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## Religious conversion in early modern English drama

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## CHAPTER 7 'Most Beautiful Pagan; Most Sweet Jew:' Preserving Christianity in Authentic Conversions

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how playwrights condemned and ridiculed forms of interfaith conversion. They attacked defection from Christianity, and created grotesque religious enemies – Jews, Catholics, Muslims and pagans – to emphasize the absurdity of their Christianization (or turn to Protestantism). These depictions reassured audiences that (Protestant) Christian identity was inherent in one's being, and could thus not be assumed by religious others. In this way, plays alleviated anxieties over the actual exchange of religious identity. However, many interfaith conversion plays do not draw attention to the danger of apostasy or the absurdity of Christianization, but focus on authentic and genuine embraces of Christianity. This suggests that dramatists did welcome the idea of Christianization to some degree and were inclined to acknowledge the importance of non-Christians recognizing and embracing Christian Truth. Yet despite the ostensibly unproblematic character of authentic Christianizations, playwrights nevertheless recoil from exploring them as completely successful or radical transformations of Christian identity.

Before I turn to portrayals of genuine embraces of Christianity in this chapter, I will discuss a work that sheds further light on the early modern problematic understanding of interfaith conversion. This is Richard Zouche's university play *The Sophister* (1614), which is the only early modern English work of drama that features "conversion" as a character. *The Sophister* casts Conversion in largely unspecified interfaith terms and presents him as naive, unreliable and essentially changeable. In this way, the play underscores the undesirability of interfaith conversion, *including* conversion to (Protestant) Christianity, and helps us understand why the theatre refrained from presenting it as a glorious or radical transformation.

The idea, put forward in *The Sophister*, that interfaith conversion signifies first and foremost changeability, recurs in Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624). There is a critical consensus that *The Renegado* portrays the happy and unproblematic reconversion of the renegade pirate Grimaldi. According to scholars, the play follows a new avenue of presenting apostates by allowing Grimaldi to return to Christianity instead of punishing him, and thus presents him as a hero of the faith. I will argue, however, that this reading is too simple and optimistic. When we take into account that *The Renegado* juxtaposes Grimaldi with a character who heroically resists an overwhelming temptation to turn Turk, as well as the way in which Grimaldi interacts with his confessor, it becomes clear that *The Renegado* presents religious constancy as ethically superior

to conversion and that Grimaldi comes off as a weak character. What is more, this play underlines its skepticism of interfaith conversion by drawing parallels between religious and financial exchange, an analogy that we also find in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596).

In addition to toning down Christianizations as moments of sheer Christian victory and favouring Christian constancy over (re)turns to Christianity, playwrights construct Christianizations not as a change but as a form of continuity. That is to say, those characters who adopt Christianity are not presented as overtly different, but as Jews, Muslims or pagans with Christian hearts: they are not caricatures of their faith, but attractive or heroic, and already congenial with Christian characters. Examples are Corcut in *Selimus* (1592), Joffer in *The Fair Maid of the West Part II* (1631), Abigail in *The Jew of Malta* (1589), and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, who bear little resemblance to their grotesque co-religionists before their conversion. What plays present as the Christian nature of these characters, expressed in their attractive appearance, kindness towards Christians and nobility, shines through a thin veneer of nominal Muslim or Jewish identity. In addition, these characters are already alienated from their ostensible religious background. Accordingly, when they turn Christian, they do not erase their religious selves in order to assume a wholly new identity, but are much closer to revealing their true nature or confirming the moral or cultural difference between them and their non-Christian coreligionists. In this way, they suggest, just like the preposterous converts of the ironic Christianizations in the previous chapter, that Christian identity is encoded in one's self. Indeed, the point of this chapter is to demonstrate that in order to dispel anxieties over the stability of Christianity, playwrights not only ridiculed Christianization, but also used authentic conversions for this purpose, presenting them in such a way as to reassure their audiences that those religious others who adopt a Christian identity are merely confirming and revealing their true religious nature. In this way, playwrights presented Christianization as a victory of continuity.

A special category within authentic stage Christianizations is constituted by women who simultaneously convert and marry their Christian husbands. We find these conversion-cum-marriages in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Knight of Malta* (1618), John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1621), Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* and *The Emperor of the East* (1631), and in John Kirke's *The Seven Champions of Christendome* (1635). These doubly festive events not only stress the desired analogy between a woman's submission to her husband and his God. In many cases, they also serve as human rewards for male champions of the Christian faith, who remained constant under torture.

I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the genuine Christianizations of Theophilus in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620) and Alban in William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (1608). These conversions appear to contradict my argument that stagings of genuine Christianizations do not involve radical transformations of religious identity, because before their sincere conversions, Theophilus and Alban are stereotypical pagan villains. However, both of them die a martyr's death immediately upon their conversion, which means that Massinger and Rowley are excused from portraying their converts' transformations beyond the moment of the change itself. Indeed, the fact that virtually all Christianizations of tragic characters end in death or coincide with the end of the play are indicative of a general unwillingness among playwrights to portray religious transformation and explore converts in their new capacity as Christians and new socio-religious environments. In the following chapter I will discuss Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604) as a significant exception to this rule.

### *The Sophister* and Conversion as an Allegorical Vice

The allegorical comedy *The Sophister*, attributed to the civil lawyer Richard Zouche (1590-1661), presents one of the most illuminating cases of how early modern playwrights conceived of interfaith conversion. This is because it is the only early modern English play that presents conversion as a character. In addition, there is evidence that *The Sophister* was written for a highly-educated audience and must have been performed at a University, probably Zouche's alma mater Oxford.<sup>1</sup> This academic setting enabled Zouche to portray conversion with a degree of complexity. *The Sophister* explores the role of language, rhetoric in particular, in establishing and subverting social and political power. The play thus describes the rise to power and subsequent downfall of Fallacy, the illegitimate son of Discourse, who is the ruler of the kingdom of Parrhesia. Antagonized by the established order that prevents Fallacy from inheriting his father's kingdom, Fallacy usurps the crown and creates a new kingdom. Yet, as Alison Findlay observes, "his government is a distorted mirror image of the original and by reflecting it, implies that it was equally corrupt."<sup>2</sup> The play is laced with references to academic life and puns are often based on the discourse

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<sup>1</sup> The Prologue, for instance, speaks "to the Academicall Auditors." Richard Zouche, *The Sophister, A Comedy* (London, John Okes: 1639) sig. A3r.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 124.

of academic subjects, including Logic, Alchemy and Philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The character Conversion is a minor figure, appearing onstage only briefly. *The Sophister* puns on the logical and rhetorical meanings of conversion by including it as an allegorical character in a play about logic and rhetoric,<sup>4</sup> but his role revolves around the religious meaning of conversion.

