Stage Converts: Performing Moral and Religious Change in Early Modern English Drama

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2020

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

English

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Abstract

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No concept in post-Reformation England was more fraught than conversion. Catholics and Protestant reformers fought over what conversion meant, how it was accomplished, who could achieve it, and how it related to salvation. They encouraged conversion, but distrusted converts; they feared the potential threat of forced conversion and yet used conversion as a justification for proto-colonial conquest. By weaving together conversion scenes in plays from before, during, and after the Reformation, my dissertation illuminates how early modern drama could be simultaneously invested in the dominant ideologies of Protestant England and able to imaginatively experiment with the challenges, contingencies, and contradictions of post-Reformation religious identity. Diverging from recent scholarship that has emphasized early modern dramatic depictions of conversion as ironic or as invested in religious stability, I maintain that many later Elizabethan and Jacobean plays present peculiarly equivocal ways of understanding religious and moral change. Conversion scenes became conditional and

exploratory as increasing state restrictions limited drama's ability to serve as a communal expression of shared faith or a proselytizing instrument for new doctrines. These plays present religious identity as simultaneously ambiguous and genuine, unstable and true. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that dramatic scenes of conversion provide insight into the lived experience of post-Reformation faith, revealing theater as a communal space for audiences to explore moral difficulties, confront the tensions within their faiths, and practice dwelling in religious uncertainty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not exist without the guidance and support of so many people. My first thanks go to my incredible dissertation committee. Juliet Shields, who believed in my work before I did, has offered generous mentorship since the first day I visited UW. Bill Streitberger's expansive knowledge has made me a better reader, and he has an uncanny ability to offer up the exact connection I'm missing about a text. Allison Machlis Meyer made time to give detailed, insightful feedback on every single rough draft I sent her, beyond anything I ever expected, and I am humbled by her kindness in advising me through conferences, applications, article drafts, and teaching. Finally, my chair, Jeffrey Todd Knight, has spent six years advocating for me in ways seen and unseen and giving me some of the best writing critiques I've ever had. He has offered encouragement, advice, and a sharp editorial eye every step of the way. I have been lucky in my advisor.

I am also grateful to the wonderful friends, colleagues, and mentors who have shaped my experience. Wendy Beth Hyman and Dan Breen taught me to love studying early modern literature before I ever became an English major. Lane Eagles, my brilliant writing partner and the first reader of every section of this dissertation, always gave me terrific advice and kept me from saying anything too foolish about art. UW's Special Collections librarian, Sandra Kroupa, made descriptive bibliography finally click, and taught me so much about books as material texts. Elliot Stevens, our fantastic English librarian, always came through when I needed access to anything. Beatrice Arduini, Geoffrey Turnovsky, Leila Kate Norako, and others in the Material Texts Colloquium have shown me what it means to be part of a supportive, enthusiastic intellectual community. I am grateful for the conversations and feedback provided by members of the 2018 Shakespeare Association of America seminar on "Thinking Theology with Shakespeare" organized by Jay Zysk, members of the 2019 "Occult Agents in Shakespeare" seminar organized by Mary Floyd-Wilson, and members of the 2020 "Early Mod Cons" seminar organized by Rob Carson and Eric Langley. I also wish to thank the institutions and fellowships that have made my work possible: UW's Textual and Digital Studies program, the Joff Hanauer Fellowship, the Donna Gerstenberger Fellowship, the UW Graduate School, and the Department of English have provided funding that has been instrumental in supporting my research, conference travel, and writing.

I could not have done this without the support of Krystal Marsh, who inspired me to go to graduate school in the first place because all I wanted to do was spend every day talking about literature with her. Matt Poland was always available to talk through my ideas, read my work, and hand me a strong cocktail. Anna Wager has advised me through every fellowship application and cover letter I've written, made me more attentive to the bonds of community, and changed the shape of my final chapter—thanks for vibing and keeping it tight. Thank you to my wonderful friends Steph, Alex, AJ, Liz, Katie, Greg, Wes, Clay, and Mark for keeping me fed, employed, and housed. My thanks to Olivia, Jacki, Helen, Lydia, and Matthew, who have helped me keep grad school in perspective.

And finally, thanks to my friends and family near and far who made sure I kept up with life beyond academia, asked me about my work, and always checked in on me. A special thanks to my brother Ron, my grandparents Bob and Charlene, and especially my parents, April and Rick. You taught me to love books and you convinced me I could write before I knew how to form letters. I could not have gotten here without your love and encouragement.

STAGE CONVERTS:
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Introduction

Caravaggio's *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (Fig. 1), which hangs in the Cerasi Chapel of Basilica de Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, depicts Christianity's central conversion narrative: the transformation of Saul, persecutor of early followers of Christ, into Paul the Apostle, dedicated evangelist to the Gentiles.[1] The conversion is described in Acts of the Apostles:

> And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. (Acts 9:1-9)[2]

In the story of Saul, the transformation of his soul is a clear miracle. Direct supernatural interference changes the trajectory of Saul's life, and he is physically altered by the experience; his change is absolute, his devotion to Christ steadfast from this moment on in his life. He addresses Jesus as "Lord" before knowing who the speaker is or understanding that he is being converted. The episode is followed by his baptism by the disciple Ananias, restoring his sight

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[1] On the naming of Saul/Paul, see G.A. Harrer, "Saul Who Is Also Called Paul," *The Harvard Theological Review* 33, no. 1 (1940): 19-33. For a broader perspective of Jews taking multiple names in the period, and some critique of Harrer, see Margaret H. Williams, "The Use of Alternative Names by Diaspora Jews in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 38, no. 3 (2007): 307-327. Williams addresses Saul/Paul in particular on pages 320-321.

[2] All biblical citations, except where otherwise noted, are from Herbert Marks, Gerald Hammond, and Austin Busch, ed., *The English Bible: King James Version*, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 2012).

and confirming his entry into the Christian community, but the baptismal rite, significant though it is as a sign of becoming a member of the cult, takes place in less than a sentence. Although baptism quickly became the recognized sign of conversion in early Christianity, and eventually a sacrament with the power to *cause* conversion, in the biblical narrative of Saul's turn the moment of baptism is dwarfed by his miraculous encounter with Christ.[3]

It is this encounter that Caravaggio captures, the most spectacular moment in the story as Saul falls to the ground, struck by a blinding light from heaven—the very instant of conversion, a sacred miracle and a mystery. Saul lies on his back, arms outstretched. He wears armor, a sword at his hip, with a helmet that has tumbled off in his fall, signs of the violent life that has, in this moment, become his previous life as he becomes a new man in the service of Christ. His horse arches a leg in the air, held by Saul's companion, who stares down at him in bewilderment. These are the only three figures in the painting, crowding the composition against a dark background that offers nowhere else to look.[4] What makes the scene so striking, however, is what we do not see. Saul's vision of heavenly light, the converting agent and the confirmation that his conversion is sacred and real, is beyond the frame, for Saul's eyes only. We see the ecstasy—or perhaps pain—of the convert, but his experience, so amplified by the painting's naturalism and accentuated by Saul's placement in the foreground, remains inaccessible. We cannot see what he sees. Or rather, to borrow Saul's words, we can only see it as though through a glass, darkly: in the reflection of the light against the coat of Saul's horse, on the insides of his

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[3] On the generative power of the sacraments in the Middle Ages, see Joseph P. Wawrykow, "The Sacraments in Thirteenth-Century Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 218-234.

[4] Lorenzo Pericolo describes this technique in "Visualizing Appearance and Disappearance: On Caravaggio's London 'Supper at Erasmus,'" *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 3 (Sept. 2007), 529.

arms and the creases of his shirt, and a few faint rays in the darkness of the painting's upper right corner.

Caravaggio's dim and difficult image of turning Christian serves as an entry point into this project on post-Reformation performances of conversion because of its murkiness. Painted after nearly a century of turbulent reformations and counter-reformations, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* avoids embracing any particular dogma on how conversion works or what it signifies. While Brian Cummings sees possible hints of Protestant ideas in this Italian painting hanging in a Catholic Church, he also finds its opacity to be "an obstinate reminder of the danger of reading too quickly into the meaning and structure of religious experience in late sixteenth-century Europe, or the obscure political world of conversion between one doctrinal side and the other."[5] But in denying its audience full access to Saul's epiphany, the painting confronts viewers with some of the core questions facing early modern Christians of all confessions: How does God enact conversion in humans? What agency do people have in transforming their own souls? Is a conversion experience something performed, inflicted, felt? And how should communities, families, and observers respond to such profound yet inaccessible changes? These questions are not unique to the early modern era, but the period's intense and conflicted reformations gave them renewed urgency and offered new, often incompatible answers.

For post-Reformation English literature, these questions were a source of emotional and imaginative energy. That energy found many outlets; critics have explored the literary power of

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[5] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 369.

conversion—or "turning"[6]—in spiritual autobiography, poetry, and polemic during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[7] However, I contend that creative engagement with shifting ideas about conversion was most varied and dynamic in drama, a form that demands a kind of simultaneous faith and disbelief in the transformations of one person into another. Ryan McDermott, in an essay that uses the supposedly incorruptible body of the martyr Margaret Clitherow to interrogate how academics study faith in history, describes Christian conversion as a problem of layered identities: "[I]f, to be saved, the old man must pass away, and the new man be saved, how does the new man's salvation apply to the old man? What continuity between the old man and the new man allows us to say that the old man was in fact saved and not just deleted and replaced?"[8] Drama can embody and examine this problem in ways unavailable to other narrative art forms. Audiences simultaneously observe both the actor on stage and the character they represent, and defining the connection between the two is elusive. The task of representing conversion on the early modern stage is not the task of recreating an entirely realistic experience of conversion or inspiring conversion in others (though these are entirely possible byproducts of theatrical conversions). Instead, drama imagines how such turns might be made tangible and

[6] The Latin verb *convertĕre* means "to turn about, turn in character or nature, transform, translate, etc.," "convert, adj. and n." *OED Online. The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* entry for "Conversion" begins simply, "'Conversion' means 'turning.'" See Ian A. McFarland, David A. Fergusson, and Karen Kilby, eds., "Conversion," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 115-116.
[7] Studies on the literary power of conversion in early modern England include Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, especially "God's Grammar," 365-412; Brooke Conti, *Confessions of Faith in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[8] Ryan McDermott, "The Sanctity of St. Margaret Clitherow: Conversion and Incorruptibility," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 48, no. 3 (Sept. 2018), 543.

interpretable to audiences in the moment they occur—and tests the limits of what can be depicted. In doing so, it creates a dynamic space for audiences to work through the doctrinal contradictions and spiritual mysteries of a politically and ethically fraught, emotionally demanding religious experience.

This project pauses over the interchange between doctrine, belief, and dramatic representation, analyzing depictions of sincere conversion—turns that are genuinely sought by the would-be convert or celebrated as successful within the play—to explore how drama animated this harrowing spiritual crisis and essential experience in early modern Christian life. In the following chapters, I study how plays written for the Elizabethan and Jacobean commercial stage draw on theological controversies over the process of conversion, emerging challenges to recognizing whether conversion has succeeded, and competing conversion paradigms to confront difficulties in understanding religious identity and attaining salvation in the post-Reformation world. I intervene in critical discourse around conversion in post-Reformation drama in two ways. First, while nearly all studies of early modern drama and conversion focus solely on movement between religions, my study approaches conversion as it was understood in the early modern period, as a spiritual "turn" that could encompass attempts to convert to a new religious identity and attempts to repent, to turn away from sin and error and seek grace.[9] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the distinction between converting to Christianity and converting within Christianity was not always clear, especially in moving between Catholicism and Protestantism. Studying inter- and intra-faith turns together reveals neglected ways that drama functioned as a site for shared reimaging of what conversion meant, how it was

[9] A notable exception is Lieke Stelling's *Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), which surveys plays featuring conversion as both a change of religious identity and an intensification of religious identity.

accomplished, who could achieve it, and how it related to salvation. Second, diverging from recent scholarship that has emphasized how early modern drama invests in ideologies of religious stability or ironizes conversion as false or doubtful, I focus on the ambiguity, risks, and potential that could be explored through the performance of sincere spiritual changes. By examining depictions of authentic conversions or sincere attempts to convert, I avoid only concentrating on the threatening elements of conversion—the suggestion of instability, equivocation, or permeable group identities. Instead, I consider the ways that these conversion scenes could simultaneously produce anxiety and empathy while considering individual and communal responsibility, personal and divine agency, and intersections of race, gender, and faith. Comparing scenes of sincere conversion or attempts to convert in post-Reformation commercial drama to conversion scenes in earlier religious and moral drama, I argue that these plays repurposed theological issues to suggest religious identity might be ambiguous and unstable without being false or deceptive. These conversion scenes gave early modern audiences an opportunity to grapple with moral difficulties, test possible resolutions to doctrinal tensions, and practice dwelling in spiritual uncertainty.

My project contributes to recent trans-Reformational approaches to studying theater undertaken by Jay Zysk, Matthew Smith, and Helen Cooper, which have revealed abiding relationships in theatrical engagement with theology between medieval religious drama, sixteenth-century Protestant drama, and later Elizabethan and Stuart commercial drama.[10] This study is alert to the continuities and discontinuities that emerge in conversion scenes across the

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[10] Jay Zysk, *Shadow and Substance: Eucharistic Controversy and English Drama Across the Reformation Divide* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017); Matthew J. Smith, *Performance and Religion in Early Modern England: Stage, Cathedral, Wagon, Street* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019); Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, The Arden Shakespeare Critical Studies (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, and I draw on England's long history of staging religious turns in my analysis. However, scenes of conversion in religious and moral drama are oriented toward specific doctrines, voicing community beliefs or evangelizing for new creeds. I compare these earlier plays to Elizabethan and Jacobean plays written and performed after two waves of state limitations: first, Elizabeth I's 1559 proclamation restricting the treatment of religious matters in plays—an attempt to, in Adrian Streete's words, "ensure that…the stage conformed"[11]—and second, the increasing suppression of explicitly religious theater after the 1570s.[12] While there is a significant shift toward new plays with less scriptural subject matter after these restrictions, critics studying early modern drama and religion in recent years have found theater to be "more complex and multifaceted than those who insist that post-Reformation drama is merely secular."[13] I contend that these restraints on religious plays changed, but did not diminish, drama's engagement with theology. Like critics such as Jennifer Waldron, Sarah Beckwith, and Heather Hirschfeld, I stress that the popular theater of this period is a communal form of working through difficult new systems of belief and overlapping, often inconsistent

[11] Adrian Streete, "Drama," chap. 11 in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, ed. Andrew Hiscock, Helen Wilcox, and Adrian Streete (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Oxford Handbooks Online.

[12] Performances of revised cycle plays continued through the 1570s, but reformers found that they were difficult to revise enough to sever from their past ties to traditional religion, as David Mills describes in "Some Theological Issues in Chester's Plays," in *'Bring furth the pagants': Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnstone*, ed David N. Klausner & Karen Sawyer Marsalek (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 212-229.

[13] John D. Cox, "Afterword," *Stages of Engagement: Drama and Religion in Post-Reformation England,* ed. James D. Mardock and Kathryn R. McPherson (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2014), 274.

theologies, "in crucial, mutual dialogue" with religious doctrine.[14] While the conversion scenes in "secular" drama highlighted in the following chapters have connections to earlier performances of turning, I maintain that they each present peculiarly equivocal ways of thinking about spiritual change. As state restraints meant that drama was less able to serve as a communal expression of shared faith or a proselytizing instrument for new doctrines, conversion scenes became conditional and exploratory. Rather than asserting, "This is how conversion happens," and providing a lesson or an example to follow, the transformations in these plays ask, "Could this be how conversion happens? Can conversion look like this?" These plays do not actively promote religious pluralism; they sometimes express aggressively chauvinist perspectives on English Protestant identity. But presenting conversion on the public stage without clearly asserting a specific doctrinal position makes the challenges of understanding conversion visible and invites the audience to participate in thinking about and debating theological questions.

The moral and religious transformations performed on the early modern stage are an avenue for analyzing how conversion experiences might be understood individually and communally, and for heterogeneous and inconsistent beliefs to exist without the necessity of a single, unifying doctrinal answer. Attentiveness to diverse instances of conversion in plays that are not ostensibly religious theater, and thus have a less explicitly pious or moral agenda, offers insight into complex conceptions of what it meant to move toward grace, who could be imagined as part of the elect, and the relationships between body and soul, individual convert and society. Steven Mullaney describes the Elizabethan public theaters as an emerging public sphere, "neither

[14] Heather Hirschfeld, *The End of Satisfaction: Drama and Repentance in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 15. See also Jennifer Waldron, *Reformations of the Body: Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theater* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

the product nor the organ of the state but rather the result of a historically determined collusion between artisanal entrepreneurs and a socially diverse and astoundingly large audience," emphasizing that "literacy was not the price of admission to the theater, a fact which gave the stage a currency and accessibility rivaled only by the pulpit, which it threatened to eclipse."[15] Mullaney may overstate the freedom of the theaters—official and unofficial state regulation was powerful, and companies depended on noble or royal patronage[16]—but my investigation of dramatic conversion suggests that the late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commercial stage is uniquely able to provide multivocal, affective ways of thinking about theological questions.

These problems are best explored in plays featuring seemingly genuine spiritual turns or efforts to turn because they produce an unusual dynamic for conversion narratives: the simultaneous potential for redemption and damnation. In the plays I study, when characters attempt to convert on stage, their successes or failures are not forgone conclusions like those in autobiographical accounts or hagiography, but are experienced in the moment, inviting characters and audience to judge and empathize with those experiences. This is evident in what is probably the most famous scene of attempted intra-faith moral conversion in early modern drama: Claudius's private confession and effort to repent in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's horrible desire to ensure that Claudius spends eternity in hell prevents him from murdering his uncle "in the purging of his soul / When he is fit and seasoned for his passage" (3.3.84-5). [17] But an instant after Hamlet refrains from killing him at prayer, Claudius calls that prayer futile: "Words without

[15] Steven Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 143.
[16] More recently, Adrian Streete has described the Elizabethan public theaters as "a social phenomenon supported by the state," in "Drama," 170.
[17] All references to *Hamlet* use William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, Revised Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

thoughts never to heaven go" (3.3.98), he declares, rendering Hamlet's deferral pointless. This scene has prompted criticism on the role of confession, exteriority and inwardness, and the doctrinal implications of Claudius's failure.[18] Ramie Targoff describes it as a "detailed exploration of the devotional process that fails to produce a sincere state of contrition."[19] Yet while Claudius himself confronts the potential emptiness of performing repentance, his attempt "is surprisingly uncontroversial for Hamlet," as Hirschfeld observes.[20] Hamlet sees Claudius at prayer, and immediately concludes that it is the wrong time to kill him if he hopes to condemn his uncle to perdition. Editors Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note that Claudius's lines "[cast] an ironic *retrospective* light on Hamlet's stated reasons for sparing him."[21] With the benefit of hindsight, Hamlet's delay is a misstep, a failure to read the gap between outward performance and inward truth. However, it is the time before that retrospective irony that interests me. In the moment that Hamlet makes his decision, the audience and the prince see the same thing: Claudius alone, repenting his sins. "All may be well" (3.3.72), he offers prior to Hamlet's entrance, and the space of the next twenty-four lines, as experienced by both Hamlet and the audience, is one of "may." Claudius *may* repent; his words and thoughts together *may* fly up to heaven. The potential for success or failure is felt until the king's final couplet.

In fact, the audience is given even more reason to believe in these possibilities than Hamlet is, since Claudius has shared his sincere desire to repent and find redemption before

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[18] See Ramie Targoff, "The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England," *Representations* 60 (Autumn 1997): 49-69; Paul D. Stegner, "'Try what repentance can': Hamlet, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority," *Shakespeare Studies* 35 (2007): 105-132; Joseph Sterrett, "Confessing Claudius: Sovereignty, Fraternity, and Isolation at the Heart of *Hamlet*," *Textual Practice* 23, no. 5 (24 Sept. 2009): 739-761.
[19] Targoff, "The Performance of Prayer," 49.
[20] Heather Hirschfeld, *The End of Satisfaction*, 82.
[21] Thompson and Taylor, *Hamlet*, note on 363. Emphasis added.

Hamlet's entrance: "Help, angels, make assay. / Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel / Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe" (3.3.69-71). I am not suggesting that early modern audiences would come to the same conclusion as Hamlet and believe that Claudius was successfully praying, or that they would have immediately recognized Claudius as reprobate and unconvertable. Rather, I want to emphasize that the scene creates a space for reactions that are mixed and uncertain, inviting audiences to participate in a theological question without the necessity of conveying an all-encompassing dogmatic answer. "Try what repentance can—what can it not?— / Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?" (3.3.65-66) Claudius wonders, and the question is one that might provoke varied, contradictory responses in the diverse crowds that attended the early modern theater. Claudius, Hamlet, and the audience must all reflect on the process of turning away from sin and assess Claudius's potential as a convert. In this instance, Claudius fails; other stage converts, sometimes with less expressed desire to turn, succeed. Because Claudius performs his attempted conversion in the moment, free of the necessity to embody a doctrinal lesson, the scene creates room for heterogeneous engagement with the theological problems Claudius raises.

Like Claudius, the stage converts I study in this dissertation hazard their souls in hope of redemption, and in doing so ask how conversion is felt, enacted, and interpreted. Drama can inhabit the space between the attempt and the result, conjuring up the destructive and productive possibility of radical spiritual change in the moment of turning. Paula Fredriksen, considering the archetypal models of Paul and Augustine, concludes that in Christianity, "the conversion account is both anachronistic and apologetic: apologetic personally and publicly, for the convert must explain to himself and to his audience (his new group; his old group; an opposing group); anachronistic, because the account rendered in the conversion narrative is so shaped by later

concerns."[22] But conversion on stage is not presented as retrospective. The convert does not look back on their previous self and describe their change with the benefit or blurring of hindsight, nor with the polemical motive to defend one's religion that motivated the conversion stories in spiritual autobiography.[23] Drama can portray ambivalence, wavering, and even failure in the moment they occur, without any pre-concluded promise of redemption or damnation. Characters can be sincere, true converts and reveal complex motives; they can begin to convert without quite completing the task; they can be left wondering whether and how their conversion has succeeded. No one publishes accounts of how they failed to see the light, but in drama, failures are common enough that each moment of potential turning carries risk. Plays are not alone in their ability to explore moral difficulties without coming to complete and ideologically consistent conclusions, but they are especially suited to representing belief systems in tension, staging possible worlds and ideas, and thus to engaging with the complexities of who can and cannot attain salvation, how to recognize reprobation in one's self and others, and how individuals and communities function in the midst of that uncertainty.

"I turne, I turne, oh saue my life, I turne"

This study departs from previous work on conversion in drama by focusing on depictions of both religious and moral conversions that are genuine attempts at profound transformations of the soul. As part of the recent "turn to religion" in literary studies described by Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, critics have recognized religion's simultaneous importance and instability in

[22] Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 1 (April 1986), 33.
[23] Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 60.

early modern life, which has led to increased interest in the role of conversion in literary texts. [24] Since the 1990s, and especially since Nabil Matar's 1999 *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, critics have given considerable attention to literature featuring encounters between Christians and Muslims and the threatening allure of "turning Turk."[25] Ania Loomba, Daniel Vitkus, Jonathan Burton, Patricia Parker, and Dennis Austin Britton, among others, have studied exchanges between Islam and Christianity, the racialization of religious identity, and the theatricality and bodily performance that early modern Christians imagined to be involved in conversion to Islam.[26] Jane Hwang Degenhardt, in her study of dramatic representations of steadfast Christians refusing to convert, likewise emphasizes that drama makes conversion or resistance to conversion theatrical, arguing that post-Reformation theater sometimes embraced seemingly 'Catholic' stagecraft to represent embodied resistance to converting to Islam.[27] These studies stress that characters who "turn Turk" in early modern drama are never moved by sincere spiritual feelings, and that desirable converts to Christianity are generally fair-skinned, virtuous

[24] Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (2004): 167-190.
[25] Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
[26] See Ania Loomba, "'Delicious Traffick': Racial and Religious Difference on Early Modern Stages," *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M.S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 203-224; Loomba, "'Break her will and bruise no bone sir': Colonial and Sexual Mastery in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*," in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2 (2002): 68-108; Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), as well as Vitkus's introduction to *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); Patricia Parker, "Preposterous Conversions: Turning Turk, and Its "Pauline" Rerighting." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 1-34; Dennis Austin Britton, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).
[27] Jane Hwang Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

women, more integrable because of these supposedly Christian qualities and because their identities can be subjugated through sex and marriage with Christian husbands. Critical attention to Jewish-Christian conversion has similarly highlighted the disquiet prompted by the idea of religious change. Jeffrey Shoulson makes the case that early modern authors used the idealized figure of the Jewish convert as part of a "master trope of conversion" that "attest[s] to intermingling of anxieties about, and expectations for, change that permeates early modern English culture."[28] Critics including James Shapiro, Janet Adelman, Mary Metzger, and Lara Bovilsky have reconsidered the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in early modern English drama, especially as it is portrayed in *The Merchant of Venice* and the different fates of Shylock and Jessica.[29] These studies of Muslim-Christian and Jewish-Christian conversions in drama have provided insight into the complex intersections of religion, race, gender, and class in the ways that literature imagines movement between one religious identity and another.

Yet as Molly Murray notes, studies of drama have focused on how theater could link conversion "with performance itself, implicitly designating such apostasy as a mere change of costume or props."[30] Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the combination of reformation and counter-reformation, colonizing missionary work, and anxiety over "turning Turk" heightened the urgency to provide believable explanations for spiritual and religious

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[28] Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 6.
[29] James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in* The Merchant of Venice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Lara Bovilsky, "'A Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, Portia, and Jewish Identity," *Renaissance Drama* 38 (2010): 47-76; Mary J. Metzger, "'Now, by My Hood, A Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity," *PMLA* 113, no. 1 (Jan. 1998): 52-63. See also Julia Reinhard Lupton's chapter on Shylock, "Merchants of Venice, Circles of Citizenship," in *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 73-102.
[30] Murray 28-29.

change and proof of their permanence.[31] Brian Cummings explains that a convert "must establish both sincerity and conformity, since without one the other is invalid."[32] But as previously agreed-upon signs like the sacraments became sites of contested meaning, serial converts drew attention to the alterability of religious identity, and community members hid Catholic or non-conformist sympathies, establishing sincerity and conformity grew increasingly difficult. In part to combat the perceived threat of conversion to Islam, for instance, plays like *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1612) present conversions away from Christianity as mere changes in costume and ceremony. Yet such depictions also subvert confidence in a stable religious identity: "[A]s props and costumes themselves are invested with religious significance, these plays illustrate how the very conventions of theater could be used to produce Islamic identity, even while manifesting the frightening potentiality that religious identity could be a theatrical fiction, created by theatrical materials."[33] These scenes of false conversion destabilize the idea of a consistent religious self and encourage doubts over converts' authenticity.

Lieke Stelling similarly addresses the anxiety produced by this suggestion of changeable religious identity, but Stelling argues that in addition to depicting the dangerous falseness of

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[31] For more on ways that reformation increased and complicated the need to understand conversion, see especially Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). J.H. Elliot explains the missionary aspirations of Catholics and Protestants in the Americas in "Religions on the Move," in *Religious Transformations in the Early Modern Americas*, ed. Stephanie Kirk and Sarah Rivett (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 25-45. The anxieties around "turning Turk" have received extensive attention in the last two decades, but see especially Vitkus, *Turning Turk*; Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*; Burton, *Traffic and Turning*; Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

[32] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 365.

[33] Dennis Britton, "Muslim Conversion and Circumcision as Theater," in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England*, ed. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 73.

apostasy, drama sought to create "a reassuring sense of confessional stability" by making successful conversions merely affirmations of already-present spiritual truths.[34] Stelling sees the instances of successful interfaith turns on the early modern stage as examples of "Jews, Muslims or pagans with Christian hearts…when they become Christian, they do not erase their religious selves in order to assume a wholly new identity, but are much closer to revealing their true Christian nature."[35] While such conversions might seem more hopeful than scenes of apostasy or deception, Stelling still reads them as skeptical about the possibility of real inward change. These conversions, according to Stelling, are not truly conversions at all, but acknowledgments of innate Christian identity already revealed through their earlier characterization. Ultimately, Stelling argues, these scenes of non-turns are part of a shift across the period from plays featuring spiritual conversions to plays featuring interfaith conversion as a means to focus on restrictive denominational identity.

Scholarship presents a general consensus that drama encouraged suspicion about conversion: converts were either dishonest (or at least doubtful), or their experiences were not true transformations at all. This study agrees that theater could manifest anxieties about false conversions, create doubt about the stability of faith, and participate in the construction of group religious and racial identities. However, I argue that many conversion scenes take the idea of profound change seriously. Like Claudius, these scenes question what repentance can and cannot do, exploring how conversion works on the soul and the body and how the felt conversion relates to the performed conversion. By doing so, they resist clear categorization as either destabilizing

[34] Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 95.
[35] Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 125.

or reassuring. Instead, they confront both the essential bleakness *and* hopefulness of the central tenet of Protestant faith: justification by faith alone.

Turn Again: Meanings, Signs, and Performances of Conversion

By the late sixteenth century, performances of conversion in English drama confronted a troubled nexus of theological issues. The idea of conversion was central to Christianity, but it both confounded explanation and explained too much. "Conversion" described movement between faiths, religious intensification, turning from error and sin toward truth and godliness, or movement between different Christian identities—Catholic and Protestant, but also different forms of Protestantism. It could indicate a singular event and a continuous practice, a permanent and absolute alteration, or one of numerous indecisive changes of religious affiliation. Although many of these meanings existed before the Reformation, earlier drama could draw upon paradigms for performing turns that were well-established and legible to audiences, such as baptism, confession, and penance. The religious disputes of the sixteenth century intensified the need to understand the process, proposed conflicting doctrines explaining how conversion happened, and blurred distinctions between different kinds of spiritual change.

