to the king. The trick enables the other characters to have Hornet's niece marry the gallant Playfair, which Hornet objects to. When Hornet learns that he has been deceived, he "converts" and approves of the marriage. Yet Hornet's genuine change of heart primarily serves to stress the implausibility of a similar change happening to Jews in general, as Playfair's response to Hornet's conversion illustrates: "I'me glad of your conversion; Ye are the first / Jew that in my remembrance has turn'd Christian" (sig. I3v).

Although Shylock's forced conversion at the end of *The Merchant of Venice* does not have the same ironic overtones as those of the Jewish characters mentioned above, it does fit the general pattern of dramatic Christianizations that cannot be taken seriously as plausible transformations of identity. The moral contrast between Shylock and the Christian characters is not so much endorsed by the play itself – after all, *The Merchant of Venice* includes various moments where the binary distinction between Jews and Christians is exposed as an ideological construction – but by the Christian characters.[70] They describe Shylock as a devil and show their hatred of him in a number of mocking remarks in which they unwittingly anticipate his conversion. The purport of these comments is that Shylock's conversion to Christianity is preposterous due to his inherent radical otherness. Thus, when Antonio has managed to strike a deal with Shylock, Antonio jeers at him: "Hie thee, gentle Jew. / The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind" (1.3.174-75), punning on the double meaning of the words "gentle/gentile" and "kind." A similar idea is evoked in Solario's words when he notices the arrival of Shylock's coreligionist Tubal: "Here comes another

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[69] James Shirley, *The Constant Maid* (London: J. Raworth, 1640) sig. Dv.

[70] One can think of Shylock's famous "hath not a Jew eyes?" speech, which emphasizes the basic humanity shared by Christians and Jews alike; the moment when Portia, in the guise of Balthasar, enters the courtroom and asks "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.169). In addition, while it is precisely Shylock's cruel demand for Antonio's flesh that some of the Christians associate with his Jewishness, Shylock makes painfully clear that there is essentially no difference between his buying of Antonio's flesh and the fact that the Christians own slaves which they abuse.

of the tribe. A third cannot be matched, unless the devil himself turn Jew" (3.1.73-74). These deriding comments are not fully countered by Shylock's actual Christianization because this conversion is presented in such as way that it still undermines the idea that Shylock will convincingly transform into a Christian. Indeed, the absurdity of this idea is accentuated in the way in which Shylock's forced baptism is stipulated. Antonio states that Shylock must "presently become a Christian" (4.1.382). In other words, rather than attempting to embrace the tenets of Christianity, Shylock must radically and instantaneously turn into a Christian. The conversion itself or Shylock's post-conversion identity are not staged,[71] but his reluctant acceptance of the stipulation, as well as his comment that he is "not well" suggests that Shylock will not work up the enthusiasm or desire that is necessary to convincingly embrace Christianity (4.1.392).

In addition to a number of genuine and credible Christianizations of Muslim characters – I will discuss these in the next chapter – there is one example of an ironic Christianization of a Muslim that repudiates these conversions as convincing transformations. Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* presents a comical near-conversion of an evil and stereotypical Turk to Christianity which serves to mock the Turks. The near-convert in question is Asambeg, the wicked viceroy of Tunis. He is falling under the spell of the virtuous Christian virgin Paulina whom he is holding captive. Ironically, he perceives her railing at his cruelty and perverted religion as "angelical sounds" and feels that she is "tak[ing] possession" of his "soul" (2.5.132, 134). Besides, Asambeg notices "something" in her "that can work miracles" and even "dispose and alter sexes" (2.5.149-51). The next moment, he expresses his desire to be her "nurse" (2.5.152) and a "woman" (2.5.153) until he can marry her. Asambeg's "unnatural" behaviour mirrors the precarious position of the Christian gentleman Vitelli who is falling in love with the dangerously seductive Muslim woman Donusa, who will later urge him to turn Turk. Although Pauline is a chaste and Christian foil to Donusa, both women thus embody the irresistible appeal of faith. Notwithstanding Paulina's opportunity to make a new convert to Christianity, Asambeg's potential Christianization is portrayed as a perversion of gender, an emasculation and therefore as unnatural. The near-conversion of

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[71] Michael Radford, in his 2004 film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (featuring Al Pacino as Shylock) gives a glimpse of what he thinks a post-conversion Shylock would look like and how he would be treated. By showing how Shylock is locked out of the synagogue by his former coreligionists, Radford makes the point that his forced conversion above all implies social rejection and isolation. Michael Radford, dir. *The Merchant of Venice*, perf. Al Pacino, Movision, 2004. Film.

Asambeg thus confirms that a full transformation of what the English perceived as a typical Muslim into a Christian was seen as ludicrous.

Asambeg's farcical near-conversion is in line with the other portrayals of male Turks as grotesque and repulsive in *The Renegado*. Donusa describes her Muslim suitor Mustapha, for instance, as having a "wainscot face" – that is, "resembling the oak used for paneling: hard, dark and perhaps wrinkled or scarred"[72] –, a "tadpole-like complexion" and as looking like "a bugbear to fright children" (3.1.50, 60). She moreover puns on the idea of conversion by suggesting that he can transform into a new person with the help of a French tailor: "get me some French tailor / To new create you; the first shape you were made with / Is quite worn out" (3.1.57-59). As Michael Neill notes, "France was regarded by the provincial English as a centre of (often effeminate) fashion."[73] Donusa's insulting language thus echoes Asambeg's near-conversion as a near-emasculation.

In addition to Jews and Muslims, a third group of non-Christians whose Christianization was ridiculed on the stage was that of the native New World pagans. The proselytism of the indigenous peoples in Asia and the Americas is a topic in *The Staple of News* and *The City Madam*. Both works point to the radical otherness of native Americans and their references to Christianization only serve satirical purposes. In the first play it is placed in the context of other dismissive allusions to interfaith conversion. The second focuses on the reformation of covetous London merchants and aligns the barbaric Satanism of pagan Virginians with the barbarity of the greedy London mercantile class.

Jonson's satire *The Staple of News* takes a sceptical approach to interfaith conversion in general and the Christianization of New World natives in particular. Its plot revolves around a newly established news agency. Certain current affairs that are brought up pertain to the conversion of native people in Asia and America, such as a customer's inquiry into news from the Indies. He asks whether any "miracles" have been performed "in Japan by the Jesuits, or in China."[74] Around the time Jonson wrote his satire, various Jesuit reports circulated, relating the sufferings members of the Society had undergone while attempting to make converts in Japan.[75] Anthony Parr reminds us that accounts

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[72] Neill, ed., *The Renegado*, 153, note to l. 48.

[73] Neill, ed., *The Renegado*, 153, note to l. 57.

[74] Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News*, ed. Anthony Parr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 3.2.153-54.

[75] See, for instance, *The theater of Iaponia's constancy in which an hundred and eighteene glorious martyrs suffered death for Christ, in the yeare of our Lord 1622*, trans. William Badduley (Saint-Omer: English College Press, 1624); and Pedro Moregon, *A briefe relation of the persecution*

of "wonderworking" Jesuits closer to Britain were the butt of John Gee's popular pamphlet *The Foot out of the Snare* (1624).[76] The pamphlet retells and disparages a range of miracle stories and does so "for the better discovery of the impious tricks and devices of the Priests and Jesuites, and that all who meet with any of their moderne bookes […] may hoot at them for most abominable impostors and lyers."[77] The customer in *The Staple of News* is told that there is no news about the Jesuits in Asia but the clerk of the office informs him of other conversion tidings:

> we hear of a colony of cooks
> To be set ashore o'the coast of America
> For the conversion of the cannibals,
> And making them good, eating Christians (3.2.155-58)

The clerk evokes the ludicrous but humorous image of the conversion of cannibals to Christianity by means of eating its followers, with Christians serving as a kind of magic pills that would cure cannibals of their paganism. Parr puts forward as possible sources for this passage William Wood's sketch of the Mohawks as cannibals in *New England's Prospect* (1634), John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia* (1624), which reports the killing and eating of a savage by the colony in Virginia during a famine, and with Rabelais's Gargantua who dispatches "six Pilgrims in a sallad."[78] *The Staple of News* thus satirizes proselytism in the colonies, emphasizing the savage nature of the American Indians by referring to their cannibalism and by comically rendering it as a form of conversion, suggesting that the Indians cannot really be cured of it.[79]

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lately made against the Catholike Christians, in the kingdome of Iaponia diuided into two bookes (Saint-Omer: English College Press, 1619).

[76] Parr,ed., *The Staple of News*, note to ll. 153-54, 168.

[77] John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare* (London, 1624) 25.

[78] Parr, ed., *The Staple of News*, 168, note to ll. 157-58.

[79] That the Indians' capacity for conversion was subject to debate is illustrated in *Good Newes from Virginia Sent to the Counsell and Company of Virginia, resident in England* (London, 1613) by the pro-conversion clergyman and colonist Alexander Whitaker, also known for his evangelization of Pocahontas. Having listed numerous "barbarous" traits – the Indians allegedly sacrificed their children, for instance, and "esteeme it a virtue to lie, deceiue and steale as their master the divell teacheth them" – Whitaker explains that the Indians are nonetheless capable of conversion and should be won over to the Christian faith (24). "One God created us," Whitaker writes, and "if any of us should misdoubt that this barbarous people is uncapable of such heavenly mysteries, let such men know that they are farre mistaken in the nature of these men" (25).

The Staple of News' skeptical approach to the evangelization of American Indians forms the climax of a range of other scornful remarks about interfaith conversion. When one of the characters wonders about the religion of the niggard Pennyboy Senior, another concludes: "no certain species sure. A kind of mule. / That's half an Ethnic, half a Christian" (2.4.56-57). Elsewhere, one of the clerks of the agency is accused of "chang[ing] sides" because he only reports Catholic news as a compensation for the generally Protestant coverage. The same clerk later reads the news from Constantinople, where

> the grand Signor [the Sultan of Turkey]
> Is certainly turned Christian, and to clear
> The controversy 'twixt the Pope and him,
> Which is the Antichrist, he means to visit
> The Church at Amsterdam this very summer,
> And quit all marks o'the beast. (3.2.142-46)[80]

The issue of whether the "Pope" or the "Turke" is "the truer or greater Antichrist" was part of a wider apocalyptic debate on the origin nature and purpose of the Antichrist.[81]

In Philip Massinger's comedy *The City Madam* the idea of the conversion of native Virginians is also deployed for satirical purposes. However, it should be noted that the "Indians" and potential converts in this play are dressed up English characters whose disguise is part of a scheme to teach their acquaintances a lesson. They render Virginians as exceedingly cruel and, as such, impervious to Christianity. The plot of the Indians ties in with the play's major theme, which is the moral correction of its decadent major characters. Thus, the wealthy merchant Sir John Frugal forges a plan to make his brother, the spendthrift and hypocritical Luke, and his arrogant and materialistic wife and daughters see the error of their ways. He sends a message of his retirement into a monastery in Louvain, leaving his family and possessions in charge of Luke. Yet like the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, Sir John returns disguised to oversee Luke's conduct in secret. An additional request from John to his brother is that he admits three Indians from the Virginian colony to his household and attempts to

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[80] The "Marks o'the beast" is a quotation from Revelation 16.20 refers to the "distinguishing marks of the damned." Parr 168, note to l. 146.

[81] See Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, chapter 2, esp. 113-18.

convert them to Christianity. These exotic visitors, are, in fact, Sir John himself and the two rejected suitors to his daughters.

Unlike Jonson's Indians above, Massinger's counterfeit Indians ultimately do not so much serve to distinguish between native otherness and Christian English self as between Christian piety and English mercantile materialism. The play draws parallels between the latter category and the satanic savagery of the Virginians. Sir John, in his Indian disguise, tells Luke the principle of their heathen faith is to worship the Roman god of riches, "There being no religion nor virtue / But in abundance, and no vice but want, / All deities serve Plutus." [82] The Indians' egotism and greed appeals so much to Luke that he wants them to enlighten him further. The irony of the situation is enhanced by the fact that Luke puts his desire in terms of a conversion. To him the Indians are "learned Europeans" who can teach the English, who are "worse / Than ignorant Americans," more of their "sacred principles" (3.3.126-8). When Luke later, in a soliloquy, expresses his determination to increase his riches by fleecing the poor, he concludes by forswearing Christian piety: "Religion, conscience, charity: farewell / To me you are words only, and no more" (4.2.131-2). In the next act, Luke suits the action to the word. Upon the chief Indian's remark that he is still looking for two Christian virgins and a married Christian woman to be sacrificed to the devil, Luke, still unaware who he is talking to, suggests to send his brother's daughters and wife to Virginia. In the final scene, the Indians use their "magic" to stage a number of scenes to move Luke to repentance, first a dumb show of Orpheus in the Underworld, then a parade of apparitions of people who have been wronged by Luke and are asking for mercy. The shows do not have the desired effect and Luke remains unmoved. Finally, Sir John, still in guise, produces the portraits of the two rejected suitors to his daughters, upon which his daughters break into tears of repentance for their haughty behaviour towards them. Witnessing how the portraits suddenly come alive, Luke exclaims he is struck dumb with "guilt" (5.3.110). Nevertheless Sir John is not impressed by Luke's change of heart. When he has removed his disguise, he scolds Luke and sends him off to Virginia, where he should show true repentance, a moment that is again suggestive of an ironic conversion. Luke is the avaricious savage who will learn to repent and become a pious Christian in Virginia.

The fact that the counterfeit Indians in *The City Madam* represent the savagery of English materialistic culture rather than the primitive otherness of Native Americans is also indicated by their use of language. Entering the stage, the Virginians speak an incomprehensible, pseudo-Indian language, which

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[82] Philip Massinger, *The City Madam* (Nick Hern Books: London, 2005) 3.3.106-8.

prompts Luke to ask how he and his divines can convert them if they cannot converse with the Indians. It soon turns out, however, that the "Indians" speak English fluently, a result of spending a long time in the English colony. If in the first moment of their stage life they seem radically different and incapable of conversion, the next moment they appear half English already and perfectly prepared by English missionaries to embrace Christianity. Indeed, as a confidant of Sir John explains to Luke, "they speak our language / As their own dialect" (3.3.100-1).

Although *The City Madam* is closer to thematizing spiritual conversion than interfaith conversion, as it focuses on the moral correction of its depraved and decadent characters, the way in which it uses interfaith conversion is in line with the ironic Christianizations that I have discussed so far in this chapter. *The City Madam* incorporates the Christianization of Native Americans, even the idea that these Americans could "convert" depraved people into devout Christians, precisely for its ironic overtones, thereby confirming the inherent religious otherness of actual Native Americans.

While Puritanism does not fit the same category as Judaism, Islam, paganism or even Catholicism, and although Puritan characters do not convert to a specific religion, it is worth concluding this chapter with a brief analysis of the staging of converting Puritans. This is because these depictions clearly echo the ironic Christianizations that I have discussed above. Besides, they do so with the same effect, as the otherness of Puritans serves to define a normative and stable religious self.

Since many Puritans were vociferous opponents of the stage, it is not surprising that playwrights retorted with their own medium and derided them on the stage.[83] As critics have shown, this means that their Puritan characters are not so much devotees of a religious denomination as stereotypical spoilsports, moral crusaders, as well as hypocrites.[84] The best-known stage caricature of a Puritan is Ben Jonson's Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair*.[85] Busy

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[83] See, for instance, Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1981) chapter four.

[84] For an extensive analysis of Puritanism, and anti-Puritanism in plays, see Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002) especially chapters 12, 14 and 15. See also Patrick Collinson, "Antipuritanism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, eds., John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 19-33.

[85] Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 325-433.

disapproves of a puppet show performed at Bartholomew fair, because of the "abominable" cross-dressing of the actors. This is an allusion to the Biblical criticism of transvestism in Deuteronomy 22:5 and was a common Puritan objection against the theatre. As one of the puppets retorts, "it is your old stale argument against the players" (5.5.91). Jibing at the Puritan's condemnation of the stage, the puppet exposes Busy's mistaken fears over role-playing by lifting up his own costume and showing he is sexless. Busy's concerns are thus exposed as nonsensical. The puppet puts Busy furthermore in place when he asserts that they have "neither male of female" puppets amongst them, a hint at Paul's advocacy of the irrelevance of gender in faith, in Galatians 3:28. Busy immediately admits to being defeated, upon which the puppet successfully persuades him to "*be converted*" (5.5.102) and watch the show. Busy confirms that he is "changed, and will become a beholder" of the play (5.5.104-5). Nevertheless, in the final scene, Busy is described as a "superlunatical hypocrite," which suggests that Busy's change is not taken seriously by the characters after all (5.6.37-38). In his construction of a stereotypical Puritan, Jonson, like many of his contemporaries, also relied on stereotypes of Jews.[86] Busy is, for instance, mockingly referred to as a "Rabbi," and to affirm his "hate and loathing of Judaism," he decides to eat pork, publically and "exceedingly" (1.6.85-87). Jonson also adheres to the stereotype of the inconvertible Jew, because after his parodic conversion during the puppet show, Busy is still referred to as a "Rabbi" (5.6.37).