From his assertion that he intends to travel “to *Flushing, Middelburgh, Amsterdam*, peradventure thence to *Antwerp*, and so to see *Rheims* and *Roome*,” we can conclude that Conversion represents interfaith conversion.<sup>5</sup> Commercial centres like Flushing, Middelburg, Antwerp and Amsterdam harboured a great diversity of religious communities, Amsterdam with its relative religious freedom in particular. These characteristics could nourish Conversion’s desire to exchange one newly adopted confession for another over and over again, as if they were commodities. Besides, Conversion’s suggestion that he will leave Protestant England in order to travel to Rome indicates that he will abandon Protestantism for Catholicism. Rome and Rheims were also among the the cities visited by the “extreme” serial converts Anthony Tyrrell and John Nicholls (see chapter five).

Crucially, *The Sophister* portrays Conversion as an essentially changeable, elusive and opportunistic character, regardless of the fact that a conversion often happened only once in a person’s life. In other words, conversion is presented as intrinsically problematic. This is in various ways supported by his conversation with Aequipollency,<sup>6</sup> the only character that accompanies Conversion onstage.

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<sup>3</sup> Fallacy, for instance, is an undergraduate who is going to take his “degree.” According to Findlay, *The Sophister* “invites a comparison between Fallacy and the class of dissatisfied intellectuals. In the 1630s and 1640s there was a large increase in numbers of university graduates who did not ‘share all the opportunities, privileges and responsibilities that were the prerequisites of full unequivocal membership’ of Stuart society (Curtis 1962: 28). They experienced unemployment or underemployment and were widely regarded as a discontented and factious group. Their eloquence was dangerous since their speech was directed against the ruling order rather than contained within it” (121).

<sup>4</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of conversion as a concept in logic is “the transposition of the subject and predicate of a proposition according to certain rules to form a new proposition by immediate inference.” It lists 1551 as the year in which conversion was first used in this meaning. In rhetoric, the word was used “by 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c. writers as the equivalent of antistrophe n.1, and sometimes of apostrophe n.1.” “Conversion, n.” definitions 4 and 5, *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press, 25 June 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40773?redirectedFrom=conversion>>.

<sup>5</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

<sup>6</sup> The first definition the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives of equipollency is “equivalence in signification, authority, efficacy, virtue etc.” The other definition is as a technical term used in Logic: “an equivalence between two or more propositions.” “Equipollence. n.” definitions

Discussing the topic of suffering, Aequipollency boasts that he “can suffer any thing” and urges Conversion to “be rul’d” by him, immediately advising him to “stand to the present.”<sup>7</sup> To this suggestion that he should stay who he is at present (i.e. remain constant in his religion), Conversion responds that he is “no Stoick.”<sup>8</sup> The introduction of Neo-Stoicism into the conversation results in a number of punning references to the supposedly conversion-ridden personal history of one of the key figures of Neo-Stoicism, Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) and to his principal philosophical treatise *De Constantia* (1584). Aequipollency endorses Conversion’s claim that he is no stoic, and accuses him of being quite the opposite, a “Pythagorian Peripatetick.” This, he explains as follows:

thy very essence is mutability. Thy soul could walk through more  
Sects then some honest bodies have chang’d suits: methinks thou  
mightst do well at home by temporizing.<sup>9</sup>

The phrase “Pythagorian Peripatetick” alludes, first, to the doctrine of metempsychosis, the transmigration of the soul, that early moderns commonly associated with Pythagoras.<sup>10</sup> Conversion is thus likened to a process that entails a superficial exchange: the transformation of the *exterior* of the soul, rather than a turn of the soul itself. Secondly, the word peripatetic is here intended humorously, meaning “a person who walks about; a traveller; an itinerant dealer or trader.”<sup>11</sup> Conversion will soon prove the appropriateness of this description when he announces his intention to cross the English Channel and visit a variety of European towns and cities. These meanings of “Pythagorian Peripatetick” are corroborated by Aequipollency’s next assertion that Conversion’s soul could “walk through more Sects” (assume religions more often) than sincere persons

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1 and 2, *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press. 7 September 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63801>>.

<sup>7</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

<sup>8</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

<sup>9</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

<sup>10</sup> In *The Merchant of Venice*, Gratiano refers to this doctrine and the fact that it was considered a heresy. He argues that Shylock makes him believe this theory and therefore “waver in [his] faith,” because Shylock behaves like a wolf (4.1.130-38). See also Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*, that refers to conversion in a mocking dialogue about Pythagoras’ transmigration of the soul. Ben Jonson *Volpone, The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 1-117, 1.2.1-62.

<sup>11</sup> “Peripatetic, n. and adj.,” definition 2, *OED Online*. June 2012, Oxford University Press, 25 June 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/141001?redirectedFrom=peripatetic>>.

have changed their clothes. Accordingly, Aequipollency advises Conversion to stay where he is and “temporiz[e],” in other words, remain unconverted. Most important for our purposes, however, is the fact that Aequipollency reduces interfaith conversion to changeability: “thy very essence is mutability.” In so doing, Aequipollency points to the early modern concern over the exchange of religions, a concern that had begun to dominate the way in which they perceived interfaith conversions. As the theatre intimated, the essence of conversion was not so much the affirmation of newly found religious assurance as a form of inconstancy.