The concept and methods of conversion have been central to Christianity since its origins as a movement within Judaism.[36] Before Saul's spectacular turn, the gospels show Jesus beginning his teaching with the command, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). Part of this called-for repentance and turn to God involved baptism: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

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[36] For an overview of Christianity's origin within Judaism as "the Way," see Hammond and Busch, preface to *The English Bible*, xiii-xxxi, especially xvi-xix.

teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). After Jesus's death, the apostles continued to baptize new adherents to the Way.[37] Paul's letter to the Galatians, which pre-dates the composition of Acts, contains perhaps the first recorded reference to baptism as a sign of joining the Christian community.[38] These early conversions, while not necessarily always signaling a change of religion, establish the importance of rejecting past sinfulness, turning toward God, and affirming membership within a sect.

However, despite (or because of) its early and continued importance in Christianity, conversion has had many meanings within Christian religious life. The Latin verb *convertĕre* means "to turn about, turn in character or nature, transform, translate, etc.," and *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* entry for "Conversion" begins simply, "'Conversion' means 'turning.'"[39] In early Christianity, the sort of conversion that could lead to the initiation rite of baptism could mean moving between religions, from an outside faith into Christianity, or it could mean an intensification of the faith one already held.[40] These 'turns,' then, could already broadly signify changing one's affiliation, changing one's beliefs, or changing one's lifestyle and daily actions.

In the fourth century, St. Augustine created a new and lasting paradigm for turning Christian: a turn from sin and error toward truth and faith. In his Confessions, Augustine defines his own conversion as a long inner struggle that culminates when he, like St. Paul, hears a

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[37] Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston, "Intertestamental Background of the Christian Sacraments," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 44.
[38] David Lincicum, "Sacraments in the Pauline Epistles," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 103.
[39] *OED Online*, "convert, v." See also McFarland, et al., 115-16.
[40] McFarland, et al., 115-16.

voice—but it is a child's voice, telling him to read, and it may come from heaven or from the house next door.[41] Augustine obeys what he perceives to be a divine command because he *wants* to convert; he recalls the example of Antony being inspired at hearing the gospel, and he rushes to where he left his book of the letters of Paul in hopes of finding such inspiration. Augustine's conversion is filled with agony and doubt, until he reads the words of Paul and "a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into [his] heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled."[42] Considering conversion more generally in *City of God*, Augustine explains that it is a kind of learning: "What was lost in a forest of errors has been found on the road to truth. What incredulity began faith has ended. What was founded by aversion to religious worship has been confounded by conversion to the one, true, holy God."[43] Augustine's conversion, like Paul's, is both felt and performed, given communal confirmation through the ritual of baptism. However, Augustine's understanding of conversion raises questions about human effort that the S/Paul paradigm does not. Paul's conversion is sudden and unlooked-for, but Augustine's is long sought. Augustine already wanted to turn; for him, the moment of conversion is a resolution of an inner struggle with sin. Did Augustine's desire to convert make his conversion possible? Why was his desire not enough? What efforts are required of the convert, and for how long? These questions continue to haunt conversion narratives after Augustine; Augustine's problem is Claudius's problem, and it is a problem encountered by each of the would-be converts in the plays I study here.

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[41] St. Augustine's autobiographical account of his conversion can be found in Book 8 of his *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[42] St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 153.
[43] St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God, Books VIII-XVI*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 67.

From the fifth century onwards, conversion no longer just referred to baptism into Christianity or the intense spiritual experience that led to baptism. It could also mean taking holy orders or, for lay people, religious intensification and unusual devotion.[44] The role of baptism as a conversion ritual also transformed. The increasingly common practice of infant baptism meant that while it continued to be a mark of entry into Christianity, baptism was often no longer the culmination of a conversion experience.[45] While conversion *within* Christianity rather than *to* Christianity became the predominant understanding of the process, the conversion of non-Christians remained a fundamental goal—one sometimes imposed by force. For non-Christians living under Christian dominion, conversion could be something inflicted, not a longed-for resolution or a miraculous experience, especially as theologians began defending enforced baptism. While there was agreement that absolutely forced baptism was ineffective, precisely what counted as 'force' was in dispute. Henri A. Krop explains that "Direct force, i.e. bringing a person to the baptismal font with his hands and feet tied and submerging him in the water in spite of his loud protest, was rejected by everyone," but some scholastic theology considered silence to be assent, and coercion or threats were often considered acceptable force.[46] This heightened the agentive force of baptism, no longer just a ritual confirmation but the causal power of religious change, transforming unconsenting infants and resistant adults. But in areas where infant baptism and a robust practicing Christianity was the norm for generations, experiencing

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[44] McFarland, et al., 116; Marilyn J. Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 31.
[45] McFarland, et al., 116; see also Andrew Louth, "Late Patristic Developments in Sacramental Theology in the East: Fifth-Ninth Centuries," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 170.
[46] Henri A. Krop describes the work of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas and the Franciscan Duns Scotus on forced conversion in "Duns Scotus and the Jews: Scholastic Theology and Enforced Conversion in the Thirteenth Century," *Dutch Review of Church History* 69, no. 2 (1989), 175.

conversion became ever-more personal and ever-more recurring. Since most of the populace became Christian long before they had the physical or mental capacity to begin sinning, and since no one could avoid sin, the significance of baptism as the sacrament of conversion faced a problem. As Amity Reading puts it, "By its nature…the covenant of baptism is paradoxically both performatively final and continuously renewed. It remains a promise that must be reasserted regularly, and ideally, constantly."[47]

Another sacrament offered a route for this renewal, and thus another form of continual conversion: penance and reconciliation. The idea of a penitential system was not a medieval innovation, but it became increasingly institutionalized and routinized over the twelfth century, and in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council declared yearly private confession, generally followed by penance and reconciliation, mandatory.[48] The call to repent, once an intrinsic part of Jesus's command to the apostles sent forth to baptize, became another ritualized form of conversion. The singular experiences of joining the Church or taking religious vows and the ongoing experience of penance described different sacraments, different rituals, and different actions, but they also both describe the inward transformation of the soul—and, importantly for England's religious drama and moralities and interludes, a perceptible, legible social performance.

By the sixteenth century, the idea of conversion encompassed many kinds of turns, but these turns could be broadly divided into conversion to a new faith or conversion to a new

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[47] Amity Reading, "Baptism, Conversion, and Selfhood in the Old English 'Andreas,'" *Studies in Philology* 112, no. 1 (Winter 2015), 10.
[48] For a brief summary of penance in the twelfth century, see Boyd Taylor Coolman, "The Christo-Pneumatic-Ecclesial Character of Twelfth-Century Sacramental Theology," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 211-212. For a more in-depth analysis of the development of confession and penance between the second century and the Lateran IV declaration, see the first chapter of Thomas N. Tentler's *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3-27.

attitude and behavior. Reformation upended these divisions. Luther's rejection of the Church's penitential system was, as Cummings describes it, revolutionary:

> "Conversion was a controversial word in sixteenth-century practice. Luther figures his own conversion around this controversy. He makes it an exemplary illustration of the process known as μετάνοια--the Greek word traditionally translated in Latin as *poenitentia. Poenitentia* was the key practice of the monastic discipline…ritual acts of repentance for the life of sin. Protestant exegesis, following Erasmus, rejected this as a misreading of the Greek word, which does not mean 'doing penance' but a 'change of mind.' Luther's μετάνοια therefore surrounds the meaning of μετάνοια. His conversion consists in nothing less than a new understanding of conversion."[49]

As Luther and his followers transformed the meaning of μετάνοια, reformist movements raised questions about the distinctions between inter-faith and intra-faith conversion. Did reforming the church mean converting to a new religion, or turning away from sin within an old religion? Was joining a Protestant church a conversion? What did it mean to turn from Protestantism to Catholicism? And how could these turns be signified? These movements were experienced as private intensifications of faith and state-mandated national transformations, fleeing to or from religious orders, changes of belief and changes of political loyalty. For early modern Christians moving between denominations, explaining their experiences to themselves and their faith communities presented an urgent problem.

The plays I study draw on these expansive, confused definitions of conversion to interrogate when and how the soul is remade and how the personal experience of conversion might relate to its performed signs. Drama in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries inherited a rich tradition of staging conversion, but those traditions were in the process of transformation. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both before and after England's official break with Rome, plays often featured a core conversion plot: turning from sin toward

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[49] Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 62.

faith and righteousness. Mystery cycles, which could directly portray God and the embodied Christ, depict the central Christian narrative of Christ redeeming mankind, a conversion of the world, and also include individual conversion scenes like that of Mary Magdalene and the thief on the cross. Although we have few surviving saints' plays, two late fifteenth-century examples, *The Conversion of St. Paul* and *Mary Magdalene*, both feature striking scenes of conversion including performances of repentance and baptism. Darryll Grantley attributes "the representation of conversion and the depiction of divine miracle" as the central aims of all extant saints' plays.[50] Moralities—a loose category encompassing non-liturgical plays featuring abstract characters (sometimes mixed with more concrete characters or types) and which aim "at the moral betterment of their audiences" [51]—are also focused on whether a character generally representative of mankind can be turned away from sin and saved.

Religious drama was not immediately suppressed by reformers; rather, new plays were written to spread Protestant ideology and old plays were adapted to comply with Protestant authority. Seymour Baker House describes John Bale's religious plays under Cromwell's patronage as Protestant indoctrination,[52] and Tamara Atkin argues that the conversion scene in Lewis Wager's *Mary Magdalene* (c. 1553) attempts to use "stagecraft centered on the naked

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[50] Darryll Grantley, "Saints and Miracles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre,* 2nd ed., ed Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[51] Edgar Schell and J.D. Shuchter, *English Morality Plays and Moral Interludes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), vii.
[52] Seymour Baker House, "Cromwell's Message to the Regulars: The Biblical Trilogy of John Bale, 1537," *Renaissance and Reformation* 27, no. 2 (1991): 123-38. Bale is also explicitly called a "propagandist dramatist" for Protestantism by James Simpson in "John Bale, *Three Laws*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110.

truth of Scripture" to promote Protestant beliefs.[53] Heather Hill-Vasquez suggests that the formerly Catholic sensibilities of the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul* were reformulated for a Protestant agenda.[54] Both biblical drama and moralities persisted well into the reign of Elizabeth, but scriptural plays and saints' plays were gradually suppressed and moralities and interludes were gradually supplanted by less allegorical drama.[55] While the new plays written and performed during the later Elizabethan and Jacobean years drew on these traditions, playwrights and players faced new theatrical and theological challenges in signifying religious and moral transformations.

Staging conversion meant confronting unsettled questions about the efficacy of performance. Some of the Reformation's most contentious doctrinal debates focused on the relationship between inner grace, enacted sacrament, and embodied faith. In Catholicism, believers could gain real spiritual benefit from actions such as taking the Eucharist, performing penance, or undergoing baptism—the sacraments, as Peter Walter describes, "were thought of more as operating within the framework of productive action than as a representative action."[56] Reformers rejected this causality, emphasizing mankind's utter inadequacy and powerlessness to achieve grace, which was a free gift from God to the elect. The Church of England's soteriology, torn between Pauline universal salvation and the doctrinal demands of predestination, attempted

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[53] Tamara Atkin, "Reforming Sanctity: The Digby Mary Magdalen and Lewis Wager's Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene," in *Sanctity as Literature in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Eva von Contzen and Anke Bernau (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 191.
[54] See Heather Hill-Vasquez, "The Possibilities of Performance: A Reformation Sponsorship of for the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul*," *Records of Early English Drama* 22, no. 1 (1997): 2-20.
[55] Performances of revised cycle plays continued through the 1570s, although reformers found that they were difficult to revise enough to sever from their past ties to traditional religion, as Mills describes in "Some Theological Issues in Chester's Plays."
[56] Peter Walter, "Sacraments in the Council of Trent and Sixteenth-Century Catholic Theology," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 313.

to have it both ways, asserting that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were spiritually necessary and that they could not affect participants one way or another. Richard Hooker, in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593), confronts a crucial epistemological challenge faced by reformed believers when he attempts to explain the Church of England's use of sacraments: "[I]t may be understood, that sacraments are necessary, and that the manner of their necessity to life supernatural is not in all respects as food unto natural life, because they contain *in themselves* no vital force or efficacy, they are not physical but *moral instruments* of salvation…For all receive not the grace of God which receive the sacraments of his grace."[57] The sacraments, supposedly outward signs of inner grace, could be simultaneously essential and possibly futile.

While these two positions are not theologically incompatible, in practice, they are difficult to reconcile. After the rapid series of compelled national conversions England experienced throughout the 16th century, and amid persistent fears of equivocating Jesuits and recusant citizens, this disconnection between outward performance and inward state of grace or reprobation was a source of deep unease. Believers could not rely on performance to evaluate faith; no matter how sincere, performances of sacraments and other signs of faith did not reliably indicate election. The disruption of Catholic, sacramental epistemologies created obvious challenges for theater, "where the internal workings of the constructed subject are laid open to the scrutiny of the spectator"[58] through forms of outward performance. However, it also enabled plays to explore conversion as a mysterious spiritual risk beyond easy confirmation and without

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[57] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (London: JM Dent & Sons LTD, 1954), 2:236.

[58] Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27.

a guaranteed outcome. "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" Saul wonders as God reshapes his life. He receives a direct answer and enacts his change through a baptism that restores his sight. The prospective converts in the following chapters linger in the question: like Claudius, they struggle to know what, if anything, they can do, whether any relationship exists between the miracle of turning and its embodied performance—and if so, in what direction.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation argues that scenes of genuine, non-homiletic religious or moral conversion function as opportunities for collective examination of a fundamental sacred experience. All of the plays I analyze raise questions about the process of conversion, and all are united in two essential ways. First, the conversions—successful, failed, or somewhere in between—take place on stage before the audience, excluding off-stage transformations such as those of Oliver and Duke Frederick in *As You Like It* (1599). Second, the conversions are ostensibly in earnest; that is, they are either successful transformations or sincere attempts, not tricks meant to deceive other characters or result in only worldly rather than spiritual gain, and not mere affirmations of an already-present identity. This excludes a significant number of stage turns, such as every example of Christian characters turning "renegado" by converting to Islam, Abigail's first stint in the nunnery in *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1589-90), or the Fat Bishop's changing allegiances in Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624).

Since I do not seek to trace a trajectory in representations of conversion across the Tudor and Stuart periods, I have not arranged my chapters chronologically. Instead, each chapter is organized around a theological paradox faced by post-Reformation audiences: the pressure on the convert to perform their conversion without a single, effectual means to do so; the urge to

find reason in an irrational experience beyond human control; the necessity and threat of despair as a step in conversion or damnation; the competing paradigms of conversion as a singular, irrevocable experience and a continuously renewed way of life. Analyzing how these problems appear in Elizabethan and Jacobean "secular" drama and how those appearances resemble and diverge from depictions of conversion in earlier fifteenth- and sixteenth-century religious and moral drama reveals that plays were simultaneously invested in the dominant ideologies of Protestant England and able to imaginatively experiment with the challenges, contingencies, and contradictions of post-Reformation religious identity.

Chapter 1, "'Show me the way': Standing Mid-Conversion in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*," argues that the providential transformation of the Indonesian princess Quisara from Muslim to Christian in John Fletcher's c. 1619-1621 tragicomedy draws on conventions from medieval and early modern romance and drama to create the expectation of successful conversion, but leaves that turn in-process. Placing Quisara in the context of romance heroines who convert for love and earlier conversion scenes in religious drama, especially those in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, I contend that Quisara's status as a yet-to-be-married female stage convert makes her uniquely able to interrogate the challenges of turning Christian without outward confirmation and consider how far that transformation can go without any ritual performance or physical alteration. *The Island Princess* provides an example of how drama could offer ways of imagining religious identity as compromised and in motion yet genuine, engaging with the mixed and evolving beliefs of late Jacobean audiences.

In chapter 2, "Taste and See: Miraculous Conversion in the *Play of the Sacrament* and *The Virgin Martyr*," I examine how the spiritual and religious transformations of the romantic hero Antoninus and the villainous persecutor Theophilus reject rationality and consent as factors

in religious change in the Dekker and Massinger tragedy *The Virgin Martyr* (1620). Comparing *The Virgin Martyr* to the bloody spectacle of the anti-Semitic 15th-century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, I argue that Dekker and Massinger draw on the sensationalism of a miracle play to confront conversion—even conversion to Christianity—as an overwhelming, dangerously sensual force. Quisara desperately wants to convert but lacks both a clear template to do so and signs of confirmation; Antoninus and Theophilus never consent to become Christian but are given an excess of confirmation through their material, sensory miracles, spectacular martyrdoms, and after-life processions. *The Virgin Martyr* uses the materiality of theater to collapse distinctions between inward truth and external, occult forces, free will and compulsion, exploring conversion as a confounding force that may not need to be understood to be experienced and recognized.

The first two chapters of the dissertation focus on conversions used as culminating experiences that resolve characters' development and often resolve the dramatic conflict. With chapter three, "Bruised and Hardened Hearts: The Temporality of Despair in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* and *Doctor Faustus*," I turn to conversions that are treated as beginnings, moments of illumination that may succeed or fail as the play's action continues. I use Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592) to focus on a single step in the process of conversion, one that can lead to salvation or damnation: despair. *Faustus* does not depict a soul remade, but instead scrutinizes the repeated, stalled beginnings of that process. Reading *Faustus* alongside the despairing repentance scenes in Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (c. 1553), I argue that Faustus's despair when he thinks about his own sinfulness is close to the proper, godly experience of repentance. Rather than retreading arguments over whether the play presents Faustus as able to repent or predestined to damnation—the ambiguity

is the point—I focus on the difficulty of differentiating despair as the first movement toward redemption from despair as a destructive force.

Chapter 4, "A Light and a Journey in *Enough is as Good as a Feast* and *The Winter's Tale*," continues to focus on the moment of conversion as the beginning of a longer process, considering how the early Elizabethan moral interlude *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (c. 1570) and Shakespeare's late romance *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1609-1611) grapple with the duel nature of conversion as a sudden, complete inward transformation and a long-term, recursive practice. Building on the previous three chapters' work on conversion as an action the convert takes, as an affective experience done to the convert, and as a painful gamble with despair, this chapter argues that *The Winter's Tale* uses different iterations of conversion to probe the closeness of salvation and damnation, forgiveness and vengeance—"a world ransomed, or one destroyed" (5.2.15).[59] Both *Enough is as Good as a Feast* and *The Winter's Tale* are unusual in lingering with their converts after the initial conversion experience, focusing on what comes after the road-to-Damascus moment, and both embrace community-oriented methods of understanding spiritual change. But while *Enough is as Good as a Feast* presents the convert's recognition of his obligations to others as evidence of the success or failure of his turn, *The Winter's Tale* makes that recognition the purpose and the method of conversion. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes remains in spiritual stasis during his sixteen years performing penance, as converted in act five as he is at the end of act three. Leontes's conversion is absolute and unending because he owes it to the people he has harmed as much or more than he owes it to heaven. Through Leontes's doubling conversion, the play reimagines the relationship between instantaneous, felt conversion

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[59] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. John Pitcher, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

and ritualized, performed repentance by linking his performance to reconciliation rather than transformation.

Throughout this dissertation, I maintain that weaving together "secular" drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Reformation and post-Reformation theology, and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century religious and moral plays reveals that early modern drama's treatment of conversion was more nuanced than critics have allowed. The plays I study in this project present spiritual identity as simultaneously ambiguous and genuine, unstable and true. In doing so, they provided shared spaces for audiences to explore moral difficulties, confront the tensions within their faiths, and practice dwelling in religious uncertainty.

I

"Show me the way": Lingering Mid-Conversion in John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*

I begin with an ending, in the resolution of a plot that hinges on the possibility of successful religious change. John Fletcher's tragicomedy *The Island Princess* (c. 1619-1621), a protocolonial fantasy of European Christians finding economic, political, and romantic victory in Indonesia, concludes with religious transformation as both an unresolved problem and a fortunate solution. The Christian Portuguese and the nominally Muslim Moluccans have narrowly avoided violent conflict, and the titular island princess, Quisara, has declared her determination to live and die a Christian like her beloved Portuguese husband-to-be, Armusia. Yet as the play reaches its conclusion and suggests a future of Christian dominance over the wealthy spice islands, three of its Moluccan characters—Quisara, her lady-in-waiting Panura, and her brother the king—are left in varying degrees of spiritual instability, impressed or enamored with Christian characters but unconfirmed as co-religionists. Their halting gestures toward a new confession are best summed up by the king: "You have half persuaded me to be a Christian" (5.5.67), he tells Armusia, and half persuaded is as far as he turns.[1] The theological uncertainty of the king's brief statement makes unusually explicit one dilemma of staging successful conversions. The process of becoming Christian, this line implies, can be left unfinished; how, then, can conversion's success be measured? *The Island Princess* ends with its Moluccan characters in a liminal space, somewhere between reprobate outsiders and redeemed compatriots.

[1] All references from *The Island Princess* use John Fletcher, *The Island Princess*, ed. Clare McManus, Arden Early Modern Drama (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

This chapter focuses on the problem of conversion as a process of becoming new, a radical departure from one identity into another, and the representational and interpretive difficulties that arise when staging such a profound transformation as a spiritual journey subject to disruption. I use Fletcher's *The Island Princess* as the focal point because the play introduces various models for representing spiritual change only to either discard them or leave them incomplete: the ideologically-driven narrative of Christian redemption within romance; the methods of religious drama for making the divine mystery of conversion tangible; the powerful spectacle of martyrdom. I argue that *The Island Princess* draws on the expectations of romantic interfaith conversion and theatrical conventions for staging successful conversion to provide a vision of religious 'turning' as always in-process rather than final. The half-begun conversions of the King and Panura shadow the most unambiguously positive attempt to turn Christian: Quisara's romantic determination to join her beloved's religion. Her conversion is accepted by other characters as genuine, enabling the play to end with what Ania Loomba describes as "a fantasy of colonial and sexual possession."[2] However, the play's persistent scrutiny of the process of turning, Quisara's almost entirely inward and unresolved experience of becoming Christian, and the muddling of worldly desire and spiritual identity press against the limits of imagining salvation on the early modern stage.

In *The Island Princess*, there is no 'before' and 'after' conversion, only 'before' and 'during.' Pinheiro and Panura proposition one another and imagine Panura's possible future conversion; the King is half persuaded to be a Christian; Quisara prepares herself for Christian martyrdom, but does not need to go through with it, and her marriage to Armusia is anticipated

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[2] Ania Loomba, "'Break her will, and bruise no bone sir': Colonial and Sexual Mastery in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2.1 (Spring/Summer 2002), 68.

but unfulfilled. Even the islands of Tidore and Ternate are left in what might be the first stage of becoming Christian: their future rulers will be Christian, a significant indicator of state conversion for English audiences after so many conversions prompted by changing monarchs. Audiences are invited to imagine a redeemed Christian future—and a future of Christian economic and political power—but they are not presented with confirmed, post-conversion characters. Instead, characters end in the course of turning. Gesturing toward various conversion paradigms but ultimately leaving them all unfulfilled, *The Island Princess* makes uncertainty over how and when someone 'becomes' Christian a central part of its representation of conversion. Quisara's conversion—which comes without evident personal merit, without the sure signs of baptism or miracles from heaven, and which explicitly links her desire for Christian faith with her desire for the play's hero, Armusia—suggests that even this gratifying narrative of religious change remains illegible and precarious. However, it also embraces the notion that such invisible turns might be genuine, that a muddled and unmerited conversion might still be acceptably providential. In the context of late Jacobean England, faced with intense debates over theologies of grace and torn between the need to accommodate doctrinal differences and delineate confessional boundaries, *The Island Princess* offers a way of imagining religious identity as something hoped-for and continuous rather than confirmed, compromised and unfixed while still sincere. Dwelling in conversion's potential energy and reserving final judgment on its success or failure, *The Island Princess* transforms sustained soteriological uncertainty into part of the conversion process.

Signed, Sealed—Justified? Conversion Rites and the Power of Performance

Lingering in a state of transition enables *The Island Princess* to examine a fundamental challenge of becoming Christian, a challenge exacerbated by the competing creeds of the Catholic and Church of England communions and competing beliefs within Protestantism. As an evangelical faith, Christianity requires converts and makes conversion an ideal experience for all members. But with no single, mutually agreed-upon paradigm that could be fulfilled to cause conversion or indicate inward grace, definitive signs of conversion—more precisely, signs of *having converted*, a completed process—were difficult to establish. Disputes over theologies of grace were foundational to the project of reformation and continued long after England could be described as a Protestant nation. While salvation was always considered a free and unmerited gift from God, Catholic doctrine still emphasized human effort as worthy of some reward and made it possible, at least in theory, to know whether one is saved or damned in part through actions and sacraments, which actually contained and conferred grace.[3] Reformed faiths generally rejected any such credit to human performance, reducing the seven sacraments to two, baptism and holy communion, and largely agreeing on the distinction that the sacraments could not *cause*

[3] See the "Decree Concerning the Sacraments" in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London, 1852), 51-55. For more explanation of the sacraments' power to save, see also Peter Walter, "Sacraments in the Council of Trent and Sixteenth-Century Catholic Theology," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 313-328. Debora Shuger explores the nuances of Catholic and Protestant valuations of human effort in "The Reformation of Penance," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 71, no. 4, 2008: 557-571.

salvation.[4] Beyond that basic agreement, however, beliefs about the power and purpose of the two remaining sacraments were diverse even within the Church of England, let alone throughout the wider European reformations. Cornelius Venema contends that "On no matter of Christian doctrine or practice were the debates among Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anabaptist more sustained and acute than in this area." [5]

Various reformers emphasized that the sacraments might, as Arnold Hunt describes, "confirm and strengthen the assurance of one's salvation," but precisely how they did this was a source of major dispute.[6] Baptism, while still an important sacramental ritual in reformed faiths, could be the sign of entrance into the Christian community or indicative of nothing at all, since it might not guarantee true faith.[7] Calvin maintained that the sacrament of baptism was a sign of God's promise and an outward confession of faith, condemning those who would describe it as meaningless ceremony, but emphasized that "we obtain only as much as we receive in faith" and expressed frustration with the belief that baptism is vital to deliverance: "Few realize how much

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[4] See Michael Allen, "Sacraments in the Reformed and Anglican Reformation," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology,* ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 283-92; Mickey L Mattox, "Sacraments in the Lutheran Reformation, *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology,* ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 269-82; John D. Rempel, "Sacraments in the Radical Reformation," *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology,* ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 298-312.
[5] See Cornelis P. Venema, "Sacraments and Baptism in the Reformed Confessions," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 11 (2000), 72.
[6] Arnold Hunt, "The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England," *Past & Present* no. 161 (Nov 1998), 57. See also Venema, "Sacraments and Baptism in the Reformed Confessions."
[7] John W. Riggs explores the challenges and nuances of baptismal theologies in reformed communions in *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical and Practical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

injury the dogma that baptism is necessary for salvation, badly expounded, has entailed."[8] But Richard Hooker drifted closer to describing baptism as obligatory, asserting that "we make not baptism a cause of grace, yet the grace which is given them with their baptism doth so forth depend on the very outward sacrament, that God will have it embraced not only as a sign or token what we receive, but also as an instrument or mean whereby we receive grace."[9] William Perkins described the sacraments as effectual on those who had *already* converted: "The holy use of a sacrament is when such as are truly converted do use those rites which God hath prescribed, unto the true ends of the sacrament."[10] For the elect who had not yet undergone conversion, Perkins explained that the sacraments had a kind of delay mechanism, gaining potency upon a person's spiritual turn.[11]

These theological debates had immediate practical consequences for believers seeking to understand their own spiritual journeys. For members of the Church of England, confirmation of one's faith was supposed to come from an inward feeling of confidence, of "sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort" at the knowledge of predestination and election, according to the Thirty-Nine Articles.[12] But such reassurance was difficult to attain. England's official state sermon "An Homelie of the Salvacion of Mankynd, by Onely Christ Our Savior, from Synne and Death

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[8] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 2, 2 vols., The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1315, 1321.
[9] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1954), 243.
[10] William Perkins, "A Golden Chain or the Description of Theology," in *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics (Appleford, UK: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 218.
[11] Perkins, "A Golden Chain," 218.
[12] Church of England, "The Thirty-Nine Articles," in *Religion in Tudor England: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Ethan H. Shagan and Debora Shuger (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 107.

Everlastyng" (1547) acknowledged that distinguishing one's faith as that of a member of the elect could be difficult, since "even the devilles know and beleve that Christ was borne of a virgin, that he fasted forty dayes and fortye nightes without meate and drynke, that he wroughte all kynde of myracles, declarying himself very God."[13] Belief in the 'facts' of Christ was no guarantee of true faith. Calvin was more direct—and harsher—in confronting this problem, describing the faith of the reprobate as genuinely felt, only understood to be false after the passage of time and that faith's eventual failure.[14] When even devils were capable of one kind of faith, sacraments had disputed instrumental power over the soul, and salvation might be predestined for a chosen and unalterable number, how could anyone be sure when *their own* conversion was achieved? On the other hand, if it was difficult to find absolute certainty of election, certainty of reprobation was equally doubtful, since "The unregenerate could always hold out hope—itself a means of salvation—because they were, until they died, merely temporarily unconverted."[15] In the lived experience of converting and receiving grace, whether that ultimately meant becoming Catholic or recognizing a predestined election, it could be impossible to distinguish between *not* and *not yet*.