Jonson's mockery of the conversion of a Puritan on the stage gains more depth when we realize that many Puritans were known for being preoccupied with conversion, something that manifested itself in the popularity of conversion sermons among their community, such as *The New Birth: or, a Treatise of Regeneration* (1618). It is likely that its author, William Whately, served as a model for Busy.[87] Early in the play, Busy himself is, moreover, described as a "proselyte" (1.2.75).

A similar but much more acerbic example of anti-Puritan satire is the theatrical image of a Puritan turning into the Devil or vice versa. It appears as a figure of speech in George Chapman's 1597 *An Humorous Day's Mirth* ("The Divill I thinke wil shortly turne Puritan, or the Puritan wil turne Divell") and

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[86] For a discussion ways in which stereotypical images of Jews were used to construct and mock the Puritan, see Brett D. Hirsch, "From Jew to Puritan: The Emblematic Owl in Early English Culture," in *'This Earthly Stage:' World and Stage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Brett D. Hirsch and Christopher Wortham (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010) 131-71.

[87] See Leah S. Marcus, "Pastimes and the Purging of Theater: *Bartholomew Fair*" in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, eds., David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991) 196-209, 198.

Thomas Dekker's 1611 *If This Be Not A Good Play, The Devil Is In It* ("the diuels turn'd puritane I feare"). [88] The ultimate symbol of evil and ungodliness, the devil played a crucial role in the notoriously fiery sermons of Puritans. As John Spurr writes, "Satan was a real presence in the puritans' lives; he jeered at them, he tempted them to sin, and he tested their faith to breaking a point."[89] He was also responsible for "the despair of the godly over their own salvation [which] produced profound melancholy and even suicidal thoughts."[90]

The stagings of and theatrical allusions to converting Puritans demonstrate that parodies of Christianization were a source of humour and were used to confirm immutable religious otherness. Precisely the fact that Puritans did not constitute an official religious denomination but were nevertheless portrayed as such in ironic conversions teaches us a great deal about the early modern fluid conceptions of religions and early modern urge to solidify these.

Conclusion

The stage lent itself perfectly to capturing the dramatic transformation of the exchange of one religious identity for another. By means of narrative, acting, costume and props, playwrights could graphically depict this change. Yet this is not what we find in drama. Instead, playwrights used their imagination to undermine, circumvent and mock interfaith conversion. Thus, the theme of apostasy enabled playwrights to depict conversion as a dangerous act as well as an empty and absurd ritual that could only be motivated by worldly opportunism. It was, moreover, presented in spiritual terms, as destroying one's soul and self, and not as an exchange of religious identity. By the same token, resisting the threat of forced apostasy was used to portray Christians as heroes of the faith, that confirmed the inherent quality of Christian identity. Interfaith conversion was also ridiculed in references to Christianization. By presenting caricatural religious others as converts or would-be converts, playwrights portrayed conversion to Christianity as absurd and impossible. Conversely, these ironic Christianizations reassuringly confirmed religious identity as securely and invariably anchored in a person's being.

This chapter has also demonstrated that interfaith conversion plays address a fundamentally different religious question than spiritual conversion

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[88] George Chapman, *An Humorous Day's Mirth*, ed. W.W. Greg (London: The Malone Society, 1938) ll. 322-24; Thomas Dekker, *If This Be Not A Good Play, The Devil Is In It* in Bowers, vol. 3, 113-215, 3.3.52

[89] John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 180.

[90] Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 180.

drama. While the latter uses theatre to explore theological problems, interfaith conversion plays are chiefly occupied with the construction of religious identity. Theological or doctrinal concerns are strikingly absent from this process. Instead, playwrights use non-religious constituents of identity, based on race, nationality and gender to give meaning to the variety of denominations with which the early moderns were faced. Although different non-Christian religions are portrayed in distinct ways, the only distinction that ultimately matters is between Christianity and non-Christian faith. This becomes clear precisely from the consistent patterns in theatrical approaches of apostasy and interfaith conversion; regardless of specific non-Christian religions, conversion from Christianity is mocked and condemned. More strikingly, regardless of particular non-Christian faith of origin, Christianization is presented in satirical terms, and, as such used to nurture a comforting sense of inherent and impermeable Christian superiority. In the next chapter, I will explore stage conversions to Christianity in further detail and argue that even genuine and authentic embraces of Christianity serve to portray (Protestant) Christianity as an inherent part of the self.

CHAPTER 7 'Most Beautiful Pagan; Most Sweet Jew:' Preserving Christianity in Authentic Conversions

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how playwrights condemned and ridiculed forms of interfaith conversion. They attacked defection from Christianity, and created grotesque religious enemies – Jews, Catholics, Muslims and pagans – to emphasize the absurdity of their Christianization (or turn to Protestantism). These depictions reassured audiences that (Protestant) Christian identity was inherent in one's being, and could thus not be assumed by religious others. In this way, plays alleviated anxieties over the actual exchange of religious identity. However, many interfaith conversion plays do not draw attention to the danger of apostasy or the absurdity of Christianization, but focus on authentic and genuine embraces of Christianity. This suggests that dramatists did welcome the idea of Christianization to some degree and were inclined to acknowledge the importance of non-Christians recognizing and embracing Christian Truth. Yet despite the ostensibly unproblematic character of authentic Christianizations, playwrights nevertheless recoil from exploring them as completely successful or radical transformations of Christian identity.

Before I turn to portrayals of genuine embraces of Christianity in this chapter, I will discuss a work that sheds further light on the early modern problematic understanding of interfaith conversion. This is Richard Zouche's university play *The Sophister* (1614), which is the only early modern English work of drama that features "conversion" as a character. *The Sophister* casts Conversion in largely unspecified interfaith terms and presents him as naive, unreliable and essentially changeable. In this way, the play underscores the undesirability of interfaith conversion, *including* conversion to (Protestant) Christianity, and helps us understand why the theatre refrained from presenting it as a glorious or radical transformation.

The idea, put forward in *The Sophister*, that interfaith conversion signifies first and foremost changeability, recurs in Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624). There is a critical consensus that *The Renegado* portrays the happy and unproblematic reconversion of the renegade pirate Grimaldi. According to scholars, the play follows a new avenue of presenting apostates by allowing Grimaldi to return to Christianity instead of punishing him, and thus presents him as a hero of the faith. I will argue, however, that is reading is too simple and optimistic. When we take into account that *The Renegado* juxtaposes Grimaldi with a character who heroically resists an overwhelming temptation to turn Turk, as well as the way in which Grimaldi interacts with his confessor, it becomes clear that *The Renegado* presents religious constancy as ethically superior

to conversion and that Grimaldi comes off as a weak character. What is more, this play underlines its skepticism of interfaith conversion by drawing parallels between religious and financial exchange, an analogy that we also find in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596).

In addition to toning down Christianizations as moments of sheer Christian victory and favouring Christian constancy over (re)turns to Christianity, playwrights construct Christianizations not as a change but as a form of continuity. That is to say, those characters who adopt Christianity are not presented as overtly different, but as Jews, Muslims or pagans with Christian hearts: they are not caricatures of their faith, but attractive or heroic, and already congenial with Christian characters. Examples are Corcut in *Selimus* (1592), Joffer in *The Fair Maid of the West Part II* (1631), Abigail in *The Jew of Malta* (1589), and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, who bear little resemblance to their grotesque co-religionists before their conversion. What plays present as the Christian nature of these characters, expressed in their attractive appearance, kindness towards Christians and nobility, shines through a thin veneer of nominal Muslim or Jewish identity. In addition, these characters are already alienated from their ostensible religious background. Accordingly, when they turn Christian, they do not erase their religious selves in order to assume a wholly new identity, but are much closer to revealing their true nature or confirming the moral or cultural difference between them and their non-Christian coreligionists. In this way, they suggest, just like the preposterous converts of the ironic Christianizations in the previous chapter, that Christian identity is encoded in one's self. Indeed, the point of this chapter is to demonstrate that in order to dispel anxieties over the stability of Christianity, playwrights not only ridiculed Christianization, but also used authentic conversions for this purpose, presenting them in such a way as to reassure their audiences that those religious others who adopt a Christian identity are merely confirming and revealing their true religious nature. In this way, playwrights presented Christianization as a victory of continuity.

A special category within authentic stage Christianizations is constituted by women who simultaneously convert and marry their Christian husbands. We find these conversion-cum-marriages in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Knight of Malta* (1618), John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1621), Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* and *The Emperor of the East* (1631), and in John Kirke's *The Seven Champions of Christendome* (1635). These doubly festive events not only stress the desired analogy between a woman's submission to her husband and his God. In many cases, they also serve as human rewards for male champions of the Christian faith, who remained constant under torture.

I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the genuine Christianizations of Theophilus in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620) and Alban in William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (1608). These conversions appear to contradict my argument that stagings of genuine Christianizations do not involve radical transformations of religious identity, because before their sincere conversions, Theophilus and Alban are stereotypical pagan villains. However, both of them die a martyr's death immediately upon their conversion, which means that Massinger and Rowley are excused from portraying their converts' transformations beyond the moment of the change itself. Indeed, the fact that virtually all Christianizations of tragic characters end in death or coincide with the end of the play are indicative of a general unwillingness among playwrights to portray religious transformation and explore converts in their new capacity as Christians and new socio-religious environments. In the following chapter I will discuss Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604) as a significant exception to this rule.

The Sophister and Conversion as an Allegorical Vice

The allegorical comedy *The Sophister*, attributed to the civil lawyer Richard Zouche (1590-1661), presents one of the most illuminating cases of how early modern playwrights conceived of interfaith conversion. This is because it is the only early modern English play that presents conversion as a character. In addition, there is evidence that *The Sophister* was written for a highly-educated audience and must have been performed at a University, probably Zouche's alma mater Oxford.[1] This academic setting enabled Zouche to portray conversion with a degree of complexity. *The Sophister* explores the role of language, rhetoric in particular, in establishing and subverting social and political power. The play thus describes the rise to power and subsequent downfall of Fallacy, the illegitimate son of Discourse, who is the ruler of the kingdom of Parrhesia. Antagonized by the established order that prevents Fallacy from inheriting his father's kingdom, Fallacy usurps the crown and creates a new kingdom. Yet, as Alison Findlay observes, "his government is a distorted mirror image of the original and by reflecting it, implies that it was equally corrupt."[2] The play is laced with references to academic life and puns are often based on the discourse

[1] The Prologue, for instance, speaks "to the Academicall Auditors." Richard Zouche, *The Sophister, A Comedy* (London, John Okes: 1639) sig. A3r.

[2] Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 124.

of academic subjects, including Logic, Alchemy and Philosophy.[3] The character Conversion is a minor figure, appearing onstage only briefly. *The Sophister* puns on the logical and rhetorical meanings of conversion by including it as an allegorical character in a play about logic and rhetoric,[4] but his role revolves around the religious meaning of conversion.

From his assertion that he intends to travel "to *Flushing, Midleborough, Amsterdam*, peradventure thence to *Antwerp*, and so to see *Rheams* and *Roome*," we can conclude that Conversion represents interfaith conversion.[5] Commercial centres like Flushing, Middelburg, Antwerp and Amsterdam harboured a great diversity of religious communities, Amsterdam with its relative religous freedom in particular. These characteristics could nourish Conversion's desire to exchange one newly adopted confession for another over and over again, as if they were commodities. Besides, Conversion's suggestion that he will leave Protestant England in order to travel to Rome indicates that he will abandon Protestantism for Catholicism. Rome and Rheims were also among the the cities visited by the "extreme" serial converts Anthony Tyrrell and John Nicholls (see chapter five).

Crucially, *The Sophister* portrays Conversion as an essentially changeable, elusive and opportunistic character, regardless of the fact that a conversion often happened only once in a person's life. In other words, conversion is presented as intrinsically problematic. This is in various ways supported by his conversation with Aequipollency,[6] the only character that accompanies Conversion onstage.

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[3] Fallacy, for instance, is an undergraduate who is going to take his "degree." According to Findlay, *The Sophister* "invites a comparison between Fallacy and the class of dissatisfied intellectuals. In the 1630s and 1640s there was a large increase in numbers of university graduates who did not 'share all the opportunities, privileges and responsibilities that were the prerequisites of full unequivocal membership' of Stuart society (Curtis 1962: 28). They experienced unemployment or underemployment and were widely regarded as a discontented and factious group. Their eloquence was dangerous since their speech was directed against the ruling order rather than contained within it" (121).

[4] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of conversion as a concept in logic is "the transposition of the subject and predicate of a proposition according to certain rules to form a new proposition by immediate inference." It lists 1551 as the year in which conversion was first used in this meaning. In rhetoric, the word was used "by 16th and 17th c. writers as the equivalent of antistrophe n.1, and sometimes of apostrophe n.1." "Conversion, n." definitions 4 and 5, *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press, 25 June 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40773?redirectedFrom=conversion>.

[5] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

[6] The first definition the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives of equipollency is "equivalence in signification, authority, efficacy, virtue etc." The other definition is as a technical term used in Logic: "an equivalence between two or more propositions." "Equipollence. n." definitions

Discussing the topic of suffering, Aequipollency boasts that he "can suffer any thing" and urges Conversion to "be rul'd" by him, immediately advising him to "stand to the present."[7] To this suggestion that he should stay who he is at present (i.e. remain constant in his religion), Conversion responds that he is "no Stoick."[8] The introduction of Neo-Stoicism into the conversation results in a number of punning references to the supposedly conversion-ridden personal history of one of the key figures of Neo-Stoicism, Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) and to his principal philosophical treatise *De Constantia* (1584). Aequipollency endorses Conversion's claim that he is no stoic, and accuses him of being quite the opposite, a "Pythagorian Peripatetick." This, he explains as follows:

> thy very essence is mutability. Thy soul could walk through more Sects then some honest bodies have chang'd suits: methinks thou mightst do well at home by temporizing.[9]

The phrase "Pythagorian Peripatetick" alludes, first, to the doctrine of metempsychosis, the transmigration of the soul, that early moderns commonly associated with Pythagoras.[10] Conversion is thus likened to a process that entails a superficial exchange: the transformation of the *exterior* of the soul, rather than a turn of the soul itself. Secondly, the word peripatetic is here intended humorously, meaning "a person who walks about; a traveller; an itinerant dealer or trader."[11] Conversion will soon prove the appropriateness of this description when he announces his intention to cross the English Channel and visit a variety of European towns and cities. These meanings of "Pythagorian Peripatetick" are corroborated by Aequipollency's next assertion that Conversion's soul could "walk through more Sects" (assume religions more often) than sincere persons

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1 and 2, *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press. 7 September 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63801>.

[7] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

[8] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

[9] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

[10] In *The Merchant of Venice*, Gratiano refers to this doctrine and the fact that it was considered a heresy. He argues that Shylock makes him believe this theory and therefore "waver in [his] faith," because Shylock behaves like a wolf (4.1.130-38). See also Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, that refers to conversion in a mocking dialogue about Pythagoras' transmigration of the soul. Ben Jonson *Volpone*, The Alchemist *and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 1-117, 1.2.1-62.

[11] "Peripatetic, n. and adj," definition 2, *OED Online*. June 2012, Oxford University Press, 25 June 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/141001?redirectedFrom=peripatetic>.

have changed their clothes. Accordingly, Aequipollency advises Conversion to stay where he is and "temporiz[e]," in other words, remain unconverted. Most important for our purposes, however, is the fact that Aequipollency reduces interfaith conversion to changeability: "thy very essence is mutability." In so doing, Aequipollency points to the early modern concern over the exchange of religions, a concern that had begun to dominate the way in which they perceived interfaith conversions. As the theatre intimated, the essence of conversion was not so much the affirmation of newly found religious assurance as a form of inconstancy.

Conversion's ignorance and failure to recognize the importance of steadfastness manifests itself in a number of allusions to *De Constantia* in relation to Lipsius' denominationally unstable past. Zouche and his contemporaries could have read Lipsius' work in several editions both in the Latin original (first ed. 1584) or in John Stradling's translation (first ed. 1594). Conversion does not respond directly to Aequipollency's accusations of inconstancy, but continues the conversation by sighing: "Oh these Climats are too cunning, I must seeke further."[12] That this is a reference to Lipsius's work becomes clear from Aequipollency's subsequent advice to read "*Lipsius* Constancy," which should "confirm" Conversion ("let that confirme thee").[13] The first three chapters of *De Constantia* discuss the idea that a change of location will not help a person to escape afflictions, but that one should attempt to deal with any kind of trouble by attaining mental equilibrium. In a dialogue between Lipsius and his friend Langius, Lipsius laments the difficulty of living in Belgium, that is tormented by civic unrest, something that is faintly echoed in the idea that Conversion wants to escape his country because the "Climats are too cunning." When Lipsius announces his intention to leave Belgium, Langius seeks to dissuade him from pursuing his plans: "Thou must not forsake thy countrey, but thy affections. Our mindes must be so confirmed and conformed, that we way bee at rest in troubles, and have peace even in the midst of warre."[14] Indeed, Aequipollency's assertion that reading *De Constantia* will "confirm" Conversion recalls Langius' advice to Lipsius. What follows in *The Sophister* is a deeply ironic comment on Lipsius and his advocacy of constancy. Conversion, who is clearly unaware of the irony, says "Faith he will lead the next way from *Leyden* to *Doway*, That it may be I may

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[12] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

[13] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

[14] Justus Lipsius, *Two bookes of constancie*, trans. John Stradling (London: Richard Johnes, 1594) B2v-B2r.

make use of him."[15] This journey, from the Dutch university city to the French town that hosted the English College for Jesuits can be interpreted symbolically as a conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism. In addition, it is significant that the English college in Douay was a training ground precisely for Jesuits, who were known for their missionary zeal and who would be sent to England to proselytize. There is no evidence that Lipsius travelled from Leiden to Douay, but he did leave his professorship at Leiden University – as a Protestant – to revert to Catholicism in Mainz, after which he became a Catholic professor of theology at Leuven. *The Sophister* thus exposes the discrepancy between Lipsius' philosophy of constancy and his shifts in denominational identity. The satirical effect is enhanced by the fact that the relationship between Lipsius and Langius is echoed in that between Conversion and Aequipollency. An additional level of satire, moreover, is produced by Conversion himself, who naively takes *De Constantia* to mean the opposite and believes it promotes travelling as a cure for an anguished mind.