Conversion’s ignorance and failure to recognize the importance of steadfastness manifests itself in a number of allusions to *De Constantia* in relation to Lipsius’ denominationally unstable past. Zouche and his contemporaries could have read Lipsius’ work in several editions both in the Latin original (first ed. 1584) or in John Stradling’s translation (first ed. 1594). Conversion does not respond directly to Aequipollency’s accusations of inconstancy, but continues the conversation by sighing: “Oh these Climats are too cunning, I must seeke further.”<sup>12</sup> That this is a reference to Lipsius’s work becomes clear from Aequipollency’s subsequent advice to read “*Lipsius Constancy*,” which should “confirm” Conversion (“let that confirme thee”).<sup>13</sup> The first three chapters of *De Constantia* discuss the idea that a change of location will not help a person to escape afflictions, but that one should attempt to deal with any kind of trouble by attaining mental equilibrium. In a dialogue between Lipsius and his friend Langius, Lipsius laments the difficulty of living in Belgium, that is tormented by civic unrest, something that is faintly echoed in the idea that Conversion wants to escape his country because the “Climats are too cunning.” When Lipsius announces his intention to leave Belgium, Langius seeks to dissuade him from pursuing his plans: “Thou must not forsake thy countrey, but thy affections. Our mindes must be so confirmed and conformed, that we way bee at rest in troubles, and have peace even in the midst of warre.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Aequipollency’s assertion that reading *De Constantia* will “confirm” Conversion recalls Langius’ advice to Lipsius. What follows in *The Sophister* is a deeply ironic comment on Lipsius and his advocacy of constancy. Conversion, who is clearly unaware of the irony, says “Faith he will lead the next way from *Leyden* to *Doway*, That it may be I may

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<sup>12</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

<sup>13</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

<sup>14</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Two bookes of constancie*, trans. John Stradling (London: Richard Johnes, 1594) B2v-B2r.



make use of him.”<sup>15</sup> This journey, from the Dutch university city to the French town that hosted the English College for Jesuits can be interpreted symbolically as a conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism. In addition, it is significant that the English college in Douay was a training ground precisely for Jesuits, who were known for their missionary zeal and who would be sent to England to proselytize. There is no evidence that Lipsius travelled from Leiden to Douay, but he did leave his professorship at Leiden University – as a Protestant – to revert to Catholicism in Mainz, after which he became a Catholic professor of theology at Leuven. *The Sophister* thus exposes the discrepancy between Lipsius’ philosophy of constancy and his shifts in denominational identity. The satirical effect is enhanced by the fact that the relationship between Lipsius and Langius is echoed in that between Conversion and Aequipollency. An additional level of satire, moreover, is produced by Conversion himself, who naively takes *De Constantia* to mean the opposite and believes it promotes travelling as a cure for an anguished mind.

The final part of the discussion between Aequipollency and Conversion is devoted to further confirmations of Conversion’s opportunism. He repeats his resolution to embark on a journey to several places on the continent. In addition, he explains how travelling will change and improve him, using metaphors for treatments for improving and enriching objects and people. He notes, for instance, that “Your finest wits are thought insipu’d [insipid] till / They have past the salt water,” and “The Germans [Germans’] vates drencht in a deeper grain, *Venice* and *Padua* will returne them richer” (G3v). His mentioning of the city that hosted one of the most important universities in early modern Europe, Padua, might explain why Conversion then suddenly turns to the subject of learning and medicine. It is significant that in so doing, he unwittingly refers to a false kind of learning and belief: quackery. The ease with which Conversion changes his religious persuasions is reminiscent of the manner in which a gullible person embraces the nostrums of mountebanks. As he says to Aequipollency:

What course intendest thou?  
‘Twere thy best, being skill’d in tempering  
Confections, to proclaim some Paracelsian<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G2r.

<sup>16</sup> The German-Swiss Paracelsus (1493-1541) was a controversial figure (and an enthusiastic traveller), known for his belief “that one could treat diseases with cheap, simple chemical

Oyl, or Angelicall pills.<sup>17</sup>

This incites Aequipollency to respond sarcastically: "Nay, I'le rather professe the making of *Aurum potabile* [drinkable gold], and credit it with some two leaves of reasons, and ten of authority, for all diseases, griefs, and maladies. But which way art thou bent."<sup>18</sup> When Conversion responds that he will start in (Protestant) Flushing and hopes to end up in Rome, Aequipollency makes another sneering comment, noting that Conversion "may sooner be prefer'd to the Inquisition then to the Conclave."<sup>19</sup> Conversion, however, brushes this aside with more opportunism: "Well, except the morrow Sunne display more comfort, I am gone beleeve it."<sup>20</sup> In his last words of the discussion, Aequipollency notes that he expects Conversion's "reconversion."<sup>21</sup> Conversion responds by asserting his belief that the future holds much less danger for him than for Aequipollency:

This fellow thinkes himselfe as cunning as a tumbler that walks upon ropes, and with his leuell keeps himselfe upright, but his steps are dangerous, I had rather walk on the Alps, though steeper, where I may have sure footing.<sup>22</sup>

To sum up, *The Sophister* exposes the early modern problem of interfaith conversion in an explicit way: interfaith conversion, regardless of the religions involved, is intrinsically problematic because it denotes first and foremost changeability. Whereas the change in a spiritual conversion is necessarily an *improvement* (the emphasis either being on the embrace of virtuousness, or on the rejection of sin), the change of an interfaith conversion above all signifies an *exchange* of denominations. Even if converts embrace "the right" faith, there is no guarantee that they will not subsequently exchange it for their previous religion, or even for a wholly new one. Worse still, an interfaith conversion could easily be interpreted as "proof" of a believer's lack of steadfastness in faith. This intrinsic problem of interfaith conversion recurs in Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*,

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remedies," and his advocacy of astrology. Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 103.

<sup>17</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

<sup>18</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

<sup>19</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

<sup>20</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

<sup>21</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

<sup>22</sup> Zouche, *The Sophister*, sig. G3v.

which plays down the heroic and festive aspects of its recanting renegade and aligns interfaith conversion with commercial exchange.