The Elizabethan Church did not definitively settle what Michael Questier calls "disputes about how grace filtered from its source to its final destination,"[16] and the terms of these debates transformed as the threat of external invasion and forced interfaith conversion to Catholicism receded. While individual conversion between Catholicism and Protestantism continued, Leif

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[13] Church of England, *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and a Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570)*, ed. Ronald Bond (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 86.
[14] Calvin, *Institutes,* 107-109.
[15] Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590-1640* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 302.
[16] Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63.

Dixon explains that "by the late sixteenth century, it was becoming necessary for ministers to respond to the practical challenge of 'converting' people who were already being brought up as Protestants."[17] Disagreements over how such conversion was accomplished persisted and arguably intensified as King James attempted to assert control over factions and promoted policies that seemed pro-Catholic to many observers. Peter Lake and Kenneth Fincham describe James as "a monarch dedicated to the principle of religious unity" who sought to "incorporate a wide range of theological opinion and churchmanship into the ecclesiastical establishment."[18] But whatever equilibrium the Jacobean Church may have achieved collapsed into religious conflict in the face of the start of the Thirty Years' War in 1618, James's attempts to negotiate a Spanish marriage for Charles, and continuing arguments over the identity of the Church and what it meant to be converted.[19] Broadly defined as a struggle between Calvinism and Arminianism, disagreements over human agency within the Church of England's soteriology encompassed a range of doctrinal positions; rather than a conflict between rigid ideologies, these debates reflected individual and institutional beliefs that could be inconsistent, tentative, or mutable, reflecting "the capacity for religious identities to change and evolve."[20]

Critics such as Lieke Stelling, Jane Hwang Degenhardt, and Dennis Austin Britton have focused on how dramatic engagement with tensions and anxieties over religious identity's

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[17] Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 27.
[18] Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, "The Ecclesiastical Policy of King James I," *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 2 (1985), 187.
[19] Fincham and Lake, especially 198-207.
[20] See Anthony Milton, "Arminians, Laudians, Anglicans, and Revisionists: Back to Which Drawing Board?," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2015), 739; Diarmaid MacCulloch, "The Latitude of the Church of England," in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, ed. Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, NED-New edition (Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 41–59; On a larger scale, see Alexandra Walsham, "The Reformation of the Generations: Youth, Age and Religious Change in England, c. 1500-1700," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series, vol. 21 (2011): 93-121.

permanence and authenticity reveal ideological investments in making categories stable and exclusive.[21] Stelling points out that one result of staging satirical or ironic conversions was to "[provide] a sense of unshakeable religious group identity…suggesting that conversion is essentially impossible."[22] However, malleable religious convictions were not necessarily self-serving signs of corruption or ironic failures to join a closed religious community, and drama could also provide ways of imagining spiritual identity in motion, uncertain and unfinished in ways that speak to the conversion experiences and spiritual journeys undergone by audiences with varied and evolving beliefs. *The Island Princess* stages the problem of compromised, uncertain religious change and declines to solve it, letting Quisara linger mid-conversion, seeking a way to complete her transformation but not fully satisfying any legible model. From the beginning, Quisara's motives are fickle and her convertibility is drastic. When Quisara decides to turn Christian, her lack of initiation rite, aborted martyrdom, and silence after announcing her new religious affiliation suggest she inhabits an unperformable role. Yet her conversion is not presented as either a complete theological success or simply a threatening reminder of religious instability. Rather, by raising the generic and modal expectations of

[21] Britton, in *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), argues that "the Protestant restructuring of difference between Christian and infidel provides a context for understanding the emergence of a theology of race, in which Christian and infidel identity were engendered less by sacraments than by genealogy and biological kinship. This theology of race did not make the possibility of conversion either to or from Christianity impossible, but it did render converts miraculous and monstrous anomalies in the natural order of things" (9). Degenhardt, in *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), focuses on how theater materialized Christian resistance to conversion to Islam and argues that debates and anxieties over predestination were linked to increasing racial exclusion in Protestant conceptions of who could be 'elect.'

[22] Lieke Stelling, *Religious Conversion in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 112.

tragicomedy and romance yet withholding the fulfillment of any clear conversion paradigm, the play suggests that a sincere convert can remain resolute, yet unresolved.

Inherited Forms: Romance, Religious Drama, and the Legacy of Turning Christian

With its narrative of desirable Christian heroes voyaging to new lands, fair foreign princesses, and final act redemptions, *The Island Princess* employs many of the generic expectations of tragicomedy and the tropes of earlier literary and dramatic conversions in its cross-cultural romance. However, while the story it tells is commonplace in its chauvinistic portrayal of masculine, Christian power winning both woman and land,[23] its depiction of conversion is stranger. *The Island Princess* makes use of the idea of 'turning' well before religious conversion becomes central to the plot. Although Quisara and Armusia do not directly confront the problem of their differing faiths until act four, the play is filled with the language of salvation and conversion from the first scene. Characters discuss 'turning' in the context of loyalty, romantic attachment, and physical movement, 'redemption' in terms of heroic rescues and profitable adventures. Religious conversion is prefigured by a typology of other 'conversions': love "converts" honorable men to "scurvy things" (3.1.92); Portuguese countrymen turn on one another, then turn back to one another; friends and lovers convert to fanatics. Changes in temperament are celebrated as religious turns: "I am glad to see this man's conversion" (4.2.58), declares one character when another rejects his previous dishonorable

[23] Louis Montrose describes the English feminization and sexualization of territorial possession in "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations* 33 (Winter 1991): 1-41. Notable readings of *The Island Princess* as a colonial or protocolonial text include Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), especially pages 222-235; Ania Loomba, "'Break her will, and bruise no bone sir';" Michael Neill, "'Material Flames': The Space of Mercantile Fantasy in John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*," in *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997): 99-131.

behavior. By the time Quisara and Armusia clash over religious difference, the idea of conversion has been entangled with erotic love, economic success, and treacherous allies. In deferring the religious implications of conversion until late in the action, the play makes it impossible to see spiritual turns as isolated from other, more worldly turns.

Briefly, the plot begins with the King of Tidore captured by the Governor of Ternate, and the King's sister, Quisara, announcing that she will marry the man who redeems her brother—hoping that her Portuguese love, Rui Dias, will be the one to do it. Instead, Rui Dias hesitates, and the new Portuguese arrival Armusia, an adventurer of decidedly lower social status, rescues the King and wins the princess. Quisara is initially dismayed at the thought of marrying a man she has never met and never wanted and plots against Armusia, but she is won by his honorable behavior: when he surprises her in her chamber at night, he declares his love and trust in her instead of committing the rape she fears. The Governor, plotting his revenge, disguises himself as an imam and stirs up trouble by convincing Quisara that she must convert Armusia.[24] Her attempts fail, Armusia is arrested, and Quisara decides to convert to Christianity and join him in his suffering. Before the Portuguese and Moluccan forces can kill each other, Rui Dias's nephew, the Portuguese soldier and sometime-malcontent Pinheiro, thanks to Panura's help, discovers the Governor's identity and reveals his mischief. In a fantasy of European colonial and economic success, Pinheiro is sent to govern Ternate and Armusia and Quisara are released to wed and live as Christian heirs to the Moluccan King's throne.

The heroine's romantic turn to Christianity is not unusual in the context of early modern theater. Critics such as Michael Neill, Jean E. Feerick, and Valerie Forman have emphasized the

[24] Presumably to Islam, although the Moluccan religion in the play is a vague mishmash of paganism, Islam, and Catholicism, while the Portuguese avoid doing or saying anything overtly Catholic.

links between 'turning' and the genre of tragicomedy, arguing that the redemptions of characters like Quisara are essential to early modern tragicomic dramaturgy.[25] In love stories across religious and cultural divides, these critics argue, tragicomedy has a formal as well as ideological investment in turning characters Christian. Neill argues that *The Island Princess*'s story of a "European voyager or colonist as predestined husband come to claim the feminized body of the land" would have been a familiar trope for audiences of early modern English drama.[26]
He uses Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), which relies on characters converting (or returning) to Christianity for its resolution, as an example of how tragicomedy links "doctrinal stance and…dramatic form" by providentially saving characters from tragic ends through spiritual transformation.[27] Clare McManus likewise sees "a connection between theology and form" in *The Island Princess*'s depiction of journeying characters "turn[ing] from a set path," which the play aligns with the idea of religious conversion.[28]

Bound by the genre of tragicomedy and providential ideology, Quisara falls in love first with Armusia, then with his faith, which she concludes to be superior to her own because she associates it with her steadfast and righteous beloved. Her inter-faith romance with Armusia is

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[25] Michael Neill argues that the genre of tragicomedy, which transforms tragic events to comic ends, lends itself to a providential worldview, in "Turn and Counterturn: Merchanting, Apostasy, and Tragicomic Form in Massinger's *The Renegado*," in *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Boydell and Brewer, 2007): 154-174. Valerie Forman connects tragicomedy to both the redemptive narrative of *felix culpa* and the economics and class dynamics of emerging free trade in *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Jean E. Feerick pushes back against notions of Fletcher as a conservative, royalist dramatist by arguing that his tragicomedies in general, and *The Island Princess* in particular, are invested in subversive intermingling and suggestive of political compromise, in "Tragicomic Transformations: Passion, Politics, and the 'art to turn' in Fletcher's *The Island Princess*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 12.19 (2009).
[26] Neill, "'Material Flames,'" 101, 110.
[27] Neill, "Turn and Counterturn," 174.
[28] McManus, "Introduction," 62.

absent from Fletcher's likely sources for her story, Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola's *La Conquista de las Islas Malvcas* (1609) and Louis Gédoyn, Sieur de Bellan's *L'Histoire Mémorable de Dias Espagnol, et de Quixaire Princesse des Moluques* (1615), which have her marry Salama, another Moluccan.[29] By giving Salama's role to a white Christian, *The Island Princess* makes its comic ending pivot on Quisara's conversion. She briefly plays the part of dangerous heathen temptress—the role she would have in a tragedy like *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1612)—but she ultimately fits neatly into the tragicomic redemption narrative described by Neill, Feerick, and Forman. Without her devout change of heart and willingness to die for her new faith, the play's conflicts would be beyond resolution.

In addition to the expectations of tragicomedy, the basic structure of Quisara's conversion—a Muslim princess sees the error of her faith out of love for a Christian hero—follows the ideologically useful fictions of earlier English and French romance. Narratives during the Middle Ages often linked erotic desire for Christians with conversion to Christianity from Islam or paganism. Geraldine Heng, in her study of the development of romance and its cultural work, describes "the fantasy of the Muslim princess or queen who converts for the love of a Christian knight, baron, or ruler" that appears in crusade literature and histories as common enough to be "utterly conventional."[30] The women of these stories, which emerge during the First Crusade and persist for centuries, are, like Quisara, "desiring, sexually aggressive agents, whose religious conversion is part of their bold enactment of their erotic attraction to particular

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[29] Carmen Nocentelli analyzes Fletcher's adaptation of his sources in "*The Island Princess* and the Politics of Transnational Appropriation," in *PMLA* 25, no. 3 (May 2010): 572-588, 895. See also McManus, "Introduction," 51-53. McMullan, *The Politics of Unease*, Loomba, "Break her will," and Neill, "Material Flames," all discuss Fletcher's substitution of Armusia for Salama as a colonialist reworking of Argensola's story.
[30] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 186.

Christian men."[31] Over the last two decades, criticism on these interfaith, cross-cultural love stories has argued that "Saracens" in medieval romance and hagiography provided ways of formulating racial and cultural identity and negotiating the shifting lines separating a Christian from non-Christian.[32] In this context, by facilitating the entrance of outsiders into the Christian community, conversion could raise challenges to a singular concept of group identity. But in assimilating Muslim princesses or noble knights, it could also be "a comforting alternative to the radical intermingling of two peoples."[33] Rather than conceiving romantic cross-cultural contact taking place amid immutable difference, these narratives could use conversion to imagine a communal identity powerful and virtuous enough to subsume difference—or, as Cohen argues, they could use conversion to erase difference entirely, insisting that the converted brides, often described as fairer than their countrymen, were always white and, in a sense, always Christian.[34]

The trope of romantic conversion endured through the Reformation, even while the means of interfaith conversion (the sacrament of baptism) and the impetus to convert (free will or election) grew troubled. Dennis Austin Britton notes that conversions to Christianity rooted in desire continued to be routine in stories popular with English readers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: "In works like *Bevis of Hampton*, *Orlando Furioso*, and *Gerusalemme liberatra* English readers encountered a convention that emerges in the infidel-conversion motif:

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[31] Heng, *Empire of Magic,* 187.

[32] See, in addition to Heng, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 (2001): 113-146; Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Women in Medieval French Epic* (New York: Garland, 1998); Leila K. Norako, "*Sir Isumbrus* and the Fantasy of Crusade," *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 2 (2013): 166-189; and Siobhan Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[33] Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity,* 98.

[34] Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment," 121.

romantic feelings that lead to religious conversion."[35] These stories of Christianity's theological attractiveness and the erotic appeal of Christians continued to be comforting fairy tales for a disunited Christendom, which faced economic, military, and existential insecurities in its encounters with the Ottoman empire. Critics have provided extensive insight into the various ways that English literature grappled with England's relative weakness in the face of this more powerful empire.[36] Jonathan Burton, for instance, argues that in the face of Islamic might, English writers "read Islamic power, and more importantly English weakness, within a recuperative, providential framework."[37] In travel accounts, this sometimes meant imagining punishment for 'renegados' who converted to Islam. In romance, however, Christians could find an affirmation of the essential truth and constancy of their confessions of faith, and, through the possibility of Muslim conversion, the falseness of competing faiths. Matthew Dimmock explains the fantasy of stability offered in such stories, noting that "in these tales…religious identity, whilst possible to lose, is immutable if the protagonist is Christian, yet convertible if Muslim."[38] And as Loomba points out, reflecting on the ways that literary texts addressed cultural anxieties,

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[35] Britton, *Becoming Christian,* 23. In addition to Britton, for the popularity and significance of Islamic characters in romance in post-Reformation England, see Benedict Scott Robinson, *Islam and Early Modern English Literature: The Politics of Romance from Spenser to Milton* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[36] English literature's mix of admiration and anxiety about the Islamic world has been treated at length over the last two decades; see, for example, Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and also Vitkus's introduction to *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), especially 3-16; Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

[37] Jonathan Burton, "English Anxiety and the Muslim Power of Conversion: Five Perspectives on 'Turning Turk' in Early Modern Texts," *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002), 41.

[38] Dimmock, *New Turkes*, 95

"The deep contradictions that attach to the conversion of non-European Christians become easier to negotiate if the convert is fair-skinned, or of a royal lineage, especially if she is also a woman."[39] Easier, that is, if her differences can be made to disappear, swallowed up by a Christian husband's identity, her economic and social value, and her whiteness.

Quisara is, in many ways, just the sort of convertible Muslim woman common to romance: she is fair, female, and royal. Yet she pushes that convertibility to more radical extremes by disrupting the ease with which she can be subsumed, drawing attention to the ways that conversion demands a profound ability to change. She inherits the tradition of physically resembling white Christians; she is similarly described as fair, and her fairness is directly related to her convertibility. But Quisara's fairness is troubled in the first scene, linked to cosmetics and anxiously avoiding the sun, when Pinheiro mocks that "She dares not see [the sun], / But keeps herself at distance from his kisses / And wears her complexion in a case: let him but like it / A week or two, or three, she would look like a lion" (1.1.63-66). Neill argues that Quisara's appearance is described as shifting with her actions, so that she is perceived as blacker when she attempts to convert Armusia, and fairer when she converts to Christianity.[40] Rather than establishing a firm connection between Quisara's whiteness and her innate virtue or destined Christianity, *The Island Princess* connects Quisara's fair skin to the possibility that racial identity might alter. The discussion of Quisara's fairness and its transmutability takes place among the Portuguese, drawing attention to their own whiteness and raising the prospect that the princess, who can avoid the sun, might be fairer than the 'white' Europeans—and perhaps suggesting that a little sun might change anyone, making racial identity as slippery as religious identity in the

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[39] Loomba, "Break her will," 84.
[40] Neill, "Material flames," 119.

play and hinting that Quisara's female, malleable, white-passing body might not make her a dormant Christian.

The quality of Quisara's moral character throughout the play also renders her doubtful, making her spiritual change more essential than a mere affirmation of an already-present Christian identity. The Portuguese admire her nobility and defiance of the wicked Governor, but she is also duplicitous, willing to encourage violence against Armusia, and sexually assertive, inviting Rui Dias to her private chambers at night. Perhaps most troubling for audiences that might expect a female potential convert to be morally unimpeachable, she proves inconstant: initially in love with Rui Dias, she easily transfers her affections to his nephew Pinheiro, then to Armusia. Pinheiro describes her fickleness with scorn: "For a tun of crowns she turns! She is a woman: / And much, I fear, worse than I expected" (3.1.241-242). Her lack of merit, though technically in keeping with Protestant understandings of salvation as an unearned gift from Christ and faith alone, makes her an uncomfortable convert; the ease with which she moves between men, a stereotypically feminine, Cressida-like quality, aligns too neatly with her ability to move between faiths. Loomba observes that inconstant women normally appear in Jacobean tragedy rather than comedy, and that linking romantic change and religious change in *The Island Princess* "sanctions forms of 'infidelity' which would otherwise invite censure."[41] But it also raises the possibility that there is something disturbing about the act of conversion itself in this context, something beyond the frightening risk of false conversions or turning in the wrong direction, away from God. Even a turn in the 'right' direction recalls Quisara's pattern of infidelity; rather than affirming some always-Christian inner truth, all conversions, *especially*

[41] Loomba, "'Break her will,'" 81.

genuine, radical changes from one creed to another, might be made possible by a form of faithlessness.

By making Quisara both a noble and fair princess and an untrustworthy, vain schemer, *The Island Princess* pushes what Britton calls the "infidel-conversion motif" of romance past its usual limits. She is not one of the "Jews, Muslims or pagans with Christian hearts" that Stelling, in her study of religious conversion in post-Reformation drama, describes as the sort of character capable of conversion in early modern plays.[42] Stelling argues that these types of converts persist in Protestant drama because they are essentially non-threatening, characters who in truth always belonged with Christianity anyway, not examples of troubling outsiders breaching the Christian community:

> [T]hey are not caricatures of their faith, but attractive or heroic, and already on congenial terms with Christian characters. In addition, these characters are already alienated from their non-Christian background in the sense that they are treated with enmity by their coreligionists. Accordingly, when they become Christian, they do not erase their religious selves in order to assume a wholly new identity, but are much closer to revealing their true Christian nature and confirming the moral difference between them and their non-Christian co-religionists.[43]

Stelling sees one particularly successful category of these already-really-Christian characters: "Many of these sympathetic converts are non-Christian women, whose simultaneous Christianization and marriage rendered their change permanent, stable and irreversible."[44] Marriage, and by extension sex, does appear to ease the way for female converts in plays, perhaps because, as Britton argues, women might be saved by motherhood, blessed by the Christian fetuses that share their bodies.[45] Quisara, however, is too morally compromised to

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[42] Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 125.
[43] Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 125.
[44] Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 140-141.
[45] Britton, *Becoming Christian*, 156-157.

qualify as a latent Christian, and she remains unwed at the play's end, her love for Armusia not yet consummated. The presumption that they *will* marry is clear, but Quisara enjoys no performable confirmation of her new identity as Christian wife, on or off stage.

This lack of confirmation makes Quisara an especially unsettled convert. Medieval and early modern English drama had many methods for conveying spiritual change; characters underwent catechisms, journeys, baptism, marriage, and martyrdom. *The Island Princess* invokes each of these models, but realizes none of them. In order to understand how *The Island Princess* resists providing a complete conversion paradigm, we can look to English drama's conventions for portraying religious turns. Staging conversion was a well-established tradition in the religious drama, moralities, and interludes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For example, Greg Walker argues that "the morality plays ask audiences to see themselves in the protagonist and he in them, while the interludes provoke theirs to re-engage with the moral dimensions to social and political life, as the first stage in a process of personal and collective reform."[46] Cycle plays, in addition to staging the central mysteries of Christianity and mankind's redemption, included more intimate and personal conversion scenes such as Mary Magdalene's repentance and the centurion's acceptance of Jesus as "Godes Sonne almightie" (17.361).[47] Such scenes do more than represent familiar Christian narratives; they are moments of profound individual transformation and acknowledgment of Christ that can be embodied and performed by actors.

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[46] Greg Walker, "The Cultural Work of Early Drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). ProQuest.
[47] Quoted from "The Passion" in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, edited by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills (London, New York: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1974).

Even more direct conversions feature in plays about saints and miracles.[48] The two most widely studied extant English saints' plays, *The Conversion of St. Paul* and *Mary Magdalene*, both late fifteenth-century works included in the Digby manuscript, rely on performances of sudden, total, and dramatically confirmed conversion.[49] David Bevington describes *St. Paul* and *Mary Magdalene* as "conversion plays with a serious intention of demonstrating God's solicitude toward the sinner or non-Christian," and notes that, "[b]oth plays feature ceremonial baptisms and preachings of the power of grace."[50] The use of these recognizable rituals and performances, as well as the canonical status of Mary Magdalene and Paul as converts, make the spiritual turns in these plays comprehensible—and conclusive—battles for human souls.

The Digby *Magdalene* is particularly rich in techniques for showing conversion. The heroine experiences her conversion early in the play, and her transformation is made evident through her own actions, through Christ's words, and through theatrical spectacle. Her turn away from sin and toward sainthood is unambiguous. When a Good Angel speaks to her in her sleep, encouraging her to repent and remember mercy, it equates her iniquity with instability—"Woman, woman, why art thou so onstabyll?" (588)—setting up her conversion as a return to constancy rather than linking it to change. She awakens and immediately decides to seek out Jesus, expressing sorrow for her sins but also absolute confidence in the Lord's power to forgive her:

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[48] See Darryll Grantley, "Saints and Miracles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, 2nd ed., edited by Richard Beadle and Alan Fletcher (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). ProQuest. Grantley cautions that extant texts are limited, making it difficult to generalize, what remains suggests that early modern audiences up to and after the Reformation would have been accustomed to seeing miraculous conversion staged, even if the lost plays did not all center on conversion.

[49] All references to the Digby *Magdalene* and *Conversion of St. Paul* are from *Early English Drama: An Anthology*, ed. John C. Coldewey (New York: Garland, 1993).

[50] David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 662.

> I shal porsue the Prophett whereso he be
> For he is the welle of perfyth charyte.
> Be the oyle of mercy he shal me relyff.
> Wyth swete bawmys, I wyl sekyn hym this syth,
> And sadly follow hys lordship in eche degree. (610-14)

With this speech, Mary does more than reject her past sinfulness; she shows an innate understanding of the faith to which she converts, recognizing Jesus as the source of forgiveness. She immediately knows to whom she should turn, and why, and she articulates that faith first verbally and then physically, performing her contrition by washing Jesus's feet with her tears, drying them with her hair, and anointing them with precious oil.

Mary communicates her conversion in word and deed, but Jesus himself announces the success of her turn. After she washes and anoints him, he praises her faith and explicitly declares her converted, soul remade: "I forgeyffe thee thi wreccednesse, / And hol in sowle be thou made thereby!" (677-78). Assuring her that her soul contains inward power, he tells her that "Thy feyth hath savyt the[e], and made the[e] bryth!" (690). Mary's transformation reflects a clear conversion doctrine and method: she is saved by faith, enacts her penance, is forgiven by Christ, and is made whole in soul. Christ's spoken confirmation is heightened by the use of stage devils and theatrical effects. Mary is followed by a Bad Angel, and throughout her encounter with Jesus, the seven devils that possess her lurk in the scene, a visual and physical reminder of the dangers of sin. But as Jesus pronounces Mary saved and tells her to go in peace, the stage directions indicate that audiences would then see seven devils "*devoyde from the woman, and the Bad Angyll entyr into hell with thondyr*" (691sd). After the devils depart, Mary's turn is celebrated as complete, and the devils lament her as lost to them.

The Digby *Magdalene* represents Mary's conversion as performable, and confirms it through the direct intervention of Christ and the visual and audible spectacle of the fleeing

devils. Later, she will begin wearing white to indicate the purified state of her soul. But Mary's is not the only conversion in the play. In her encounter with the resurrected Jesus, he directs her to go to Marseille and convert the pagan king and queen, and the play shifts from biblical narrative to travel romance as Mary announces that she will go to sea.[51] Her arrival on strange shores leads to the likewise theatrical, over-determined religious transformations of the king and queen. Their conversions are instigated by spectacular evidence of heavenly power and by Mary's preaching, which provides them with a basic catechism after the king asks her the identity of Jesus:

> *Id est salvator*, yf thow wyll lere,
> The Secunde Person, that hell ded conquare,
> And the son of the Father in Trenyté. (1471-1473)

Beginning with this introduction of the Trinity, Mary goes on to give a detailed description of the creation of the world and the power of God, which is quickly proven by the destruction of Marseille's pagan temple and the blessed pregnancy of the queen in response to Mary's prayers. The royal couple then perform their dedication through a dangerous journey "into the flod" (1742), sailing to the holy land. The king is baptized by St. Peter in Jerusalem, sprinkled with water before the audience. The queen's conversion success is confirmed by her miraculous salvation after being left for dead at sea.

The Digby *Magdalene* puts more emphasis on conversions in Mary's hagiography than appears in her biblical role and connects those conversions to the technologies of theater: storms, miracles, journeys, actions, and prayers. The example of the Digby *Conversion of St. Paul* follows scriptural outlines more closely than *Mary Magdalene*, depicting Saul's awed

[51] Joanne Findon, in "Mary Magdalene as New Cunstance? 'The Woman Cast Adrift' in the Digby *Mary Magdalene* Play," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 32, no. 4 (2006): 25-50, argues that the Digby *Magdalene*;s not only evokes the romance trope of heroines cast adrift at sea, but subverts the trope to emphasize Mary's heroic status and agency.

transformation from persecutor of Christians to apostle of Christ while on the road to Damascus, as well as the immediate lead-up and aftermath of his turn. But like *Mary Magdalene*, the *Conversion* uses the tools of theater to represent the salvation of the soul: special effects, hapless devils, and baptism aid in staging Saul's conversion. In addition to the light and tempest of the Lord speaking to Saul from heaven, a manifestation of Christ appears before the discipline Ananias to proclaim Saul "a chosen vessell" (234), elect of God. Before Ananias arrives to baptize him, Saul, like Mary Magdalene, gives a speech contemplating his faith, which is absolute. The baptism scene includes an appearance from the Holy Spirit, the miraculous cure of Saul's blindness, and, of course, the ritual of baptism itself.

The legibility of Saul's change is not solely from sacramental rituals or the theatrical representation of God, which might have Catholic implications after the Reformation. Heather Hill-Vásquez, arguing that the *Conversion* may have been adapted for reformist purposes, emphasizes that the stage directions indicate "a decided costume change" when Saul becomes a disciple of Christ, providing more visual indications of his transformation and perhaps making use of Catholic vestments to represent Saul's pre-conversion self.[52] John Velz sees conversion plays as using the "metaphoring of moral change as spatial movement," citing the performance of Saul on the road to Damascus in the *Conversion* as emblematic of this theatrical use of space.[53] For both the Digby *Conversion* and *Mary Magdalene*, baptism and preaching are crucial demonstrations of faith identities, yet both also feature clothing changes and significant journeys from one location to another as part of characters' spiritual transformations.

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[52] Heather Hill-Vásquez, "The Possibilities of Performance: A Reformation Sponsorship for the Digby Conversion of Saint Paul," *Records of Early English Drama* 22.1 (1997), 5.
[53] John Velz, "From Jerusalem to Damascus: Biblical Dramaturgy in Medieval and Shakespearean Conversion Plays," *Comparative Drama* 15.4 (Winter 1981-1982), 312.

The Digby *Magdalene* and *Conversion* offer spectacular examples of medieval conversion drama, demonstrating dramatic use of religious instruction, voyages, journeys, baptisms, and miracles as conversion paradigms. With few extant English saint's plays, it is impossible to claim that the Digby *Magdalene* or *Conversion of St. Paul* are representative of how saint's plays illustrated conversion, but they do provide a glut of possible tropes, many of which are echoed in later drama. The Reformation transformed conversion theologies and the relationship between religion and drama, but theater continued to find ways to stage religious turns. In Lewis Wager's stridently reformist *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (p. 1566), Mary undergoes a thorough Calvinist education on the purpose of the Old Testament law, her rightful damnation, and her unmerited salvation through Christ, which is then confirmed by Christ himself. Even more problematized conversions in later popular drama still could follow legible conversion patterns. One option for women—if they were, as described earlier, fair enough—was marriage. Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596) is the most famous example, and although her acceptance into the Christian community is doubtful, she is still able to assert "I shall be saved by my husband. He hath made me a Christian" (3.5.16-17) as an already-accomplished conversion.[54] Donusa, in Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), experiences a comical yet apparently effective baptism after expressing her desire to become a Christian: a stage direction explains that her lover "*Throws [water] on her face*" (5.3.116sd), and she declares, "I am another woman" (5.3.121).[55] And, of course, converts to Christianity could always affirm their constancy by being martyred, like Abigail in Marlowe's

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[54] William Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice," *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. Stephan Greenblatt, et al., 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 1327-1393.
[55] Philip Massinger, "The Renegado," in *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 249–339.