The final part of the discussion between Aequipollency and Conversion is devoted to further confirmations of Conversion's opportunism. He repeats his resolution to embark on a journey to several places on the continent. In addition, he explains how travelling will change and improve him, using metaphors for treatments for improving and enriching objects and people. He notes, for instance, that "Your finest wits are thought insipu'd [insipid] till / They have past the salt water," and "The Germans [Germans'] vates drencht in a deeper grain, *Venice* and *Padua* will returne them richer" (G3v). His mentioning of the city that hosted one of the most important universities in early modern Europe, Padua, might explain why Conversion then suddenly turns to the subject of learning and medicine. It is significant that in so doing, he unwittingly refers to a false kind of learning and belief: quackery. The ease with which Conversion changes his religious persuasions is reminiscent of the manner in which a gullible person embraces the nostrums of mountebanks. As he says to Aequipollency:

> What course intendest thou?
> 'Twere thy best, being skill'd in tempering
> Confections, to proclaim some Paracelsian[16]

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[15] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

[16] The German-Swiss Paracelsus (1493-1541) was a controversial figure (and an enthusiastic traveller), known for his belief "that one could treat diseases with cheap, simple chemical

> Oyl, or Angelicall pills.[17]

This incites Aequipollency to respond sarcastically: "Nay, I'le rather professe the making of *Aurum potabile* [drinkable gold], and credit it with some two leaves of reasons, and ten of authority, for all diseases, griefs, and maladies. But which way art thou bent."[18] When Conversion responds that he will start in (Protestant) Flushing and hopes to end up in Rome, Aequipollency makes another sneering comment, noting that Conversion "may sooner be prefer'd to the Inquisition then to the Conclave."[19] Conversion, however, brushes this aside with more opportunism: "Well, except the morrow Sunne display more comfort, I am gone beleeve it."[20] In his last words of the discussion, Aequipollency notes that he expects Conversion's "reconversion."[21] Conversion responds by asserting his belief that the future holds much less danger for him than for Aequipollency:

> This fellow thinkes himselfe as cunning as a tumbler that walks upon ropes, and with his levell keeps himselfe upright, but his steps are dangerous, I had rather walk on the Alps, though steeper, where I may have sure footing.[22]

To sum up, *The Sophister* exposes the early modern problem of interfaith conversion in an explicit way: interfaith conversion, regardless of the religions involved, is intrinsically problematic because it denotes first and foremost changeability. Whereas the change in a spiritual conversion is necessarily an *improvement* (the emphasis either being on the embrace of virtuousness, or on the rejection of sin), the change of an interfaith conversion above all signifies an *exchange* of denominations. Even if converts embrace "the right" faith, there is no guarantee that they will not subsequently exchange it for their previous religion, or even for a wholly new one. Worse still, an interfaith conversion could easily be interpreted as "proof" of a believer's lack of steadfastness in faith. This intrinsic problem of interfaith conversion recurs in Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*,

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remedies," and his advocacy of astrology. Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 103.

[17] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

[18] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

[19] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

[20] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

[21] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

[22] Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

which plays down the heroic and festive aspects of its recanting renegade and aligns interfaith conversion with commercial exchange.

A Not-So-Heroic Titular Hero in *The Renegado*

Massinger's comedy *The Renegado* frustrates an uncomplicatedly positive reading of the reconversion of its titular hero. Despite the fact that the renegade pirate Grimaldi manages to save himself at the incentive of the Jesuit friar Francisco, his reintegration into the Christian community is not as smooth and joyful as is often argued. I cannot agree with Nabil Matar who claims that "Massinger presented a Happy ending for this renegade" or with Daniel Vitkus's interpretation of Grimaldi as a "successful, surviving hero."[23] Of course, compared to the fate of Daborne's Ward, Grimaldi's fortune is much brighter, if only because he seizes the chance to reform and does not die. There is no doubt, moreover, that Grimaldi's conversion is sincere, because it is preceded by a long process of spiritual agony and repentance and accompanied by an act of redemption.[24] Yet within the context of play as a whole, the repentant sinner comes off as a pitiful figure through the stark contrast between him and a true Christian hero who does manage to remain constant in his faith under violent pressure. This Christian hero, the Venetian Gentleman Vitelli, both defies a forced conversion to Islam on pain of death and resists the temptations of the attractive Muslim woman Donusa. What is more, Vitelli even manages to convert Donusa to Christianity. Despite the fact that both Grimaldi and Vitelli succeed in escaping the Turks and returning to Christian territory, only Vitelli is rewarded. His prize is no less than the doubly perfect woman Donusa, whom the play invites us to consider not only as exotic and sexually attractive, but, after her conversion, also as a virtuous Christian.[25]

Equally important is the contrast between Grimaldi's former sinful – but very masculine in his intrepidness – self and the new Grimaldi after his atonement. The former pirate is reduced to a sorry figure or nobody, which is most clearly demonstrated precisely in his very last words on the stage in which Grimaldi portrays himself as the malleable servant of his confessor Francisco. When Francisco instructs him to temporarily assume his pre-conversion

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[23] Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 59; Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 161.

[24] See also chapter three on Grimaldi's fear of damnation.

[25] Her conversion and the idea of Donusa as a convert-bride and prize will be further explored below in this chapter.

depressed appearance so that the Viceroy will not suspect him of his return to Christianity and his involvement in the Christians' plot against the Turks, Grimaldi answers: "I am nothing / But what you please to have me be."[26] These words demonstrate Grimaldi's loyalty to his confessor, but they also intimate that his latest conversion has bereft Grimaldi of his identity. After all, everything that characterized Grimaldi's identity as a renegade, his debauchery and hedonism, has been erased by his conversion. Vitkus writes that "Grimaldi's unruly masculinity is recuperated for the service of Christendom."[27] Bindu Malieckal even claims that Grimaldi in reconverting "regains his 'manhood,'" having earlier undergone a "spiritual emasculation" by embracing Islam.[28] Yet I would argue that Grimaldi as a Christian turned Turk, and, as such, the personification of "unruly masculinity," is in fact closer to being emasculated with his return to Christianity, which implies a drastic curbing of his masculine rowdiness. It is worth noting in this respect that the term "nothing," that Grimaldi uses to describe himself after his reconversion to Christianity, was also an Elizabethan slang term for the female genitalia.

The striking contrast between the fates of Grimaldi and Vitelli is enhanced by the fact that *The Renegado* is the only interfaith conversion play that presents a detailed description of a repenting renegade who returns to Christianity. This suggests that Massinger felt this was acceptable under the condition that audiences would not have to be forced to consider him the true star of the play.

The Renegado affirms the negative aspect of Grimaldi's conversion to Christianity by suggesting that interfaith conversion turns Christian identity into an object of exchange, thus corroding its intrinsic value. Set in a commercial context, *The Renegado* draws parallels between conversion and concepts of trade, associating religious exchange with commercial transaction. This already begins in the first lines of the play. In a Tunisian street "near the bazaar," Vitelli asks his servant Gazet if he has managed to "hire a shop" which they will need as part of their scheme to pose as merchants (1.1.1). To this Gazet answers in the positive and reveals his cunning plan as to how he will vend their crockery and paintings:

> I have studied speeches for each piece,
> And, in a thrifty tone to sell 'em off,

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[26] Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*, ed. Michael Neill (London: Arden Shakespeare 2010) 5.2.37-38.

[27] Daniel Vitkus, Introduction, *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England:* Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk The Renegado (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 1-53, 43.

[28] Bindu Malieckal, " 'Wanton Irreligious Madness:' Conversion and Castration in Massinger's The Renegado," *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 31 (2002): 25-43, 26.

Will swear by Mahomet and Termagant
That this is mistress to the great Duke of Florence,
That niece to old King Pippin, and a third,
An Austrian Princess by her Roman lip –
Howe'er *my conscience tells me* they are figures
Of bawds and common courtesans in Venice
(1.1.6-13, my emphasis)

Gazet proudly explains how he will sell portraits of aristocratic women, even though he suspects that they are depictions of Venetian prostitutes. His trick is significant, if only because it points to the idea that capitalism undermined the social hierarchy, especially that of the aristocracy. The assertions that he will "swear by Mahomet and Termagant," and that his "conscience" tells him he is lying show that he believes religion can be used for mercantile purposes, conscience being of secondary importance only. Moments later, *The Renegado* provides another instance of the conflation between religious and commercial exchange. When asked about his own faith, Gazet claims:

I would not be confined
In my belief: when all your sects and sectaries
Are grown of one opinion, if I like it
I will profess myself; in the meantime,
Live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva,
I am of that country's faith. (1.1.32-37)[29]

Gazet demonstrates that he, much in the vein of Richard Zouche's character Conversion, would convert according to the denomination of the places he will visit, thus proving his opportunism as well as his changeability. This passage becomes apposite in a commercial sense when we realize that the name of the speaker, Gazet, was also known as the word of a "Venetian coin of small value" that was "coined at Venice for circulation in the Levant."[30]

In associating interfaith conversion with financial transaction, *The Renegado* echoes *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakesepeare's comedy presents conversions in an environment that reverberates with the new creeds of

[29] Cf. Sir Politic in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, who notes that other traveller's reasons to visit countries include "shifting a religion" (2.1.5).
[30] "† gazet(t, n.". *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press. 29 June 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77234?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=ddWxuu&>.

capitalism – venture, advantage and hazard –, whether it is in Antonio's commercial adventures at sea or Bassanio's venture to marry the wealthy Portia. The play thus presents Venice as a site of exchange where, in addition to goods and money, religion is traded.[31] This comes to the fore in the various conflations of conversion and commercial transaction. Jessica, for instance, literally gilds herself with money when she flees her parental home to convert and marry (2.6.49-50). Of course, Jessica commits theft, but the act also alludes to the transaction of the dowry. This is later echoed in Portia's assertion that she, as well as all her possessions, "conver[t]" to Bassanio when she learns she can marry him (3.2.166-67).[32] Another case in point is the moment when Lancelot refers to the negative economic implications of Jessica's Christianization. It is significant that this constitutes the end of a theological dispute about the possibility of salvation for Jessica. Jessica says: "I shall be sav'd by my husband, – he hath made me a Christian!" to which Lancelot replies:

> Truly the more to blame he! We were Christians enough before, e'en as many as could well live, one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money. (3.5.17-23)

Apparently, Lancelot is more concerned about the commercial consequences of Jessica's conversion than its religious implications. A final example of financial transaction coinciding with conversion is Antonio's demand for Shylock's baptism, which is accompanied by a financial penalty.

In drawing attention to the similarities between interfaith conversion and commerce, playwrights killed two birds with one stone. Not only did they expose the problem of changing faith out of opportunistic, financial reasons, they also made clear that the rejection of a particular religion in favour of Christianity rendered Christianity essentially exchangeable. In short, for all the joyful and victorious connotations of the baptism of Jews, Muslims or pagans, the same baptism had by implication an undermining effect on the unique value of the Christian faith. This erosive effect was diminished by a genuine, heartfelt adoption of Christianity, an embrace of the Gospel that was motivated by the

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[31] Of course, these are not the only forms of exchange in the play; other examples are the exchange of gender by Jessica, Portia and Nerissa and the exchange of news, by Shylock and Tubal.

[32] See also chapter four on this passage.

convert's recognition of Christ as the messenger of Truth, or by sincere remorse. However, from representations of authentic embraces of Christianity we can deduce that even these were considered problematic. We have just seen an example of this in *The Renegado*. In addition, various plays depict authentic Christianizations as revelations of a deep-rooted Christian identity.

Nominal Converts

Many conversions that are presented as genuine embraces of Christianity are conversions only in a nominal sense. The converts in question do not share the stereotypical and negative traits of their family members or acquaintances, are often on bad terms with them, or are inclined to virtues that are portrayed as typically Christian. Two illustrative examples are Corcut in Robert Greene's 1592 tragedy *Selimus* and Joffer in the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West*.

Corcut is the eldest son of the tyrannous emperor Bajazet. Unlike his younger brothers Acomat and Selimus, he is peace-loving and without ambitions of power and prestige. In addition, he is a "philosopher" and said to "live his life / In learning arts and Mahound's dreaded laws," which contrasts starkly with the activities of his younger brothers, especially Selimus, who "snatcheth" at the "crown."[33] Bajazet renounces the crown and offers it to Selimus after the latter has counterfeited repentance over his despotic behaviour. Selimus now suspects Corcut of aspiring to the thrown and wants to murder him. Corcut goes into hiding by disguising himself as a mourner. Anticipating his conversion, Corcut conveys his knowledge and high regard of Christianity and talks to a Christian character of the "blessèd Christ" and the "sovereign hope which thou conceiv'st in him, / Whom dead, as everliving thou adorest" (19. 79-82). When Corcut is eventually caught by his wicked brother and about to be killed by him, he reveals that he has become a Christian, having "conversed with Christians / And learned of them the way to save [his] soul / And 'pease the anger of the highest God" (22. 50-53). After a vain attempt to convert and reform Selimus, Corcut is strangled. In the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West*, Joffer, who is the pasha at the court of Fez, experiences a happier fate than Corcut after his conversion. Prior to his religious exchange, Joffer is also portrayed as a benign and noble Turk. He is, for instance, contrasted with his lecherous and hostile fellow-Turk, Mullisheg, the King of Fez, aids the Christian characters, expresses his regret over the moments he is unable to assist them, and conveys his admiration for the

[33] Robert Greene, *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks*, in Vitkus, ed., *Three Turk Plays* 55-143, 1. 78, 80-81, 85.

magnanimity of the Christians. Indeed, it is eventually the "virtue in these Christians" that prompts him to convert.[34] His request to be accepted as "a Christian and a brother" (5.4.187) is happily granted "with all due rites" (5.4.197). Joffer's conversion marks the festive end of the comedy.

Before their Christianization, Corcut and Joffer are, at least nominally, Turks, but we find similar portrayals of conversion to Christianity with Jewish and Pagan characters.[35] In addition, most of these converts are women.[36] The Jewish Abigail in *The Jew of Malta* and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* are cases in point. What is particularly interesting about these plays is that they problematize the contrast between stereotypical Jews and their unstereotypical daughters who become Christians, by simultaneously emphasizing their biological relationship. That is to say, Jessica and Abigail are contrasted with their grotesque Jewish fathers and they use their turns to Christianity to stress precisely this disparity, but the biological kinship with their fathers at the same time prevents them from breaking off relations with Shylock and Barabas unreservedly.

Abigail and Jessica are juxtaposed with their grotesquely Jewish fathers in largely the same way. The Christian characters in both plays express their intense hatred of Barabas and Shylock only, because they are Jewish. Indeed, as opposed to their daughters, Barabas and Shylock are mostly referred to as "Jew" rather than called by their names. Abigail and Jessica's Jewish identity, on the other

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[34] Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West The Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II*. Ed. Robert K. Turner (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) 91-197, 5.4.185.

[35] Examples of pagan converts of this type are Antoninus in *The Virgin Martyr,* the Queen, Conallus, Emeria, Ferochus and Endarius in *St. Patrick for Ireland* by James Shirley (1640). In Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier* (1638), which also thematizes pagan-Christian conversion, matters are slightly more complicated. The heroic but pagan army general Bellizarius and the pagan commander Hubert have achieved an important victory over the African Christians. Later in the play, both men convert to Christianity, but their conversion is anticipated by their great admiration for the Christians they fought and have captured, as well as their faith. Other converts to Christianity in this play are Bellizarius' wife Victoria and his daughter Bellina, who are presented as nominal pagans with a Christian heart to begin with. The sadistic King turns Christian too, but this conversion is not genuine and he quickly lapses back into paganism.

[36] Theatrical stereotypes of malign religious others are in most cases male. While the non-Christian identity of male characters was an obvious target of ridicule, playwrights used Jewish, pagan or Muslim identity of female characters to portray them as exotic beauties. The idea that women who turn Christian on the early modern stage are all strikingly fair has also been observed by Ania Loomba. She notes that "these conversions hark back to a long literary tradition featuring a converted Saracen princess," Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 157.

hand, is not a major issue for the Christians. Besides, both women are often described as "fair," and exceptionally pretty and kind to emphasize the contrast with their fathers. Before Jessica converts, Lancelot, for instance, calls her: "most beautiful pagan; most sweet Jew" (2.3.10-11). Other characters suggest that Shylock and Jessica are radically different from each other. A particularly striking case in point is Salerio's remark to Shylock: "there is more difference between thy flesh and hers, than between jet and ivory, more between your bloods, than there is between red wine and Rhenish" (3.1.34-36). Salerio in effect denies the blood relationship between Jessica and Shylock, thus suggesting that Jessica is not Jewish to begin with.