### A Not-So-Heroic Titular Hero in *The Renegado*

Massinger's comedy *The Renegado* frustrates an uncomplicatedly positive reading of the reconversion of its titular hero. Despite the fact that the renegade pirate Grimaldi manages to save himself at the incentive of the Jesuit friar Francisco, his reintegration into the Christian community is not as smooth and joyful as is often argued. I cannot agree with Nabil Matar who claims that "Massinger presented a Happy ending for this renegade" or with Daniel Vitkus's interpretation of Grimaldi as a "successful, surviving hero."<sup>23</sup> Of course, compared to the fate of Daborne's Ward, Grimaldi's fortune is much brighter, if only because he seizes the chance to reform and does not die. There is no doubt, moreover, that Grimaldi's conversion is sincere, because it is preceded by a long process of spiritual agony and repentance and accompanied by an act of redemption.<sup>24</sup> Yet within the context of play as a whole, the repentant sinner comes off as a pitiful figure through the stark contrast between him and a true Christian hero who does manage to remain constant in his faith under violent pressure. This Christian hero, the Venetian Gentleman Vitelli, both defies a forced conversion to Islam on pain of death and resists the temptations of the attractive Muslim woman Donusa. What is more, Vitelli even manages to convert Donusa to Christianity. Despite the fact that both Grimaldi and Vitelli succeed in escaping the Turks and returning to Christian territory, only Vitelli is rewarded. His prize is no less than the doubly perfect woman Donusa, whom the play invites us to consider not only as exotic and sexually attractive, but, after her conversion, also as a virtuous Christian.<sup>25</sup>

Equally important is the contrast between Grimaldi's former sinful – but very masculine in his intrepidity – self and the new Grimaldi after his atonement. The former pirate is reduced to a sorry figure or nobody, which is most clearly demonstrated precisely in his very last words on the stage in which Grimaldi portrays himself as the malleable servant of his confessor Francisco. When Francisco instructs him to temporarily assume his pre-conversion

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<sup>23</sup> Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 59; Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 161.

<sup>24</sup> See also chapter three on Grimaldi's fear of damnation.

<sup>25</sup> Her conversion and the idea of Donusa as a convert-bride and prize will be further explored below in this chapter.

depressed appearance so that the Viceroy will not suspect him of his return to Christianity and his involvement in the Christians' plot against the Turks, Grimaldi answers: "I am nothing / But what you please to have me be."<sup>26</sup> These words demonstrate Grimaldi's loyalty to his confessor, but they also intimate that his latest conversion has bereft Grimaldi of his identity. After all, everything that characterized Grimaldi's identity as a renegade, his debauchery and hedonism, has been erased by his conversion. Vitkus writes that "Grimaldi's unruly masculinity is recuperated for the service of Christendom."<sup>27</sup> Bindu Maleieckal even claims that Grimaldi in reconverting "regains his 'manhood,'" having earlier undergone a "spiritual emasculation" by embracing Islam.<sup>28</sup> Yet I would argue that Grimaldi as a Christian turned Turk, and, as such, the personification of "unruly masculinity," is in fact closer to being emasculated with his return to Christianity, which implies a drastic curbing of his masculine rowdiness. It is worth noting in this respect that the term "nothing," that Grimaldi uses to describe himself after his reconversion to Christianity, was also an Elizabethan slang term for the female genitalia.

The striking contrast between the fates of Grimaldi and Vitelli is enhanced by the fact that *The Renegado* is the only interfaith conversion play that presents a detailed description of a repenting renegade who returns to Christianity. This suggests that Massinger felt this was acceptable under the condition that audiences would not have to be forced to consider him the true star of the play.

*The Renegado* affirms the negative aspect of Grimaldi's conversion to Christianity by suggesting that interfaith conversion turns Christian identity into an object of exchange, thus corroding its intrinsic value. Set in a commercial context, *The Renegado* draws parallels between conversion and concepts of trade, associating religious exchange with commercial transaction. This already begins in the first lines of the play. In a Tunisian street "near the bazaar," Vitelli asks his servant Gazet if he has managed to "hire a shop" which they will need as part of their scheme to pose as merchants (1.1.1). To this Gazet answers in the positive and reveals his cunning plan as to how he will vend their crockery and paintings:

I have studied speeches for each piece,  
And, in a thrifty tone to sell 'em off,

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<sup>26</sup> Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*, ed. Michael Neill (London: Arden Shakespeare 2010) 5.2.37-38.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Vitkus, Introduction, *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk The Renegado* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 1-53, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Bindu Maleieckal, " 'Wanton Irreligious Madness:' Conversion and Castration in Massinger's *The Renegado*," *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 31 (2002): 25-43, 26.

*Will swear by Mahomet and Termagant*  
That this is mistress to the great Duke of Florence,  
That niece to old King Pippin, and a third,  
An Austrian Princess by her Roman lip –  
Howe'er *my conscience tells me* they are figures  
Of bawds and common courtesans in Venice  
(1.1.6-13, my emphasis)

Gazet proudly explains how he will sell portraits of aristocratic women, even though he suspects that they are depictions of Venetian prostitutes. His trick is significant, if only because it points to the idea that capitalism undermined the social hierarchy, especially that of the aristocracy. The assertions that he will "swear by Mahomet and Termagant," and that his "conscience" tells him he is lying show that he believes religion can be used for mercantile purposes, conscience being of secondary importance only. Moments later, *The Renegado* provides another instance of the conflation between religious and commercial exchange. When asked about his own faith, Gazet claims:

I would not be confined  
In my belief: when all your sects and sectaries  
Are grown of one opinion, if I like it  
I will profess myself; in the meantime,  
Live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva,  
I am of that country's faith. (1.1.32-37)<sup>29</sup>

Gazet demonstrates that he, much in the vein of Richard Zouche's character Conversion, would convert according to the denomination of the places he will visit, thus proving his opportunism as well as his changeability. This passage becomes apposite in a commercial sense when we realize that the name of the speaker, Gazet, was also known as the word of a "Venetian coin of small value" that was "coined at Venice for circulation in the Levant."<sup>30</sup>

In associating interfaith conversion with financial transaction, *The Renegado* echoes *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare's comedy presents conversions in an environment that reverberates with the new creeds of

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sir Politic in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, who notes that other traveller's reasons to visit countries include "shifting a religion" (2.1.5).