The Jew of Malta (c. 1589-1590), Albon and Amphiabel in William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (c. 1608-1618),[56] or Theophilus, Antoninus, Caliste, and Christeta in Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620).

Romance and drama offer paths for converts to become confirmed members of their new religious communities, whether by suppressing their difference or by enacting their transformation from their past identities into their new, Christian selves. Sometimes, tension arises because the conversion itself is treated within the play as somehow doubtful; Janet Adelman notes of *The Merchant of Venice* that "The play carefully does not distinguish a moment after which Jessica is converted; and that omission allows for a chronic tension between Jessica and the others, in which she persistently regards her conversion to Christianity as complete, and they persistently regard her as a Jew."[57] But unlike Jessica, Quisara's decision to convert happens on stage, and the Europeans readily celebrate it as genuine: "O blessed Lady," Armusia exclaims instantly, "Since thou art won, let me begin my triumph" (5.2.125-126). Even Pinheiro, the play's most cynical character, treats Quisara's conversion as sincere, joyfully telling Panura that he will turn her Christian, too, and perceiving Panura as fair-skinned through her support of Quisara. But Quisara undergoes no baptismal ritual, hears no sermons, witnesses no miracles, and remains unmartyred and unwed. She simply feels her change, and declares her intention to take up a new religious identity. This evolving feeling-faith is underscored by her continuous search for a legible conversion paradigm; she asks to be taught, hopes to marry, prepares for martyrdom, but by the end of the play, all her possible methods remain incomplete.

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[56] For a discussion of dating Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman,* see Trudi L. Darby, "The Date of William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman,*" *Notes and Queries* 53, no. 1, 2006: 83–84.

[57] Janet Adelman, "Her Father's Blood: Race, Conversion, and Nation in The 'Merchant of Venice,'" *Representations* 81 (2003), 7.

Quisara's soul is described as being as 'fair' as Armusia's after she decides to become Christian, but her religious journey muddles earnest intentions and imperfect, worldly motives and highlights the gap between the resolve to convert and the uncertainty over how to do it.

The Substance of Things Hoped For

The Island Princess begins with a vision of being in-between. As Portuguese gallants watch a ship attempt to make port in the strait between the islands of Tidore and Ternate, they discuss the recent capture of the King of Tidore:

> Their late attempt, which is too fresh amongst us—
> In which, against all arms and honesty,
> The Governor of Ternate made surprise
> Of our confederate, the King of Tidore,
> As for his recreation he was rowing
> Between both lands—bids us be wise and circumspect. (1.1.9-12)

The image of the ship's cautious navigation and the King, flanked by two lands, taking "delight in a baratto— / A little scurvy boat—to row her tightly / And have the art to turn and wind her nimbly" (1.1.19-21), introduces *The Island Princess*'s first, defining impression of turning. Like the Digby *Magdalene*, this play links conversion with voyages. *Mary Magdalene* makes journeys at sea an essential part of its conversion narratives, with ships that appear on stage to convey Mary to Marseille for her missionary work and to bring the King and Queen of Marseille to the Holy Land for baptism; the characters move from shore to shore, transforming through their travel. Likewise, *The Tempest*—which Clare McManus observes *The Island Princess*

"rewrites"[58]—also utilizes the metamorphic force of the sea voyage, though without the explicit notion of religious change as part of the plot. But if *The Island Princess* conjures up these examples of the converting power of ocean travel, it produces a distorted reflection. The King's ability to "turn" is open to Portuguese mockery, and the image of his turning boat is suspended between the islands, not traveling from one shore to another. The doing, and not the destination, commands the imagination here.

Quisara's own interest in the art of turning appears early in the play, yet that interest both primes her for turning Christian and makes the very idea of conversion unsettling. From the first act, Quisara's eventual conversion as the white-passing love object of European Christians is predictable—but it is also immediately entangled in her romantic feelings and her wish to be impressed. She sets the terms for winning her faith when she challenges Rui Dias (who also wishes she would become Christian) to "Do some brave thing that may entice me that way, / Some such thing of such a meritorious goodnesse / Of such an unmatcht noblenesse, that I may know / You have a power beyond ours that preserves you" (1.2.56-59). This wish for proof of heavenly favor is, of course, *not* the way to turn—"Thou shalt not tempt the Lorde thy God" (Luke 4.12)[59]—but the desire to be converted through her beloved's prowess remains with Quisara even after she has transferred her affections. Rui Dias fails at this conversion-quest, but Armusia, through his impassioned rage at her faith and his resolve to suffer rather than convert, accomplishes the 'some brave thing' that Quisara requires. His sudden, venomous attack on her

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[58] McManus, Introduction to *The Island Princess*, 1; McManus elaborates that "in *The Island Princess*, as in *The Tempest*, European politics are worked out on the territory of an island inhabited by wondrous but violence-prone natives; in both, the sexual possession of an island woman is treated as equivalent to the possession of power" (11). Michael Neill argues in "Material Flames" that *The Island Princess* critiques *The Tempest* and its colonialism.

[59] From the Geneva Bible—see Church of England, *The Bible* (London: Christopher Barker, Printer for the Queenes Most Excellent Maiestie, 1583), ff 466.

religion prompts her aside "And yet I love to hear him" (4.5.97), and his defiance when faced with death ultimately prompts her turn to try to join him in martyrdom. Thus, while Quisara's *intention* to convert may be sincere, her motives to embrace Christ are hopelessly enmeshed with her erotic love for Armusia: "Keep on your way," she assures him in the face of torture, "a virgin will assist ye, / A virgin won by your fair constancy, / And, glorying that she is won so, will die by ye" (5.2.108-110). Quisara, not notable for her own constancy, wants to be won, and makes her attachment to Christianity conditional on her attachment to Armusia: "Your faith and your religion must be like ye" (5.2.118). Yet the erotic contingency of Quisara's religious affiliation is not treated with the scorn given to similar desire-driven conversions like Ward's in *A Christian Turn'd Turk*. Quisara's motives are questionable, but *The Island Princess* suggests that her motives may not matter. Her dedication to being Christian appears absolute, regardless of what prompted it—but her enactment of that conversion is limited.

In fact, both Armusia and Quisara seem unsure of how she ought to actually achieve her conversion. Quisara's conversion is further eroticized by Armusia's determination to obtain her consent for both sex and Christianity. He tells the king that he does not want Quisara compelled to marry him, even though he has fulfilled the terms of her challenge and earned the reward of her hand. When his friends suggest that Armusia overcome the princess's initial rebuff by raping her in order to "break her will and bruise no bone" (3.2.28), he rejects their counsel as "too boisterous" (3.2.43)—although he admits that the thought of forcing himself on Quisara makes him smile. When Armusia later expresses his wish for her conversion, he does so with a more forceful desire for her to want it: "I looked ye should have wept and kneeled to beg for it" (4.5.89). No weeping and kneeling to beg for conversion take place, nor does any consummation of their relationship, but Armusia imagines both in similar terms, as manifestations of Quisara's

ardent desire. Armusia's fourth-act conversion fantasy of Quisara on her knees, begging for Christianity as her tears "Washed off your mist of ignorance with waters / Pure and repentant from those eyes" (4.5.89-90), is evocative of baptism. But Armusia does not offer a fantasy of Quisara actually undergoing baptism or inhabiting a new, Christian identity; his description is strangely focused on making Quisara *wish* to convert, stopping short of allowing her a sacramental ritual or confirmed salvation. Quisara's language as she finally declares her intention to be a Christian also evokes the spiritually cleansing power of baptism—"When the streams flow clear and fair, what are the fountains?" (5.2.120)—but baptism itself is never directly mentioned, let alone carried out. Desire is, after all, a state of unfulfillment.

The Island Princess maintains Quisara's unfulfilled status to the end, creating a charged atmosphere where characters look to the promise of salvation, but receive no guarantee. The other two pseudo-converts, Panura and the King, do more than echo Quisara's faltering transformation. They also highlight her protracted state of conversion by putting forward two potential frameworks for becoming Christian: marriage and motherhood, and martyrdom. Romance expectations, as I have shown, anticipate Quisara's conversion-via-marriage and eventual motherhood, but shortly after Quisara announces her intention to be Christian (and emphasizes her current virginity), Panura and Pinheiro make the ideology and eroticism behind those expectations unusually explicit. The possibility of Panura becoming Christian comes in the form of a bawdy assertion that religious conversion might be the direct result of sexual intercourse. When Panura tells Pinheiro that her mistress "has entertained a Christian hope" (5.4.8), his delight at this information prompts him to announce his desire to make more Christian hopes: "I'll kiss thee for this news! Nay, more, Panura: / If thou wilt give me leave, I'll

get thee with Christian— / The best way to convert thee" (5.4.13-15).[60] Pinheiro presumes that if he impregnates her, the child will be Christian—and that carrying an embryonic Christian in her body will also convert Panura. Yet in a play full of violations of territory and violations of women's private chambers, Pinheiro's sudden interest in obtaining Panura's consent stands out. Like Armusia, Pinheiro conflates erotic desire with the desire to convert; Panura, like Quisara, must want it.

Pinheiro's proposition is neither rejected nor accepted by Panura. Instead, it is postponed for some future encounter, one that may never occur. Rather than embracing Christianity or finding her apparently malleable body made Christian by a Christian fetus, Panura responds with a similar muddling of sex and faith: "Make me believe so" (5.4.15). Whether she wants to be convinced of his promise to sleep with her, convinced of his honorable intentions, or convinced to believe as a Christian is left unclear. Perhaps, this confusion suggests, for Panura these desires are one and the same. The flirtation between Panura and Pinheiro draws attention to the physical logistics of Christian men converting non-Christian women; conversion through marriage might in fact be conversion through consummation. But Panura remains unconverted by the play's end, presumably abandoned by Pinheiro when he is given governance over the island of Ternate. Pinheiro's reward takes place in a denouement that leaves Panura forgotten—there is no further mention of his vows to make her a Christian—and leaves Quisara silent and mostly overlooked by the male characters, a wife-in-waiting. For both Panura and for the desiring but still-virginal Quisara, this model of romantic conversion remains the "Christian hope" (5.4.8) that Panura first describes.

[60] Britton, in *Becoming Christian*, describes this moment as an example of the belief that "the power attributed to male seed could allow the infidel woman to be a legitimate sexual partner" (148).

The second model Quisara could follow is perhaps the most prominent model for professing faith in early modern England: martyrdom. Christian histories treated martyrdom as a kind of miraculous testimony, an indisputable argument for Christianity where the "willingness—and ability—to die an unflinching death for Christian conviction was offered as proof that Christian belief was founded in an incontestable reality."[61] Martyrdom attested to the belief of the martyrs, and was even thought to be a tool to convert its audiences.[62] Ryan McDermott, studying the 1586 death and supposed incorruptibility of Margaret Clitherow, an English convert to Roman Catholicism, goes so far as to name the martyrological model itself "conversion," describing it as a pattern that imitates the life and death of Christ and defining conversion as "becoming like Christ."[63] Throughout the Reformation and the Protestant reigns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles, the violent horror of martyrdom was a spectacular and public confirmation of faith. The meanings of specific martyrdoms were contested by confessional

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[61] Kate Cooper, "Ventriloquism and the Miraculous: Conversion, Preaching, and the Martyr Exemplum in Late Antiquity," *Signs, Wonders, and Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2005), 23.

[62] Cooper, "Ventriloquism and the Miraculous," 24. Sarah Juliet Lauro, in "The Zombie Saints: The Contagious Spirit of Christian Conversion Narratives," *Literature and Theology* 26, no. 2 (June 2012): 160-178, also observes the narrative link between martyrdom and mass conversions of the witnesses, comparing the power of the martyr's tortured body and eventual corpse to the contagious spread of zombies. Brad Gregory, in his study *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), explains that this belief that "The martyrs were holy fertilizer for Christian truth" was equally prominent in Protestant traditions (163).

[63] Ryan McDermott, "The Sanctity of St. Margaret Clitherow: Conversion and Incorruptibility," *JMEMS* 48, no. 3 (Sept. 2018), ed. David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, 526.

allies and opponents,[64] but this was largely *because* would-be martyrs and their supporters and biographers so clearly understood the formula to follow. Any interpretive difficulties in studying martyrdom come not from its obscurity, but from its legibility: how can observers (or the martyrs themselves) assess the success of a martyr-convert's experience when it is by nature an imitation? As Brad Gregory puts it, "Protestant, Anabaptist, and Roman Catholic martyrs died similarly, just as they had prepared for death similarly."[65] For witnesses and for martyrs themselves, their suffering and death *was* the sign of their completed achievement. Elizabeth Williamson, reflecting on staging violence and martyrdom, argues that "The body was both an inadequate means of accessing the divine and the only grounds upon which the divine could be conceived in the first place."[66] The martyr's tormented body, their endurance of pain, materializes their faith.

The recognizability of the martyrdom model was intensified by the actual state persecutions on the basis of religion under the Tudor and Stuart governments and by the

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[64] Gregory, in *Salvation at Stake*, introduces the problem by explaining that "Early modern executions engendered not three (or in some respects, four) independent martyrological traditions, but interrelated, competing interpretations about what the deaths meant" (2). Alice Dailey, in *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), focuses on the interpretive disputes over how to recognize a martyr from a heretic or traitor. See also Peter Lake and Michael Questier, "Catholic Nonconformity, Martyrology and the Politics of Religious Change in Elizabethan England," *Past and Present* no. 185 (Nov. 2004): 42-90.

[65] Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 137.

[66] Elizabeth Williamson, "'Batter'd, not demolished': Staging the Tortured Body in *The Martyred Soldier,*" *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 26 (2013), 48. Donald R. Kelley emphasizes the importance of suffering in the martyrological model and its performativity: "Martyrdom was a highly conventional as well as highly painful process—*imitatio Christi* with a vengeance. And to follow Christ…entailed a heavy weight of ritual, rhetoric, etiquette, and symbolism, as reflected in interrogations, confessions of faith, executions scenes, crowd reactions, and contemporary graphic representations" (1328), in "Martyrs, Myths, and Massacre: The Background of St. Bartholomew," *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 5 (Dec. 1972): 1323-1342.

prominence of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments,* the most important collection of martyrdom accounts in reformed England. John N. King, describing the book's ever-expanding editions and enduring influence across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, notes that the so-called "Book of Martyrs" was "Revered by many Protestants as a 'holy' book…[and] frequently chained alongside the Bible for reading by ordinary people at many public places including cathedrals, churches, schools, libraries, guildhalls, and at least one inn."[67] To early modern audiences, martyrdom was a vivid, sacred proof of faith—and horribly familiar, either through direct witness or from the profusion of martyrologies.

For the purposes of drama, martyrdom also contained clear performance and narrative expectations. Alice Dailey describes the martyrdoms in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* as publicly legible productions:

> Each martyr account in *Acts and Monuments* records a carefully crafted performance, one that is both consciously and unconsciously shaped like earlier martyr legends in order to ensure that its audience will interpret it correctly as the death of a true martyr for Christ. In order for the martyr's message to be clearly communicated to his or her audience, the two have to share a language of martyrdom—a set of gestures, words, and behaviors that signal the creation of a martyr.[68]

The "language of martyrdom," as Dailey defines it, is the language of theater—gestures, words, and behaviors that signify in ways audiences can understand. Short of spectacular miracles or soul-altering sacraments, this language of martyrdom is the best way that a character like Quisara could enact conversion, sharing her faith with spectators and embodying it for herself.

The Island Princess invokes the language of martyrdom before it ever raises overt religious conflict, priming audiences for Armusia's and Quisara's determination to be martyred

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[67] John N. King, *Foxe's* Book of Martyrs *and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.
[68] Dailey, *The English Martyr,* 57.

in the final act. But characteristically, the play simultaneously unsettles this model by making the first character to directly resemble a Christian martyr not a Christian at all, but the Muslim Moluccan King.[69] His politically-motivated captivity by the Governor offers him an opportunity to show his saintly embrace of suffering: "He smiles upon his miseries, / And bears 'em with such strength as if his nature / Had been nursed up and fostered with calamities" (2.1.14-16), his guards note with admiration. The king's patience under oppression exemplifies one of the defining topoi of martyrology, one that persisted in Protestant accounts as well as Catholic.[70] When the Governor attempts to bait him into resenting his suffering, the King refuses by laying out the reasoning behind a martyr's power: "For he that holds my constancy still triumphs" (2.1.88). The King's endurance in the face of persecution and his readiness for death—"In death I am still a king and contemn ye…Here's a throat, soldiers— / Come, see who can strike deepest" (2.3.69-74)—conform to both ancient and contemporary early modern models of martyrs who defeat their persecutors by embracing the violence inflicted on them.[71] But the King is never martyred and never converted—instead, he disconcertingly and reluctantly takes on the role of a persecutor to Armusia and the converting Quisara.

Two methods of enacting conversion present themselves in *The Island Princess*, and Quisara knows the importance of following a paradigm. She draws on the tropes of female mad

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[69] In her introduction to the Arden edition, Clare McManus notes that "On his first appearance, the captive King closely resembles a Christian martyr" and that this "complicates the conventional alignment between the heretical Eastern ruler and the tyrant (63).

[70] See Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 50-62, on the patient endurance of pain as an imitation of Christ. Foxe's use of the motif is analyzed in John R. Knott, "John Foxe and the Joy of Suffering," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 721-734.

[71] In *The English Martyr*, Dailey describes the violence of martyrologies as "a vehicle by which the martyr—not the persecutor—gains and exhibits power over the human body and human nature" (20). Also see Knott, "John Foxe and the Joy of Suffering," and Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 119-126.

scenes as a threat and a source of agency twice. The first comes when she thinks Armusia has come into her rooms to rape her: "I'll take to me / The spirit of a man, borrow his boldness / And force my woman's fears into a madness; / And, ere you arrive at what you aim at—" (3.3.52-55) she declares before Armusia interrupts her with reassurances that he means her no harm and that unspecified "holy powers bear shields to defend chastity" (3.3.72). In this scene, Quisara threatens to actively embrace a legible, gendered pattern for performing madness in the early modern theater.[72] Although Armusia convinces her that she does not need to assume the part of madwoman in their encounter, when she appears on stage after Armusia's arrest in act five, her entrance invokes the language of madness again: "Why looks she so distractedly?" (5.2.33) asks the King.[73] Quisara's first indication to the other characters that she will join with Armusia follows an established paradigm, but not that of wife or martyr. The part she knows how to enact is that of the dramatic madwoman— an echo of "Enter Ophelia distracted" (sig. 2P3r).[74] Her aunt Quisana describes her as "grown wild / And raving on the stranger's love and honour" (5.2.35-36), and fears that she will commit suicide. It *is* a performance, though whether it is meant to indicate Quisara's cunning or a truly felt madness is unclear; when Quisara confronts her brother and the disguised Governor, she is as lucid as she has been throughout the rest of the play.

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[72] See Carol Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), and Neely, "'Documents in Madness': Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 315-338. Douglas Bruster also describes stage madness as gendered and following a recognizable pattern in "The Jailer's Daughter and the Politics of Madwomen's Language," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 277-300.
[73] Neely, in *Distracted Subjects*, explains that "The Renaissance most often used 'distraction' as a near synonym for extreme madness" (2). Later in Quisara's mad scene, the disguised Governor attempts to dismiss her accusations by telling the King that "She speaks distractedly" (5.2.58).
[74] Digital facsimile of the Bodleian First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, Arch G c.7.

Once Armusia is brought on stage again, Quisara, apparently denied the possibility of marrying him, fixes on the role of martyred convert. Moved by Armusia's defiance of the Governor's threats of fire and torture, Quisara declares "I do embrace your faith, sir, and your fortune" (5.2.121). Together, Armusia and Quisara plan to die for Christianity, following the clearest model available to confirm their shared faith and Quisara's conversion. But though Quisara declares herself in favor of a "new faith, which is most sacred" (5.2.131), the martyrological model Quisara and Armusia seek to follow is only half present: the willing, triumphant victims are eager to perform their roles, but the persecutors are not. As Dailey describes, the part of the persecutor in martyrology is as constituted as that of martyr: "A figure of godless pagan excess, he is without logic, reason, or self-control, representing the fleshly passions and unhinged chaos that must reign for those who fail to grasp the universal order and logic provided by faith in Christ."[75] In Foxe's accounts of the Marian martyrs, the Catholic persecutors continue to be a "caricatured representation of consummate evil."[76]

But the persecutors in *The Island Princess* are not illogical, murderous zealots. The Governor only pretends to be a fanatic to achieve his revenge; the King only nominally fits the part of tyrant. Before the Governor stirs up tensions in his disguise, the King is tolerant, telling Armusia "I'll hinder no devotion" (3.2.66) and assuming more genuine religiosity of the Portuguese than they actually demonstrate. Even with the Governor working to convince him that the Christians are his enemies, he counsels patience, resists their execution, and always seems an instant away from repenting and releasing Armusia, arguing that "I am ungrateful and a wretch" (5.2.1) for imprisoning his friend and insisting that his gods "are mild and pitiful"

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[75] Dailey, *The English Martyr*, 34.
[76] Dailey, *The English Martyr*, 80.

(5.2.20) rather than merciless. Once his sister decides to convert, he tries to postpone execution: "Not so sudden. / If they go, all my friends and sisters perish" (5.2.140-141). Moreover, the steadfastness of the would-be-martyrs does not provoke their enemies' rage. Even the Governor, the villain of the piece and the only character seeking violence, only persists because he finds himself in too deep. Quisara's decision to convert, rather than inspiring more frenzied sadism, disturbs his commitment to revenge. "This woman makes me weary of my mischief: / She shakes me and she staggers me" (5.2.138-139)," he says in an aside, realizing that he longs to be "safe at home again" (5.2.142). Even as *The Island Princess* seems to offer up martyrdom as a template for achieving full conversion, then, it only provides a partial formula. Without persecutors thirsting for Christian blood, what signs of fully achieved Christian faith can Quisara offer?

"If"

When Quisara announces that she finally has been "won" for Christianity and Armusia, she tries to describe what happens within: "I feel a sparkle here, / A lively spark that kindles my affection / And tells me it will rise to flames of glory" (5.2.122-124). She feels *something*, but describes her spark of faith as still in the process of being kindled, not yet ablaze. Her newly forming Christian identity flickers, and she turns to Armusia for guidance. "Show me the way," she asks of him, "and, when I faint, instruct me" (5.2.126). Rather than *imitatio Christi*, to Quisara, enacting her faith consists of imitating Armusia. But his instruction never takes place, and for all her commitment to Christianity and death, she lingers in the conditional. After asking Armusia to lead her in a martyr's death, she begins to add, "And, if I follow not—" (5.2.126-7). Armusia interrupts her before she can finish conceiving of that 'if,' leaving it suspended, even while she insists to the Governor and King that she is ready to suffer "every scruple of affliction"

(5.2.133). Martyrdom might literalize her flames of glory, but since Quisara and Armusia are quickly released, even that willingness to die does not lead her to an act that can manifest her inward spark. Quisara raises the idea that she *could* fail, that faltering is possible, and leaves it an unanswered question. Her willingness to die and her projected marriage to Armusia remain *ifs*.

While Quisara knows how to perform the roles of sexual agent and madwoman, and employs her knowledge of these parts, she is prevented from fully playing the part of convert; there are clear paradigms for her to follow in other situations, but not as an unmartyred, unwed, unbaptized new Christian. Quisara's lack of sacramental initiation, lack of knowledge of the Gospels, and lack of outward change seem immaterial to the outcome of the plot, which rapidly moves toward its happy ending. But without confirmation, *The Island Princess* also seems unable to depict a post-conversion, reborn Quisara. After Quisara's conversion scene, she speaks only once more, to tell Armusia "Which way you go, sir, I must follow necessary: / One life and one death" (5.5.42-3), simply reiterating her earlier plan to follow Armusia in religious self-sacrifice. Thereafter, she is silent and virtually ignored, while the King declares himself half-persuaded to convert, still ending the play with praise for his own deities, declaring that "the gods give peace at last" (5.5.94). Although Quisara's apparent dedication to becoming Christian enables the comic end, the King's partial, uncertain persuasion toward Christianity gets the last word.

By making conversion a fundamental change that is motivationally compromised and ultimately unfinished, *The Island Princess* invites its audiences to inhabit an emotional space where achieving conversion might remain something hoped for, not confirmed, an unsettled and doubtful state without necessarily being a state of failure. Brooke Conti has recently pointed out that early modern religion is "a category of identity both as central and as unstable as race,

subject to continual social and contextual redefinition," and Musa Gurnis has suggested reframing concepts of religious identity to be "not so much something one *is* but rather something one is constantly *doing*," a schema that allows for inconsistency, internal conflict, and change over time that remains earnest.[77] While some performances of conversion may have responded to that instability by either ironizing religious turns or seeking ways to make faith reassuringly stable, *The Island Princess* suggests that drama might also have offered ways to think about religious identity in motion and unfinished. By raising the expectations of interfaith romance and evoking—and then abandoning—conventional means of depicting conversion in drama, *The Island Princess* asks how far the conversion journey can be imagined without a clearly demarcated path and destination, and leaves its characters still at sea, in the process of becoming.

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[77] Brooke Conti, *Confessions of Faith in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 8; Musa Gurnis, *Mixed Faith and Shared Feeling: Theater in Post-Reformation London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 11.

II

Taste and See: Miraculous Conversion in the *Play of the Sacrament* and *The Virgin Martyr*

What moves a person to convert? To break with a past identity, and perhaps break with family, friends, ancestors, and community, and embrace a new self? Within Christian history, explanations for conversion abound. From Constantine's vision of the cross,[1] to the vitriolic arguments over right religion in the sixteenth century, to the seventeenth-century declarations of allegiance that Brooke Conti terms "confessions of faith,"[2] converts and their chroniclers attributed their turns to signs from heaven, studying the scriptures, disillusionment with previous religions, effective preachers, academic arguments, or the influence of loved ones. Such accounts are meant to persuade: to spread an evangelical agenda, to convince an established faith community to accept a new member, or—sometimes eliding the actual experience of the conversion altogether—to offer reasons why the convert's new religion is the correct one.[3] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this drive to persuade grew more urgent amid protracted reformations, encounters with indigenous faiths, and emerging Western European

[1] The most famous account of Constantine's vision of the cross and conversion is in Book 1 of Eusebius of Caesarea's fourth-century history *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* (London: S. Bagster and Sons, 1845), 25-29.
[2] Brooke Conti, *Confessions of Faith in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).
[3] On conversion narratives and religious apology and polemic, see Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Bruce Hindmarsch, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 42, 50. See Conti, *Confessions of Faith*, for examples of converts avoiding descriptions of their conversions in favor of "declarations of fidelity" (73).

colonial evangelism.[4] Abigail Shinn and Peter Mazur describe conversion during this period as "an act that cried out for justification,"[5] and print and manuscript tracts that used doctrinal arguments or biographical accounts to promote converting to a new faith provided justifications in abundance.[6]

That need for justification, however, meant that biographical accounts and polemical tracts depicted changes in religious identity as within the realm of human comprehension. People upended their spiritual lives, these works suggested, because they used good judgment, discerning a new faith to be the way to salvation. Such works were often blunt about their evangelical purposes. For instance, *The Conuersion of a Gentleman long tyme misled in Poperie, to the sincere and true profession of the Gospell of Christ Iesus* (1587) declares on its title page that this tale of conversion is "an Exhortation to his good Countrymen in England or elsewhere, to embrace this trueth with all the heauenly doctrine of Christes Religion" (sig. A1r).[7]

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[4] On the connections between conversion and Western European expansion, see Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially 44-62; J.H. Elliot, "Religions on the Move," in *Religious Transformations in the Early Modern Americas*, ed. Stephanie Kirk and Sarah Rivett (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 25–45; Carmen Nocentelli, "The Erotics of Mercantile Imperialism: Cross-Cultural Requitedness in the Early Modern Period," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (2008): 134–52.

[5] Abigail Shinn and Peter Mazur, "Introduction: Conversion Narratives in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Early Modern History* 17, no. 5-6 (2013), 428.

[6] Michael Questier describes conversion polemics in *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12-39. Relevant overviews of print and manuscript circulation promoting Protestant and Catholic causes can be found in Patrick Collinson, Arnold Hunt, and Alexandra Walsham, "Religious Publishing in England 1557-1640," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. John Barnard and D.F. McKenzie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 4:29-66, and in Andrew Pettegree, "Books, Pamphlets, and Polemic" in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2000), 109-126. See also Alexandra Walsham, "'Domme Preachers'? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print," *Past and Present* no. 168 (Aug. 2000), 72-123; and Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), especially 107-129 and 203-225.

[7] William Chauncie, *The conuersion of a gentleman long tyme misled in poperie* (London, 1587).

Conversion accounts might be published "for the benefit of our people" (sig. A1r), as another title page declares.[8] To be effective as arguments, these conversions are presented as the genuine and desired outcome of new clarity. Published accounts insist on the free, willing, and well-reasoned nature of the turns they describe. They narrate, for instance, *The Voluntarie Conuersion, and Severall Recantations, of foure great learned men, professed Fryers in sundry Monasteries of France* (1604).[9] Former seminary priest John Copley's *Doctrinall and Moral Observations Concerning Religion* (1612) promises the "Reasons of his late vn-forced departure from the Church of Rome" (sig. ¶1r).[10] A Catholic man writing to his father in *An Epistle of a Catholicke young gentleman (being for his religion imprisoned.) To his father a Protestant* (1614) consistently describes his decision to be a Catholic as a personal and well-reasoned journey, with no outside influences.[11] In all these cases, conversion is a decision with comprehensible logic, the result of active consideration from the convert—a decision that might, if explained well enough, persuade others. There is no confusion or ambiguity about the obvious rightness of the convert's new faith, and no admission that a convert's experience might be baffling, irrational, an inexplicable and uncontrollable change.