Unlike Abigail, who at first sympathizes with her father, Jessica makes clear from her first appearance on the stage that she feels alienated from her Jewish background. In her first lines she explains that she understands why Lancelot has decided to leave Shylock as his employer, comparing their "house" to "hell" (2.3.2). Jessica's use of the word "hell" is telling because it reveals her dislike of her Jewish background not only in the strongest but also in Christian terms. Although it cannot be proven whether Shakespeare was familiar with a Jewish concept of hell, the play evinces little knowledge of Jewish doctrine and there is no indication that Jessica refers to a specifically Jewish version of this place that is also a profoundly Christian concept. In this way, her use of "hell" appears to indicate Jessica's familiarity with the Christian world before her conversion. It is difficult to judge whether Shylock is objectively responsible for turning his house into a hell for Jessica and whether the term hell is fitting. We learn that he is frugal and does not allow Jessica to look at revelling Christians or listen to music. This could indicate Shylock's capacity as a responsible father, but when he learns about his daughter's elopement he is more concerned about the loss of his money than of his daughter.

Jessica's decision to convert is not taken lightly, as she realises that it will necessitate a rift with her father and knows it is "a heinous sin" to "be ashamed to be [her] father's child" (2.3.17). The decisive factor in her resolution is that their biological relationship is outweighed by the fact that their characters have no resemblance whatsoever: "though I am a daughter to his blood / I am not to his manners" (2.3.18-19). Nevertheless, the last words she says to her father before she converts express her sadness over the loss of their relationship, rather than the joy that her decision to elope and convert will bring about: "Farewell, – and if my fortune be not crost / I have a father, you a daughter, lost" (2.5.55-56).

At the beginning of *The Jew of Malta*, Abigail and Barabas appear to have a loving relationship, but this changes and Barabas becomes indirectly responsible for her turn to Christianity. In the first act, Abigail is deeply disturbed by the injustice her father suffers at the hands of the Christian authorities and she is

willing to help her father by posing as a nun. Barabas's house has been converted into a nunnery by the Christians, and feigning a conversion to Christianity will allow her to enter this monastery in order to collect a treasure that Barabas has hidden in his former house. Later in the play, however, Barabas constructs a plot that causes the death of Abigail's lover and his friend. Abigail's restrained response to her father's atrocity is that she will enter a monastery, but this time, genuinely. What is striking about this conversion is that it also contains an oath in which Abigail swears to remain faithful to her father. When her confessor, friar Jacomo, grants Abigail's desire to become a nun, he begs Abigail to "change no more" (3.3.70). Abigail, hinting at her feigned conversion at the request of Barabas, replies this was her father's "fault" (3.3.70). When friar Jacomo inquires further, Abigail refuses to explain her words, but notes in an aside: "O Barabas, / Though thou deservest hardly at my hands, / Yet never shall these lips bewray thy life" (3.3.73-75).

Marriage-Cum-Conversion

Among the early modern stage portrayals of genuine Christianizations is a striking pattern of non-Christian women who convert and marry their Christian husband at the same time. We find conversion-cum-marriages in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Knight of Malta,* John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*, Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* and *The Emperor of the East*, and in John Kirke's *The Seven Champions of Christendome*.

In addition to presenting a comedic ending with a fitting conversional twist, another advantage of conversion-cum-marriage was that a woman's identity was largely incorporated into that of her husband, thus cancelling out any anxieties over her change.[37] As part of this, it was essential that a woman subjected herself to her spouse. Just as Christian converts subjected themselves to God, so a woman was expected to conform to the will of her husband. One of the most important grounds for this rule was Paul's exhortation to married women:

> Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the

[37] Margaret R. Hunt, "Women in Ottoman and Western European Law Courts: Were Western Women *Really* the Luckiest Women in the World?" *Structures and Subjectivities: Attending to Early Modern Women*, ed. Joan E. Hartman and Adele Seeff (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 2007) 176-199, 182.

> head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

The marginal commentaries of the Geneva Bible (1595) elucidated this point of female compliance by suggesting a further analogy between a husband and God: "[wives] cannot be disobedient to their husbands except by also resisting God, who is the author of this subjection." In his popular work *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), the Church of England clergyman William Gouge engages in an extensive discussion of this passage, stressing that for a woman Christianization is virtually synonymous with marriage: "*A wife by subjecting herself to a husband therein is subject unto Christ.*"[38] However, this does not imply that women should follow their husbands blindly; Gouge takes care to explain that men should not assume to themselves divine authority, noting, for instance, that "there is no equality betwixt Christ the Lord from heaven, and an earthly husband: the disparity betwixt them is infinite."[39]

Without exception, all authors of plays which feature marriage-cum-conversion render Christianization and marriage interchangeable. This maximizes its effect as a consolidation of a woman's conversion and submission. In *The Knight of Malta*, for instance, the Christian character Angelo relates how, having been taken captive by the Turks, he became engaged to a beautiful Turkish woman whom he converted. Angelo expresses this in a way that gives equal importance to the Christianization and their marriage (or engagement in this particular case) and suggests that these two events were inextricably linked:

> I laboured her conversion with my love,
> And doubly won her; to fair faith her soule

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[38] William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Havinland, 1622) 342 (original emphasis). Gouge also touches on the subject of conversion in relation to marriage explicitly. In this case, husbands and wives have an equally important role in conversion and becoming devout Christian spouses: "If it please the Lord to give such a blessing to the endeavour of an husband or wife, as to be a meanes of the conversion of their bedfellow, then will the partie converted both intirely love the other, and also heartily blesse God (as there is just cause) that ever they were so neerely linked together. This dutie of winning one another, is to be applied to such as are married not only to plaine infidels, but also to Papists or other like Idolaters, to Atheists, or any other profane persons, to heretiques, separatists, schismatiques, or any that believe not aright" (239-40).

[39] Gouge, "*Of Domesticall Duties*," 144.

She first betroth'd, and then her faith to me. (5.2.167-74)[40]

A similar thing happens in the tragicomedy *The Emperor of the East*, also by Philip Massinger. It relates the story of the jealous Christian and Byzantine emperor Theodosius, who marries the pagan and "stranger virgin" Athenais.[41] Here, the intrinsic connection between their wedding and Anthenais's Christianization is emphasised in temporal terms. As Theodosius announces: "In the same houre / In which she is confirmed in our faith, / We mutually will give away each other, / And both be gainers" (2.1.396-9). Shakespeare observes the principle of christianization-cum-marriage in *The Merchant of Venice*. When Jessica has decided that she wants to escape her father's unpleasant household, she announces her desire to convert. In so doing she, too, presents marriage and conversion as interchangeable events:

O Lorenzo
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (2.3.19-21)

Another benefit of conversion-cum-marriage was that the convert bride could serve as a fitting prize for a Christian man who proved his religious constancy. Cases in point are *The Island Princess*, *The Renegado* and *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, where pagans or Muslims attempt to force Christians into adopting their faith. It is precisely these men's unflinching loyalty to their faith that make non-Christian women fall in love with them and desire to turn Christian. In *The Island Princess*, which is set on one of the Moluccas, the eponymous princess Quisara falls in love with the noble Portuguese Armusia and asks him to convert to her unidentified faith. He refuses, is tortured for this, but, astonished by his constancy, the princess decides to turn Christian and die with him. This effectively paves the way for their marriage. While the princess does not yet know that she and her future husband will be spared and allowed to marry, the way in which she describes her desire to convert clearly prefigures their marriage: "A virgin won by your fair constancy, / And glorying that she is

[40] John Fletcher, *The Knight of Malta*, ed. George Walton Williams, in Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1647]) 345-465.
[41] Philip Massinger, *The Emperor of the East* in ed. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger* (Oxford: 1976 [1632]) 391-488, 1.1.124.

won so, will dye by ye." [42] After she has concluded that Armusia's good character must reflect his religious conviction and vice versa – "Your faith, and your religion must be like ye" (5.2.118) – she proclaims her conversion: "I do embrace your faith sir, and your fortune" (5.2.121). Indeed, for Quisara turning Christian means marrying the man who provoked her to convert in the first place. The same narrative principle can be found in *The Renegado*. Here, the non-Christian woman who first attempts to convert a Christian hero to her faith is the Islamic Donusa. Like Armusia in *The Island Princess*, Vitelli is tortured for his refusal to relinquish Christianity, and like Armusia, Vitelli charms his beloved woman with his constancy. In addition, Vitelli manages to convince Donusa of the Christian truth and incites her to convert by suggesting that converting is essentially the same as marrying him:

> Oh, Donusa!
> Die in my faith like me and 'tis a marriage
> At which celestial angels shall be waiters,
> And such as have been sainted welcome us. (4.3.150-3)

The next act features the staging of Donusa's baptism, performed by Vitelli himself. The Christening has a miraculous effect on Donusa, which she puts in Pauline terms: "By this blest means, I feel the films of error / Ta'en from my soul's eyes" (5.3.124-25). At the same time, she expresses her belief that she is fully indebted to her fiancée for her conversion:

> Let me kiss the hand
> That did this miracle, and seal my thanks
> Upon those lips from whence these sweet words vanished
> That freed me from the cruellest of prisons (5.3.127-131)

The Seven Champions of Christendome, which is based on the popular eponymous romance by Richard Jonson, ends with the adoption of Christianity by the King of Macedon and his three daughters, and with the announcement of their marriage to the three bachelor Saints: Anthony, Denis and Patrick. This marriage immediately follows upon the conversion of these women. The faith of these knights is tested throughout the play and Anthony is even forced to relinquish

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[42] John Fletcher, *The Island Princess*, ed. George Walton Williams, in Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [1647]) 539-651, 5.2.109-110.

his Christian identity on pain of death. Realizing he does not need "armour" but his "constant heart," he manages to survive.[43] In this way, these nameless women, and Anthony's bride in particular, can be seen as rewards for Christian constancy. The converting women in *The Island Princess*, *The Renegado* and *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, then, are all presented as highly attractive and kind. This not only makes their Christianization easy to swallow for a Christian audience, but, combined with their marriage to a Christian hero of the faith, also renders their conversions unequivocal celebrations of religious constancy.

Christianization and Death

Most theatrical representions of authentic conversion follow the pattern I have outlined above: the stage converts are not caricatures of their faith and the conversion itself is a confirmation of continuity in rather than a radical change of identity. Two stage Christianizations seem to deviate from this model. Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* and William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* present wicked pagans undergoing a genuine conversion. These converts, however, are immediately killed by their former coreligionists and are thus not fully staged in their new capacity as Christians. In this way, these plays come very close to celebrating Christianization as a radical transformation, but the subsequent martyr's deaths reveal that Thomas Dekker, Philip Massinger and William Rowley were unwilling to explore these Christianizations to their full extent.

The Virgin Martyr features the ruthless persecutor of Christians Theophilus who, at the end of the play, embraces Christianity. While his name, meaning friend of God, clearly anticipates his conversion, he is depicted as a ruthless villain in every other respect. His conversion is the result of a miraculous gift from heaven, sent by the virgin martyr Dorothea he has killed. Realizing that Dorothea has sent a message of forgiveness, Theophilus starts to repent and finally turns Christian. The emperor Dioclesian takes this as his cue to torture Theophilus to death, which Theophilus suffers heroically and which draws the admiration of one of the pagan witnesses: "I have seene thousands tortur'd, but nere yet / A constancy like this." [44] There is no question that Theophilus

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[43] John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, ed. Giles Edwin Dawson (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1929) 2.1081.

[44] Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr* in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964-70) 365-480, 5.2.234.

represents a grotesque inversion of the benign Christian Dorothea and that his turn to Christianity is genuine, but *The Virgin Martyr* does not give its audience an idea of Theophilus' post-Christianization identity. A similar thing happens in William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, which features an adaptation of the historical conversion of the first British Christian martyr Saint Alban, by Amphibalus (Amphiabel in the play).[45] Like Theophilus, Alban is first presented as wicked Roman knight, and immediately led off the stage by his executioners after his conversion.

Theophilus and Alban may present relatively exceptional cases of genuine stage Christianization, but their deaths are, again, part of a general pattern. Virtually all stage converts to Christianity in tragedies meet with a tragic death soon after their conversion.[46] Some other genuine conversions take place at the very end of the play, such as that of Joffer in *The Fair Maid of the West part II*. This suggest that playwrights not only refused to portray conversion as a radical transformation, but also took pains to avoid having to explore its consequences for the converts and their fellow-Christians. The only work of drama that does revolve around the post-conversion life of a new Christian is Shakespeare's *Othello*, which will be investigated in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed a paradox in the early modern English theatrical representation of interfaith conversion that is similar to the paradox discussed in chapter five. I have shown that in addition to apostasy and ironic conversions to

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[45] Despite the many fatalities in the play, it is classified as "A Merrie and Pleasant Comedy" on its title page, W. R. [William Rowley] *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (London: I. Okes, 1638).

[46] Thus, the fact that the convert to Catholicism Philologus, in Nathaniel Woodes's *Conflict of Conscience*, returns happily to Protestantism in one of the play's two endings does not alter the fact that he dies a miserable death in both versions. Corcut, in *Selimus* is strangled by his brother immediately after Corcut has announced is Christianization. Abigail, in *The Jew of Malta* is secretly poisoned by Barabas after he has learned that she has entered a monastery. Basilisco, in Thomas Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda*, turns Turk out of love for a woman. When he learns that his object of desire has married another man, he returns to Christianity, after which the emperor of the Turks immediately murders him. Bitter fates befall the two pagan daughters of Theophilus in *The Virgin Martyr*, who are killed by their enraged father after their conversion to Christianity. In the same play, Dorothea converts Antoninus, the man who is in love with her. His life as a new Christian, however, is only short, as he dies with Dorothea from the pain of losing her. In Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier* Bellizarius and his wife Victoria convert to Christianity, but both are tormented and pay for their Christianizations with their lives.

Christianity, playwrights stage genuine Christianizations of adherents of all major religions that were known to the early moderns. Yet the most obvious ways of presenting these Christianizations – as straightforwardly festive or radical transformations of identity – are virtually absent from early modern English drama. The reason for this is that playwrights considered interfaith conversion intrinsically problematic. Indeed, *The Sophister* taught its educated early modern audiences that interfaith conversion is not a solution to hardships but rather endlessly invite new religious turns. This particular negative understanding of interfaith conversion is confirmed in plays that render Christian constancy superior to Christianization, such as *The Renegado*, which plays down the success of a repenting renegade by juxtaposing him to a hero of Christian constancy and condemns the exchange of religions by aligning it with financial exchange. Other examples are *The Island Princess*, and *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, that, like *The Renegado*, make marriage coincide with conversion, and present the convert bride as a prize for the heroic Christian constancy of their grooms.

Theatrical portrayals of genuine Christianizations show nevertheless that playwrights felt the urge to rejoice at characters turning or returning to Christianity. The way in which they stage Christianizations reveals that they were unwilling to portray these as full-blown transformations of identity. By portraying converts to Christianity that are already likable, comely and congenial to Christians before their turns, playwrights present genuine conversions not as changes but as revelations of true religious identity. *The Virgin Martyr* and *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, that do include Christianizations as transformations, appear to prove the contrary, but the fact that only an immediate martyr's death is presented as a suitable response to these conversions meets the general idea that on the English renaissance stage interfaith conversion cannot be shown and explored as a fully-fledged transformation. Thus, by omitting post-conversion identities from the stage, even these works support the idea that religious identity can only be conceived of as an untransferable part of the self. A changed religious self, these plays suggest, cannot exist.

CHAPTER 8 'For Christian Shame:' Othello's Assimilation Into Venice

Othello (1604) lacks literal religious conversions and does not contain the word "conversion" or any of its derivatives. This play is nevertheless particularly relevant to the study of early modern dramatic representations of conversion. *Othello* suggests in several ways that its titular hero was not born a Christian but baptized before the action of the play begins. In this way, it presents Othello as a convert to Christianity. If we also take into account the events underlying the action of the tragedy, the threat of a Turkish invasion of Cyprus that must be warded off by the Christian army of Venice under the command of Othello, as well as the play's suggestion that Othello's original faith was probably Islamic, it is not surprising that Othello features prominently in a number of studies on representations of Islamic-Christian conversion in early modern drama.[1] These critical interpretations are important to our understanding of *Othello* in its historical context and inform our insight into the role of Othello as a convert and defender of Christianity against the Ottoman enemy. In his article "Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor" (1997), that later became a chapter in his *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (2003), Daniel Vitkus demonstrates that conversion is not only relevant to Othello's character, but is a dominant theme in the play as a whole, which becomes apparent through its rich use of "tropes of conversion – transformations from Christian to Turk, from virgin to whore, from good to evil, and from gracious virtue to black damnation."[2] Vitkus, moreover, explains how these meanings address early modern anxieties over sexuality, moral values and the stability of Protestantism that were provoked by conversions to the Church of Rome and the Ottoman Empire.[3]

Vitkus's work has sparked new interest in *Othello* as a play that addresses questions of Islamic, Christian and racial identity in conversion. A central issue

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[1] See Daniel Vitkus, "Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.2 (1997): 145-176, and his *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005); and Jane Hwang Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

[2] Vitkus, *Turning Turk* 78.