<sup>30</sup> "† gazet(t, n.". *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press. 29 June 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77234?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=ddWxuu&>>.

capitalism – venture, advantage and hazard –, whether it is in Antonio's commercial adventures at sea or Bassanio's venture to marry the wealthy Portia. The play thus presents Venice as a site of exchange where, in addition to goods and money, religion is traded.<sup>31</sup> This comes to the fore in the various confluences of conversion and commercial transaction. Jessica, for instance, literally gilds herself with money when she flees her parental home to convert and marry (2.6.49-50). Of course, Jessica commits theft, but the act also alludes to the transaction of the dowry. This is later echoed in Portia's assertion that she, as well as all her possessions, "conver[t]" to Bassanio when she learns she can marry him (3.2.166-67).<sup>32</sup> Another case in point is the moment when Lancelot refers to the negative economic implications of Jessica's Christianization. It is significant that this constitutes the end of a theological dispute about the possibility of salvation for Jessica. Jessica says: "I shall be sav'd by my husband, – he hath made me a Christian!" to which Lancelot replies:

Truly the more to blame he! We were Christians enough before,  
e'en as many as could well live, one by another. This making of  
Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-  
eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money.  
(3.5.17-23)

Apparently, Lancelot is more concerned about the commercial consequences of Jessica's conversion than its religious implications. A final example of financial transaction coinciding with conversion is Antonio's demand for Shylock's baptism, which is accompanied by a financial penalty.

In drawing attention to the similarities between interfaith conversion and commerce, playwrights killed two birds with one stone. Not only did they expose the problem of changing faith out of opportunistic, financial reasons, they also made clear that the rejection of a particular religion in favour of Christianity rendered Christianity essentially exchangeable. In short, for all the joyful and victorious connotations of the baptism of Jews, Muslims or pagans, the same baptism had by implication an undermining effect on the unique value of the Christian faith. This erosive effect was diminished by a genuine, heartfelt adoption of Christianity, an embrace of the Gospel that was motivated by the

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, these are not the only forms of exchange in the play; other examples are the exchange of gender by Jessica, Portia and Nerissa and the exchange of news, by Shylock and Tubal.

<sup>32</sup> See also chapter four on this passage.

convert's recognition of Christ as the messenger of Truth, or by sincere remorse. However, from representations of authentic embraces of Christianity we can deduce that even these were considered problematic. We have just seen an example of this in *The Renegado*. In addition, various plays depict authentic Christianizations as revelations of a deep-rooted Christian identity.

## Nominal Converts

Many conversions that are presented as genuine embraces of Christianity are conversions only in a nominal sense. The converts in question do not share the stereotypical and negative traits of their family members or acquaintances, are often on bad terms with them, or are inclined to virtues that are portrayed as typically Christian. Two illustrative examples are Corcut in Robert Greene's 1592 tragedy *Selimus* and Joffer in the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West*.

Corcut is the eldest son of the tyrannous emperor Bajazet. Unlike his younger brothers Acomat and Selimus, he is peace-loving and without ambitions of power and prestige. In addition, he is a "philosopher" and said to "live his life / In learning arts and Mahound's dreaded laws," which contrasts starkly with the activities of his younger brothers, especially Selimus, who "snatcheth" at the "crown."<sup>33</sup> Bajazet renounces the crown and offers it to Selimus after the latter has counterfeited repentance over his despotic behaviour. Selimus now suspects Corcut of aspiring to the throne and wants to murder him. Corcut goes into hiding by disguising himself as a mourner. Anticipating his conversion, Corcut conveys his knowledge and high regard of Christianity and talks to a Christian character of the "blessèd Christ" and the "sovereign hope which thou conceiv'st in him, / Whom dead, as everliving thou adorest" (19. 79-82). When Corcut is eventually caught by his wicked brother and about to be killed by him, he reveals that he has become a Christian, having "conversed with Christians / And learned of them the way to save [his] soul / And 'pease the anger of the highest God" (22. 50-53). After a vain attempt to convert and reform Selimus, Corcut is strangled. In the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West*, Joffer, who is the pasha at the court of Fez, experiences a happier fate than Corcut after his conversion. Prior to his religious exchange, Joffer is also portrayed as a benign and noble Turk. He is, for instance, contrasted with his lecherous and hostile fellow-Turk, Mullisheg, the King of Fez, aids the Christian characters, expresses his regret over the moments he is unable to assist them, and conveys his admiration for the

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Greene, *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks*, in Vitkus, ed., *Three Turk Plays* 55-143, 1. 78, 80-81, 85.

magnanimity of the Christians. Indeed, it is eventually the “virtue in these Christians” that prompts him to convert.<sup>34</sup> His request to be accepted as “a Christian and a brother” (5.4.187) is happily granted “with all due rites” (5.4.197). Joffer’s conversion marks the festive end of the comedy.

Before their Christianization, Corcut and Joffer are, at least nominally, Turks, but we find similar portrayals of conversion to Christianity with Jewish and Pagan characters.<sup>35</sup> In addition, most of these converts are women.<sup>36</sup> The Jewish Abigail in *The Jew of Malta* and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* are cases in point. What is particularly interesting about these plays is that they problematize the contrast between stereotypical Jews and their unsterotypical daughters who become Christians, by simultaneously emphasizing their biological relationship. That is to say, Jessica and Abigail are contrasted with their grotesque Jewish fathers and they use their turns to Christianity to stress precisely this disparity, but the biological kinship with their fathers at the same time prevents them from breaking off relations with Shylock and Barabas unreservedly.

Abigail and Jessica are juxtaposed with their grotesquely Jewish fathers in largely the same way. The Christian characters in both plays express their intense hatred of Barabas and Shylock only, because they are Jewish. Indeed, as opposed to their daughters, Barabas and Shylock are mostly referred to as “Jew” rather than called by their names. Abigail and Jessica’s Jewish identity, on the other

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West The Fair Maid of the West Parts I and II*. Ed. Robert K. Turner (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) 91-197, 5.4.185.