This chapter considers how drama, unlike religious polemic or apology, could represent models of conversion that resisted such logic. Chapter one explored conversion as an experience pursued by the would-be convert, a desired transformation that characters might enact. In what follows, I shift from the emphatically consensual yet intangible and compromised turn to

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[8] Niccolo Balbani, *Newes from Italy of a second Moses or, the life of Galeacius Caracciolus the noble Marquesse of Vico,* trans. William Crashaw (London, 1608).
[9] Anon., *The voluntarie conuersion and seuerall recantations of foure great learned men, professed fryers in sundry monasteries of France* (London, 1604).
[10] John Copley, *Doctrinall and moral obseruations concerning religion* (London, 1612).
[11] N.N., *An epistle of a Catholicke young gentleman* (Doway [i.e. printed secretly in England], 1623).

Christianity portrayed in *The Island Princess* to focus on conversion that hovers in a liminal space between consensual and forced and takes full advantage of theater's affordances to make the soul's change legible: miraculous conversion. In representing conversion as a theatrical miracle, drama could provide an outlet for processing the overwhelming, illogical facets of religious change. The newly turned Christians I study here—incredulous Jewish merchants confronted with the brutal power of the Eucharist, a lovesick war hero of late antiquity, and a fanatical pagan persecutor of Christians in Roman Caesarea (modern-day Kayseri)—do not pose the same interpretive difficulties as chapter one's half-persuaded and unreadable would-be converts. Instead, they offer an excess of spectacular proof of their conversions: lively images, baptism, gifts from heaven, and martyrdom. The success of their turns is unmistakable. Their consent to those turns, however, is far more ambiguous. The conversions I focus on in this chapter are depicted as the unsought result of overwhelming divine forces that transform characters into Christians without their willing participation.

I examine the use of sensational miracles that bring about unwanted conversions in two plays: first, the fifteenth-century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a viciously anti-Jewish miracle play featuring host desecration and the lively power of sacred images; second, the Jacobean tragedy *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), a collaboration between Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger depicting multiple martyrdoms and conversions to and from Christianity. While the late medieval East Anglian miracle play and the seventeenth-century tragedy performed at London's Red Bull playhouse[12] are separated by time, region, genre, and religious milieu, placing the miraculous conversions of *The Virgin Martyr* alongside those in the *Play of the*

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[12] Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vol. 6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 220.

Sacrament enables a consideration of *The Virgin Martyr*'s spectacle of becoming Christian outside of its relative Catholicism, Protestantism, or *via media*-ism.[13] The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* embraces the transformative power of sacraments, linking the transubstantiation of the Eucharist to the transubstantiation of the soul with bloody literalism and making conversion a miracle beyond human comprehension or influence. The play's use of spectacle and sensation as a means to convert and its substitution of Jewish conversion for punishment and revenge provide a framework for my reading of *The Virgin Martyr*. Although *The Virgin Martyr* avoids the incarnational theater, community ritual, and sacramental agency central to the *Play of the Sacrament*, its two climactic turns to Christianity are similarly sensory-based, inexplicable miracles, conversions done to, rather than done by, the converts. Comparing the conversions in *The Virgin Martyr* to the conversions of the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament* highlights ways that this post-Reformation, "secular" tragedy draws on the idea of conversion-as-miracle to depict religious change as an embodied experience that could be thrilling and terrifying. Both plays represent conversion as an unfathomable ordeal made sensible through stagecraft; both make conversion something inflicted by heaven as simultaneously salvation and punishment; both reject integrating their miraculously converted characters into the living Christian community. If biographies, religious polemic, and confessions of faith offer justifications for conversion, *The Virgin Martyr* employs the theatricality of a miracle play to envisage conversion

[13] Louise George Clubb argues that *The Virgin Martyr* is essentially Catholic in "*The Virgin Martyr* and the Tragedia Sacra," in *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989): 205-229. Susannah Brietz Monta suggests it is aggressively Protestant in "Martyrdom, Nostalgia, and Political Engagement," *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 194-232. Thomas J. Moretti sees it as drawing on both Catholic and Protestant ideas in "*Via Media* Theatricality and Fantasy in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*," *Renaissance Drama* 42, no. 12 (2014): 243-270.

without justification. In attributing inward change to the agency of outward, sensational forces, *The Virgin Martyr* engages with the potential dangers of those forces and suggests that even conversion to the "right" religion could be a confounding, daunting ordeal that might remain a mystery to the convert.

The Bloody Child: Transformative Sight in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a late fifteenth-century miracle play that survives in a single sixteenth-century manuscript, has been studied for its special effects, its antisemitism, its potential anti-Lollard agenda, and its brutal depiction of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[14] Purporting to be based on true events that took place "In the forest seyd of Aragon (60), it draws on myths of Jewish ritual murder and host desecration in its story of a group of Jews, led by the merchant Jonathas, who bribe a corrupt Christian merchant to steal a host for them so that they can torture it to prove the absurdity of Christian belief.[15] The most notorious section of the play depicts Jonathas and his fellow Jews Jason, Jasdon, Masphat, and Malchus subjecting the stolen host to torments that reflect the Passion, Burial, and the Harrowing of

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[14] On dating the play and the manuscript, see John T. Sebastian, "Introduction," *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 2012), 29. The banns written at the end of the play claim that the events it depicts took place in Aragon in 1461, which provides an earliest possible date for its composition; Elisabeth Dutton describes it as "an early or possibly even pre-Tudor play surviving only in a mid-Tudor manuscript" in "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 56. For a helpful overview of critical trends in studying the Croxton *Play* from the 1930s through the early 2000s see David Lawton, "Sacrilege and Theatricality: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33.2 (Spring 2003), 281-309, especially pages 289-297.

[15] All quotations from the text of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* are from John T. Sebastian, *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 2012).

Hell—inflicting the "cake" with the five wounds, nailing it to a post, throwing it in boiling oil, and putting it in an oven—until it bursts forth, miraculously transformed into a bloody image of the Christ Child, accuses them of cruelty and unbelief, and converts them to Christianity. While critics debate the specifics of how the play would have been staged, the manuscript's stage directions indicate a gory spectacle, beginning with the stabbing of the host: "*Here the Ost must blede*" (480sd).[16] Subsequent stage directions call for a detachable hand for Jonathas, a cauldron that boils with blood, and a bleeding oven ready to break apart and reveal Jesus as a mutilated child.

While the ostentatious violence of this sequence and its representation of sacramental theology might be the *Play of the Sacrament*'s most memorable aspect, the literal transubstantiation of the host into body and blood is only one part of its miracle. Scholarship on the play commonly refers to it by the title derived from the end of the manuscript: "*Thus endyth the Play of the Blyssd Sacrament*."[17] This reflects the centrality of the host within the play; as Sarah Beckwith explains, "*Croxton* is first and foremost a play of, and play with, the sacrament."[18] However, the manuscript provides another, more complete title after the Vexillators' introductions: "*Hereafter foloweth the Play of the Conversyon of Ser Jonathas the Jewe by Myracle of the Blyssed Sacrament.*"[19] In this title, the miraculous transformation of the

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[16] Dutton provides a useful summary of differing ideas about staging in "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," 64-67. See also Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 79-81; David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 755; Sebastian, "Introduction," especially 17-22; and Lawton, "Sacrilege and Theatricality," 294-295.
[17] Sebastian, *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, 63.
[18] Sarah Beckwith, "Ritual, Church and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," in *Culture and History: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing 1350-1600*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State Univresity Press, 1992), 66.
[19] Sebastian, *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, 37.

sacrament is inseparable from the miraculous transformation of Jonathas, suggesting that this miracle play is about conversion as much as it is about the real presence in the Eucharist. Cameron Hunt McNabb, considering the sacred power of words in the *Play of the Sacrament*, argues that the play makes conversion its "ultimate miracle" in order to make its more theatrical miracle of the real presence in the Eucharist more palatable.[20] But as the title's "by" implies, it might be more accurate to say that the theatrical miracle of the sacrament *is* the miracle of conversion, that the gory spectacle of the bread becoming an image of Christ is the agent of change that destroys and recreates souls. In making the transubstantiation of bread into Christ and the transubstantiation of Jew into Christian one and the same, the *Play of the Sacrament* also makes conversion a bewildering, shattering force that engulfs characters who do not seek it.

The *Play of the Sacrament*'s stage miracles bring together the sensual power of late medieval piety—particularly its emphasis on devotional images and on beholding the sacrament of the Eucharist—and antisemitic stories of Jewish host desecration and blood libel to depict conversion as an overpowering, affective experience of being remade by seeing. The status of images in the Church was never beyond controversy, but prior to the reformations of the sixteenth century, visual culture was a central part of England's religion. Images and icons such as crosses, stained glass, altars, statues, and paintings were, as David Davis explains, "the most public displays of Catholicism…religious imagery was a tangible and permanent aspect of the landscape, both inside and outside the churches."[21] The impact of encountering religious images was not merely one of enjoying decorative art, nor was it only educational, as Gregory the Great

[20] Cameron Hunt McNabb, "Hocus Pocus and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Early Theatre* 17.2 (2014), 27.
[21] David J. Davis, "General Introduction," in *From Icons to Idols: Documents of the Image Debate in Reformation England*, ed. David J. Davis (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2016), 1.

influentially argued.[22] Instead, it became a religious experience unto itself. Leah Marcus, considering the proliferation of miracle stories depicting visions of the Eucharist as a child, notes the importance of seeing in the later Middle Ages: "From the twelfth century on, seeing the host became an ever more prominent feature of the Mass…More than one writer ventured even to assert that adoring the body of Christ is equivalent to partaking in the sacrament."[23] Such an equivalence makes sight sacramental, suggesting that seeing is as transformative as eating—that seeing the Eucharist and eating the Eucharist are both ways for metamorphic grace to enter the body. Eamon Duffy argues that in the fifteenth-century mass, sight was the primary way to encounter the sacred: "To see the Host, however fleetingly, was a privilege bringing blessing. Those robbed of this privilege by misfortunes such as poor eyesight might be rescued by heavenly intervention. Conversely, the sacrilegious might be deprived of the ability to see the Host which they profaned."[24] Simply seeing the bread, raised by the priest during the sacring, was a moving experience reserved for the faithful.

But spectators were sometimes granted far more intense visions of the Eucharist: the broken, bleeding body of the Christ Child. Marcus describes these visions as "one of the most bizarre, yet common, miracles of the Middle Ages."[25] Sometimes appearing to entire congregations, sometimes to individual doubters, these gruesome miracles manifested the doctrine of the real presence, which asserted that every morsel of the Eucharist contained the

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[22] See Celia M. Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word and Image* 6, no. 2 (1990), 138-153.
[23] Leah S. Marcus, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the English Cycle Plays," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Literature: Alpha Es et O!* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 10-11.
[24] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 101.
[25] Marcus, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice," 3.

complete body of Christ.[26] Elina Gertsman connects these host miracle stories with a popular sacred image in religious art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Child of Sorrows, which "displays or carries a small cross, holds scourge and reed, or is pierced or surrounded by five disembodied wounds conflat[ing] Christ's infant vulnerability with his adult sacrifice."[27] Gertsman argues that the prolific material image of the Child of Sorrows and narratives of miraculous visions of the Eucharist as a tortured, cannibalized infant emphasized both the suffering of the Passion and the perfect innocence of Christ, inspiring intense empathy and devotion. But Gertsman also notes a more horrific manifestation of that extreme emotional response. The image of a bloody, sacrificed child, when invoked in accusations against Jews, also inspired and reflected real-life violence toward Jewish communities.[28]

The *Play of the Sacrament* depicts an especially brutal manifestation of the pitiful Christ Child, and it does so in the context of anti-Jewish blood libel and host desecration stories that featured extravagant violence against Christian children or against the Christ Child in the host. Within these stories, the expected end for Jews is not conversion—it is retribution. The demonization of Jews within Western Christianity grew more pronounced in the later Middle Ages, and the first recorded stories of Jews kidnapping and killing Christian children appeared in

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[26] On Eucharistic miracle stories, see Marcus, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice"; Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 101-102; Steven Justice, "Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 307–32.
[27] Elina Gertsman, "Signs of Death: The Sacrificial Christ Child in Late-Medieval Art," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es et O!*, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 66.
[28] Gertsman, "Signs of Death," 84-86.

the twelfth century.[29] These myths claimed that Jews would murder children in reenactments of the crucifixion, to obtain Christian blood, or out of amorphous hatred of Christianity, and the stories were often—like the *Play of the Sacrament*— markedly gory. They depict Jews, especially Jewish men, as so hostile to Christianity and resistant to conversion that they become ridiculous.[30] While tales of Jewish men miraculously converting did circulate in the Middle Ages, they generally present successful conversion as an immediate response to the first sign from heaven.[31] More violent tales of ritual murder or determined, obstinate host desecration such as that in the *Play of the Sacrament* do not typically end with Jewish men becoming Christians. The Jews in these narratives stubbornly reject the "right" religion in spite of miraculous signs and are depicted as determined to oppose Christians by desecrating holy things—the sacrament, relics, sacred icons, a saintly child singing hymns—and by committing violence against the

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[29] François Soyer describes the rise of anti-Jewish discourse in "The Dehumanization and Demonization of the Medieval Jews," *Medieval Antisemitism?* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019), 45–66; see also Geraldine Heng, "England's Dead Boys: Telling Tales of Christian-Jewish Relations Before and After the First European Expulsion of the Jews," *MLN* 127, no. 5 (2012): S54–85. Kati Ihnat describes how miracle stories depicting Jews became increasingly violent and vengeful after the twelfth century in "Enemies of Mary: Jews in Miracle Stories," in *Mother of Mercy, Bane of the Jews: Devotion to the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Norman England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 138–81. On blood libel myths, see Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemetic Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Hannah R. Johnson, *Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012). James Shapiro focuses on the persistence of Christian belief in blood libels in *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 89-112.

[30] On the supposed convertibility of Jewish women as opposed to Jewish men, see Jacob Lackner, "Violent Men and Malleable Women: Gender and Jewish Conversion to Christianity in Medieval Sermon Exempla," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 30 (Spring 2016): 24-47. Ihnat also describes medieval miracle stories making Jewish women and children more convertible than Jewish men throughout "Enemies of Mary."

[31] Lackner provides examples of men converting in response to a sign from heaven in "Violent Men and Malleable Women," 27-30.

innocent—Christian children, the Christ Child in the host, or Jewish children too interested in Christianity.[32]

The *Play of the Sacrament* is unusual in concluding its story with conversion rather than death. Geraldine Heng, reflecting on the rise of antisemitic literature after the official expulsion of the Jews from England, argues that blood libel and host desecration stories "elicit human passions ranging from pathos and rage to indignant laughter, thus uniting and pulling together the English Christian community."[33] These stories, Heng maintains, function to demarcate a racialized English Christian identity—not to imagine a genuine incorporation of outsiders into the community. François Soyer, in a study on anti-Jewish discourse in the Middle Ages, also notes that stories focus on punishment and rejection from Christian society rather than integration, and describes one of the "stock characters" that appear in host desecration libels as "the 'evil' Jewish male who desecrates the host and is justly punished for it."[34] Such stories not only accorded violent ends for Jewish characters, they provoked outrage and excused violence against actual Jews throughout the Middle Ages, even when blood libels were condemned by papal authorities.[35] In most narratives, Jews who ignore signs such as a bleeding host are not seen as potential converts, but as enemies deserving of revenge.

The Jewish characters in the *Play of the Sacrament* are presented as guilty of both repeated host desecration and, because the tortured host transforms into an image of the tortured

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[32] Variations on accusations against Jewish communities and stories featuring murder or host desecration during the Middle Ages are described in Soyer, "Dehumanization and Demonization," Heng, "England's Dead Boys," Ihnat, "Enemies of Mary," and Teter, *Blood Libel*, especially 1-42.
[33] Heng, "England's Dead Boys," S59.
[34] Soyer, "Dehumanization and Demonization," 54.
[35] See Teter, *Blood Libel*, 14-42, and Soyer, "Dehumanization and Demonization."

Christ Child, of ritual child murder.[36] The play's graphic evocation of these familiar narratives creates an expectation of punishment, which is subverted—but not erased—by the Jews' conversion. David Lawton and Sarah Beckwith both note that the *Play of the Sacrament*'s French counterpart, *Le Mystère de la Sainte Hostie*, features a much more prototypical version of a Jewish host desecration story: the Jewish merchant is burned at the stake, along with his family.[37] Lawton points out that in every other version of the narrative, "vengeance is taken at least on the Jewish male or males who torture [the host], whereas in the English play they are forgiven and converted."[38] Beckwith likewise emphasizes the apparent forbearance of this narrative twist, arguing that the play is exceptional in that, "the figure of the Jew, the archetypal outsider, is brought inside, where he is not executed but converted,"[39] and Elisabeth Dutton describes the Jews' conversion as "a fantasy of incorporation in the fullest sense of the word—a reintegration into the body of Christ."[40] But as Claire Sponsler and Robert Clark remind us, although the play depicts Jewish conversion to Christianity, it does not depict the Christian community embracing Jewish converts.[41] Upon receiving the sacrament of baptism, the Jews announce that they will depart to wander "by contré and cost" (964). There is a limit to their acceptance as Christians, and a limit to the *Play of the Sacrament*'s exceptional treatment of its

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[36] Lisa Lambert, in "The Once and Future Jew: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Little Robert of Bury and Historical Memory," *Jewish History* 15.3 (2001): 236-327, points out that East Anglia (the region where the play likely originated, and where the Vexillatores indicate it is performed in the manuscript, though it may have toured) "saw some of the earliest ritual murder accusations in England and all of Europe" beginning in 1144 (237).
[37] Beckwith, "Ritual, Church, and Theatre," 73; Lawton, "Sacrilege and Theatricality," 288.
[38] Lawton, "Sacrilege and Theatricality," 288.
[39] Beckwith, "Ritual, Church, and Theatre, 73.
[40] Dutton, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," 57.
[41] Robert L.A. Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Othered Bodies: Racial Cross-Dressing in the Mistere de La Sainte Hostie and the Croxton Play of the Sacrament," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 61-87.

Jewish characters, as Sponsler and Clark suggest: "This conversion followed by exodus conveniently leaves untested the ability of the Christian community to integrate the Jews on a permanent resident basis."[42] Jonathas, Jason, Jasdon, Masphat, and Malchus may be converted, but practically, they are still purged from the community.

The exclusion of the converts is not the only vestige of the expected torment for the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament*. Rather than focusing on the Jews' effective banishment, I contend that the play makes the miraculous conversion itself a heart-rending experience carrying shades of the suffering inflicted on Jews in other stories. In doing so, it takes advantage of narrative expectations of punishment to consider the process of spiritual transformation as an embodied, harrowing mystery. For the Jews, the power that converts them brings horror and distress—which the play presents as ultimately redemptive, but which also suggests an uneasy correspondence between their fate in the *Play of the Sacrament* and the fate of similar characters in other antisemitic stories of blood libel and host desecration. Jews who torture the host are swept up by the consequences in this story just as they are in others, helpless in the face of death or banishment and helpless in undergoing religious change. The *Play of the Sacrament* depicts conversion as disconnected from knowledge of doctrine, evidence of sacred power, or a clear line of reasoning. Throughout the play the Jews display impressive understanding of Christian doctrine and use liturgical Latin with ease. They have little to learn about the tenets of Christian faith. By the time the Jews witness the materialization of God that causes their transformation, the host has already confronted them with a series of miracles proving the truth of the Church's sacramental doctrine that have *not* convinced them to convert: the host has bled when pierced, it has somehow ripped off Jonathas's hand, and it has caused a cauldron to boil with blood. They

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[42] Clark and Sponsler, "Othered Bodies," 73.

have more than enough reasons to be persuaded to convert, if their conversion is a result of persuasion. There are, of course, dramatic reasons to postpone their turns until the play's climactic special effect, but the final miracle is still treated as different from the other signs of God's power in the host. The Jews remain determined to disprove Christian belief after every other miracle, only to be instantly, fundamentally transformed by this one.

The *Play of the Sacrament* accomplishes this narrative turn by taking the affective power of seeing the Christ Child to an extreme, attributing the frightening and pitiful image with the agency to compel, not just inspire, inward transformations. The importance of the transformative miracle being an image is especially evident in the way the manuscript presents the play's action. As Dutton notes, the stage directions "are more descriptive than practical…they can describe the action of the play as if it were real, rather than acknowledging its theatrical illusion and giving any hint as to how the illusion is to be achieved: these might well be stage directions which would be more useful to a reader, imagining a performance, than a troupe having to realize one."[43] These literary rather than practicable stage directions are better indicators of how the play is to be experienced than how it is to be performed; it is worth considering how they render the miracle that converts the Jews. In the play's most spectacular piece of stagecraft, as Christ bursts forth from the oven, the manuscript's stage directions do not refer to "Christ," a prop, or an actor. Precisely how this wondrous special effect was accomplished—child actor, mechanical Christ, puppet—is unknown.[44] However, the way the special effect is to be understood is somewhat clearer. In the manuscript's stage directions, the impetus for the Jews' conversion is consistently referred to as a speaking, bleeding *image*: "*Here the owyn must ryve asunder and*

[43] Dutton, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," 68.
[44] Sebastian, *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, 21; Scherb, *Staging Faith,* 48, 79.

blede owt at the cranys and an image appere owt, with woundys bledyng"(712sd); "*Here shall the image speke to the Juys*" (716sd). The final piece of spectacular stagecraft is another transformation of the image: "*Here shall the image change again into brede*" (825sd).

The Croxton *Play*'s dramatic use of a transformative vision is part of a larger cultural embrace of the power of sight and spectacle. Victor Scherb argues that in the Middle Ages, "drama was seen as analogous to the painting or sculpture of religious or moral subjects" in its mimetic nature, all artistic forms that might create devotional images.[45] Yet more specifically and more strangely, the manuscript's persistent use of "image" to describe the converting miracle connects it to stories of painted images or statues that move or even seem to come alive. David Freedberg, in his study *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, describes a pattern of devotional art portraying 'lively images' across the ninth through the seventeenth centuries—images of images that reach out to viewers, increasingly naturalistic depictions that show "absolutely conscious and sometimes extreme diligence in making the living qualities of the dead image present."[46] The miracles represented in these pictures are stories of religious images that come to life, often in order to spur conversions in the people who encounter them.[47] The lifelike qualities of these images are integral to their stories: they bleed, they reach out to embrace, they speak, they spout milk from their breasts.[48] The *Play of the Sacrament*'s miracle is an oddly recursive variation on this artistic trope. As proof of the real presence in the Eucharist, what should be an already-lively dramatic embodiment of Christ

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[45] Scherb, *Staging Faith,* 43-44.
[46] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 297. Freedberg surveys examples of lively images on pages 294-311.
[47] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 305.
[48] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 304-306.

manifests in the dialogue and stage directions as an image. Rather than a dead image coming to life, the play's stage directions suggest, the living and irresistible power of God becomes an image. The *Play of the Sacrament* makes the case that an image can convert those who see it—whether they want to be converted or not.

No violence or threat of violence constrains the Jews' turn to Christianity in the *Play of the Sacrament*, and yet it is in a sense compelled, an instantaneous response to the emergence of the image of Christ from the oven. He appears and speaks—a terrible manifestation of suffering—and each of the Jews in turn addresses him as Lord, recalling Saul's immediate use of "Lord" during his own miraculous encounter on the road to Damascus. Their transformation is a spontaneous and visceral transformation; they feel both the horror of their offense and the mercy of God, rather than gaining new knowledge of previously unknown gospels or announcing they have decided to convert because of the miraculous evidence before their eyes. The dialogue presents their conversion to faith in Christ as overwhelming and embodied. Jonathas, addressing the image-Christ as his protector, focuses on his body's reaction: "For dred of Thee I trymble and quake" (743). Kneeling before the sight of the Christ Child, the other Jews describe the intensity of their sorrow and the pain in their hearts. Jason feels his soul transformed through "sorow and care and grete wepyng…With condolent harte and grete sorowyng" (746; 748); Masphat cries out for mercy "With lamentable hart" (757); Malchus feels his offense "stykyth at my hart as hard as a core" (759).

These reactions are conventional professions of repentance, but the repeated emphasis on the pain and sorrow induced by the image—and thus on conversion as sensory and overpowering rather than as new enlightenment—persists when the Jews go to Episcopus for baptism. After the many miracles of the Eucharist, after hearing the words of Jesus, and after Jonathas's hand has

been miraculously healed, the Jews still present their conversion and need for baptism as an experience of anguished seeing:

> Hayle, father of grace! I knele upon my knee,
> Hertely besechyng yow and interely,
> A swemfull syght all for to see
> In my howse apperyng, verely:
> The Holy Sacrament, the whyche we have done tormentry,
> And ther we have putt Hym to a newe passyon,
> A Chyld apperyng with wondys blody!
> A swemfull syght yt ys to looke upon. (798-805)

Jonathas does not describe what Jesus said; he does not describe the exploding cauldron, or the bleeding host, or the loss and recovery of his hand. Instead, it is the image that haunts his confession, the "swemfull sight for all to see" (800). In six lines, he twice proclaims that this "swemfull syght" appeared in his house, and his explanation for the Jews' desire for baptism appears to be the emotional ordeal of seeing: "A swemfull syght yt ys to looke upon" (805).

The overwhelming affective power of the converting image is primarily inflicted on the Jews, but the play suggests that Christians are also susceptible to its painful, transformative force. Imbued with the power to reshape the soul and make believers out of the most resistant of nonbelievers, this life-altering image prompts the play's transition into a communal procession. The bishop Episcopus, upon hearing the Jews' confession, goes to see the image of the Christ Child, and commands that his people—possibly silent actors playing attendants, but likely the audience as well—look at it with him: "Now, all my pepull, with me ye dresse / For to go see that swymfull syght" (808-9).[49] His language echoes Jonathas's description of the image of the bloody child; for both the Jewish characters and the Christian audience, it is important to look at,

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[49] On the likelihood that the audience is included in the bishop's invitation, see Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 755; Dutton, "The Croxton Play," 63; McNabb, "Hocus Pocus." 28; and Heather Hill-Vásquez, "'The precious body of Crist that they treytyn in ther hondis': 'Miraclis Plyinge' and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Early Theatre* 4 (2001), 65-66.

and be changed by, the sorrowful vision. Unlike the interaction between the Jews and the Christ Child, the image says nothing at all to the bishop. The sight alone is overwhelming. Its power compels sorrow and distress in even this representative of the Christian faith. The bishop begs for it to turn back into bread with language that suggests looking at the image causes painful inward change for him, too: "*O Jhesu, fili Dei!* / How thys paynfull passyon rancheth myn hart! / Lord, I crye to Thee, *misere mei*, / From thys rufull syght Thou wylt reverte!" (814-17). Episcopus, like the Jews, feels the image in his heart. At his request, the image turns back into bread, and the play turns into a ritual of repentance and renewal for the audience.[50]

By the end of the play, stage miracles transform into a communal procession, affirming faith and perhaps guiding audiences through their own renewing spiritual conversion experiences. But the most sensational conversions happen to the Jewish characters, displacing the fearful power of spiritual death and rebirth beyond human control onto people that Christian audiences in the late Middle Ages could imagine as outsiders. Although conversion is not forced in the sense that no one is dragged against their protests to the baptismal font or told they must convert or die, it does not result from any agency or judgment from the play's Jewish converts. Instead, the play's theatrical spectacle depicts conversion as an embodied, sensory miracle, as much a mystery of faith as the sacrament itself. In the *Play of the Sacrament*, conversion is overwhelming and frightening, emerging from obvious theater—and from the sacred power of seeing. The bloody image of the Christ-child reaches uninvited into the hearts of those who look

[50] Sarah Beckwith notes that this ending procession could be a transition of leaving the theater space and entering a ritual space, or a transition of ritual and audience entering into the theater, in "Ritual, Church, and Theatre," 78-79. On the merging of ritual and theater in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, see Dutton, "The Croxton Play," 61-68; Donnalee Dox, "Theatrical Space, Mutable Space, and the Space of Imagination: Three Readings of the Croxton Play of the Sacrament," in *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 167–98; Hill-Vásquez, "'The Precious Body of Crist,'" especially 64-66.

on it and substitutes the usual narrative of vengeance and death for Jews in similar stories with the miracle of becoming Christian—making conversion function as a kind of deliverance akin to punishment and potentially offering audiences a venue to process the more turbulent aspects of religious change.

In the *Play of the Sacrament*, the uncontrolled, embodied, and potentially frightening experience of spiritual rebirth is projected onto the Jews and finally contained by the transition into a sacred ritual upholding the faith of the community and the strength of the Church's doctrine. During the fifteenth century, this conflation of performance, image, and religious exploration could be affirming. Heather Hill-Vásquez suggests that the *Play of the Sacrament* was a "potential site for indulging spiritual desires and exploring religious belief, while reassuringly asserting the fundamental stability and authority of Christianity."[51] More broadly, the visual and performance culture of pre-Reformation English religion closely linked theater, spectacle, and faith.[52] Sensual responses to devotional images were an acceptable, even encouraged part of worship during the late Middle Ages, and the *Play of the Sacrament* could rely on their tremendous affective influence. But if miraculous, sensational conversion in the fifteenth-century *Play of the Sacrament* could arise from the power of an image, reshape the soul, and prompt a communal ritual of repentance in the audience, what function could such miraculous conversions have when they appeared on the commercial stage, before a mixed but largely Protestant audience, after a hundred years of sporadic iconoclasm?