[3] Vitkus, *Turning Turk* 78.

in critical readings following Vitkus's article is why Othello's social integration into Venice as a convert ultimately breaks down. Jonathan Burton addresses this question by comparing Othello's adoption of Christian culture and discourse to that of Leo Africanus (1497-1554?), a historical convert from Islam to Christianity and best known for his *Geographical History of Africa,* that first appeared in English in 1600.[4] Although both Othello and Africanus incorporate in their reasoning the culture and language of their fellow Christians, Burton notes that Othello, unlike Africanus, eventually fails to recognize Christian racism and misogyny and does not use this knowledge strategically to define himself as a noble convert against "women and dark-skinned Africans as […] 'more other'."[5] According to Julia Reinhard Lupton, it is the possibility that Othello has converted from Islam, rather than paganism, that renders problematic his integration into the Christian community. As opposed to Muslims, Pagans "were conceived as a blank slate more open to a transformative Christian reinscripton."[6] Nevertheless, Othello's status as a former Muslim also renders him closer to Christianity, because according to early modern Christians, Muslims, like Jews, could be "brought back into contact with a law that should have been both historically and personally dissolved by the rite of baptism."[7] Lupton concludes that Othello's death must in fact be seen as a successful reconversion to Christianity, where he "becomes both saint and citizen, both true Christian and acknowledged member of the Venetian republic."[8] In addition, by means of his suicide Othello nullifies his "circumcision" because his self-murder "is itself a kind of circumcision, a gesture that constitutes at once a means of

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[4] Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 233-56.

[5] Burton, *Traffic and Turning,* 256.

[6] Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 105. See also Gil Anidjar, "The Enemy's Two Bodies (Political Theology Too)" in ed. Vincent W. Lloyd, *Race and Political Theology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) 156-173, and Daniel Boyarin, "The Double Mark of the Male Muslim: Eracing Othello," in ed. Lloyd, 174-87, who point to the significance of Othello's former Muslim identity.

[7] Lupton, *Citizen-Saints,* 113.

[8] Lupton, *Citizen-Saints,* 121. I find this reading problematic, in part because Othello commits suicide after he has realized the enormity of his crime, killing an innocent person. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that early modern audiences associated Othello with the exceptional virtuousness of saints. Othello, moreover, does not undergo a process of penance or purification as we have seen in, for instance, *The Virgin Martyr* and its portrayal of the pagan sinner-turned saint Theophilus, nor are there any indications of Othello's supposed sainthood after his death.

social reinscription and a subjectivizing signature."[9] Dennis Austin Britton points to the crucial role "of storytelling to the construction of Othello's identity." [10] He suggests that in so doing, both Othello and Iago rely on the genre of romance but with two different purposes. Othello appropriates it as part of the tradition of the Christianized Muslim, and thus as a transformation of identity, whereas Iago deploys it to "restore" his identity as a racial and religious other. Contrary to Lupton, Britton argues that Iago largely succeeds in reconverting Othello back to Islam. Jane Hwang Degenhardt focuses on Othello's racial difference, and argues that *Othello* "raises the question of whether a Moor can be converted and assimilated into Christianity."[11] She comes to the conclusion that this is not the case, arguing that the play presents the problematic "deeper claims of Pauline universalism."[12] Paul's theological embrace of Christianization clashes with "the physical badges [that] persist and continue to hold sway for specific communities and epochs," including Shakespeare's.[13] Shakespeare thus "shows us how the historically contingent impossibility that threatens Pauline universalism in his own time was an embodied distinction caught in the process of becoming racialized."[14]

It is striking that none of the above readings (or indeed other interpretations of Othello as a convert) refer to *Othello* in the broad context of early modern conversion drama. As I will demonstrate, it is precisely this approach which allows us to apprehend the unique position *Othello* takes up in early modern dramatic portrayals of conversion. That is, *Othello* is the only play that revolves entirely around the fortunes of a character *after* his radical interfaith conversion. The play thus offers answers to the questions raised by the interfaith conversion plays of the period, where the new Christian identity of stage converts and their entrance into their new religious society in particular is left to the imagination of the spectators. Treating the play as part of a rich body of early modern conversion drama also shows us that the reason why Othello's conversion is ultimately unsuccessful is not in the first place his failure to

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[9] Lupton, *Citizen-Saints,* 121. I am not convinced by Lupton's reading of Othello's suicide as "kind of circumcision." Instead of performing a "social reinscription" or a "subjectivizing signature," Othello, in killing himself, removes himself permanently from society and terminates his role as a subject.

[10] Dennis Austin Britton, "Re-'turning' Othello: Transformative and Restorative Romance," *English Literary History* (2011) 78.1: 27-50, 43.

[11] Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 49.

[12] Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion,* 71.

[13] Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 71.

[14] Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 71.

strategically deploy racist and misogynist ideology, his perceived Islamic origin or even his racial difference, but the fact that, as part of his integration into Venice, he adopts Venetian prejudices against women and Moors that render his marriage and conversion untenable. Indeed, it is precisely Othello's success in assimilating into Venice that causes his downfall, since, ironically enough, his adoption of Christianity also means that he will come to see religious identity as fixed and inalienable.

As I have shown throughout this study, this idea manifests itself in all early modern English interfaith conversion plays. Significantly, Othello's utter absorption of Venetian prejudices is presented as a spiritual lapse and thus reminiscent of the spiritual conversion drama that I have discussed in chapters three and four. In this way, Shakespeare emphasizes the problematic difference between on the one hand early modern conceptions of religious identity that are largely determined by ideas of gender, race and culture and, on the other, the notion of religion as spiritual truth thematized in spiritual conversion plays.

A key factor in Othello's destructive integration is the arrangement of his marriage, the very institution that is deployed in other interfaith conversion drama to consolidate a woman's submission to her husband and to celebrate (a husband's) Christian constancy. In contrast to all other cases of marriage-cum-conversion, where it is the woman who turns Christian and weds a Christian husband, it is Othello himself who converts and marries a Christian spouse. This enables Iago to instill in Othello misogynist thinking and provoke anxieties over Desdemona's fidelity that eventually result in Othello's intense self-hatred and suicide. At the end of the play, Othello has fully adopted the Venetian prejudices against Moors and women and believes it is his duty to kill Desdemona. "With the passion of the recently converted," as Walter Cohen reminds us, "Othello is driven to murder not by reversion to African barbarism but by adherence to an extreme, perverse version of the logic of Christian society."[15] This "perverse version of the logic of Christian society" not only includes the misogyny that motivates Othello to kill Desdemona, but, crucially, also the very notion that Christianization is impossible as a radical, genuine and lasting transformation. It is this twisted logic that Othello assumes and that causes his life to end in a tragic and schizophrenic relapse into otherness.

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[15] Walter Cohen, "Othello," *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al. (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997) 2091-99, 2095.

Othello the Convert

Othello is never described as a convert, but that he is one can be deduced from various passages.[16] The most obvious clue is Iago's reference to Othello's baptism. This is when Iago describes the great power Desdemona has over Othello: she is able to make him "renounce his baptism" as "His soul is so enfettered to her love" (2.3.338, 340). It is significant that Iago associates Othello's conversion with their marriage, because it is reminiscent of the six theatrical conversion-cum-marriages that I have discussed in the previous chapter. Yet as opposed to these fortunate couplings, Iago presents Othello's marriage not as a confirmation of conversion but as a menace to it. In this way, Iago anticipates the tragic violation of their marital bond.

Further indications of Othello's conversion can be found in his own and other characters' remarks about his exotic origin.[17] Just as the precise nature of Othello's race and ethnicity remains unspecified, so is his original faith vague and mysterious. The term "Moor" is suggestive of Othello's African descent, but the word was used to refer to sub-Saharan black Moors as well as to north-African Arabs.[18] Whether Othello's original religion was a form of African paganism or Islam is therefore also left undetermined.[19] Other references to Othello's African past are equally cryptic as clues to the precise nature of his previous religion – the handkerchief that was given to his mother by an *Egyptian*, the landscape of his "travailous history" that features "cannibals" and

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[16] Many critics agree that Othello must be seen as a convert to Christianity. See, for instance, Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993) 174-75; Vitkus, *Turning Turk* 89-90; Britton, *Traffic and Turning*, 27-28; Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*, 108; and Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 49. E. A. J. Honigmann asserts that "we cannot prove Othello to be a Christian convert, but the play prompts us to speculate about his mysterious past and its effect on his multilayered personality," in E. A. J. Honigmann, Introduction, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Thomson Learning, 1997) 1-111, 23.

[17] Britton reminds us of a completely different indication of Othello's conversion to Christianity; "Othello is patterned after Ariosto's Ruggiero [in *Orlando Furioso*], a fellow convert to Christianity who also marries an Italian Heroine," "Re-'turning' Othello," 28. The first English translation of the epic poem *Orlando Furioso* appeared in 1591.

[18] See for an extensive analysis of early modern conceptions of Moors and of Othello as a Moor, Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From* Alcazar *to* Othello (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). It is somewhat surprising that in her discussion of Othello's his identity as a Moor, Bartels does not consider the idea of Othello as a convert.

[19] As Lupton notes, "the play never decisively determines whether he has converted from a pagan religion or from Islam," *Citizen-Saints*, 105. See also Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 90.

"magicians," Iago's epithets of "erring Barbarian," and "Barbarian horse" for Othello, and perhaps even Brabantio's oblique reference to Othello as a "pagan" (1.2.99).[20] The point is that Othello's previous faith is different and *radically* different from Christianity. This is in line with the argument of this thesis that important theatrical choices regarding the depiction of conversion are not made on the basis of denominational particularities, but rest on a basic distinction between Christianity and any other faith. This other religion was often simply labeled paganism and could in some cases even refer to Catholicism. Othello uses this same rough contrast himself to condemn the brawl between his officers: "Are we turned Turks? And to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? / For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl'" (2.3.166-168). In so doing, Othello moreover emphasizes his Christian disposition, or in the words of E. A. J. Honigmann: "[Othello] adopts a militantly Christian tone as if to forestall criticism of him as an outsider, or even a pagan."[21] Finally, the remark proves that Othello has internalized Venetian binary thinking about Christians and non-Christian others.

It is important to note that the tragedy's strong emphasis on Othello's race as the object of xenophobic discourse does not cancel out the importance of his status as a religious convert.[22] As has been shown in chapter five and six, in early modern England, religion and what we would describe today as ethnicity or race were intimately, often inextricably, linked.[23] Thus, the word "Moor," used more than forty times to denote Othello, also carried the meaning of Muslim. In fact, it was not uncommon to refer to conversion to Islam with the expression "to turn Moor."[24]

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[20] In this way Brabantio, of course, denies Othello's baptism. See for a discussion of this passage Boyarin, who argues that it is illustrative of "a deep anxiety in the play about the ability of the Turk to turn Christian and back to Turk as he wills, to hide, as it were, his true (or always false) identity," "The Double Mark of the Male Muslim," 183, 184.

[21] Honigmann, *Othello*, 22.

[22] According to Lupton, "in *Othello*, religious difference is more powerfully felt, or at least more deeply theorized, than racial difference, which was only then beginning to surface in its virulent modern form," *Citizen-Saints*, 106. Jonathan Burton writes that "somatic markers often functioned as indicators of religious difference in the early modern period," *Traffic and Turning*, 252.

[23] See for a useful analysis of the relationship between race and religion in early modern England and *Othello*, Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 2-74, 106-107.

[24] In his account of his experiences as a galley slave in Algeria, the captain Richard Hasleton, for instance, frequently uses the expression "to turn Moor" when writing about the attempts of a group of Berber Muslims to convert him to Islam. *Strange and wonderfull things. Happened*

Othello the Convert-Groom

The fact that before the action of the play the Venetians have promoted the convert Othello to the rank of army general intimates that they consider him a loyal and trustworthy member of society who is, moreover, willing to defend Christianity against the Turkish enemy with his life. However, Othello's status as a convert does turn into a problem when he becomes part of the Christian community at its most intimate level, by marrying one of its women. Indeed, Othello's marriage is presented as the trigger and focal point of his ruin. This sudden change in the Christian Venetians' appreciation of Othello as a member of their community is powerfully illustrated in Brabantio's remark which immediately follows Roderigo's xenophobic allusion to Othello and Desdemona's wedding: "This accident is not unlike my dream, / Belief of it oppresses me already" (1.1.140-41).

The Christians' most conspicuous reason for objecting to Othello's marriage with Desdemona is concern over miscegenation. By means of bestial imagery, Iago portrays Desdemona and Othello's marriage as a form of interbreeding, which touches a raw nerve in the Christian society. Of course, this fear of miscegenation also rests on the presupposition that Othello has never become a full member of society and will never be able to change his status as an other. Thus, when Iago, at the beginning of the play, kicks up a disturbance and wakes up Desdemona's father Brabantio, he tells Brabantio that "an old black ram / Is tupping [his] white ewe" and he should take action "Or else the devil will make a grandsire of [him]" (1.1.87-90). When this message does not seem to register with Brabantio, Iago repeats this argument in equally vulgar and racist terms: "you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans!"(1.1.109-112). Brabantio's above remark about his dream follows closely upon Iago and Roderigo's offensive depictions of his daughter's sex life, suggesting that these were precisely the content of his dream. This illustrates the deep-seatedness of Brabantio's fear over miscegenation, as well as the disturbing effect it has on the content of his thoughts.

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to Richard Hasleton, borne at Braintree in Essex, in his ten yeares trauailes in many forraine countries. Penned as he deliuered it from his ovvne mouth (London: Abel Jeffes, 1595). Another example is the cleric Edward Topsell, who wrote that he had "heard a story of an Englishman in Barbary which turned Moore," in *The historie of foure-footed beastes* (London: William Iaggard, 1607) 462.

Miscegenation is not the only issue that renders Othello's marriage problematic for the Venetians. The fact that his marriage involves a perverted gender hierarchy (from a Venetian viewpoint) enables Iago to manipulate Othello into adopting a Venetian bias against religious others and women. In the previous chapter we have seen that a bride converting to Christianity and marrying her Christian husband is presented as a "natural" situation: the bride submits herself to her spouse as well as his God and, in some cases, serves as a "prize" for her husband's heroic constancy. In addition, early moderns identified women less closely with religious otherness than men. It is for these reasons that marriage as a confirmation of a woman's Christianization proved a particularly suitable comedic ending for interfaith conversion plays. By the same token, the Venetians perceive Othello and Desdemona's marriage as "unnatural."

In manoeuvring Othello into questioning his wife's fidelity, Iago draws on broad racial stereotypes of male religious others. As Walter Cohen observes, "Iago's racial insinuations influence Othello in part not because they are true but because they are the norm in Venetian society."[25] However, no less influential than the "racial insinuations" are Iago's misogynistic remarks. For instance, Iago tells Othello that the women of Venice are inherently unchaste because they have no qualms about adultery and are inclined to hide their sins from their husbands rather than avoid wrongdoing:

> I know her country disposition well –
> In Venice they do let God see the pranks
> They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
> Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown. (3.3.204-7)

Moments later, these ideas have become part of Othello's thinking. He describes his marriage as a "curse" because men "can call these delicate creatures ours" but "not their appetites" (3.3.272-74). That is to say, Othello believes that marriage renders women the property of their husbands, and subject to their wills. In addition, he claims that this institution is undermined by these very women because they are essentially inconstant. These Venetian prejudices against women are poignantly criticized by Emilia in a way that clearly echoes Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech from *The Merchant of Venice* (5.1.85-102). The principles underlying Shylock's forceful arguments to attack Venetian bigotry against Jews are used by Emilia to denounce Venetian sexism. She argues that if women cheat on their husbands, they are driven by the same passions and

[25] Cohen, "Othello," 2095.

desires, and suffer from the same weaknesses. Moreover, women model their behaviour on men's (4.3.85-102).

At another moment, Iago reverts to xenophobia to undermine Othello's confidence in Desdemona, suggesting that it is not so much female unfaithfulness but Othello's exotic origin that renders Desdemona's love for him unnatural:

> Not to affect many proposed matches
> Of her own clime, complexion and degree,
> Whereto we see, in all things, nature tends –
> Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank,
> Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural. (3.3.232-236)

Iago bluntly states that Desdemona's reason for marrying Othello is lust, because it is inconceivable that a woman native to Christian Venice wishes to wed someone who is not of her own "clime, complexion and degree." Iago's use of the first person plural and "one" in line 232 reveal that he is relying on existing values and convictions that are shared by members of Venetian society. Realizing that he has overstepped his bounds, Iago hastens to add that he is not referring to Desdemona in particular, but this is immediately followed by his feigned concern that Desdemona might "recoil to her better judgement" and reject Othello in favour of a white Christian:

> But pardon me, I do not in position
> Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
> Her will, recoiling to her better judgement,
> May fall to match you with her country forms,
> And happily repent. (3.3.237-242)

Iago's manipulations almost immediately have the desired effect and become manifest when Othello begins to believe that his complexion and exotic origin may be the reason for Desdemona's adultery: "Haply for I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have" (3.3.275).