<sup>35</sup> Examples of pagan converts of this type are Antoninus in *The Virgin Martyr*, the Queen, Conallus, Emeria, Ferochus and Endarius in *St. Patrick for Ireland* by James Shirley (1640). In Henry Shirley’s *The Martyred Soldier* (1638), which also thematizes pagan-Christian conversion, matters are slightly more complicated. The heroic but pagan army general Bellizarius and the pagan commander Hubert have achieved an important victory over the African Christians. Later in the play, both men convert to Christianity, but their conversion is anticipated by their great admiration for the Christians they fought and have captured, as well as their faith. Other converts to Christianity in this play are Bellizarius’ wife Victoria and his daughter Bellina, who are presented as nominal pagans with a Christian heart to begin with. The sadistic King turns Christian too, but this conversion is not genuine and he quickly lapses back into paganism.

<sup>36</sup> Theatrical stereotypes of malign religious others are in most cases male. While the non-Christian identity of male characters was an obvious target of ridicule, playwrights used Jewish, pagan or Muslim identity of female characters to portray them as exotic beauties. The idea that women who turn Christian on the early modern stage are all strikingly fair has also been observed by Ania Loomba. She notes that “these conversions hark back to a long literary tradition featuring a converted Saracen princess,” Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 157.



hand, is not a major issue for the Christians. Besides, both women are often described as “fair,” and exceptionally pretty and kind to emphasize the contrast with their fathers. Before Jessica converts, Lancelot, for instance, calls her: “most beautiful pagan; most sweet Jew” (2.3.10-11). Other characters suggest that Shylock and Jessica are radically different from each other. A particularly striking case in point is Salerio’s remark to Shylock: “there is more difference between thy flesh and hers, than between jet and ivory, more between your bloods, than there is between red wine and Rhenish” (3.1.34-36). Salerio in effect denies the blood relationship between Jessica and Shylock, thus suggesting that Jessica is not Jewish to begin with.

Unlike Abigail, who at first sympathizes with her father, Jessica makes clear from her first appearance on the stage that she feels alienated from her Jewish background. In her first lines she explains that she understands why Lancelot has decided to leave Shylock as his employer, comparing their “house” to “hell” (2.3.2). Jessica’s use of the word “hell” is telling because it reveals her dislike of her Jewish background not only in the strongest but also in Christian terms. Although it cannot be proven whether Shakespeare was familiar with a Jewish concept of hell, the play evinces little knowledge of Jewish doctrine and there is no indication that Jessica refers to a specifically Jewish version of this place that is also a profoundly Christian concept. In this way, her use of “hell” appears to indicate Jessica’s familiarity with the Christian world before her conversion. It is difficult to judge whether Shylock is objectively responsible for turning his house into a hell for Jessica and whether the term hell is fitting. We learn that he is frugal and does not allow Jessica to look at revelling Christians or listen to music. This could indicate Shylock’s capacity as a responsible father, but when he learns about his daughter’s elopement he is more concerned about the loss of his money than of his daughter.

Jessica’s decision to convert is not taken lightly, as she realises that it will necessitate a rift with her father and knows it is “a heinous sin” to “be ashamed to be [her] father’s child” (2.3.17). The decisive factor in her resolution is that their biological relationship is outweighed by the fact that their characters have no resemblance whatsoever: “though I am a daughter to his blood / I am not to his manners” (2.3.18-19). Nevertheless, the last words she says to her father before she converts express her sadness over the loss of their relationship, rather than the joy that her decision to elope and convert will bring about: “Farewell, – and if my fortune be not crost / I have a father, you a daughter, lost” (2.5.55-56).

At the beginning of *The Jew of Malta*, Abigail and Barabas appear to have a loving relationship, but this changes and Barabas becomes indirectly responsible for her turn to Christianity. In the first act, Abigail is deeply disturbed by the injustice her father suffers at the hands of the Christian authorities and she is

willing to help her father by posing as a nun. Barabas's house has been converted into a nunnery by the Christians, and feigning a conversion to Christianity will allow her to enter this monastery in order to collect a treasure that Barabas has hidden in his former house. Later in the play, however, Barabas constructs a plot that causes the death of Abigail's lover and his friend. Abigail's restrained response to her father's atrocity is that she will enter a monastery, but this time, genuinely. What is striking about this conversion is that it also contains an oath in which Abigail swears to remain faithful to her father. When her confessor, friar Jacomo, grants Abigail's desire to become a nun, he begs Abigail to "change no more" (3.3.70). Abigail, hinting at her feigned conversion at the request of Barabas, replies this was her father's "fault" (3.3.70). When friar Jacomo inquires further, Abigail refuses to explain her words, but notes in an aside: "O Barabas, / Though thou deservest hardly at my hands, / Yet never shall these lips bewray thy life" (3.3.73-75).

### Marriage-Cum-Conversion

Among the early modern stage portrayals of genuine Christianizations is a striking pattern of non-Christian women who convert and marry their Christian husband at the same time. We find conversion-cum-marriages in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Knight of Malta*, John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*, Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* and *The Emperor of the East*, and in John Kirke's *The Seven Champions of Christendome*.

