Religious conversion in early modern English drama

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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.