Othello's adoption of Venetian double standards and bigotry leads him to believe that he has been "abused" by Desdemona and therefore "must […] loathe" her (3.3.271-72). This happens even before Desdemona has dropped the handkerchief that Iago will later use as proof of Desdemona's infidelity. In the last part of the play, Othello acts on his misogynistic views when he decides that Desdemona "must die, else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6). Significantly, this glimpse into Othello's mind, his desire to protect the men of Venice against his

wife, reveals the "extreme, perverse version of the logic of Christian society," as Cohen puts it, that Othello has adopted as part of an intemperate embrace of his new social environment.

In fact, Shakespeare toys with the idea that Othello trades his marital bond with a Christian for a metaphorical marriage to a person who can make him even more "Venetian" than he already is. The way in which Othello puts his trust in Iago is presented in terms reminiscent of a marriage vow, albeit a deeply ironic and perverted one. Iago promises Othello that he will give him proof of Desdemona's infidelity: "now I shall have reason / To show the love and duty that I bear you / With franker spirit: therefore, as I am bound, Receive it from me" (3.3.196-9), and moments later Othello returns this vow of loyalty in similar terms: "I am bound to thee for ever" (3.3.214). The end of this long scene, after Iago has subtly presented the handkerchief to Othello, is concluded with a cynical inversion of a solemnization of marriage. Othello responds to Iago's warning that his mind "perhaps may change" by swearing that it will never do so, adding "Now by yond marble heaven / In the due reverence of a sacred vow / I here engage my words (3.3.455, 463-65). Iago answers this with an equally sinister pledge:

> Witness, you ever-burning lights above […]
> that here Iago doth give up
> The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
> To wronged Othello's service. Let him command
> And to obey shall be in me remorse
> What bloody business ever. (3.3.466-72)

The mock rite culminates in Othello appointing Iago his lieutenant, and Iago feigning full submission to his general: "I am your own for ever" (3.3.482). The resemblance to an actual marriage ceremony is enhanced by the fact that Othello and Iago exchange these vows in a kneeling position.

Othello the Spiritual Apostate

Although *Othello* revolves around an interfaith convert's integration into his new social environment, spiritual conversion, too, plays an essential role in this tragedy. Shakespeare employs the language of spiritual conversion to intensify the poignant paradoxes of interfaith conversion in this play. A case in point is when Iago suggests to Othello that Desdemona might change her mind about Othello and make the "better" decision to marry a white Christian. In this passage, also quoted above, Iago tells Othello: "Her will, recoiling to her better

judgement, / May fall to match you with her country forms / And happily repent" (3.3.240-242). Iago uses the vocabulary of spiritual conversion, "to repent," to describe Desdemona's rejection of Othello and falling in love with native Venetian men. More importantly, Shakespeare draws attention to the bitter irony of Othello's integration as a Christian convert by portraying his embrace of Venetian prejudice largely in terms of a spiritual fall, and by presenting the success of this embrace as inversely proportional to the fall. That is to say, the more Othello thinks and acts according to Venetian culture, the further he drifts away from true Christianity. This notion is supported in particular by the play's portrayal of Desdemona as a paragon of constancy and Christian values who suffers and dies at the hands of her convert-husband.

Desdemona's steadfastness is contrasted with and called attention to by the barrage of false accusations made against her precisely of unfaithfulness and inconstancy. The hurling of allegations against Desdemona already begins in the first scene of the play, where Iago and Roderigo convince Brabantio that Desdemona has deceived her father by marrying Othello. Two scenes later this idea is repeated by Brabantio, who warns Othello that Desdemona may therefore also betray her husband. Othello swears on his life that Desdemona is faithful, but when Iago reiterates Brabantio's warning in 3.3.209, Othello affirms it. This anger culminates in a tirade in which Othello describes Desdemona's infidelity to Lodovico. It is significant that his language of marital infidelity echoes that of religious apostasy: "Ay, you wish that I would make her turn. / Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on / And turn again" (4.1.252-54). In addition to suggesting that Desdemona's craving for sex can never be satisfied, Othello conveys the important early modern concern over interfaith conversion, explained throughout this thesis, that one turn will inevitably lead to another. This idea of Desdemona as an essentially changeable character is prefigured by Iago when he asserts to Roderigo that Desdemona will exchange Othello for a younger lover: Desdemona "must change" (1.3.350) and she "must have change" (352). As various scholars have pointed out, the other way in which *Othello* portrays Desdemona as a blameless Christian is by depicting her as a Christ-like figure.[26] The idea that she is a Christ-like victim who is killed after a betrayal is sustained in a number of allusions to the Passion. Desdemona prays for mercy for her murderer (5.2.58). Besides, as Robert Watson points out,

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[26] See, for instance, Anthony Hecht, *Melodies Unheard: Essays on the Mysteries of Poetry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 12; Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*, 117; Paul N. Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise* (New York: New York University Press, 1957) 132.

> Othello's assertion that Desdemona's death should be accompanied by 'a great eclipse of sun and moon, / And earth should yawn at alteration' (5.2.101-4) recalls the report in Luke 23:45 that 'the sun was darkened, and the vaile of the Temple rent through the middes' at the moment of Christ's death.[27]

In its treatment of spiritual conversion, *Othello* bears some resemblances with *Doctor Faustus* (1592).[28]In the words of Paul Siegel, "Iago becomes Othello's Mephistopheles, and in making the devil his servant, Othello gives himself up into his power."[29] Siegel continues to argue that Othello, like Faustus, fails to follow the "good angel" Desdemona and eventually calls down damnation on himself as a consequence of his "pact with the devil."[30] Degenhardt, too, argues that Othello is damned. She writes, for instance, "Othello is damned not directly because of his outer blackness but because of his inability to sustain faith in Desdemona's intangible faith, or, in other words, for his reliance on outward markers that would in fact attach significance to his own blackness."[31] The interpretations of Othello as a "damned character" seem to be confirmed when Othello becomes aware of the dreadful mistake he has committed. At this moment his self-accusation recalls that of Faustus and other Elizabethan damned characters, such as William Wager's Moros or Worldly Man: "Whip me, ye devils, / From the possession of this heavenly sight! / Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur, / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!" (5.2.275-78). The most elaborate discussion of Othello's spiritual lapse comes from Robert Watson, who deploys the similarities between *Othello* and the Protestant morality play to contend that *Othello* is a form of Protestant propaganda. He concludes:

> A Jacobean audience convinced to value spontaneous love above Venetian traditions, to condemn Othello for letting the dubious evidence of his senses distract him from the certain devotion of his

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[27] Robert Watson, "*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda," in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 234-57, 235.

[28] Vitkus makes a similar point: Othello is a "morality play […] (like that of Doctor Faustus), and "a tragedy of damnation, not a divine comedy, and it ends with the triumph of the Vice, that 'demi-devil' Iago, who has won another soul for Satan," *Turning Turk*, 97.

[29] Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 127.

[30] Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 128.

[31] Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 65.

> heart, and to hate Iago for deluding Christians into believing in reward and retaliation rather than love, would have found itself endorsing the protestant Reformation.[32]

Yet the problem with these interpretations of Othello as a *damned* character is that Othello's spiritual lapse is not brought about by divine intervention but by a Christian society that refuses to accept a new Christian as a fully-fledged member of its community. Although Othello suffers spiritual agony over an interfaith conversion, like Woodes's Philologus, and Daborne and Massinger's renegade pirates Ward and Grimaldi, Othello pays a spiritual price precisely for turning Christian. Indeed, while Woodes, Daborne and Massinger use the vocabulary of spiritual conversion to condemn and warn against apostasy, Shakespeare employs it to expose the bitter and paradoxical fate of a convert who does what is desired of him and internalizes the values and moral standards of his new Christian community. In this way, Shakespeare draws attention to the troubling absence of spiritual conversion in Othello's interfaith conversion, of actual Christian truth and morality in Othello's integration into Venetian Christianity.

The Convert Who Cannot Be

A striking Venetian prejudice that Othello comes to internalize is the idea that his non-Christian background makes him inconstant and unreliable. This idea manifested itself not only in regard to historical converts, as I have shown in chapter five, but also in interfaith conversion plays, as has been demonstrated in chapter seven. Othello's perceived inconstancy is not explicitly associated with his status as a convert, but with his exotic roots. Yet the purport of the intimations that Othello is unreliable is essentially the same: converts to Christianity cannot rid themselves of their inherent otherness which also renders them inherently unreliable. Spurred by Iago, Roderigo, for instance, inspires fear in Brabantio over Othello's trustworthiness: Othello cannot be trusted because he is "an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.134-35). Iago repeats this point to Roderigo, turning it into a broad stereotype about all moors: "These Moors are changeable in their wills" (1.3.347). It is important to remember that remarks like these draw on Venetian stereotypes and divulge little about Iago's personal views of Othello; in a soliloquy Iago asserts that he

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[32] Watson, "*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda," 250.

believes Othello to be quite the opposite of how he describes him to others: "The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not, / Is of a constant, loving noble nature" (2.1.286-87).

Othello anticipates the perception of his identity as changeable and of his conversion as impossible in his own bold challenge in the third act: "Exchange me for a goat / When I shall turn the business of my soul / To such exsufflicate and blown surmises, / Matching thy inference" (3.3.183-86). Othello makes the point that he will not lose his head over false or exaggerated speculations about his wife's conjugal fidelity. The word goat is apposite because it is a "horned animal" and thus reminiscent of the cuckold, and the animal was seen as "highly sexed, spend[ing] too much time in lustful activity."[33] However, the goat may also be appropriate in the sense that it evokes the idea of capriciousness or changeability. The word "capricious" is derived from the Latin term for goat, *caper.* Shakespeare evidences an awareness of this connection in *As You Like It* (1599), where Touchstone says to Audrey: "I am here with thee and thy goats as the most capricious poet honest Ovid was among the Goths" (3.3.5-6). It is, moreover, worth noting that Shakespeare uses the verb "to caper" in connection with Moors who had converted to Christianity in *2 Henry VI*. In this play, the Duke of the Gloucester notes about John Mortimer "I have seen /Him caper upright like a wild Morisco" (3.1.364-65). Thus, the phrase "Exchange me for a goat / When I shall turn the business of my soul," is not simply part of an assertion about jealousy and infidelity; it also points to the supposed changeability of converts. In addition, this moment anticipates Othello's identification with another animal, the "circumcised dog," just before he commits suicide. It is, finally, important that Othello uses the word "exchange." As this thesis has shown, on the early modern stage, turning the business of one's soul had come to signify first and foremost the exchange of religious identities and only secondly seeing the error of one's ways.

When, after Othello has killed Desdemona, he realizes that she is innocent, Othello begins to conceive of himself through a Christian Venetian lens as an ignoble and savage other. He first compares himself to the "base Indian" who "threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (5.2.345-46).[34] This is followed by his famous projection of himself onto a Muslim he once killed:

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[33] Honigmann, *Othello*, 219.

[34] In my interpretation of "Indian" instead of "Iudean" in the First Folio (1623) is based on Richard's Levin's "The Indian/ Iudean Crux in Othello," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33 (1982): 60-67. Adopting Levin's conclusion, the editor of the Arden edition, E. A. J. Honigmann, provides an overview of the arguments for and against the interpretations of "Indian" and "Iudean" (342).

> […] in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him – thus! *He stabs himself* (5.2.350-54)

Othello places himself in the position of the perceived malignant Muslim and enemy of Christianity. In the words of Daniel Vitkus, Othello "turns Turk and becomes the enemy within. He has 'traduced' the state of Venice and converted to a black, Muslim identity, and embodiment of the Europeans' phobic fantasy: Othello has become the ugly stereotype."[35] Yet this interpretation obscures the fact that in this scene Othello is *also* portrayed as the ultimate insider in Venice, protector of the Venetian state and Christianity, who kills "the ugly stereotype." This view is advocated by Julia Reinhard Lupton who concludes that Othello therefore dies "into citizenship," his suicide marking "his entry into the archives of state memory as a citizen-soldier."[36] Lupton even goes as far as to argue that Othello here becomes a "saint" and a "true Christian."[37] This conclusion, in turn, disregards the depiction of Othello as a lapsed Christian. Indeed, the way in which Vitkus and Lupton's interpretations of Othello's self-murder relate to each other are reminiscent of Ludwig Wittgenstein's well-known optical illusion of the duck-rabbit, where one sees the heads of a duck and a rabbit but never at the same time.[38] The point is that there is no resolution at this moment. As Kiernan Ryan has observed, Othello "correctly perceives himself to have been both the alien victim of Venetian society and the active, though unwitting, accomplice of its destruction of him."[39] I also agree with Matthew Dimmock, who notes that Othello both substantiates and subverts the menace of the Turk, but rather than inferring that Othello's capacity as a convert rules out his loyalty to Venice and *vice versa*,[40] I argue that Shakespeare here illustrates the inherent problem of interfaith conversion: the fact that the early moderns could not conceive of the concept of conversion as a radical transformation of religious identity. Othello is the convert who has assimilated himself into the community to the point that he believes religious identities are inalienable. In this way, Othello's conversion

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[35] Vitkus, *Turning Turk* 106.
[36] Lupton, *Citizen-Saints,* 121.
[37] Lupton, *Citizen-Saints,* 121.
[38] See his *Philosophical Investigations* that was first published in its original German in 1953.
[39] Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 89.
[40] Dimmock, *New Turkes*, 206.

generates an insoluble contradiction: he is *both* a Christian warrior *and* a religious enemy. Realizing that this identity cannot be sustained, Othello ends it.

Conclusion

Othello complies with the unwritten rule that radical and conclusive transformations of religious identity are not shown on the early modern stage. Othello's Christianization takes place before the action of the play, and we do not learn anything, therefore, about the precise features of his pre-conversion identity that were erased upon his adoption of Christianity. In this way, *Othello* seems yet another illustration of the incapability of the early modern theatre to portray religious identity as something that can be shed or assumed in conversion.

Yet by devoting an entire play to the post-conversion life of a new-Christian, Shakespeare is unique in exploring the limits of what is conceivable in interfaith conversion on the early modern stage. In addition, he uses marriage, the very tool other playwrights employ to contain conversion or celebrate constancy, to examine this convert's integration into a Christian society, and to explore how this society, including Othello himself, and with Iago as an evil instigator, fashions the identity of its convert. *Othello*, then, shows us what happens if a convert assimilates fully into a new culture, which is precisely what his new cultural and religious environment desires of him. His assimilation paradoxically involves absorbing the racism and misogyny endemic to his environment. Moreover, it involves adopting the understanding of religious identity as an inherent part of one's self, which renders interfaith conversion essentially impossible. The inevitable result is a schizophrenic situation in which the convert can no longer maintain his self-identity.

What makes *Othello* even more interesting as a conversion play is that it captures Othello's assimilation in terms of a spiritual drift away from the Christian truth and constancy that is embodied by Desdemona. In this way, Shakespeare exposes the alarming divergence between on the one hand religion as an identity, constituted by secular and inherited components such as race, gender, culture and social customs, and,
on the other, Christianity as a spiritual mindset.

CONCLUSION

Conversion is a useful entry point for studying religious issues that were at the heart of the early modern period. These issues pertain to devotion, human and divine agency, mystical experience, the demarcations of different faiths, the relation between inner conviction and outward behaviour and the nature and possibility of religious transformation. I have used the theatre as a source to investigate how early moderns addressed these questions. Serving an important socio-cultural role in early modern England, the stage produced narratives of conversion, and investigated the conditions under which it could be successful. In order to bring the staging of conversion into sharper focus, I have distinguished between spiritual conversion, which amounts to a change of behaviour, whether an intensification of faith, a rejection of a sinful or worldly lifestyle or the pursuit of godliness, and interfaith conversion, which involves a change of being or the exchange of one denominational identity for another. Although these two forms of conversion do not exclude each other and although both forms existed long before the early modern period, the distinction has allowed me to explicate a central development in the early modern English dramatization of religion: perceptions of faith in spiritual terms were increasingly replaced by an understanding of belief in terms of mutually exclusive denominational identities. This raises the question of the extent to which this development is indicative of a much broader change in early modern understandings of faith. While I have used the theatre as a rich source to investigate how early moderns attempted to formulate answers to broad social, cultural and political questions of religion and conversion, further research is required to explore this development in other early modern genres and contexts.

The present study is not the first to suggest that the early modern theatre functioned as a site for negotiating the complexities of religious conversion. In the past few decades a series of studies have scrutinized dramatic representations of interfaith conversion. Yet these works have approached conversion from a restricted confessional perspective, showing how religious change informed early modern Christian understandings of *either* Jews *or* Muslims and how these conceptions were instrumental in building and reinforcing notions of English, Protestant, masculine and feminine identity. In this way, these analyses can also be seen as products of the early modern development in which dramatists began to conceive of faith more and more in terms of separate, organized, and exclusionary religions and denominations. It is telling that the large number of studies of conversion and early modern English drama does not include investigations into spiritual conversion, which, as this thesis has shown, constituted a major topic in early Elizabethan plays. Another aspect that previous research has ignored is the

close resemblance between stage portrayals of all forms of interfaith conversion. This similitude tells us that playwrights may have shown specific interest in, for instance, Jewish-Christian or Muslim-Christian relations, but that their conception of religious difference was not as clear and developed as scholars suggest by their exclusive focus on Islam or Judaism.