In addition to presenting a comedic ending with a fitting conversional twist, another advantage of conversion-cum-marriage was that a woman's identity was largely incorporated into that of her husband, thus cancelling out any anxieties over her change.<sup>37</sup> As part of this, it was essential that a woman subjected herself to her spouse. Just as Christian converts subjected themselves to God, so a woman was expected to conform to the will of her husband. One of the most important grounds for this rule was Paul's exhortation to married women:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the

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<sup>37</sup> Margaret R. Hunt, "Women in Ottoman and Western European Law Courts: Were Western Women Really the Luckiest Women in the World?" *Structures and Subjectivities: Attending to Early Modern Women*, ed. Joan E. Hartman and Adele Seeff (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 2007) 176-199, 182.

head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

The marginal commentaries of the Geneva Bible (1595) elucidated this point of female compliance by suggesting a further analogy between a husband and God: “[wives] cannot be disobedient to their husbands except by also resisting God, who is the author of this subjection.” In his popular work *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), the Church of England clergyman William Gouge engages in an extensive discussion of this passage, stressing that for a woman Christianization is virtually synonymous with marriage: “A wife by subjecting herself to a husband therein is subject unto Christ.”<sup>38</sup> However, this does not imply that women should follow their husbands blindly; Gouge takes care to explain that men should not assume to themselves divine authority, noting, for instance, that “there is no equality betwixt Christ the Lord from heaven, and an earthly husband: the disparity betwixt them is infinite.”<sup>39</sup>

Without exception, all authors of plays which feature marriage-cum-conversion render Christianization and marriage interchangeable. This maximizes its effect as a consolidation of a woman’s conversion and submission. In *The Knight of Malta*, for instance, the Christian character Angelo relates how, having been taken captive by the Turks, he became engaged to a beautiful Turkish woman whom he converted. Angelo expresses this in a way that gives equal importance to the Christianization and their marriage (or engagement in this particular case) and suggests that these two events were inextricably linked:

I laboured her conversion with my love,  
And doubly won her; to fair faith her soule

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<sup>38</sup> William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Havinland, 1622) 342 (original emphasis). Gouge also touches on the subject of conversion in relation to marriage explicitly. In this case, husbands and wives have an equally important role in conversion and becoming devout Christian spouses: “If it please the Lord to give such a blessing to the endeavour of an husband or wife, as to be a meanes of the conversion of their bedfellow, then will the partie converted both intirely love the other, and also heartily blesse God (as there is just cause) that ever they were so neerely linked together. This dutie of winning one another, is to be applied to such as are married not only to plaine infidels, but also to Papists or other like Idolaters, to Atheists, or any other profane persons, to heretiques, separatists, schismaticques, or any that believe not aright” (239-40).

<sup>39</sup> Gouge, “*Of Domesticall Duties*,” 144.

She first betroth'd, and then her faith to me. (5.2.167-74)<sup>40</sup>

A similar thing happens in the tragicomedy *The Emperor of the East*, also by Philip Massinger. It relates the story of the jealous Christian and Byzantine emperor Theodosius, who marries the pagan and "stranger virgin" Athenais.<sup>41</sup> Here, the intrinsic connection between their wedding and Athenais's Christianization is emphasised in temporal terms. As Theodosius announces: "In the same houre / In which she is confirmed in our faith, / We mutually will give away each other, / And both be gainers" (2.1.396-9). Shakespeare observes the principle of christianization-cum-marriage in *The Merchant of Venice*. When Jessica has decided that she wants to escape her father's unpleasant household, she announces her desire to convert. In so doing she, too, presents marriage and conversion as interchangeable events:

O Lorenzo  
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,  
Become a Christian and thy loving wife. (2.3.19-21)

Another benefit of conversion-cum-marriage was that the convert bride could serve as a fitting prize for a Christian man who proved his religious constancy. Cases in point are *The Island Princess*, *The Renegado* and *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, where pagans or Muslims attempt to force Christians into adopting their faith. It is precisely these men's unflinching loyalty to their faith that make non-Christian women fall in love with them and desire to turn Christian. In *The Island Princess*, which is set on one of the Moluccas, the eponymous princess Quisara falls in love with the noble Portuguese Armusia and asks him to convert to her unidentified faith. He refuses, is tortured for this, but, astonished by his constancy, the princess decides to turn Christian and die with him. This effectively paves the way for their marriage. While the princess does not yet know that she and her future husband will be spared and allowed to marry, the way in which she describes her desire to convert clearly prefigures their marriage: "A virgin won by your fair constancy, / And glorying that she is

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<sup>40</sup> John Fletcher, *The Knight of Malta*, ed. George Walton Williams, in Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1647]) 345-465.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Massinger, *The Emperor of the East* in ed. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger* (Oxford: 1976 [1632]) 391-488, 1.1.124.

won so, will dye by ye.”<sup>42</sup> After she has concluded that Armusia’s good character must reflect his religious conviction and vice versa – “Your faith, and your religion must be like ye” (5.2.118) – she proclaims her conversion: “I do embrace your faith sir, and your fortune” (5.2.121). Indeed, for Quisara turning Christian means marrying the man who provoked her to convert in the first place. The same narrative principle can be found in *The Renegado*. Here, the non-Christian woman who first attempts to convert a Christian hero to her faith is the Islamic Donusa. Like Armusia in *The Island Princess*, Vitelli is tortured for his refusal to relinquish Christianity, and like Armusia, Vitelli charms his beloved woman with his constancy. In addition, Vitelli manages to convince Donusa of the Christian truth and incites her to convert by suggesting that converting is essentially the same as marrying him:

Oh, Donusa!  
Die in my faith like me and ‘tis a marriage  
At which celestial angels shall be waiters,  
And such as have been sainted welcome us. (4.3.150-3)

The next act features the staging of Donusa’s baptism, performed by Vitelli himself. The Christening has a miraculous effect on Donusa, which she puts in Pauline terms: “By this blest means, I feel the films of error / Ta’en from my soul’s eyes” (5.3.124-25). At the same time, she expresses her belief that she is fully indebted to her fiancée for her conversion:

Let me kiss the hand  
That did this miracle, and seal my thanks  
Upon those lips from whence these sweet words vanished  
That freed me from the cruellest of prisons (5.3.127-131)

*The Seven Champions of Christendome*, which is based on the popular eponymous romance by Richard Jonson, ends with the adoption of Christianity by the King of Macedon and his three daughters, and with the announcement of their marriage to the three bachelor Saints: Anthony, Denis and Patrick. This marriage immediately follows upon the conversion of these women. The faith of these knights is tested throughout the play and Anthony is even forced to relinquish

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<sup>42</sup> John Fletcher, *The Island Princess*, ed. George Walton Williams, in Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [1647]) 539-651, 5.2.109-110.

his Christian identity on pain of death. Realizing he does not need "armour" but his "constant heart," he manages to survive.<sup>43</sup> In this way, these nameless women, and Anthony's bride in particular, can be seen as rewards for Christian constancy. The converting women in *The Island Princess*, *The Renegado* and *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, then, are all presented as highly attractive and kind. This not only makes their Christianization easy to swallow for a Christian audience, but, combined with their marriage to a Christian hero of the faith, also renders their conversions unequivocal celebrations of religious constancy.