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[51] Heather Hill-Vásquez, "'The Precious Body of Crist," 54.
[52] Studies on the close links between liturgy, theater, and religious ceremony include Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Bevington, *Medieval Drama*; Scherb, *Staging Faith.*

A late Jacobean collaboration between Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martyr* depicts the miracles and martyrdom of Saint Dorothea during the Diocletian persecution and the multiple conversions she causes. Like the *Play of the Sacrament*, the most prominent conversions to Christianity in this play are miraculous events rather than choices, closely linked to sensory experience. But post-Reformation English religious culture had a complicated and often contradictory relationship with religious imagery and the power of the senses, never fully settling the question of what constituted idolatry despite bouts of aggressive iconoclasm.[53] Religious iconography and supernatural visions, and their apparent power to change the spectators, carried different and often dangerous meanings. While all of creation was itself a miracle, reformers argued, the kinds of clear instances of heavenly intervention in the New Testament and the early Church, were gone from the world.[54] Over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestant thinkers developed explanations for what seemed to be miraculous or unearthly visions and events that dismissed them as theater or attributed them to the frightening

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[53] The influential analysis of English iconoclasm provided by John Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (Berkley: University of California Berkley Press, 1973) has been complicated and refined by Margaret Aston in *England's Iconoclasts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), and Aston, "Cross and Crucifix in the English Reformation," *Historische Zeitschrift. Beihefte* 33 (2002), 253-72; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Walsham, "Recycling the Sacred: Material Culture and Cultural Memory after the English Reformation," *Church History* 86, no. 4 (Dec. 2017): 1121-1154; Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, part II; Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c. 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[54] The nuances of reformers' beliefs about miracles are explored by Moshe Sluhovsky in "Calvinist Miracles and the Concept of the Miraculous in Sixteenth-Century Huguenot Thought," *Renaissance and Reformation* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 5-25; also by Walsham, "Miracles in Post-Reformation England."

power of the devil. For Jacobean audiences watching *The Virgin Martyr*, the notion that a person could be converted by sensory, embodied miracles might have threatening implications.

Imagining God in Dead Things

"How can the infinite majesty and greatness of God, incomprehensible to man's mind, much more not able to be compassed with the sense, be expressed in a finite and little image?" asks the homily "Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches" (1563).[55] The homily offers extensive justification of stripping all images from churches. Humans, it reminds listeners, are innately inclined toward idolatry, and even images that might be 'things indifferent' would be perverted by spectators eager to imbue dead metals and stones with divine power.[56] Broken into three sections to be read over multiple days, "Against Peril of Idolatry" uses biblical injunctions, patristic writings, and church history to reject the possibility that spectacle could ever have any positive spiritual impact. Rather than serving as representations so that believers might honor the originals, bringing greater understanding to the ignorant, or inspiring observers to become Christian, icons and other religious imagery corrupt the faithful and inhibit conversion: "And truth it is that the Jews and Turks, who abhor images and idols as directly forbidden by God's Word, will never come to the truth of our religion while these stumbling blocks of images remain among us and lie in their way."[57]

During the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the very notion of seeing took on new and dangerous potential. "Against Peril of Idolatry" is part of *The Second*

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[55] Church of England, "An Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches," in *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition*, ed. Bray Gerald, 217-91 (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 251.
[56] Gerald 271-273.
[57] Gerald 256.

Book of Homilies, the Elizabethan addition to Cranmer's original 1547 collection.[58] Meant to unify the diverging theologies of the Reformation and to help congregations understand the new church doctrines, these official Tudor homilies, in conjunction with the Thirty-Nine Articles, explain the central tenets of conforming English Protestantism. Of the twenty additional Elizabethan homilies published in 1563, "Against Peril of Idolatry" is by far the longest.[59] Its length surpasses homilies on the Passion, the sacraments, repentance, and prayer. Although reformist beliefs about which images were acceptable, and in what contexts, were mixed and fluctuating—as Margaret Aston explains in her study of English iconoclasm, "There are almost as many kinds of iconoclasts as there are images, and in England the range of iconoclasm, ritual to clandestine, high noon to midnight, presents an unusual diversity"[60]—the homily's rejection of spectacle in favor of strict austerity reflects a pervasive Protestant distrust of the senses as a way to find God.

The iconoclastic movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stand out for more than just their massive scope. As Aston explains, compared to previous bouts of Christian iconoclasm, "there was an enlarged ideological intention and expectation" among Protestant reformers, who understood, "as none of their predecessors had seen so clearly, the possibilities of controlling minds through imagery or the destruction of imagery, loading or unloading mental

[58] For an overview of the significance of the Tudor *Books of Homilies*, see Gerald's introduction in *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition*: ix-xxi, and Ashley Null, "Official Tudor Homilies," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 348-365. For an overview focused on the 1563 Elizabethan Homilies in particular, see Brian T. Hartley, "The Liturgical Rendering of the Ecclesia Anglicana: Faithful Understanding in the Elizabethan Homilies of 1563," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 76:4 (December 2007): 489-519.
[59] Null notes that the homily "took up a quarter of the 1563 collection," attributing its length to the importance of undoing Marian Catholic practices (362).
[60] Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 11.

processes with visual effects."[61] This ideological drive went beyond the physical destruction of statues, paintings, and rood screens. Arthur Marotti, describing Protestant attempts to eradicate the perceived superstition of Catholicism, notes that reformers believed "minimal sensuous impact was best" in representations of religious ideas, and observes that the "perceived connection between aesthetic representation and idolatry was involved in Puritan hostility in Elizabethan and early Stuart England to theatre."[62] Michael O'Connell has argued that critics should view the suppression of religious drama as a triumph of iconoclasm on par with the stripping of religious images from churches.[63]

In England, the war against idolatry in all its forms was both intensely waged and unusually drawn-out. Iconoclastic projects that began under Edward VI continued or were re-invigorated under the Long Parliament.[64] In an example with particular relevance to *The Virgin Martyr*, which depicts a cross made of flowers with the power to repel a devil, the sacred images of the crucifix and the cross were especially fraught. Aston describes the slow, haphazard disappearance of these icons from the Henrician Reformation through the 1640s, beginning with only roods thought to be particularly idolatrous under Henry VIII, then the more systematic removal of roods under Edward VI, their restoral under Mary, and their removal again under Elizabeth.[65] Yet throughout Elizabeth's reign, the image of the cross remained on church documents, on stained glass windows, in the persistent use of the sign of the cross in worship and

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[61] Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 5.
[62] Arthur F. Marotti, "In Defense of Idolatry: Residual Catholic Culture and the Protestant Assault on the Sensuous in Early Modern England," *Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism*, ed. Lowell Gallagher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 28, 35.
[63] O'Connell 17.
[64] Keith Thomas, "Art and Iconoclasm in Early Modern England," *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, ed. Kenneth Finchum and Peter Lake (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006), 17; also Aston, "Cross and Crucifix," 253.
[65] Aston, "Cross and Crucifix," 255-259.

baptism, and in public monuments.[66] In fact, the queen herself continued to keep a gold cross in her own chapel, an exception notorious enough that John Martiall, an English Catholic living in exile, dedicated his *Treatise on the Cross* to Elizabeth, citing her love of the icon:

> And knowing your majesty to be one of the noblest personages that lives this day in Europe, in all princely prowess and gifts of nature equal with the chief and inferior to none, and so well affectioned to the cross (which is the matter that I have taken in hand to treat) that your Majesty has always kept it reverently in your chapel, notwithstanding many means have been made to the contrary… I have adventurously presumed to recommend and dedicate this little treatise of the cross to your Majesty.[67]

The campaign to remove the cross persisted, eventually enveloping many freestanding crosses and stained-glass windows over the course of the 1570s-1640s—but amid these removals, competing factions built new images and restored old ones.[68]

One thing that united both defenders of images and their assailants, however, was the belief that images have power. Aston says of the impetus for iconoclasm in general that it is "a representative act…One attacks the physical object to destroy the spiritual being that resides in it—or the system of belief to which it belongs."[69] Freedberg also links iconophilia and iconoclasm:

> For the love and fear of images…are indeed two sides of one coin. The arguments all rage round the same issues: the superior status of the word; the need for images to provide a channel for the more susceptible sense of sight, so that the mind can ascend to that which it otherwise could not grasp; the awareness throughout of the possibility—and the danger—of the fusion of image and prototype, of perceiving the prototype in the

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[66] Aston "Cross and Crucifix," 260-262; see also Joel Budd, "Rethinking Iconoclasm in Early Modern England: The Case of the Cheapside Cross," *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, no. 3/4 (Aug. 2000): 379-404.
[67] John Martiall, "A Treatise of the Cross (Antwerp, 1564)," in *From Icons to Idols: Documents of the Image Debate in Reformation England*, ed. David J. Davis (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2016), 99-100. Aston describes the persistence of new and restored images of the cross in "Cross and Crucifix," 262-267.
[68] Aston, "Cross and Crucifix," 262-264.
[69] Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 4.

> image and the image as the prototype itself. Indeed, that danger is sensed even by the most strenuous defenders of images, in every period.[70]

Over the course of the Reformation, the essential power of once-sacred images became dangerous instead of holy, seductive instead of sublime. If looking at a devotional image supposedly benefitted the looker, then designating those images as idolatrous meant looking at them was harmful. An image might still transform those who see it, but that transformation carried extreme risks—not only the risks of conflation Freedberg describes, but the risk of deception by immoral counterfeits of nature or contamination by the phantasms of Satan.

The risks of being changed by a sensory experience grew especially serious as a result of Protestant explanations for what seemed wondrous, inexplicable—miraculous. Beyond the danger that the eye might be tricked by illusions or deceit, Protestant theologians and demonologists argued that the most perilous aspect of relying on the senses was the power of the devil to interfere in the process. As Stuart Clark explains in his study on the senses in early modern Europe, demonic influence could intrude at every level of perception, "manipulating the world of perceived objects, tampering with the medium through which species traveled, and altering the workings of both the external and internal senses."[71] Alexandra Walsham observes that this attribution of power to Satan provided reformers with a routine and sweeping dismissal of any claims that supernatural evidence supporting Catholic doctrine, since supposed miracles themselves "provided patent proof that the Church of Rome was the Antichrist…They were either 'cunning devices' and 'juggling tricks' contrived by popish priests to delude the laity for their own profit and gain or they were examples of the extraordinary ingenuity of Lucifer, that

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[70] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 405.
[71] Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 2.

skilled manipulator of nature, that master of the arts of optical illusion and disguise."[72] But although this explanation was convenient for rejecting Catholic claims, rationalizing apparent miracles as lies of the devil radically impacted sensory epistemologies. Conceding that Satan could make false miracles indistinguishable from God's true ones would lead to chaos, but Clark argues that Protestant theories amounted to almost the same thing:

> To give [the devil] the power to deceive totally was to end in religious and moral absurdity, with no criterion for distinguishing what was really good and true from demonic copies. But to give him something just short of this was to allow for demonically contrived situations where this same criterion might be all but impossible to find.[73]

The devil possessed vast power to deceive the senses and infect the imagination, making reliance on the senses for religious experience inherently perilous.

It is in this context of protracted iconoclasm, spiritually threatening images, and Satanic interference with the senses, as well as in the wake of the suppression of religious drama and saints' plays, that *The Virgin Martyr*'s sensual miraculous conversions must be understood. While the setting in pagan antiquity may have rendered the play's spectacular miracles more palatable to Protestant believers than, say, the fifteenth-century Christian setting of the *Play of the Sacrament*, *The Virgin Martyr* still confronts audiences with religious turns that are irrational, bound up in sensory experience, and removed from human decision-making. Making conversion an act beyond human agency is doctrinally sound—that humans are powerless to save themselves and God alone converts is central to Protestant belief—but in practice, converts worked hard to insist that their turns were willing and well-reasoned. Without the material confirmation of miracles, depictions of unwilling or otherwise compelled conversions are treated

[72] Walsham, "Miracles in Post-Reformation England," 278.
[73] Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 124.

as suspect. For instance, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock's wretched plea that he might be allowed to leave the court—"I pray you, give me leave to go from hence. / I am not well. Send the deed after me / And I will sign it"—concludes the most notorious conversion to Christianity in early modern English drama (4.1.391-93).[74] He exits to Gratiano's taunting reminder that turning Christian and signing over his wealth are all that has saved him from the gallows. Shylock agrees to convert with token willingness, announcing that he is content with the sentence, but only after the Duke has threatened to withdraw his pardon if he refuses; he is defeated, choosing to become Christian over choosing his own execution but expressing no enthusiasm for his fate and no penitence for his actions or gratitude for Antonio's supposed act of mercy. This simply worded claim of unwellness is all the insight audiences are given into Shylock's feelings about his fate, and it is difficult to see how it might suggest salvation attained.

It has become a critical commonplace to note that the play is skeptical of Shylock's conversion, and that it is not truly accepted by the other characters, who persist in calling him "Jew" and give no indication that they will accept him in their Christian society.[75] *The Merchant of Venice* ends with the question of whether Shylock can be a true convert unanswered, leaving him, as Heather Hirschfeld describes, "in his role on the verge of a predetermined salvation or damnation that remains unknown to [the Venetians]."[76] The success or failure of his conversion,

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[74] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis (London & New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010).
[75] Influential works that have advocated seeing the conversions of Shylock (and Jessica) as fraught and bound up with racial, ethnic, and/or gender identities include Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*; Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in* The Merchant of Venice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Mary Janell Metzger, "'Now by My Hood, a Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity," *PMLA* 113, no. 1 (1998): 52-63.
[76] Heather Anne Hirschfeld, "We All Expect a Gentle Answer, Jew': *The Merchant of Venice* and the Psychotheology of Conversion," *ELH* 73, no. 1 (2006), 70.

and thus the status of his soul, remains invisible to the audience and to the other characters. That invisibility, disconcerting though it is in *The Merchant of Venice*'s comic ending, fits well within predestinarian theology—as does Shylock's lack of agency in his own turn. Shylock's decidedly unfree and indeterminate conversion provides an example of a dramatic turn that offers nothing to mitigate the anxieties of Protestant doctrine, which severed the link between salvation and human actions and desires. As William Perkins explains in *A Graine of Musterd-Seede* (1597), humans can take no credit for their conversions: "This is the work of God, and of God alone."[77] Conversion was something that happened *to* a person, not something they chose to do. The proliferation of attempts to justify inter-faith conversions were, on this level, superfluous.

In the *Play of the Sacrament*, the sensory power of the converting miracle overcomes the Jews' unwillingness to become Christians and offers theatrical proof of their turns. The final sections of this chapter focus on two scenes of turning Christian in *The Virgin Martyr* that engage with debates over the treacherous power of the senses and the potential theatricality of miracles, raising the possibility that both are untrustworthy and dangerous only to embrace spectacular, sensual forms of conversion. *The Virgin Martyr*'s use of miraculous conversion is not only a vestige of the Catholic past, an indicator of the lingering present of English Catholicism, or an example of the difficulties of escaping Catholic performance traditions in a Protestant theater—although the play can certainly be linked to these dynamics. Instead, it takes advantage of the tensions that emerge through using the practices, technologies, and expectations of a miracle play to explore the confounding, even threatening potential of affective conversion experiences while still ultimately affirming them as providential. *The Virgin Martyr* employs

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[77] William Perkins, *A Graine of Musterd-Seede*, in *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Abingdon, Berkshire, UK: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 393.

sensory miracles first to raise the possibility that conversion experiences might be dangerous and uncontrolled, then to embrace the salvific potential of turning Christian upon compulsion.

"Let not my love be call'd idolatry"

The Virgin Martyr begins and ends with conversion. Conflating the legends of St. Agnes and St. Dorothea, it tells the story of a beautiful Christian virgin living in Roman Caesarea who rejects the love of the governor's son, converts two other maidens, proves miraculously inviolable to rape and torture, and, after she is finally executed, converts her chief tormenter by sending him a heavenly fruit basket.[78] Much of the criticism of *The Virgin Martyr* has focused on Dorothea's martyrdom or on debating the play's Catholic or Protestant sympathies.[79] However, as Holly Crawford Pickett notes, *The Virgin Martyr* makes conversion as central as Dorothea's spectacular martyrdom.[80] The play begins with characters celebrating the conversion of two young women *back* to paganism and away from Christianity; it ends with its primary antagonist embracing Christianity and receiving divine confirmation of his turn's success as he dies a martyr. Pickett, examining *The Virgin Martyr*'s depictions of serial converts, argues that the play ultimately makes turning Christian "both dramatic and spectacular," emphasizing the link between conversion and performance and raising questions about the ways that the rhetoric of

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[78] For more on the conflation of the saints' legends and the sources of *The Virgin Martyr*, see Julia Gasper, "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*," *The Review of English Studies* 42, no. 165 (Feb. 1991):17-31.
[79] On *The Virgin Martyr*'s depictions of martyrdom, see especially Myhill, "Making Death a Miracle"; Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Recycled Models: Catholic Martyrdom and Embodied Resistance to Conversion in *The Virgin Martyr* and other Red Bull Plays," in *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010): 73-120; and Monta, "Martyrdom, Nostalgia, and Political Engagement."
[80] Holly Crawford Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's 'The Virgin Martyr,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 49, no. 2 (2009): 437–62.

'reason' can be abused by giving much of that rhetoric to the play's pagan persecutors.[81] Like Pickett, I see *The Virgin Martyr* as a play that "embraces the theatricality of conversion" and credits visual spectacle as a legitimate component of becoming Christian.[82] But while Pickett argues that *The Virgin Martyr* contrasts the "corrupt rhetoric of reason" of the violent torturers with Dorothea's "reason of the soul,"[83] I argue that the play embraces a model of conversion that uses sensuality and spectacle as agents of change to suggest that conversion might involve ravishment rather than reason and to explore the uncertain boundaries between human will and overwhelming divine power.

The first of the play's two miraculous conversions transforms idolatrous romantic love into pious love of God. Near the end of *The Virgin Martyr*, Dorothea asks an angel to aid her in converting the lovesick Roman war hero Antoninus, transforming his adoration of her into adoration of her religion.[84] Her request is granted; Antoninus dies a Christian the moment he sees Dorothea's head struck from her body. But if Shylock's turn is a relatively clear example of forced conversion—or at the very least unwilling and coerced conversion—with uncertain results, the impetus behind Antoninus's change is decidedly more muddled, while its outcome is unmistakable. Antoninus never consents to become Christian, but he is a sympathetic and believable convert, admiring Dorothea's faith and expressing doubt in his own gods. His whole-hearted embrace of Christianity comes only after angelic intervention, but Antoninus, unlike

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[81] Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion," 452.
[82] Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion," 455.
[83] Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion," 445.
[84] All references to *The Virgin Martyr* use Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martyr*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 3: 365-480.

Shylock, provides irrefutable evidence of conversion's success: he dies, and reappears later in a miraculous vision of heavenly martyrs.

From the start, *The Virgin Martyr* gives cause to doubt human decisions to convert and human ability to persevere in faith. The play opens with the fanatical but sincere and devout Theophilus, persecutor of Christians, discussing the conversions—already plural—of his daughters Caliste and Christeta with his secretary Harpax, a disguised devil intent on driving Theophilus to ever-greater cruelty in his attempts to suppress the spread of Christianity. Caliste and Christeta had become Christians; discovered by Harpax, they endured torture and refused to recant, but relented in response to their father's horror and pleading at their suffering, returning to Theophilus's pagan faith. Narrated from the perspective of the pagan Theophilus and Harpax—not yet revealed as a devil to the audience—the play's initial flip-flopping conversions offer two paradigms. Turning Christian is irrational and sensual: "Seduc'd by an imagined faith, not reason," Theophilus's daughters had "yeelded vp themselues / To this new found religion" (1.1.29-32). Returning to paganism, on the other hand, is motivated by compassion and pious respect for their patriarch: "I kneeld, and wept, and begd them though they would / Be cruell to themselues, they would take pittie / On my gray haires," Theophilus recalls (1.1.187-189). Starting in the first scene, the play questions and complicates converts' motives by suggesting that virtues such as piety and love might be unreliable guides, while an experience of true conversion might be perceived as seductive force. Caliste and Christeta are brave in the face of torture, moved to convert back to paganism by love and kindness, not fear or pain: "Now note a sodaine change, / Which I with joy remember, those whom torture / Nor feare of death could terrifie, were orecome / By seeing of my suffrings, and so wonne, / Returning to the faith that they were borne in" (1.1.189-193). They declare themselves to be devoted to their father's gods,

and the play gives no reason to doubt them or believe them to be self-serving, since other characters describe them as constant and persuasive. Their good qualities—compassion and love for their father, loyalty as daughters—cause them to fall back into error.

While Caliste and Christeta do find their way back to Christianity and die as martyrs (although less glorious martyrs than the unfaltering Dorothea, the play emphasizes), the inadequacy of human motives and the failure of humans to remain steadfast remains central throughout the play. The comic duo of Hircius and Spungius, lecherous and drunken servants Dorothea had converted to Christianity, switch back and forth between pagan and Christian at every whim, declaring themselves "halfe Pagans and halfe Christians" (2.1.41). They are moved by greed, lust, resentment, poverty, and even, briefly, compassion, never committing fully to any faith. Caliste and Christeta ultimately do better, but the reason for that may be linked to the reason Antoninus is later able to become a Christian. Their final conversion—their third—takes place in the presence of Dorothea's beloved servant boy, Angelo, who is eventually revealed to be an angel.

The Virgin Martyr makes strange use of its stage devil and angel. Unlike more famous examples of unearthly forces like the Good Angel and many devils of *Doctor Faustus* or the weird sisters of *Macbeth*, neither Angelo nor Harpax make their inhuman power readily apparent to the audience during the first acts. They provide hints, but not straightforward admissions, that they are denizens of heaven and hell, working toward the salvation and damnation of the play's other characters. The audience certainly guesses Angelo's true identity before Dorothea learns of it during her death scene in act four, but his appearance to her as she stands on the scaffold awaiting beheading is the first time he appears *as* an angel: *"Enter* Angelo *in the Angels habit*" (4.3.113sd). Even though it should not come as a surprise, the revelation of Angelo's nature

gives retrospective weight to his presence in other scenes, such as the conversion of Theophilus's daughters. Persuaded to return to Christianity by Dorothea's arguments, they remain firm in this last conversion. Angelo is not credited with their turn, but his presence during it seems important; even Dorothea believes he inspires constancy, insisting he remain when Christeta asks that he leave: "He must not leaue me, without him I fall" (3.1.63). When Dorothea is beaten in 4.2, it is Angelo—unseen by the other characters but visible to the audience—who holds her fast and prevents her from succumbing to the blows. After revealing his divine nature, Angelo tells Dorothea that he has been won by her steadfast faith and charity, but even praising her at the moment of her death, he makes sure to emphasize that *she* was not the cause. Instead, he combines her faithfulness with God's authority: "Your zealous prayers and pious deeds first wonne me / (But 'twas by his command to whom you sent 'em) / To guide your steps" (4.3.135-137). As an emissary of God, Angelo can inspire resoluteness in Dorothea and perhaps Caliste and Christeta. He can also, it seems, enact conversion.

He does this most unambiguously during the conversion of Antoninus moments before Dorothea's death. The Antoninus of act four is a sympathetic character, a virtuous and devoted (though rejected) suitor to Dorothea and an admired war hero. He is not, however, a ready convert to Christianity. He has known of Dorothea's religion since act one, and has made no attempts to join her sect, even to persuade Dorothea to marry him, only offering to let her remain a Christian as his wife. When Antoninus is first caught wooing Dorothea, Artemia, the emperor's daughter and the woman he is supposed to marry, demands, "Is this your Idoll, traitor, which thou kneelst to, / Trampling vpon my beauty?" (2.3.111-112). The romantic devotion to Dorothea that makes him sympathetic also makes him idolatrous. Even as his conversion scene begins, Antoninus worships Dorothea more than any god: "Is this the place where virtue is to

suffer, / And heauenly beauty leauing this base earth, / To make a glad returne from whence it came, / Is it *Macrinus*?" he asks his friend upon seeing Dorothea's scaffold (4.3.1-4). He longs to die rather than be without her, since she provides more light to him than "the glorious Sun himself" (4.3.22). This is the language of sonnets, equating the love-object to heaven and making her the god[dess] of his idolatry, not the language of a man seeking a new faith. The closest he comes to expressing the desire to convert and recognizing his own religion as an error still takes the form as only reverence for Dorothea:

> How sweet her innocence appears, more like
> To heauen it selfe then any sacrifice
> That can be offerd to it. By my hopes
> Of ioyes hereafter, the sight makes me doubtfull
> In my beleefe, nor can I thinke our gods
> Are good, or to be seru'd, that take delight
> In offrings of this kinde, that to maintaine
> Their power, deface the masterpiece of nature,
> Which they themselues come short of. (4.3.33-41)

Antoninus doubts the goodness of his gods but does not dismiss their reality. He may be prepared to reject the Roman gods, but the Christian god remains strange to him: "What god so ere thou art that must enjoy her, / Receiue in her a boundlesse happinesse" (4.3.43-44). In response to Dorothea's prediction of her heavenly glory, Anontinus responds, "O take me thither with you," but this also falls short of asking to be converted (4.3.94). Antoninus is not prepared to die a Christian martyr; he wants to die a follower of Dorothea.

Rather than Antoninus choosing to convert in order to join Dorothea or even out of inspiration from her innocent suffering, *Dorothea* chooses his conversion for him. Angelo offers to give her any gift she desires before she dies, and she asks for a miracle: "Grant that the loue of this yong man to me, / In which he languisheth to death, may be / Chang'd to the loue of heauen" (4.3.148-52). This is not the image-power of the *Play of the Sacrament*—Antoninus looks at

Dorothea, not at Angelo. Dorothea asks for Antoninus's conversion as a boon from a heavenly power, one that Antoninus cannot even see—"what object / Is her eye fixd on?" he wonders as she gazes at Angelo in his angel's habit (4.3.125-26). His turn is troubling in its sensuality and irresistibility. After all, his devotional gaze is fixed on the woman he desires, a living saint, the sort of virgin martyr whose dead image might have once graced England's churches, while an outside agent changes him without his knowledge or consent.[85] In act three, Antoninus's father raises the possibility that his son is a malleable object in language that explicitly evokes the fearful power of seeing: "She's a Witch…my sonne / Is charmed by her enticing eyes, and like / An image made of waxe, her beames of beauty / Melt him to nothing" (3.1.2-6). Here, Antoninus is the one compared to an image, but not a particularly lively one, and the exchange of looking between him and Dorothea—her "beams of beauty" that recall theories of devilish interference with the senses—is frightening to his pagan father. That malleability is confirmed in his conversion, which is not inspired by angelic proof or produced to Dorothea's arguments. She asks that his love be changed, and Angelo responds, "I will performe it" (4.3.152). The will to turn is Dorothea's, and the action is Angelo's.

As Antoninus describes his own experience of conversion, it is something done *to* him, a force to which he passively yields and which he does not seek to understand: "I feele a holy fire / That yeelds a comfortable heate within me. / I am quite alterd from the thing I was. / See I can stand, and goe alone, thus kneele / To heauenly *Dorothea*, touch her hand / With a religious kisse" (4.3.160-165). He compares the feeling of turning Christian to an inward fire, evocative of both romantic passion and biblical fires—burning bushes, pillars of fire, tongues of flame—and

[85] For a description of the cult of virgin saints in England, see Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 171-178.

of the fires of martyrdom. Fire reshapes what it touches, and even though this fire produces a "comfortable heate" rather than agony, it is unmistakably a force that reshapes Antoninus. He is powerlessly "alterd" from what he was; when he dies twenty lines later, he is without doubt a Christian. While the play makes it clear that Antoninus does not choose his conversion and plays no active role in turning himself Christian, Antoninus's conversion gives him what he wants: a way to follow Dorothea into paradise. The altering inner fire gives him the strength to follow in her footsteps, walking to her scaffold to kneel and take her hand. When she is beheaded, Antoninus longs for his soul to follow hers: "O take my soule along to waite on thine" (4.3.180). He dies instantly, wish granted, appearing once more in the final scene, as part of a procession of glorious martyrs dressed in white.

The Virgin Martyr does not show its romantic hero converting in response to witnessing a divine miracle; instead, it uses its theatrical angel to represent the divine miracle of conversion to audiences. The will and power of saint and angel coalesce with Antoninus's love and longing to render a conversion that is both imposed on the convert and embraced by him. Angelo is visible to the audience but not to Antoninus, making Antoninus's conversion more legible to viewers than to the convert himself. But his joyful acceptance of his new state suggests that Antoninus does not need to interpret what has happened to him. He receives it as grace, and prepares the audience for another, even more wondrous turn in the final act: that of Theophilus, the bloodthirsty and obsessive persecutor who killed his own daughters rather than let them live as Christians. Antoninus's unasked-for change makes the invisible, mysterious power of heaven tangible, providing an example of an arbitrarily chosen recipient of grace and preparing the way for Theophilus's even less earned, and less desired, turn to a new faith.