While early modern English playwrights had an abiding interest in issues of conversion, an important shift can be discerned in the type of conversion that drew most attention. Taking their cue from their late medieval predecessors, various early Elizabethan plays featured characters who made attempts at spiritual reformation. From the early 1580s onwards, and along with the rise of the commercial theatre, however, dramatic interest in spiritual conversion largely disappeared from the stage, leaving the field to explorations of interfaith conversion. The fascination of playwrights was not only with Jews or Muslims turning Christian (or, in the case of Islam, *vice versa*), but also with conversions between Christianity and a variety of pagan convictions, and between Protestantism and Catholicism. In addition to actual stage conversions, we also find near-conversions, for instance, when Christians heroically resist pressure to abandon their faith and metaphorical use of conversion language. These choices of topic are not dependent on genre. The fact that we find them in tragedies, comedies and tragicomedies alike proves their broad dramatic appeal. Spiritual conversion did not vanish completely from the stage, but its role was relegated to the fringes of the action and, as such, in stark contrast with the centrality of interfaith conversion.

In the first part of this thesis I have shown that spiritual conversion constituted a key theme of late medieval and early Elizabethan drama. As a response to the renewed emphasis on the bondage of the will, and the introduction of double predestination, early Elizabethan playwrights began to express a rather pessimistic view of this possibility by staging failed attempts at spiritual regeneration. After the last play that fully revolved around spiritual conversion, *Doctor Faustus* (1592), successful spiritual conversion was revived, but only as a minor topic and with an air of romanticism and nostalgia. These theatrical approaches evidence the growing dominance of interfaith conversion in drama. Spiritual conversion, reconfigured through the lens of Calvinism, becomes intensely confessionalized itself. When it is not confessionalized it is marginalized and presented as an ideal of a bygone era.

The prevalence of interfaith conversion in early modern drama vis-à-vis the secondary role of spiritual conversion illustrates the early modern tendency to conceive of religion progressively in terms of identity. Faith came increasingly to be seen as a property shared by a group of people. Although this understanding was not in itself new, it intensified sharply in the late sixteenth and early

seventeenth centuries. This intensification also manifested itself in the polarization between religious others and (Protestant) Christians, and in the identification of religious identity with certain character traits and other markers of identity, such as gender and nationality. What mattered in these identifications was first and foremost the binary distinction between self and other. On the stage, Jews, pagans, Muslims and Catholics were broadly stereotyped as equally cruel and hostile to (Protestant) Christians.

Many scholars have noted that early modern conversion raised questions about the relation between inner conviction and the outward expression of worship. According to Molly Murray, for instance, "the English contemporaries and successors" of John Calvin "would continue the proper relationship between inward and outward conversion, and would do so in an increasingly crowded polemical arena."[1] Ania Loomba has noted that concerns about "the relationship between the inner and outer self [...] is at the heart of the question of religious conversion."[2] Peter Lake has explained that early moderns showed an "obsession with dissimulation," which was a consequence of a "renewed insistence on external conformity and obedience" by the Elizabethan regime.[3] More recently, Chloe Preedy has compellingly argued that this emphasis on outward conformity and the concomitant "fearful realization that it was impossible to determine true belief" is an important theme in the drama of the religious sceptic Christopher Marlowe, and particularly in his portrayal of conversion.[4] She writes that he "provocatively aligns false conversion with a skeptical secular agenda, depicting characters who adapt their faith in response to political circumstances."[5] Other scholars, too, have focused on the theatre as the place where the relationship between conversion on the one hand, and the relationship between outward behaviour and inner considerations on the other was investigated. Thus, according to Jane Hwang Degenhardt, the "disjunction between inner faith and outer show

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[1] Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 14. Murray here defines this opposition as "a radical reorientation of the soul and a radical change of outward confessional identity" (13).

[2] Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 56.

[3] Peter, Lake. "Religious Identities in Shakespeare's England," *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (London: Blackwell, 1999) 57-85, 64.

[4] Chloe Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism: Politic Religion and Post-Reformation Polemic* (Arden Shakespeare: London, 2013) 65.

[5] Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 65.

reappears as a persistent theme and source of anxiety in plays about Christians 'turning Turk.'"[6]

While this thesis does not deny that conversion provides a natural tool to explore questions of sincerity in faith in relation to outward conformity and duplicity, these questions have not constituted a main focus of this thesis. The reasons are that the number of staged counterfeit conversions is relatively limited, and, more importantly, the general pattern in stage depictions of interfaith conversion point to a problem that *precedes* questions of inner conviction and outward behaviour: the unsettling effect of interfaith conversion on the perceived and much desired stability of religious identity. This is something Ania Loomba overlooks when she rightly observes that "conversion implies that religious identity is not fixed or innate and can be acquired and shed," yet immediately moves on to stress that "this possibility generates" questions over ways in which to establish whether "the convert [has] really converted."[7] It is a main contention of this thesis that the very notion of interfaith conversion itself was so disturbing that playwrights never portrayed conversion in a way that suggested that religious identity could be adopted and shed.

Virtually all of the drama that has been discussed in this study portrays interfaith conversion in a way that suggests that a full and convincing transformation of religious identity is not possible. In chapter six I have shown how plays ridicule the Christianizations of non-Christians and in doing so confirm their unalterable otherness rather than their potential for conversion. By the same token, Christian identity is corroborated by its adherents' courageous resistance against violently forced apostasy. The actual stage conversions in this chapter are of craven or clownish Christian figures of whom it is suggested that their embrace of Catholicism or Islam is motivated by sheer opportunism and that their change amounts, above all, to a destruction of the soul rather than a change of religious identity.

Chapter seven has shown that in cases when interfaith conversion was presented as a genuine possibility, these conversions were hedged about with conditions that rendered it impossible to recognize them as full exchanges of religious identity. To begin with, all of these conversions involved a turn to (Protestant) Christianity. Besides, the characters in question may be labeled as

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[6] Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's The Virgin Martyr and the Early Modern Threat of 'Turning Turk,'" *ELH* (2006): 83-117, 91. See also Dennis Britton, "Muslim Conversion and Circumcision as Theater," *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) 71-86, 79.

[7] Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, 56.

Muslims, Jews or pagans prior to their change of faith, but, as is testified by figures like Marlowe's Abigail or Thomas Greene's Corcut in *Selimus* (1592), they are portrayed as equally kind, pretty or heroic as Christians. Many of these nominal converts are non-Christian women marrying a Christian husband and adopting his faith at the same time. The popularity of this topic can be explained in part by the fact that marriage also solemnized the desired analogy between a woman's submission to her husband and his God. On a more abstract level, the very identity of an early modern woman was subsumed into her husband's, thus cancelling out any anxieties over her conversion. These concerns were also dealt with in instances where death follows conversion. In the rare instances when wicked non-Christians become genuine converts to Christianity, such as Theophilus in *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), a remarkable metamorphosis is immediately followed by death. While this fate is presented as a celebration of the heroism of the convert, who has now become a martyr, it invests the change with reassuring permanence and absolves the playwright from having to picture a full-blown exchange of religious identity, with all of the disturbing implications which this carries. These implications are shed light on by the only early modern dramatic personification of conversion, in Richard Zouche's *The Sophister* (1614). It presents this figure in terms of interfaith conversion and portrays him as inherently opportunistic and essentially changeable.

The paradoxical thesis of this study has been that the theatre's thematic preoccupation with conversion conceals the notion that it did everything in its power to suppress it. Although drama appeared to embrace the subject of interfaith conversion, it contained an undercurrent of concern over the porousness of English Protestant identity that prevented playwrights from suiting the full dramatic action to the word and showing how the same depraved Muslim, Jewish, Catholic or pagan identities they had constructed could be shed and exchanged for a righteous Christian one. As I have shown in chapter five, this attitude was by no means exclusive to the theatre and could be found in sermons as well as in statements by converts themselves that betrayed concerns over their image as weathercocks. The study of stage, however, has allowed us to gain a much richer understanding of the complexities and the sheer depth of the concern over conversion. On the site where humans could transform into beasts and statues, and men and women could, albeit temporarily, convincingly pass for each other, no Muslim, Jew or pagan could undergo a transformation of similar magnitude.

It should perhaps come as no surprise that the limitations of the concerted effort to suppress the disturbing implications of conversion were stretched by England's most imaginative playwright. Shakespeare wrote the only play of this period about life *after* interfaith conversion. In *Othello* (1604), he depicts how successfully integrating into a Christian society is paramount to internalizing

prejudices against converts, and inevitably results in tragedy. The insight that Shakespeare displayed in *Othello* makes all the more clear that many early moderns could not accept converts as coreligionists and full member of a community. It is nevertheless telling that nowhere in his drama does Shakespeare stage a fully-fledged interfaith conversion.

In her work on the role of conversion in the British Empire of the nineteenth century, Gauri Viswanathan has observed that "by undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders."[8] In this thesis I have tried to show that what Viswanathan here argues about conversion in relation to modernity and specifically modern categories of citizenship and nineteenth century nationhood had its roots in a much earlier period. This thesis has described the growing conception of faith in terms of denominational identity as a characteristically early modern phenomenon. While it has discussed at length the onset of this development as well as older understandings of religion that had to make place for this newer view, this study has, for reasons of scope and space, not commented on the role and nature of this development during succeeding centuries. Viswanathan shows that the basic concerns surrounding conversion had not altered fundamentally during a period that is significantly closer to ours. Today, many people still appear to have difficulty coming to terms with interfaith conversion. Converts, especially those to Islam, are still likely to be accused of opportunism, and the ban on apostasy that is imposed in Islamic communities signals a concern over the stability of faith that is not dissimilar to the early modern English anxieties which this thesis has analysed. Similarly, although the Western world is arguably more secular than the early modern period, the unease about exchanges or alterations of religious and ethnic identity has not disappeared. This is testified, for instance, by media debates about immigration by non-Western foreigners, in which the urge to conceive of cultural otherness as intrinsic is thinly veiled by a rhetoric of integration or assimilation. In a similar vein, "participation contracts" and "citizenship tests" first and foremost show a desire to draw and confirm cultural boundaries. Although such initiatives are intended to alleviate concerns, they seem, like the early modern drama discussed in this study, an aspect of the problems which they seek to address.

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[8] Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 16.

APPENDIX

List of Spiritual and Interfaith Conversion Plays

This list includes plays, performed between 1558 and 1642, that feature spiritual and interfaith (near)conversions, feigned conversions, (near-) converts, and works that thematize spiritual and interfaith conversion. In addition to the works below, there are around 70 plays that occasionally use conversion in a metaphorical sense or employ tropes of conversion. Although some of these works are mentioned sporadically in this thesis, they are of secondary importance to my argument, and it is for this reason that I have not included them in the list.

Interfaith conversion plays are marked in bold.
Categorization of genre is according to Harbage. Abbreviations: C = Comedy; H = History; HR = Heroical Romance; M = Moral; MI = Moral-Biblical Interlude; NM = Neo-miracle; PM = Protestant Moral; PS = Political Satire; T = Tragedy; TC = Tragicomedy; TP = Topical Play.

Year	Title	Author	Genre
c. 1550-1566	*The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*	Lewis Wager	MI
1559	*The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art*	William Wager	PM
1560	*Enough Is as Good as a Feast*	William Wager	PM
1565	*King Darius*	Anonymous	PM
1572	***The Conflict of Conscience****	Nathaniel Woodes	PM
1581	***The Three Ladies of London***	Robert Wilson	M
1587	*I Tamburlaine the Great*	Christopher Marlowe	HR
1589	***The Jew of Malta***	Christopher Marlowe	T
1592	***Selimus***	Robert Greene	HR
1592	*Doctor Faustus*	Christopher Marlowe	T
1592	***Soliman and Perseda***	Thomas Kyd	T
1596	***The Merchant of Venice***	William Shakespeare	C
1597	***An Humorous Day's Mirth***	George Chapman	C
1599	*As You Like It*	William Shakespeare	C
1604	***The Fair Maid of the West Part I***	Thomas Heywood	C
1604	***Othello***	William Shakespeare	T
1607	***The Travels of the Three English Brothers***	John Day, William Rowley and George Wilkins	TP
1607	***The Insatiate Countess***	John Marston, William Barksted and Lewis Mackin	T
1608	***A Shoemaker, A Gentleman***	William Rowley	C

1610	***A Christian Turned Turk***	Robert Daborne	T
1611	***If It Be Not Good, the Devil Is In It***	Thomas Dekker	T
1612	*The White Devil*	John Webster	T
1614	***Bartholomew Fair***	Ben Jonson	C
1614	***The Sophister***	Richard Zouche	M
1615	*Monsieur Thomas*	John Fletcher	C
1618	***The Knight of Malta***	John Fletcher and Philip Massinger	TC
1618	***The Martyred Soldier***	Henry Shirley	T
1620	***The Virgin Martyr***	Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger	T
1621	***The Island Princess***	John Fletcher	TC
1622	***The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjurer***	Anonymous	TC
1624	***The Duchess of Suffolk***	Thomas Drue	H
1624	***The Unnatural Combat***	Philip Massinger	T
1624	***A Game at Chess***	Thomas Middleton	PS
1624	***The Renegado***	Philip Massinger	TC
1626	***The Staple of News***	Ben Jonson	C
1628	*The Witty Fair One*	James Shirley	C
1631	***The Fair Maid of the West Part II***	Thomas Heywood	C
1631	***The Emperor of the East***	Philip Massinger	TC
1631	*The Traitor*	James Shirley	T
1632	***The City Madam***	Philip Massinger	C
1635	***The Seven Champions of Christendome***	John Kirke	HR
1638	***The Constant Maid***	James Shirley	C
1639	***St. Patrick for Ireland***	James Shirley	NM
1640	*The Queen of Aragon*	William Habington	TC

* Both a spiritual and an interfaith conversion play

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SAMENVATTING

Bekering was een belangrijk thema in het Europa van de vroegmoderne tijd. Hoewel bekering altijd een substantiële rol heeft gespeeld in de christelijke theologie, kreeg het in deze periode een nieuwe urgentie. De protestantse Reformatie zorgde voor een toename van confessionele diversiteit, waardoor er nog nooit zoveel keuze ontstond aan denominaties die afgezworen en aangenomen konden worden. Tegelijkertijd kregen bekeringen extra lading. Leden van kerken begonnen hun identiteit steeds sterker af te zetten tegen die van anderen. Hierdoor schaadde afvalligheid het zelfvertrouwen van de ene kerk, terwijl een andere kerk diezelfde bekering kon vieren als een overwinning op de religieuze vijand.

In Engeland werd de Reformatie zelf gekenmerkt door bekering, aangezien de bevolking driemaal gedwongen werd zich aan een andere staatskerk te conformeren. In 1534 riep Hendrik VIII zichzelf uit tot hoofd van de Church of England. Tijdens het bewind van Maria Tudor, dat in 1553 begon, keerde het land voor een periode van vijf jaar terug naar het katholicisme, waarna het in 1559, kort nadat Elizabeth I werd gekroond, weer officieel protestants werd. Het was echter niet alleen de Reformatie die bekering actueel maakte in het vroegmoderne Engeland. Door handelsmissies in het Middellandse Zeegebied en ontdekkingsreizen in Noord- en Zuid-Amerika kwamen de Engelsen steeds vaker in contact met joden, moslims en andere gelovigen, wat de gelegenheid bood en de wens versterkte om niet-christelijke volkeren tot het (protestantse) christendom te brengen. Al deze ontwikkelingen maakten bekering tot een veelbesproken kwestie en zetten Engelse mannen en vrouwen aan het denken over de implicaties en betekenissen van dit verschijnsel.

Het feit dat een bekeerling haar leven had gebeterd of overtuigd was geraakt van het ware geloof resulteerde in opluchting, maar bekering kon ook verwarring scheppen en vragen oproepen. Omdat protestantse hervormers bekering volledig toedichtten aan Gods genade, zaaiden zij twijfel over het belang van factoren die traditioneel als instrumenten van bekering werden gezien, zoals liefdadigheid, de wijze waarop de Schrift gelezen dient te worden en de actieve rol van de bekeerling zelf. Of een bekering tot vreugde of verontrusting leidde, was ook afhankelijk van de richting waarin deze zich voltrok. Veel protestantse Engelsen maakten zich zorgen over bekeerlingen tot het katholicisme en over landgenoten die zich lieerden aan het expansionistische Ottomaanse rijk en de islam omarmden. Er circuleerden er talloze nieuwsberichten over vermeende gelukzoekende Engelse piraten die uit opportunisme een islamitische identiteit hadden aangenomen. Ook waren er verslagen over onfortuinlijke zielen die gevangen waren genomen door Turkse zeerovers en gedwongen werden hun

christelijke geloof af te zweren. Omgekeerd werden de schaarse bekeringen van moslims en joden tot de Church of England gepresenteerd als religieuze en politieke successen. Dat gold ook voor katholieken die protestants werden. Echter, de opportunistische motieven van sommige bekeerlingen en het bestaan van notoire "seriebekeerlingen," die meer dan eens, en soms wel zes keer van gedachten veranderden over wat volgens hen het ware geloof was, beïnvloedden de beeldvorming over alle nieuwe protestanten.