### Christianization and Death

Most theatrical representations of authentic conversion follow the pattern I have outlined above: the stage converts are not caricatures of their faith and the conversion itself is a confirmation of continuity in rather than a radical change of identity. Two stage Christianizations seem to deviate from this model. Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* and William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* present wicked pagans undergoing a genuine conversion. These converts, however, are immediately killed by their former coreligionists and are thus not fully staged in their new capacity as Christians. In this way, these plays come very close to celebrating Christianization as a radical transformation, but the subsequent martyr's deaths reveal that Thomas Dekker, Philip Massinger and William Rowley were unwilling to explore these Christianizations to their full extent.

*The Virgin Martyr* features the ruthless persecutor of Christians Theophilus who, at the end of the play, embraces Christianity. While his name, meaning friend of God, clearly anticipates his conversion, he is depicted as a ruthless villain in every other respect. His conversion is the result of a miraculous gift from heaven, sent by the virgin martyr Dorothea he has killed. Realizing that Dorothea has sent a message of forgiveness, Theophilus starts to repent and finally turns Christian. The emperor Dioclesian takes this as his cue to torture Theophilus to death, which Theophilus suffers heroically and which draws the admiration of one of the pagan witnesses: "I have seene thousands tortur'd, but nere yet / A constancy like this."<sup>44</sup> There is no question that Theophilus

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<sup>43</sup> John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, ed. Giles Edwin Dawson (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1929) 2.1081.

<sup>44</sup> Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr* in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964-70) 365-480, 5.2.234.

represents a grotesque inversion of the benign Christian Dorothea and that his turn to Christianity is genuine, but *The Virgin Martyr* does not give its audience an idea of Theophilus' post-Christianization identity. A similar thing happens in William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, which features an adaptation of the historical conversion of the first British Christian martyr Saint Alban, by Amphibalus (Amphiabel in the play).<sup>45</sup> Like Theophilus, Alban is first presented as wicked Roman knight, and immediately led off the stage by his executioners after his conversion.

Theophilus and Alban may present relatively exceptional cases of genuine stage Christianization, but their deaths are, again, part of a general pattern. Virtually all stage converts to Christianity in tragedies meet with a tragic death soon after their conversion.<sup>46</sup> Some other genuine conversions take place at the very end of the play, such as that of Joffer in *The Fair Maid of the West part II*. This suggests that playwrights not only refused to portray conversion as a radical transformation, but also took pains to avoid having to explore its consequences for the converts and their fellow-Christians. The only work of drama that does revolve around the post-conversion life of a new Christian is Shakespeare's *Othello*, which will be investigated in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed a paradox in the early modern English theatrical representation of interfaith conversion that is similar to the paradox discussed in chapter five. I have shown that in addition to apostasy and ironic conversions to

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<sup>45</sup> Despite the many fatalities in the play, it is classified as "A Merrie and Pleasant Comedy" on its title page, W. R. [William Rowley] *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (London: I. Okes, 1638).

<sup>46</sup> Thus, the fact that the convert to Catholicism Philologus, in Nathaniel Woodes's *Conflict of Conscience*, returns happily to Protestantism in one of the play's two endings does not alter the fact that he dies a miserable death in both versions. Corcut, in *Selimus* is strangled by his brother immediately after Corcut has announced his Christianization. Abigail, in *The Jew of Malta* is secretly poisoned by Barabas after he has learned that she has entered a monastery. Basilisco, in Thomas Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda*, turns Turk out of love for a woman. When he learns that his object of desire has married another man, he returns to Christianity, after which the emperor of the Turks immediately murders him. Bitter fates befall the two pagan daughters of Theophilus in *The Virgin Martyr*, who are killed by their enraged father after their conversion to Christianity. In the same play, Dorothea converts Antoninus, the man who is in love with her. His life as a new Christian, however, is only short, as he dies with Dorothea from the pain of losing her. In Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier* Bellizarius and his wife Victoria convert to Christianity, but both are tormented and pay for their Christianizations with their lives.

Christianity, playwrights stage genuine Christianizations of adherents of all major religions that were known to the early moderns. Yet the most obvious ways of presenting these Christianizations – as straightforwardly festive or radical transformations of identity – are virtually absent from early modern English drama. The reason for this is that playwrights considered interfaith conversion intrinsically problematic. Indeed, *The Sophister* taught its educated early modern audiences that interfaith conversion is not a solution to hardships but rather endlessly invite new religious turns. This particular negative understanding of interfaith conversion is confirmed in plays that render Christian constancy superior to Christianization, such as *The Renegado*, which plays down the success of a repenting renegade by juxtaposing him to a hero of Christian constancy and condemns the exchange of religions by aligning it with financial exchange. Other examples are *The Island Princess*, and *The Seven Champions of Christendome*, that, like *The Renegado*, make marriage coincide with conversion, and present the convert bride as a prize for the heroic Christian constancy of their grooms.

Theatrical portrayals of genuine Christianizations show nevertheless that playwrights felt the urge to rejoice at characters turning or returning to Christianity. The way in which they stage Christianizations reveals that they were unwilling to portray these as full-blown transformations of identity. By portraying converts to Christianity that are already likable, comely and congenial to Christians before their turns, playwrights present genuine conversions not as changes but as revelations of true religious identity. *The Virgin Martyr* and *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, that do include Christianizations as transformations, appear to prove the contrary, but the fact that only an immediate martyr's death is presented as a suitable response to these conversions meets the general idea that on the English renaissance stage interfaith conversion cannot be shown and explored as a fully-fledged transformation. Thus, by omitting post-conversion identities from the stage, even these works support the idea that religious identity can only be conceived of as an untransferable part of the self. A changed religious self, these plays suggest, cannot exist.