Religious conversion in early modern English drama

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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.