Evidence of Things Not Seen

The final and most miraculous conversion in *The Virgin Martyr* takes place in the final act, with the transformation of Theophilus from fanatical persecutor of Christians to celebrated Christian martyr. Theophilus's character and role in the story is the most significant change the play makes to its source material, and, I argue, does the most work to turn a narrative of early Christian martyrdom into an opportunity to scrutinize the process of conversion and its connection to the senses. In other versions of Dorothea's legend, Theophilus is a minor character, a chance for the saint to perform one last miracle.[86] He takes no part in her official persecution or execution; he is merely a spectator at her death, a lawyer who mocks her on her way to the scaffold by asking her to send roses and apples from heaven. Dorothea prays, a child appears to give him this gift, the proof converts him on the spot, and she goes on to her martyrdom.[87] But in *The Virgin Martyr*, Theophilus is arguably both antagonist and protagonist. The play's action opens and closes with him, gives him the most conflicted emotions, allows him to voice skepticism of theatrical miracles, insists on the sincerity of his beliefs, and provides him with a climactic and heroic martyrdom. Louise George Clubb contrasts the static character of Dorothea with Theophilus, arguing that "It is Theophilus who most nearly resembles a

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[86] In Gasper's survey of possible sources, Theophilus's scene is always brief; Gasper suggests that the playwrights drew on St. Paul for a more prominent persecutor-turned-martyr, in "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*, 20-22.
[87] Gasper, "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*," 20.

protagonist of classical tragedy."[88] By focusing not only on Theophilus's story, but often on his perspective, *The Virgin Martyr* creates a disconcerting representation of conversion and persecution, complicating the narrative and preparing the audience for a final turn that relies on the astonishing power of a sensory experience to overcome intractable resistance to Christianity.

The Virgin Martyr makes Theophilus a zealous persecutor of Christians with a mandate from the governor Sapritius and the Roman emperor Diocletian. He places the destruction of Christianity above everything else in his life, preferring to be a "rooter out of Christians" over being ruler of all the kingdoms of the world (1.1.72). But the play emphasizes that he is devout and not corrupt, motivated by his piety and complete faith in his religion. His willingness to persecute his own daughters is simultaneously evidence of his wickedness and of his earnestness and impartiality, and he takes no pleasure in their torment, describing "a strange contention in me, / Betweene the impartiall office of a Iudge, / And pitty of a father" (1.1.180-182). When he believes his daughters have won Dorothea away from Christianity, he reacts with joy and welcome: "Let me embrace in you my blisse, my comfort / And *Dorothea* now more welcome too, / Then if you neuer had falne off, I am rauish't / With the excesse of ioy" (3.2.34-37). His happiness at believing Dorothea is won recalls the father in the parable of the prodigal son, gladder at her return than if she had never been lost. Of course, he is mistaken; Dorothea has won his daughters, not the other way around, and when they throw down and spit on the statue of

[88] Clubb, "*The Virgin Martyr* and the Tragedia Sacra," 209. Larry S. Champion argues in favor of Antoninus as the play's "single credibly dynamic or developing character," since he "moves from a secular concern for love and martial achievement to a contempt for life without Dorothea and the spiritual qualities she which she embodies," in "'Disaster With So Many Joys': Structure and Perspective in Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*," in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 1 (1984), 204. However, I argue that both Antoninus and Theophilus change through miracles, not development, and Theophilus is a significantly more prominent character throughout the play.

Jupiter, proving it, at least, is not a miraculous image, his first reaction is to be aghast at their blasphemy. This quickly becomes a murderous frenzy, and he kills his daughters before the altar, praying that "hels dreadfull porter / Receiue into thy euer open gates / Their damned souls" (3.2.116-118). The play fully embraces the trope of the furious, vengeful persecutor in Theophilus, but it also repeatedly emphasizes his piety and absolute faith. In the moment he kills his daughters, he declares himself sure of Elysium.

Theophilus is totally opposed to Christianity, unshakeable in his pagan faith, and sure of his scholarship and rationality. For him to convincingly yield and join Dorothea's religion, after four acts of single-minded persecution, a miracle is required—one that must compel his senses enough to overcome his skepticism. Moments before her execution, he mocks her belief that she will go to paradise and eat heavenly fruit by challenging her, "If there be any truth in your religion…pray send me some / Small pittance of that curious fruit you bost of" (4.3.104-107). Although Dorothea carefully asserted earlier in act four that she can work no miracles, she is certain of her ability to meet this challenge: "Though thou art most vnworthy to tast of it, / I can and will" (4.3.112-13). The delivery of this fruit basket is the second boon she asks of Angelo.

Theophilus's conversion at the beginning of act five is a sensual experience, even more so than the inner fire that changes Antoninus as he gazes at Dorothea. It begins with Theophilus reflecting on his enthusiastic torment of the Christians and comparing his work to that of a painter, who, "When he has made some admirable peece, / Stands off, and with a searching eye examines / Each colour, how tis sweetened, and then hugs / Himselfe for his rare workemanship" (5.1.6-9). This violent yet distanced image is quickly replaced by more astonishing visions with more powerful impacts on Theophilus's senses. In the previous act, upon hearing heavenly music at Dorothea's death, Theophilus dismissed it as "Illusions of the Diuell / Wrought by some one

of her Religion, / That fane would make her death a miracle" (4.3.188-190). As Myhill points out, the music is not an illusion in the fiction of the play, but it is an illusion of the theater.[89] Theophilus's declaration is a startling reminder of the play's theatricality, and it underscores the possibility that miracles might be devilish tricks. Yet this illusion of music is cued again as Angelo enters Theophilus's study carrying the basket of heavenly fruit and flowers, and Theophilus has a different reaction. "Are you amaz'd Sir," Angelo asks, "So great a Roman spirit and does it tremble" (5.1.45-46). Hearing the music and seeing the angel prompts an immediate and visceral response.

Angelo delivers his basket with word of Dorothea's forgiveness and vanishes. Presented with a miracle from heaven, one that will save his soul, Theophilus's initial reply highlights the dangerous implications of this converting miracle: "Tis a tempting fruit" (5.1.56). The sign of a saint's forgiveness, evidence of Christian heaven, and, perhaps, agent of Theophilus's conversion also evokes the Fall. For a moment, before Theophilus becomes a Christian, the fruit holds the potential of sacred converting power and dangerous trick. Theophilus describes the fruit as "Sweete smelling" and the flowers as more beautiful than any in the emperor's gardens but remains unsure of whether or not it is a trap sent by Dorothea (5.1.58). Nevertheless, he cannot seem to resist: "I am sure / This is essentiall, and how ere it growes, / Will taste it" (5.1.78-80). He eats the tempting fruit—and does, in fact, fall, inflicted with the sudden awareness of his sins. Harpax's laughter surrounds him as he has a vision of *being* seen: "all this ground me thinks is bloudy, / And pau'd with thousands of those Christians eyes / Whom I haue tortur'd, and they stare vpon me" (5.1.102-104). In this case, the audience does not have access to his bloody vision. Theophilus seems to know that his new way of seeing comes from "a power

[89] Myhill, "Making Death a Miracle," 14.

diuine" that shines on his soul "And makes me see a conscience all stai'nd ore, / Nay drown'd and damn'd for euer in Christian gore" (5.1.115-118). Unlike Antoninus, and unlike the Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament*, the harrowing, unsought experience of conversion for Theophilus does not result in instantaneous Christian identity. Instead, his change forces him to see his own damnation, and despair.

But this is not where his conversion ends. In Theophilus's despair, Harpax appears to demand his allegiance and claim his soul. Yet Theophilus continues to eat and finds another visual power his fruit and flowers as Harpax recoils: "My Fruit! / Does this offend thee? see" (5.1.133-134). He forces Harpax to look at this miracle, and when that seems to frighten the devil, Theophilus forces him to look at the miraculous flowers, too: "Art thou with this affrighted? See, heares more" (5.1.136). He finds his most powerful sacred image, however, at the bottom of the basket, where the flowers form a cross, and makes Harpax once again "see" (5.1.139), driving away the devil with this icon.[90] It is only after seeing the image of the cross that Theophilus explicitly refers to himself as a Christian, not just a sinner in despair: "I serue a better Master," he declares, and grasps the possibility of traveling to the next world to beg Dorothea's forgiveness.

Theophilus's turn is overtly sensual; he sees, hears, smells, touches, and tastes the miracle that changes him. At the end of his conversion scene, Theophilus repeats the act of looking that that he began with, but what he sees has changed. Rather than reflecting on his persecution of the Christians like a painter eyeing his work, he has a clearer vision. His ways of

[90] Elizabeth Williamson describes *The Virgin Martyr*'s use of the cross in this scene as invoking the audience's nostalgia for the materiality of religion in relative safety by associating it with a sympathetic and helpless female martyr and by making it a cross of flowers rather than metal or wood, in *The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 132-133.

seeing have been transformed by looking at Angelo: "Oh come back rauishing Boy, bright Messenger, / Thou hast (by these mine eyes fixt on thy beauty) / Illumined all my soule, now looke I backe / On my blacke Tyranies" (5.1.166-170). Angelo does not return in this moment, but Theophilus, with his newly ravished and illuminated soul, commits himself to martyrdom.

In a final parallel with the conversions of the incredulous Jews in the *Play of the Sacrament*, Theophilus is given no place among the living Christians in *The Virgin Martyr*. He rescues the remaining Christians awaiting execution, enlisting Antoninus's friend Macrinus to help them escape, but he does not join them in fleeing. Instead, he seeks to suffer the fate he inflicted on so many Christians before, begging for torture and death as "an easie penance" (5.2.177). For Theophilus, salvation and punishment converge in feeling the "studied crueltie" (5.2.182) he inflicted on other Christians. However, rather than wandering in penance, Theophilus finds assurance in his death, and that assurance is made visible to the audience through one more theatrical miracle. As Theophilus is stretched on the rack, he has a vision—this time shared by the audience—of Angelo leading Dorothea, dressed in white and wearing a martyr's crown, at the head of a procession of the play's martyrs. Angelo holds a crown for Theophilus, who responds with joy at this material proof of his conversion's success:

> Most glorious vision,
> Did ere so hard a bed yield man a dreame
> So heauenly as this? Iam confirm'd,
> Confirm'd you blessed spirits, and make hast
> To take that crowne of immortality…
> Oh now I feele thee, blessed spirits I come,
> And witnesse for me, all these wounds and scares,
> I die a souldier in the Christian warres. (5.2.220-233)

With this celebration that he is confirmed and final request to be witnessed, Theophilus dies.

By repurposing the sensory, affective mode of miraculous conversion that appears in the *Play of the Sacrament*, this Jacobean tragedy embraces a model of conversion that surrenders

rationality and justification and succumbs to the fearful power of being overcome and transformed by a supernatural force. *The Virgin Martyr*'s unwilling yet joyful converts and theatrical miracles attempt to reconcile the conflict between the doctrine that God alone is responsible for turning the heart and the risk and doubts that accompany forced conversions. *The Virgin Martyr* can ultimately affirm its characters' sensual and compelled conversions because that same sensuality and spectacle could also provide a surety that audiences lacked outside of theater; the certain declaration "I am confirmed" was not available to Protestants before death. The idea that religious transformation is beyond human control, an overpowering force of providence, could be frightening. But *The Virgin Martyr* uses theatrical, material conversion to reject the idea that spiritual change results from rational arguments or active human choices in favor of accepting it as a miracle of grace, beyond the comprehension of its human beneficiaries. Through its depiction of conversion as an overwhelming sensory experience, the play presents—without negating—both the promise and danger of human powerlessness.

III

Bruised and Hardened Hearts: The Temporality of Despair in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* and *Doctor Faustus*

"Despair therefore, and die" (5.3.120) commands the specter of Prince Edward of Lancaster in the final act of *Richard III*, haunting Richard's dreams and leading a procession of ghosts who reiterate his decree.[1] It is not enough that Richard should perish; he must "die in terror of thy guiltiness" (5.3.170), not only condemned to hell but recognizing his own damnation. Richard's victims repeat verbatim that he should "despair and die" another eight times.[2] The reasoning behind the command to despair appears straightforward: Richard is obviously wicked, and he has every reason to despair of salvation. Understanding this and succumbing to despair will increase his suffering before his death, and perhaps guarantee his damnation, providing his victims with earthly and divine justice. But if Richard's angry ghosts seek retribution, telling him to despair is also a risky maneuver. Upon awakening, Richard experiences something close to tragic anagnorisis—and he has his single glance at repentance. That repentance falls far short of success, but it is the only moment in the play where he earnestly attends to his conscience, and briefly lets it control him: "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, / And every tongue brings in a several tale, / And every tale condemns me for a villain" (5.3.193-195). He acknowledges that his nightmare has "struck more terror to the soul of Richard / Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers" (5.3.217-219). Richard's conscience is pricked, and for a few minutes on the night before his death, he takes what could

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[1] All references to *Richard III* are from William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. James R. Siemon, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).
[2] 5.3.126, 5.3.127, 5.3.135, 5.3.140, 5.3.143, 5.3.148, 5.3.156, 5.3.163.

be the first step toward a moral conversion: he sees his sinfulness clearly, and despairs. There is an urgency to the ghosts' demand that he should follow despair with immediate death. If he does not, he just might find salvation.

Within this project about turning, chapter three is a turning point. The first two chapters focused on plays featuring characters who seem to sincerely find spiritual rebirth through becoming Christian. The plays analyzed in those chapters raise questions about the method and certainty of conversion, but they consistently embrace the process as a positive development, one that prevents or undermines tragic endings. Quisara wants to convert and seeks a paradigm to follow; Antoninus and Theopholis do not express the same desire to turn, but are converted and prevail over their enemies in death anyway. *The Island Princess* and *The Virgin Martyr* explore the possibilities of conversion as a redemptive ending, delving into the relationship between the desire to convert and the capacity to be converted. Within those plays, conversion is a movement from one religious identity to another, and thus from one community to another, a resolution to inter-faith conflicts. But although entering into a new faith was one distinct possible way to turn, it was not the only way; conversion, the process of repenting and turning away from sin or error and toward grace, was, as Michael Questier explains, "at the centre of all Christian life, and thus a necessity for all the Church's members."[3] Chapter three pivots away from studying conversions as triumphant finales to focus more narrowly on dramatic depictions of a single, dangerous step that might begin a conversion journey toward Christianity or a conversion journey within Christianity, a step that might facilitate tragic endings: despair.

[3] Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40.

In this chapter, I focus on two dramatic representations of moral conversion: one, a scripturally attested success; the other, an unambiguous failure. Reading these two outcomes together reveals ways that drama could dwell on despair as a state of spiritual potential, containing the simultaneous possibilities of salvation or damnation. After describing the theological complexity of differentiating damning despair from saving despair, I examine how despair features in performances of successful conversion in the contexts of commercial drama, Protestant biblical drama, and moral interlude, focusing particularly on Lewis Wager's mid-sixteenth-century *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*. I conclude by reconsidering the role of despair in the play that has dominated studies of despair in early modern drama, leading critics to focus on it as an inevitably tragic, damning sin: Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1590).[4] The ghosts in *Richard III* echo what has become early modern drama's defining depiction of religious anguish, Faustus's self-reflection on his tormented soul: "Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die!" (5.1.48).[5] In comparing Faustus's declarations of hopelessness with those of more effective penitents, I do not seek to shed light on whether Marlowe's protagonist is fated to hell or damns himself—the ambiguity is the point. Instead, I argue that *Doctor Faustus* uses the dread and hope of despair as a source of narrative tension. By making Faustus's despair closely resemble the despair of successful stage converts, the play scrutinizes despair as an

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[4] See, for instance, Helen Gardner, "The Damnation of Faustus," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Doctor Faustus, ed. Willard Farnham (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 35-42; Arieh Sachs, "The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63, no. 4 (1964): 625–47l; John Stachniewski's chapter on *Doctor Faustus*, "*Doctor Faustus* and Puritan Culture: Confronting the Persecutory Imagination," *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 292-331.
[5] All references to *Doctor Faustus* use Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005). Unless otherwise noted, citations are to the A-text.

integral, yet agonizing and precarious, step toward conversion. In depicting Faustus repeating—and then retreating from—that same initial step over and over, the play suggests that Faustus's failure is not simply that he despairs of deliverance, but that he is unwilling to plunge into his despair and trust that the suffering might lead him to salvation.

In both Catholic and Protestant tradition, falling into despair indicated a breakdown of belief in God's mercy and carried the threat of eternal damnation. But in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant conversion narratives and theological treatises, despair was also a prominent step in the conversion process, the "mollifying of the heart, the which must be bruised in pieces that it may be fit to receive God's saving grace offered unto it."[6] Despair might raise the possibility of hell, but confronting spiritual anguish and declaring oneself to be hopeless of salvation was no guarantee of damnation.[7] However, the risk of being driven to sinful despair by an afflicted conscience was of real concern among early modern Protestants, appearing in pastoral guides, medical treatises, and autobiographies.[8] Susan Snyder, in her study of despair in medieval and Renaissance literature, contends that "The whole Protestant emphasis on man's

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[6] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, UK: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 228.

[7] John Stachniewski's argument in *The Persecutory Imagination* that predestinarian doctrine led to widespread introspective suffering, with a fear of reprobation that "invaded the most intimate thought processes where…it actively persecuted its host" (7), has been critiqued for flattening the nuances of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century experiences of sorrow and repentance by Iver Kaufman, *Prayer, Despair, and Drama: Elizabethan Introspection*, Studies in Anglican History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Alec Ryrie, "Despair and Salvation," in *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199565726.003.0003; and Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Oxford Scholarship Online, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198739654.003.0006.

[8] See Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*, The History of Medicine in Context (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 20007); Mary Ann Lund, "Reading and the Cure of Despair in 'The Anatomy of Melancholy,'" *Studies in Philology* 105, no. 4 (2008): 533–58; Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy*.

complete unworthiness and helplessness tended to reinforce the paradox of despair, to make it at once more necessary and more terrible."[9] Drama thrived on that paradox of despair as both vital to conversion and potentially damning, using it to create suspense as characters either fell into final, damning despair or began a spiritual transformation.

In this chapter, I argue that studying representations of despair in a religious context where a desperate conscience might be an aid or an inhibitor reveals how drama could magnify the latent terror of entering the conversion process. As Snyder explains, "Whether despair is seen as the last stage in a life of sin or as the beginning of a life of holiness, it is itself a state full of spiritual peril."[10] The anguish of confronting one's sins and recognizing the helplessness of humanity was a terrible experience that would be worth it if it led to conversion, but which might mire the potential convert in final, damning despair. More than any other condition, despair illuminated the precariousness of undergoing conversion—at least as humanity perceived it, without providential knowledge of how the conversion journey would end. Believers in predestination could assume that there was never any chance of the elect being damned or the reprobate being saved, but as Karen Bruhn has argued, the unwavering certainty of providence was outside of the temporal human experience.[11] Conversion was a venture that demanded the would-be-convert hazard their soul, possibly descending into despair without the surety of salvation on the other side.

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[9] Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965), 23. https://doi.org/10.2307/2857068.
[10] Snyder, "The Left Hand of God," 48.
[11] Karen Bruhn, "'Sinne Unfoulded': Time, Election, and Disbelief among the Godly in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Church History* 77, no. 3 (Sept. 2008): 574-595.

Drama could highlight the sense of contingency within this spiritual gamble, drawing on the relationship between despair, conversion, and time as a source of uncertainty and conflict. A character falling into seemingly damning despair could be a character beginning to convert, and a character appearing to genuinely convert might yet fall into final despair. James Mardock has suggested that theater provided a microcosm of living in a world governed by predestination, since "It offered a type of unknowable providence in the invisible playwright, and a version of the reformed believer in the figure of the player, whose words and actions are only ambivalently his, and who is perhaps only vaguely aware of the play as a whole and his character's predestined end."[12] But it was not only players or characters who navigated the play in a kind of experiential time rather than with full providential awareness; audiences experienced plays with an alertness to the closed narrative and with felt, shared time with the characters on stage. As Musa Gurnis points out, "the basic, declared goal of early modern stagecraft was to guide collective audience experience."[13] Matthew Wagner argues that theater creates its own unique sense of time:

> As time gains form and shape on the stage, it does so most often in ways that are neither literally seen or heard, nor only understood; rather, such temporal embodiment acts more holistically upon our sensory and cognitive modes of perception, turning the abstraction of time into a present—that is, immediate, in both the *here* and the *now*—reality. [14]

In theater, Wagner explains, audiences feel the present moment along with the narrative significance of the past and the looming awareness of *an* end, if not the exact knowledge of *the*

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[12] James D. Mardock, "'Reformation in a flood': The Religious Turn's Second Wave," in *Stages of Engagement: Drama and Religion in Post-Reformation England*, ed. J.D. Mardock and K. R. McPherson (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Press, 2014), 17.
[13] Musa Gurnis, *Mixed Faith and Shared Feeling: Theater in Post-Reformation London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 51.
[14] Matthew Wagner, *Shakespeare, Theatre, and Time* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

end. This layered manifestation of time enabled plays to experiment with religious despair, a spiritual state that can only be properly understood at its end. When the language of despair might indicate the beginning of moral transformation or lead to final, tragic doom, theater could delve into the feelings of horror and risk involved in converting. By treating despair as a possible starting point to conversion, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* and *Doctor Faustus* suggest that theater provided a testing ground for audiences to consider the theological difficulties of despair's simultaneous potential to convert or condemn by exploring what happens when characters confront their iniquity and are driven to repent—but not as the plot's resolution.

The Necessity of Despair

Chapter two described a dangerous step in Theophilus's conversion experience at the end of *The Virgin Martyr*: the moment he re-enacts the Fall and condemns himself.[15] Biting into a heavenly fruit sent by the dead woman he just proudly martyred, Theophilus is struck by the devastating knowledge of his own sinfulness. He recognizes that his conscience is "all stain'd ore, / Nay drown'd and damn'd for euer in Christian gore" (5.1.115-118). Presented with the magnitude of what he has done, he imagines himself drowned in the blood of the Christians he slaughtered, an irredeemable villain. Ultimately, Theophilus is not damned and becomes a martyr himself, but this clear-eyed understanding of his crimes leads him first to despair of salvation before he successfully converts and attains a martyr's crown.

[15] Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martyr*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 3: 365-480.

That brief certainty that he is "damn'd for euer" for his murderous zeal in persecuting Christians is an important juncture in Theophilus's transformation, one that makes his conversion experience dangerous. That danger comes from the possibility that his judgment will be correct. Theophilus's dramatic precursors who similarly believe in their own damnation include the likes of Faustus, *Hamlet*'s Claudius, and Philologus, the protagonist in Nathaniel Woodes's *Conflict of Conscience* (p. 1581), a play inspired by the notorious case of the early Italian Protestant Francesco Spiera (often anglicized to Francis Spira) who starved himself to death, believing he was a reprobate.[16] These characters' hopeless recognitions of their corrupted souls lead them to declare that heaven will not or cannot pardon them. This religious despair—the belief that God refuses mercy or that one's sins are beyond forgiveness—is often connected by both Protestants and Catholics to the supposedly unforgivable "sin against the holy ghost," either because that unspecified sin *is* the sin of despair or because despair is the natural reaction

[16] The reverberations of the Spira story in England from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century are described in Michael MacDonald, "The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira: Narrative, Identity, and Emotion in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 1 (1992): 32–61. Woodes's *Conflict of Conscience* exists in two nearly identical versions, differing only in their title pages, prologues, and epilogues. In the first, Philologus succumbs to final despair and kills himself; in the second, he is saved at the last instant before dying of natural causes. See Nathaniel Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience*, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Malone Society, 1952), and Erin Kelly's analysis of the play's two endings and its doctrinal significance in "Conflict of Conscience and Sixteenth-Century Religious Drama," *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 3 (Sept. 2014): 388-419. doi: 10.1111/1475-6757.12032.

to being unforgivable.[17] Either way, the notion that despair could be interpreted as a sign of reprobation, a terrified reaction to true inner knowledge of being damned, appears across diverse strains of Reformed thought. Calvin describes the despair of the reprobate with scorn, calling it "the blind torment that distracts the reprobate when they see that they must seek God in order to find a remedy for their misfortunes and yet flee his approach."[18] William Perkins, generally more sympathetic than Calvin to feelings of despair, still warns against final despair and asserts that in death, the reprobate are "overwhelmed with a terrible horror of conscience and despairing of their salvation."[19] As the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England explain, the knowledge of predestination was supposed to provoke comfort and assurance in the elect, since "it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ," and despair in the reprobate, since "the sentence of God's predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into recklessness."[20]

However, feelings of anguish and desperation were not always understood as the isolating experiences of the reprobate. They could as easily be an indication of godliness, a pious

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[17] Precisely what it meant to sin against the holy spirit was debated, as Baird Tipson explains in "A Dark Side of Seventeenth-Century English Protestantism: The Sin Against the Holy Spirit," *The Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 3/4 (1984): 301-330. Tipson describes the various interpretations of this sin, from blasphemy to the willful rejection of God's forgiveness, arguing that early modern Protestantism intensified the fear that one had committed the nebulously defined sin and was beyond forgiveness, prompting despair. Also see Gerald H. Cox, "Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and 'Sin Against the Holy Ghost,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1973): 119-137. Cox attributes every possible sin against the holy ghost to Faustus: "presumption and despair…impenitence, obstinacy, resistance to the known truth, and envy of a brother's spiritual good" (120).
[18] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 620.
[19] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 255.
[20] Church of England, "The Thirty-nine articles," in *Religion in Tudor England: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Ethan H. Shagan and Debora Shuger (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 107.

grief at sinning against God. There was, after all, plenty to be miserable about: the Fall of Adam, the unworthiness of humanity, the death of Christ, individual sins, family or community offences. Erin Sullivan, in her study of sadness in early modern England, describes the centrality of heartache in Protestant faith:

> The experience of sorrow for one's sins was not simply helpful, but rather compulsory for those Christians hoping to make their way towards heaven. Protestant writers stressed that complete debasement, which included total spiritual dejection, was a key step towards regeneration and salvation, and while the doctrine of predestination…held that men could not will these experiences to happen, it also suggested that those chosen for heaven would naturally manifest such behaviours. In order to facilitate this process many preachers purposefully encouraged sorrow among their flock, bruising parishioners' hearts with fearful words in order to bring them closer to God.[21]

Sullivan argues that while the sorrow and desperation experienced by the elect, the reprobate, and the melancholy were distinct in theory, those distinctions were often difficult or impossible to recognize in practice, since "the fluid nature of Renaissance disease (and its analogue 'dis-ease') constantly unsteadied such theoretical boundaries, leading to a more composite and comingled understanding of sorrowful self-experience in many contemporary texts."[22] Belief that one's sins were too terrible to forgive was not uncommon, and pastoral responsibilities included offering solace to desperate parishioners.[23] The devil, warned Perkins, could take advantage of the elect's justifiable horror at sin and accuse, "Thou art not of the elect; thou art not justified; thou hast no faith; thou must certainly be condemned for thy sins."[24] The elect might sink into

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[21] Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy*, 33. On pietist despair and introspection in particular, see Kaufman, *Prayer, Despair, and Drama*.
[22] Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy*, 12.
[23] For more on clergy publishing literature meant to console, see Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul*, 47-118; Elizabeth Hunter, "The Black Lines of Damnation: Double Predestination and the Causes of Despair in Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie*," *Études Épistéme* 28 (2015). doi: 10.4000/episteme.811; Lund, "Reading and the Cure of Despair."
[24] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 240.

hopeless certainty of reprobation, just as the reprobate might, for a time, believe themselves to be converted and faithful. Elizabeth Hunter notes that the consolation tracts published during the later sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth century emphasize that "feelings of despair and despondency did not in themselves constitute a sin, but had a number of differing causes and purposes within the spiritual life of a believer."[25] Temporary or recurring feelings of despair were normal; those attitudes only became truly damning if they persisted to the last, or emerged only at the end of life, revealing past faith to be transient.

In fact, experiencing some degree of despair was not only common, it was spiritually beneficial. Alec Ryrie argues that instead of dividing people into the confident elect and miserable reprobate, "Early modern Protestants were connoisseurs of despair, who generally saw the threat of Hell and damnation as essential to salvation: a stage to be passed through, rather than a state to be trapped in."[26] Despair could lead to two opposing outcomes: it might be a sign (or cause) of damnation, prompted by the knowledge of reprobation, but the temporary experience of despair was crucial to transforming sinners, making it, in Stachniewski's phrase, "the flashpoint of conversion."[27] This nuanced relationship to spiritual desolation was not a uniquely Protestant tradition, but predestinarian theology added to the challenges of understanding when despair was helpful and when it was final.[28] Clerics encouraged parishioners to see their anguish as productive, since, as Jeremy Schmidt explains, "repentance was precisely

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[25] Hunter, "The Black Lines of Damnation."
[26] Alec Ryrie, "Despair and Salvation" in *Being Protestant*.
[27] Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, 18.
[28] Despair as the knowledge of reprobation is described by Nicholas Watson as the "most distinctive Reformed articulation" of religious despair in "Despair," chapter 19 in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 346. See also Tipson, "A Dark Side of Seventeenth-Century English Protestantism."

the kind of spiritual exercise which tended to generate despair in the soul, as it reminded the sinner of the enormous and properly unforgivable burden of his sins."[29] Feelings of hopelessness suggested an accurate perception of one's own sinfulness and were the first step toward recognizing absolute dependence on God for redemption. Perkins, in *A Treatise Tending Unto a Declaration Whether A man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace* (1590), describes the importance of confronting spiritual anguish: "A true saying it is that the right way to go unto heaven is to sail by hell: and there is no man living that feels the power and virtue of the blood of Christ, which first hath not felt the pains of hell."[30] The suffering that accompanies despair prompts believers to turn to God and Christ for mercy, since they realize that without pardon, it is impossible for them to escape damnation. Similarly, Calvin, following Luther, argues that since humans cannot fulfill God's law, "The law renders us inexcusable and drives us into despair" in order to prompt believers to seek pardon and grace.[31]

The principle of productive despair influenced Protestant religious drama, moral interludes, and popular commercial drama, all of which depict characters brought to despair to signal their immanent turns to godliness. This is made explicit in Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (p. 1566), a stridently reformist saint's play likely written during the reign of Edward VI that makes advancing Protestant conversion theology integral to

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[29] Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul,* 52. See also Hunter, "The Black Lines of Damnation."
[30] William Perkins, *A Treatise Tending Unto a Declaration Whether A man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*, in *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appleford, UK: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 366.
[31] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:351.

the action.[32] While the earlier Digby *Magdalene* treats Mary's repentance and conversion as one episode among many, Wager's *Magdalene* revolves around Mary's climactic conversion away from sin and generally avoids depicting later, post-biblical elements of her legend, asserting scriptural authority in the prologue for presenting Mary's turn as a model.[33] The plot begins with her descent into vice, places the start of her conversion journey at the center of the action, and ends when she is sure of her justification.