Het theater, dat in deze periode als maatschappelijke kunstvorm tot bloei kwam, was de plek bij uitstek waar antwoorden werden geformuleerd op de sociale, culturele en politieke vraagstukken die bekering opriep. Zo werden in toneelstukken de voorwaarden bedacht en verbeeld waaraan een succesvolle en betrouwbare bekering diende te voldoen. Daarbij verkende en creëerde het theater betekenissen van bekering door het concept in verband te brengen met genderkwesties en vraagstukken over nationale, religieuze en raciale identiteit. Omdat bekering de thematiek van geloof en identiteitsverandering in zich herbergt en uitnodigt tot een vergelijking van een hoedanigheid of situatie a priori en a posteriori, werd het ingezet als narratief instrument om onderwerpen over geloof en identiteit te onderzoeken. Daarbij werd het afzweren en aannemen van een geloof aangewend als bron van visueel en auditief spektakel en humor.

Tussen 1558, het jaar dat Elizabeth I de troon besteeg en beginpunt van het populaire Elizabethaanse drama, en 1642, het jaar waarin de theaters werden gesloten door de puriteinse autoriteiten, werden meer dan veertig bekeringsstukken geproduceerd. Deze gingen over zondaars die hun leven beterden of pogingen daartoe deden, over potentiële, geveinsde en oprechte bekeringen tussen het christendom enerzijds en de islam, het jodendom en verschillende heidense geloven anderzijds en, in een klein aantal gevallen, tussen het katholicisme en het protestantisme. Het onderwerp werd niet alleen gedramatiseerd door middel van personages en, in één geval, een personificatie van bekering, maar ook middels beeldspraak.

Het doel van deze studie is te onderzoeken op welke wijze het vroegmoderne Engelse drama zich het bekeringsdiscours toe-eigende om er nieuwe betekenis aan te geven en welk inzicht deze betekenissen verschaffen in het vroegmoderne denken over bekering. Omdat dit proefschrift zich richt op patronen in de manier waarop bekering werd gerepresenteerd en hiervoor tientallen toneelstukken in ogenschouw neemt, werpt het ook licht op de denkkaders waarbinnen het vroegmoderne Engelse toneel religieuze thema's verbeeldde.

Om de vroegmoderne Engelse dramatisering van bekering zo scherp mogelijk in beeld te krijgen maakt deze studie een onderscheid tussen een spirituele en een interreligieuze variant. Spirituele bekering [spiritual conversion]

is een intensivering van het christelijke geloof dat plaatsvindt door middel van het afzweren van een zondig of wereldlijk leven. In de meeste gevallen bevat een spirituele bekering geen overgang naar een nieuw, georganiseerd geloof. De term interreligieuze bekering [interfaith conversion] doelt wél op een inwisseling van een religieuze identiteit. Het woord "interreligieus" verwijst naar overgangen tussen religies, maar ook tussen denominaties, zoals het aannemen of afzweren van een islamitische, heidense, katholieke of protestantse geloofsidentiteit. In de dramatische verbeelding van interreligieuze bekering wordt namelijk geen wezenlijk onderscheid gemaakt tussen christelijke denominaties enerzijds en het christendom en niet-christelijke religies anderzijds. Spirituele en interreligieuze bekering sluiten elkaar niet per definitie uit. Spirituele toneelbekeringen, waarbij een geloof niet expliciet genoemd wordt, kunnen soms toch uitgelegd worden in confessionele termen en omdat bekering per definitie neerkomt op een intense persoonlijke ervaring kan men stellen dat interreligieuze bekering altijd gemodelleerd is naar spirituele bekering. Toch is de vraag of in een vroegmodern Engels toneelstuk een bekering *voornamelijk* van een spirituele aard is of op een interreligieuze variant duidt, relatief eenvoudig te beantwoorden.

Het onderscheid tussen spirituele en interreligieuze bekering verduidelijkt een ontwikkeling binnen het vroegmoderne Engelse toneel waarin de opvatting van religie als een persoonlijke en spirituele verstandhouding met God plaatsmaakte voor een begrip van geloof als politieke factor en als onderdeel van sociale, etnische en culturele identiteit. Dit kwam door de confessionalisering die in Engeland gepaard ging met onzekerheid over de bestendigheid van de nationale protestantse identiteit. Deze werd steeds scherper gedefinieerd en afgezet tegen andere geloofsidentiteiten. Op het toneel zien wij dat het thema van spirituele bekering vanaf de jaren 1580 gemarginaliseerd raakte en dat interreligieuze bekering een opmars maakte. De toneelstukken met dit onderwerp proberen een antwoord te bieden op een intrinsiek probleem van interreligieuze bekering: het idee dat iedere geloofswisseling tot de verontrustende conclusie kon leiden dat religieuze identiteit inwisselbaar is en dat iedere bekering kon worden gezien als indicatie van onstandvastigheid in geloof. De verhoudingsgewijs weinige representaties van spirituele bekering die na de jaren 1580 te zien zijn op het toneel zijn nostalgisch van aard en verbeelden religie als een mystieke kracht en ideaal uit een ver verleden.

Hoewel er in de afgelopen decennia talloze studies naar de vroegmoderne Engelse dramatische verbeelding van bekering zijn verschenen, hebben deze zich slechts gericht op vormen van interreligieuze bekering en daarbij alleen op de overgang tussen het christendom en een enkele niet-christelijke religie. Vooral toneelrepresentaties van islamitisch-christelijke geloofswisselingen enerzijds en de kerstening van joodse personages anderzijds zijn uitgebreid onderzocht. Wat

bestaande studies hierdoor gemeen hebben, is dat zij licht werpen op vroegmoderne Engelse opvattingen van de betreffende specifieke religies en niet zozeer op bekering zelf. Dit proefschrift is de eerste uitgebreide studie naar vroegmoderne Engelse opvoeringen van bekering vanuit een breed religieus perspectief. Het duidt en brengt patronen in toneelteksten in kaart die slecht aan het licht komen door de interreligieuze benadering.

De paradoxale these van deze studie is dat de grote fascinatie van het theater voor bekering verhult dat datzelfde theater er alles aan deed om de implicaties ervan te beteugelen of zelfs te ontkennen. Hoewel interreligieuze bekering een populair onderwerp was, vermeden toneelstukken het aspect van de transformatie van religieuze identiteit. Zo vinden we geen stukken die laten zien hoe de door toneelmakers geconstrueerde verdorven islamitische, joodse, heidense of katholieke identiteiten werden afgelegd en omgevormd tot voorbeelden van christelijke rechtschapenheid. Potentiële bekeerlingen tot het christendom werden bijvoorbeeld als zo grotesk of onbetrouwbaar voorgesteld dat hun oprechte bekering bij voorbaat niet serieus genomen kon worden door het publiek. Sterker nog, door de ironische betekenis die kerstening hiermee kreeg, suggereerde het theater dat religieuze identiteit onvervreemdbaar is. In het geval van serieuze verbeeldingen van kerstening, lijken de bekeerlingen in kwestie in geen geval op hun stereotiepe islamitische, joodse, heidense of katholieke geloofsgenoten, maar worden zij van het begin af geportretteerd als even aantrekkelijk en rechtgeaard als veel christelijke personages. Zij helpen christenen uit de brand en worden zelfs al voor zij van religie wisselen niet geaccepteerd door hun eigen geloofsgenoten. Bij deze "nominale bekeringen" ontbreekt het dus aan een inhoudelijke identiteitstransformatie. Zelfs in het geval van afvalligheid van het (protestantse) christendom suggereren toneelstukken dat de betreffende bekeringen geen volledige aanname van een islamitische identiteit inhouden. Dit deden ze door de bekeringen van renegaten nadrukkelijk te presenteren als onoprecht en geveinsd, en als een spirituele dwaling in plaats van een onderwerping aan de islamitische god.

Hoewel het theater een uitermate geschikt platform bood voor het uitbeelden van identiteitstransformaties, ging het theater deze in geval van religie juist uit de weg. Op deze manier boden toneelstukken een tegenwicht aan de subversieve implicaties van bekeringen die zich buiten de muren van het theater afspeelden. In tegenstelling tot bijvoorbeeld crossdressing, dat uitgebreid werd gecultiveerd vanwege de metadramatische weerklank, werd interreligieuze bekering opgevoerd als een geruststellende vorm van continuïteit en onveranderlijkheid. Dit punt wordt misschien wel het best geïllustreerd door een van de bekendste bekeerlingen van het vroegmoderne drama. Het ontbreken van een duidelijk waarneembare gedaante- en karakterverandering in Jessica's

bekering in Shakespeares *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) staat in sterk contrast met de nadruk die wordt gelegd op haar tijdelijke verschijning als jongen, een vermomming die zij nodig heeft om zich te laten schaken door haar christelijke geliefde en zich tot zijn geloof te bekeren.

Deze studie bestaat uit twee delen die ieder vier hoofdstukken beslaan. Het eerste deel is gewijd aan spirituele en het tweede aan interreligieuze bekering. Hoofdstuk een richt zich op de manier waarop bekering verweven was met de middeleeuwse en later de vroegmoderne Engelse cultuur. In het Engeland van voor de Reformatie had bekering meestal de betekenis van een spirituele wedergeboorte. Het woord werd gebruikt om een intreding in een klooster aan te duiden of te verwijzen naar de iconische, morele transformaties van bijvoorbeeld Maria Magdalena en de apostel Paulus. In het middeleeuwse theater werden spirituele bekering en, in mindere mate, interreligieuze bekering, opgevoerd als *exempla* met als doel de leden van het publiek tot inkeer te brengen of hun geloof te verdiepen. Ik bespreek drie laatmiddeleeuwse en Reformatie-stukken die in deze traditie geworteld zijn: de Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (*c.* 1461-1500), de Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* (*c.* 1480-1520) en Lewis Wagers *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (*c.* 1550-1566). Tegelijkertijd lopen deze stukken vooruit op de patronen in de dramatisering van bekering die wij in het laat zestiende- en vroeg zeventiende-eeuwse drama vinden.

Hoofdstuk twee en drie analyseren de veranderende opvatting en rol van spirituele bekering in de context van de confessionele polemiek. Hoofdstuk twee stelt dat Anglicaanse predikanten bekering gelijk begonnen te stellen aan "repentance" [berouw, spijt, boetvaardigheid] en het begonnen te beschrijven als de essentie van het protestantse christendom. Ik noem dit de protestantisering [protestantization] van spirituele bekering. Als onderdeel van dit proces vergeleek een aantal predikanten bekering met toneelspel en bestempelde het laatste als de gevaarlijke en tot verdoemenis leidende omkering van spirituele bekering. Deze vijandige houding ten opzichte van het theater werd gevoed door een rivaliteit, die vooral door geestelijken werd ervaren, tussen predikanten en theatermakers in het trekken van publiek. Deze zorgen waren terecht in de zin dat het theater in de loop van het Elizabethaanse tijdperk een steeds grotere populariteit genoot.

De protestantisering van bekering betekende ook dat toneelschrijvers spirituele bekering op een nieuwe manier begonnen te verbeelden. Dit punt wordt besproken in hoofdstuk drie. Het beschrijft hoe de tegenstelling tussen het didactische doel van het populaire moraliteitsdrama en de deterministische doctrine van de dubbele predestinatie toneelschrijvers ertoe aanzette om spirituele bekering anders voor te stellen. Waar het middeleeuwse drama vooral geïnteresseerd was in succesvolle bekering, begonnen latere toneelschrijvers zich te richten op mislukte pogingen tot inkeer die uiteindelijk leidden tot de (tragische)

verdoeming van de protagonist. Ter illustratie analyseer ik vier populaire bekeringsstukken die werden opgevoerd in de beginjaren van Elizabeths regeerperiode: William Wagers *The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art* (1559) and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* (1560), het anonieme *King Darius* (1565) en *The Conflict of Conscience* (1572) door Nathaniel Woodes. Daarbij beargumenteer ik dat Christopher Marlowes *Doctor Faustus* (1592) gezien moet worden in de context van deze traditie van mislukte spirituele bekeringen, en dat dit stuk het dramatische hoogtepunt vormt van de uitbeelding van het problematische en complexe verband tussen spirituele bekering enerzijds en de Calvinistische leer van de uitverkiezing anderzijds.

Na 1580, toen interreligieuze bekering zijn opmars op het toneel begon te maken, kreeg ook succesvolle spirituele bekering weer de belangstelling van theatermakers, maar het zou nooit meer de populariteit genieten die het in het middeleeuwse drama had gekregen. Hoofdstuk vier analyseert drie nieuwe betekenissen die toneelstukken toekenden aan spirituele bekering: het werd gebruikt als narratief instrument om verdorven personages een onverwacht en bevredigend gelukkig einde te geven en het werd ingezet als bron van romantiek en nostalgie. Deze betekenissen hebben gemeen dat zij bekering voorstellen als een ideaal dat ver afstaat van de hedendaagse werkelijkheid. Tegelijkertijd ontdoen deze betekenissen spirituele bekering van religieuze significantie. Het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk bespreekt de negatieve implicaties van deze betekenisuitholling zoals deze aan de kaak worden gesteld in John Websters *The White Devil* (1612). Dit stuk geeft vernietigende kritiek op aspecten van contemporaine religie, in het bijzonder het opportunistisch gebruik van religie. De tragedie suggereert dat deze vorm van manipulatie in de hand wordt gewerkt door het verlies en de marginalisering van spirituele betekenis van religie.

Het tweede deel begint met hoofdstuk vijf. Dit hoofdstuk behandelt de manieren waarop Engelsen omgingen met religieuze pluralisering en interreligieuze bekering. Deze vorm van bekering werd gezien als strijdig met standvastigheid in geloof, waar juist zo'n behoefte aan was, omdat het de stabiliteit van de protestantse identiteit bevestigde. Ik illustreer het bovengenoemde conflict op twee manieren: ten eerste wordt het zichtbaar in protestantse preken die in hun klaarblijkelijke pleidooi voor de kerstening van joden en moslims vooral een punt maakten van het belang van de confessionele standvastigheid van hun protestantse toehoorders. Ten tweede besteedden bekeerlingen in persoonlijke verklaringen veel tijd en moeite aan het ontkrachten van het vooroordeel dat zij wispelturig en onbetrouwbaar waren.

In hoofdstuk zes en zeven onderzoek ik hoe het theater bekering inzette om de ongerustheid over onstandvastigheid in geloof te kanaliseren. Ironisch genoeg werd bekering aangegrepen om standvastigheid te verheerlijken. Hoofdstuk zes is

gewijd aan de manieren waarop toneelstukken interreligieuze bekering bespotten, zoals die van afvalligen of ongeloofwaardige bekeerlingen als stereotiepe joden of heidense kannibalen. Hoofdstuk zeven betoogt dat zelfs de ogenschijnlijk positieve en deugdelijke bekeringen van niet-christenen tot het christendom werden geproblematiseerd of niet opgevoerd werden als overtuigende transformaties van religieuze identiteit. Ik laat zien dat toneelschrijvers bekering juist gebruikten om de onvervreemdbaarheid van religieuze identiteit te benadrukken.

Hoewel de meeste hoofdstukken zich richten op de patronen in representaties van bekeringen en hiervoor meerdere toneelstukken tegelijkertijd analyseren, probeer ik zoveel mogelijk recht te doen aan de individualiteit van werken. Omdat Shakespeares *Othello* (1604) een unieke positie inneemt in bekeringsdrama is het laatste hoofdstuk volledig aan deze tragedie gewijd. Niet alleen bevat dit stuk zowel spirituele als interreligieuze bekering, het is ook het enige toneelstuk binnen het vroegmoderne Engelse drama dat draait om het leven van een interreligieuze bekeerling *na* zijn kerstening. Hoofdstuk acht, dat de eerste analyse van deze tragedie in de brede context van het bekeringstheater biedt, beargumenteert dat Othello's ondergang niet zozeer het gevolg is van zijn raciale of vermeende religieuze anders-zijn (Othello is net als de mensen in zijn omgeving een christen), of van Venetiaanse xenofobie, als wel een tragische consequentie van zijn eigen succes als bekeerling. Dat wil zeggen, Othello internaliseert volledig wat wordt gepresenteerd als de Venetiaanse opvatting van religieuze identiteit: het idee dat bekeerlingen wispelturig zijn en dat gekerstenden nooit hun verdorven niet-christelijke natuur kunnen afwerpen. Net als de Venetianen begint hij te geloven in de onmogelijkheid van een volledige bekering.

De manier waarop bekering wordt geschetst in *Othello* geeft ons inzicht in de grenzen van de vroegmoderne Engelse dramatische verbeelding van religie. Enerzijds wordt Shakespeares indrukwekkende vindingrijkheid en voorstellingsvermogen aangetoond in het feit dat *Othello* het enige toneelstuk is dat de integratie van een bekeerling in zijn nieuwe sociale omgeving onderzoekt. Anderzijds is het feit dat zelfs in Shakespeares corpus geen interreligieuze bekering te vinden is die als zodanig volledig wordt afgebeeld indicatief voor het collectieve onvermogen of gebrek aan bereidheid om een voorstelling te maken van een religieuze identiteitstransformatie. Literatuur, het vroegmoderne Engelse drama in het bijzonder, is door literatuurwetenschappers vaak beschreven als een vrijplaats voor gedachte-experimenten, een plek waar fantasie de vrije ruimte krijgt. Door een systematische analyse van een groot aantal toneelstukken met dezelfde thematiek laat deze studie zien dat deze vrijheid niet los gezien kan worden van het ideologische denkkader waartegen het zich aftekent.