The first half of the play focuses on Mary's corruption, establishing her need for redemption.[34] After a prologue that interprets the forthcoming action to fit mid-sixteenth-century Protestant focus on the scriptures by emphasizing the plot's direct links to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the vice Infidelitie enters to set the scene and encounters Mary Magdalene, already a vain and wealthy heiress obsessed with her appearance and inconsiderate of the lower classes. With fellow vices Pride of Life, Cupiditie, and Carnall Concupiscence, Infidelitie encourages Mary's worst impulses. Once Mary has fully embraced a sinful lifestyle, kissing all the vices and agreeing to go to Jerusalem to seek them once they depart, the action briefly turns to Simon the

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[32] On dating Wager's *Magdalene,* see Paul Whitfield White's introduction to *Reformation Biblical Drama in England* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992): xxii-xxiii. Tamara Atkin argues that Wager's obviously reformist agenda attempts not only to promote Protestant doctrine, but also to "convert" the entire genre of the saint play, in "Reforming Sanctity: The Digby *Mary Magdalen* and Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*," in *Sanctity as Literature in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Eva von Contzen and Anke Bernau (Manchester University Press, 2015), 191–208.

[33] Wager has limited success in restricting his Magdalene to the Bible's textual authority; he continues to conflate Mary with other biblical characters and perpetuates her apocryphal association with prostitution. Patricia Badir analyses how Wager's play falls into the sensual traps it attempts to repudiate in "'To Allure Vnto Their Loue': Iconoclasm and Striptease in Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*," *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 1 (1999): 1-20.

[34] All references to Wager's *Mary Magdalene* are from Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, in *Reformation Biblical Drama in England*, ed. Paul Whitfield White (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 1-68.

Pharisie and Malicious Judgment, who scheme together to invite Jesus to dinner as part of a trap to reveal him as a fraud and blasphemer. After Simon exits and Infidelite and Malicious Judgment brag about their bad deeds to one another, the plot returns its attention to Mary. At nearly the exact midpoint of the play, Mary and Infidelitie, joking about her sexual encounter with a flaxen-haired man, are abruptly confronted by more allegorical figures: first The Lawe carrying stone tablets, then Knowledge of Sinne.

Wager's *Magdalene* makes Mary's encounters with The Lawe and Knowledge of Sinne essential to her conversion. Entering first and carrying stone tablets, The Lawe declares that its purpose is to confront humans with their own wickedness and inability to find salvation:

> It was necessary and it dyd behoue,
> Considering mans pride and temeritie,
> Which was dronke and blynde in his owne loue,
> To make a lawe to shew his imbecilitie…
>
> Wherefore as I sayd to a glasse compared I may be,
> Wherein clerely as in the sunne light
> The weakeness and sinne of him selfe he may se,
> Yea and his own damnation as it is ryght. (1129-1132, 1137-1140)

Echoing Calvin's contention that the law's purpose is to condemn, in this speech The Lawe explains that law reveals the futility of self-reliance and convicts humanity for its sins. As a mirror, the reflection The Lawe provides is clear; the guilt it reveals is the truth. The Lawe calls recognizing one's own damnation "necessary" (1129), and Mary immediately follows just the pattern it describes. "O Prudence," she cries, addressing Infidelitie by its counterfeit identity, "heare you not what the law doth say, / Excedingly it pricket my conscience. / I may crie out alas nowe and welaway, / For I am damned by Gods own sentence" (1149-1152). The first step in her repentance is a declaration that she is doomed to hell—and she does not pass quickly through

this anguish. After Mary is convinced of her damnation by The Lawe, Knowledge of Sinne enters and describes Mary's crimes as too monstrous for words:

> It is not possible truly to declare here,
> The horrible, lothsome, and stinking vilitie,
> Which before the eyes of God doth appere,
> Committed by this wretched womans iniquitie." (1201-1204)

Confronted with the depth of her depravity, Mary wishes she had never been born, envisions herself as "a damned deuill in hell" (1206), and projects a future of eternal torment where she will be "punished with more pains than my tong can tell" (1208). Mary—like Faustus complaining "That's hard" (1.1.40)—laments the harshness of her sentence, seeing "small mercy" (1227) in a God who will "entangle men, and snarle them in such a trade" (1228). Finally, after The Lawe and Knowledge of Sinne tell her that Christ was sent to forgive humanity and encourage her to believe, she still mourns, "my heart is sore vexed, / The knowledge of my synne is before me always" (1313-1314). Of course, any audience would know that a biblical figure of Mary Magdalene's fame was not damned, but in Wager's play, Mary must suffer despair and feel certain of her damnation before Christ, Faith, and Repentaunce even have their entrance cues.

Once Mary gives up hope, Christ enters the action, preaching forgiveness and pardon. Yet even after he offers mercy to those who will repent, elements of Mary's despair persist: "The lawe hath set my synnes before my sight, / That I can not be mery, but am in despaire" (1349-1350), she admits. Her response is to "*falleth flat downe*" (1388sd) as Christ expels her devils, literally brought low, like Saul falling to the earth when confronted with the light of heaven. This overwhelming miracle enables the arrival of Faith and Repentaunce, who bring not joy but sorrow: Repentaunce declares that its intention is "hir soule euer after this day to scourge"

(1424), and its efforts succeed. When Mary reappears in the scene of Christ dining with Simon and Malicious Judgment, preparing to anoint Christ's feet with her precious oil, she is still in mourning: "The more that I accustom my self with repentance, / The more I see myne owne synne and iniquitie, / The more knowledge therof, the more greuance, / To a soule that is conuerted from hir impietie" (1765-1768). She is no longer desperate and sure of damnation, but she is still filled with horror and grief at the knowledge of her sins. For more than a third of the play, Mary is wretched. Only after Christ explicitly tells her that her faith has saved her and her sins are forgiven does she express happiness in her penitent state: "O ioyfull tydnges, O message most comfortable. / Let no sinner be neuer in so great despaire" (1945-1946), she rejoices, hoping no other sinner need undergo her inner torment.

But sinners who endure Mary's particular strain of despair are in luck, since it is a sign that they are on the path to blessings and grace. To ensure that the play's doctrinal message is understood, Divine Loue provides an epilogue recounting the full process of conversion:

> Such persons we introduce into presence,
> To declare the conuersion of hir offence.
> Fyrst, the lawe made a playne declaration,
> That she was a chylde of eternall damnation:
> By hearyng of the law came knowledge of synne,
> Then for to lament truly she dyd begynne.
> Nothyng but desperation dyd in her remayne,
> Lokyng for none other comfort but hell payne.
> But Christ whose nature is mercy to haue,
> Came into this world synners to saue,
> Which preached repentance synnes to forgeue,
> To as many as in hym faithfully dyd beleue.
> By the word came faith, Faith brought penitence,
> But bothe the gyft of Gods magnificence.
> Thus by Faith onely, Marie was iustified,
> Like as before it is plainly verified,
> From thens came loue, as a testification
> Of Gods mercy and her iustification. (2117-2134)

The play is careful to specify that none of Mary's actions cause her to be saved, emphasizing that the love with which Christ credits her—"But many sinnes are forgiuen hir, because she loued muche" (1923)—is merely a sign of her justification, present because she is elect and not a reason for her election.[35] Her feelings of despair likewise do not instigate her conversion, but her "desperation" (2123) and certainty that she could look for nothing "but hell payne" (2124) are testimonies of justification, signs that she is in the midst of being converted.

The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene is a play about conversion more than it is a play about Mary Magdalene. It eliminates her post-biblical legend, but it also ends well before her role as apostle to the apostles, an event with more scriptural authority than many scenes in Wager's interlude. The play's focus on the conversion process, and thus the importance of despairing at the knowledge of sin, is furthered by the parallels of its two chief sinners, Simon and Mary. Along with the vices, Simon and Mary are united by their scorn for poverty. Mary enters castigating her tailor for making an imperfect garment: "I beshrew his heart naughtye folishe knaue, / The most bungarliest tailers in this countrie, / That be in the world I thinke, so God me saue, / Not a garment can they make for my degree" (143-146). Simon reasons that Jesus must be a false prophet because "His parents for poore laboring folks ar wel known" (999) and "No man knoweth where he learned and went to schoole" (1001). Beyond their vanity, they are both accompanied by interfering vices whose role seems limited to encouraging sinful behaviors that were present before the vices came along rather than introducing sinfulness into their lives. Mary is already corrupt when the vices arrive, and when the play introduces Simon,

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[35] This line is drawn directly from Luke, when Jesus tells Simon the Pharisee that the unnamed sinful woman who washed his feet has grace: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much" (7:47). Herbert Marks, Gerald Hammond, and Austin Busch, ed., *The English Bible: King James Version*, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 2012).

he is already eager to catch Christ in a trap—and is evidently better able to plot maliciously than the vice Malicious Judgment, who keeps slipping up during their dinner with Jesus. Mary and Simon are sinners equally in need of repentance and grace. The major difference between them, the play suggests, begins with Mary's acceptance of Knowledge of Sinne, a figure Simon never encounters even though he enjoys extensive interaction with Jesus. Simon insists that he is a righteous man: "Who but we doe the law of God fulfill" (1991), he demands, and he departs the stage still confident in his morality, leaving for "our euenyng seruice" (2045). Simon never comes close to the kind of self-recognition and despair inflicted on Mary. Without it, he cannot be converted.

This use of productive despair is especially obvious in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, but it is not unique to Wager's play. The same structure appears in the moral interlude *Lusty Juventus* (c. 1550), which depicts the fall of its youthful protagonist and then his conversion to godliness.[36] Beginning with a naïve and untested faith, Juventus is quickly corrupted by the Devil and Hypocrisy, becoming a sinner despite being educated in godliness. Confronted by Good Counsel, who accuses him of blasphemy and suggests he has committed the unforgivable sin against the holy ghost, Juventus becomes desperate, acknowledging that he only asks for mercy when "I know it is too late" (1013). Desolate, he lies down—fallen like Saul and like Wager's Magdalene—and wishes, "Alas, alas, that ever I was begat! / I would to God I had never been born" (10-14-1015), realizing that "In the eternal pains is my part and portion"

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[36] All references to *Lusty Juventus* are from R. Wever, "An Enterlude called Lusty Iuuentus," in *Four Tudor Interludes*, edited by J. A. B. Somerset, 97–127, Bloomsbury Academic Collections: English Literary Criticism (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). doi: 10.5040/9781472554062.0009. For more on the possible dating of *Juventus*, see Jane Griffiths, "Lusty Juventus," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566471.013.0016.

(1020). His turnaround is far more rapid than Mary's, but it follows the same path: after despairing, he is prepared to encounter God's Merciful Promises, who assures him that "For me his mercy sake thou shalt obtain his grace / And not for thine own deserts" (1068-1069). Juventus is saved through the miracle of grace only when he despairs of salvation.

However, Juventus faces a problem that Mary does not. As a popular saint with a secure scriptural presence, Mary's conversion was well known and certain. When she converts, there is no possibility of backsliding. Juventus, upon converting, must insist that his change is final: "I will walk in his laws unto my live's end: / From his holy ordinance I will never descend" (1120-1121). In the final lines before Good Counsel ends with praise for the king, Juventus continues to focus on time, advising the audience to fear God and remember that the end of their lives could come at any moment:

> Say not 'I am young, I shall live long', lest your days shortened be.
> Do not incline to spend the time in wanton toys and nice,
> For idleness doth increase much wickedness and vice.
> Do not delay the time, and say 'my end is not near,
> For with short warning, the Lord's coming shall suddenly appear. (1145-1149)

With its assertion that Juventus's conversion will last and insistence on the importance of maintaining a spiritual state prepared for death, *Lusty Juventus* draws attention to a deciding factor in differentiating fruitful despair from reprobate despair: timing.

The reason despair does not damn Mary, Lusty Juventus, or Theophilus—the aspect that separates their desperation from the desperation of the reprobate—is that theirs is not final despair. Thinking about the relationship between despair and faith in early modern England meant thinking about the relationship between despair and time. Despair made conversion possible in the first place; the challenge was in knowing where despair fell in one's spiritual journey. It could be impossible to tell, while in the midst of despair, whether one was

experiencing the beginning of dying into new life or the soul-killing abandonment of hope. Was terror or misery over the state of one's soul a temporary test from God, or was it a final revelation of one's fate? Was subsequent conversion to godliness permanent, or self-deception? Only time would tell. In individual lives, that uncertainty could be either frightening or reassuring. However, in the conversion narratives represented in *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, *Lusty Juventus*, and *The Virgin Martyr*, despair is a fearful yet temporally limited experience, with a defined end point. Ordeals of despair are part of the plot resolutions in these plays; they spur transformation, leading characters to salvation and to the end of the action by making conversion part of a climactic finale. The play ends with the protagonist reaching the other side of despair, securely saved because the plot concludes and the play ceases.

The convenient finality of a play's ending offers clarity, giving redemptive meaning to characters' experiences of despair. But in giving audiences access to both the experiential presentness of the characters and the knowledge of a promised end, theater also prompts the awareness that the plot might not conclude seemingly productive despair with conversion—that the action might continue past this hopeful turn. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus's frantic awareness of time's forward movement is part of his tragedy; he wastes time and then longs to stretch it out, unwilling to meet his end. Although Faustus believes he needs more time, reading the play through the narrative shape of productive despair suggests he may have too much. Following the pattern laid out by Divine Loue at the end of *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, Faustus recognizes that the law condemns him to eternal damnation, is confronted with the knowledge of his sin, laments, and is filled with desperation, seeing "none other comfort but hell payne" (2124). Whenever Faustus expresses his hopeless certainty that he is damned, his desolation resembles Mary's horror at the God she believes offers no mercy, or Juventus

mourning that he repents too late, or Theophilus imagining a hell where he eternally drowns in the blood of his victims. Yet although Faustus does give voice to the tortured desperation of his soul, he rarely dwells on it for long, outlasting his penitent states again and again. In the dramatic structure of despair-driven conversion, Faustus's problem is not that he despairs. His problem is that he cannot seem to fall deep enough into despair or nurture his despair long enough to be transformed by it.

The Watch Strikes: Outliving Conversion in *Doctor Faustus*

The discovery of Duncan's body in *Macbeth* is a perilous moment for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. One misstep could expose their scheme. Surrounded by potential enemies, faced with the first, dangerous scrutiny of his murder, Macbeth lies like truth—and tells a truth in his lie. Attempting to evade suspicion, he responds to the sight of Duncan's bloody corpse by wishing he had not lived to see it:

> Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had lived a blessèd time, for from this instant
> There's nothing serious in mortality.
> All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of. (2.3.88-93)[37]

As Lady Macbeth pointed out in frustration earlier in the play, and as Macbeth will demonstrate again at his coronation feast, he is not good at deceit. Although Macbeth is trying to mislead onlookers by making himself appear overcome with grief, he is also speaking a plain truth: he would have been better off dying sooner. By act five, he seems to understand this; "I have lived

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[37] William Shakespeare, "Macbeth," in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 2709–73.

long enough" (5.3.22) is a less histrionic echo of the same sentiment. He begins with "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends" (5.3.25) and he outlives them all. In living long enough to murder Duncan, he has outlived his humanity and damned himself.

Macbeth is not a conversion play, or even a failed conversion play. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth never really try to repent, systematically destroying their own souls with far more consciousness of moral horror than the cavalier Faustus. Yet I begin this section on despair and failed conversion in *Doctor Faustus* with Macbeth's paradoxically true and false expression of sorrow because of how tightly it knits together despair and time, suggesting that one can live too long to find deliverance. Macbeth understands what Faustus does not: additional time will not help him. In his final speech, Faustus longs to stretch an hour into "A year, a month, a week, a natural day" (5.2.68) to give himself enough time to repent. Doctrinally, this is nonsense—real repentance can be felt in an instant. But within the narrative structure of the play, Faustus might do better to wish for less time and deeper despair. With Faustus, audiences encounter the psychological demands and strains of conversion through a character unable or unwilling to subject himself to the full, life-altering misery of recognizing his damnation. Faustus's despair is final, horrible, and damning—but it is also a recurring opportunity he never takes.

Critics have primarily focused on Faustus's despair as a final, tragic force, a deciding factor in his damnation. Helen Gardner declares that among all of Faustus's minor transgressions, "the final sin of Faustus is despair."[38] Faustus's despair bubbles up whenever he considers repentance, leading Arieh Sachs to argue that despair is his primary, damning sin and John Stachniewski to contend that *Doctor Faustus* "accurately dramatized Calvinist dogma" by

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[38] Gardner, "The Damnation of Faustus," 38.

making Faustus a reprobate who "consciously despairs."[39] Susan Snyder's reading of *Faustus* as a diabolical inverse of a saint's life also describes despair as the play's conclusive sin: "Because Faustus despairs, tragedy wins out in the end."[40] His despair is either a sign of his preordained damnation, or an inhibitor of his possible repentance. He is doomed to hell because he cannot repent, or he cannot repent because he is already doomed to hell—or somehow both at once. By the time Faustus's soul has been dragged to hell, his repeated expressions of despair clearly factor into his damnation, even if their exact causal relationship remains uncertain. His despair is fated by the prologue, and retrospectively final in the epilogue.

However, in the specific moments when Faustus confronts his sin, his belief that he is unforgivable is close to the proper, godly experience of despair, an understanding of iniquity that in another play might herald his successful conversion. Pompa Banerjee recognizes this similarity, attributing Faustus's failure to convert to experiencing despair more intensely than most penitents:

> Faustus' despair and fear of damnation are similar to the Christian's sorrow and anguish because they are prologue to his self-fulfillment. However, the intensity of Faustus's despair is remarkable. It surpasses the guilt and trepidation that a 'normal' sinner must experience. His mysterious inward submission to evil seems to signal his unshakeable conviction that both repentance and salvation are forever denied him and that he is eternally damned.[41]

Faustus's convictions may well be more intense than those of a normal sinner, but for most of his scenes of despair, they are not more intense than the desperation of other dramatic sinners.

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[39] Sachs, "The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus"; Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, 292, 317.
[40] Susan Snyder, "Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' as an Inverted Saint's Life," *Studies in Philology* 63, no. 4 (1966), 565.
[41] Pompa Banerjee, "I, Mephastophilis: Self, Other, and Demonic Parody in Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus,'" *Christianity and Literature* 42, no. 2 (1993), 231.

Faustus's terrified confession to his fellow scholars—"O, hell for ever! Sweet friends, what shall become of Faustus, being in hell for ever?" (5.2.41-52)—is not more fearful than Mary seeing herself as a devil in hell, "punished with more pains than my tong can tell" (1208). His guilty vision of God stretching out his arm and bending his "ireful brows" (5.2.79) is no more horrible than Theophilus's gory image of the ground around him being "pau'd with thousands of those Christians eyes / Whom I haue tortur'd, and they stare vpon me" (5.1.103-104). His "cursed be the parents that engendered me!" (5.2.106) resembles Juventus's wish that "I wolde to God I had neuer bene borne" (978) and Mary's cry, "wo be to the time that euer I was borne" (1205). For these and other sinful characters, ordeals with despair are productive, life-changing experiences.[42] Faustus's expressions of despair and his recognition that he has damned himself mirror such depictions of fruitful, saving despair. What sets Faustus apart is that his bouts of despair are not linear, but recursive—and all too brief, until the end.

Faustus's near-turns are scattered throughout the action rather than appearing in a single culminating resolution, sincere but not sustained. He first raises the idea of despair at the start of act two: "Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned / And canst thou not be saved. / What boots it then to think of God or heaven? / Away with such vain fancies and despair. / Despair in God and trust in Beelzebub." (2.1.1-5). His repetition of despair here is less agonized than it will become. He seems to realize the necessity of his damnation—like Mary Magdalene, recognizing that her body and soul must be lost—but instead of describing a desperation he feels, Faustus tries to convince himself to despair as if it were a state he can command himself to enter. For a

[42] G. M. Pinciss, for instance, argues that the Duke's actions in *Measure for Measure* can be explained if his goal is to inflict productive, saving despair on Angelo, Isabella, Claudio, and Lucio in "The 'Heavenly Comforts of Despair' and Measure for Measure," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30, no. 2 (1990): 303–313. doi: 10.2307/450519.

moment, he considers turning from sin—"Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again" (2.1.9)—but he does not linger in the idea, insisting that God "loves thee not" (2.1.10) without appearing to suffer at the idea. Although this scene features the opposing Good and Bad Angels, and although it comes before Faustus signs his contract to sell his soul for Mephistopheles, the possibility of repentance feels especially distant in this speech because Faustus is not in pain. He moves on quickly, asserting the idea of despair without ever seeming to *feel* despair.

In his subsequent mentions of despair, Faustus senses his spiritual anguish more keenly—but he will repeat his habit of recoiling from the full experience of despair again and again. His closest brushes with successful repentance (if not theologically, then at least as Faustus professes to experience them) are always at the beginnings of these episodes. With each ensuing line, he drifts further from salvation, outliving every moment of conversion. The first suggestion that he might find salvation despite already signing his contract with Lucifer comes early in the action: "When I behold the heavens, then I repent" (2.3.1), he says, implying a past and continuous pattern of repentance. For an instant, it seems possible that he already has repented. This moves quickly to "I *will* renounce this magic and repent" (2.3.11), still a promising determination to change but one that looks to the immediate future, and the Good and Bad Angels return. After the Bad Angel asserts that God cannot pity him, since he is a spirit, Faustus persists in his determination—but one more step removed, shifting to the hypothetical, "Ay, God will pity me, *if* I repent" (2.3.16).[43] After this statement, there is only one intervening line, the Bad Angel's "Ay, but Faustus never shall repent" (2.3.17) before Faustus announces that, in fact, he cannot repent after all. Faustus goes from possibly having repented already, to planning repentance, to

[43] Emphases added.

conditional future repentance, to no repentance at all in the space of eighteen lines. The more time he is given, the further he wanders from the path of conversion.

His ensuing speech stresses his desperation more emotionally than did his earlier resolve to despair. The despair Faustus describes in 2.3 is dreadful, and appears to be a classic case of suicidal, damning despair:

> My heart's so hardened I cannot repent.
> Scare can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
> But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
> "Faustus, thou art damned." Then swords and knives,
> Poison, guns, halters, and envenomed steel
> Are laid before me to dispatch myself;
> And long ere this I should have slain myself
> Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair. (2.3.18-25)

The interruption of "sweet pleasure" is typical of Faustus's vacillation throughout the play. Faustus's distractibility is a source of disappointed expectations and wavering convictions. He begins with grand fantasies of absolute power and access to endless knowledge, but spends his full twenty-four years preoccupied with impressing nobility and playing pranks, his magic reduced to, in David Webb's words, "a thing of tawdry jokes and tricks."[44] Stephen Orgel describes the play's pattern of disappointment as a move from the heroic to the banal: "The fantasies of unlimited power are consistently scaled down in the play…do you really have to make a pact with the devil just to get a decent job or someone to go to bed with?"[45] And, of course, the distractions Mephistopheles provides are obvious attempts to keep Faustus from

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[44] See David Webb description of Faustus's magic in "Damnation in 'Doctor Faustus': Theological Strip Tease and the Histrionic Hero," *Critical Survey* 11, no. 1 (1999), 38; Banerjee, in "I, Mephistophilis," sees Faustus as "transformed from the scholar thirsting for knowledge into a petty entertainer partial to crude practical jokes" (226).
[45] Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare: And Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 227.

repenting, as he admits early in the aside, "I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind" (2.1.80). Faustus is easily distracted from prayer and easily distracted from his ambitions to be emperor of the world by the chance to hoodwink the pope or get a tour of hell. But in this speech, the spiritual state that devilish, pleasurable magic distracts Faustus from is "deep despair" (2.3.25). Rather than sinking into the depths of his despair, Faustus avoids it. Mephistopheles will later encourage Faustus to succumb to despair and kill himself, but here, he is the source of the pleasure that sidetracks Faustus from his apparently deadly despair. Desperation is something hell helps him evade and yet it is also something hell urges. The distinctions between sinful, suicidal despair, which would be a victory for Lucifer, and the crushing heartbreak of repentance, a victory for Christ, begin to blur. Faustus's heart, in this moment, may be both hardened and bruised. His declaration that he cannot repent is a pronouncement of possibly damning despair, and yet he sidesteps feeling his despair in favor of demonic illusions. Reflecting on his access to the poetry and music of Homer and Amphion, Faustus rejects his desperation and conversion at once: "Why should I die therefore or basely despair? / I am resolved: Faustus shall ne'er repent" (2.3.31-32). The play raises the potential of despair as a first step toward heaven or hell to create a sense of possibilities, a sense that Faustus's fate is in a liminal state, even though his damnation has been predestined by the prologue. For Faustus, despair ultimately condemns him to hell, but it also brings him as close as he ever comes to salvation.

Faustus's repeated expressions of hopelessness are not in themselves evidence that his conversion is failing—they only become so when he cannot maintain them for longer than a few lines. He begins to despair again—and thus may take a few stumbling steps toward conversion—amid his slapstick joke on the horse courser in act four. For just six lines, he interrupts the scene

with the reminder of his doom. This brief interlude is split in half between despair and optimism, and between repentance and dismissal. The first three of those lines convey wretchedness: “What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die? / Thy fatal time doth draw to final end; / Despair doth drive distrust unto my thoughts” (4.1.132-134). Despair is the force that compels Faustus to think about his fate at all, but once again, he flees from confronting it. The next three lines are empty comfort: “Confound these passions with a quiet sleep. / Tush, Christ did call the thief upon the cross; / Then rest thee, Faustus, quiet in conceit” (4.1.135-137). Faustus puts off the terror of despair in favor of self-deceiving hope. This is precisely the attitude Juventus warns against in his reminder to assume that death will come at any moment, that no one knows their final end or controls the time they have to convert. Faustus, of course, does know when he will face his final end, and—typically presumptuous—assumes his own access to providential time, imagining that knowing the timing of his end gives him power over the meaning of his end.

Despair may be Faustus’s ultimate sin, but it is also the only avenue he has to begin to repent. His simultaneous repentance and despair in act five, “I do repent; and yet I do despair” (5.1.63), is a response to the Old Man confronting him with accusations like those that Knowledge of Sin levels at Mary. Knowledge of Sin describes Mary’s sins as “horrible, lothsome, and stinking vilitie” (1202); the Old Man tells Faustus that he sees his “most vile and loathsome filthiness, / The stench whereof corrupts the inward soul” (5.1.41-42). Being faced with knowledge of his sins does what it is supposed to do, filling Faustus with the expectation of eternal damnation and prompting desperation. This is the moment that Faustus tells himself to “despair and die” (5.1.48), and here, unlike in his earlier mention of suicidal despair, Mephistopheles hands him a dagger. In seeing his damnation, Faustus’s reaction is extreme. But once the Old Man prevents him from killing himself, urging him to “call for mercy and avoid

despair" (5.2.56), Faustus returns to avoiding despair too much, ignoring his desperate soul. If despair is linked to seeing one's sins clearly—through the mirror that Lawe carries, or biting into heavenly fruit, or accusations from Good Counsell or an Old Man—Faustus seems unable to bear looking at his damnation for long.

Faustus lives long enough to lose each of his conversion opportunities by backing out of his despair instead of journeying through it. His final scene, leading into irrevocable, eternal despair, replicates this pattern of outlasting spiritually favorable conditions. Faustus is hyperaware of time, and the stage directions induce a similar apprehension in the audience through the interruptions of the chiming clock: "*The clocke strikes eleaven*," "*The watch strikes*," "*The clocke striketh twelue.*"[46] Joseph Candido points out that the clock strikes twenty-four times, condensing Faustus's twenty-four years into a few minutes and replicating the horror of feeling time slip by faster than it should.[47] The sound of the clock is jarring, forcing actor and audience to stop and listen while it completes its chimes.[48] Faustus feels time escaping him, and the audience feels it, too.

This heightened emotional awareness of time propels the final scene. Faustus believes that given more time, he might repent and be saved:

> Ah, Faustus, now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
> And then thou must be damned perpetually.
> Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
> That time may cease and midnight never come.
> Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
> Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
> A year, a month, a week, a natural day,

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[46] Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of D. Faustus* (London: 1604): F2r, F2v.
[47] Joseph Candido, "Marking Time in 'Doctor Faustus 5.2,'" *Early Theatre* 12, no. 1 (2009): 137–40.
[48] Candido suggests that eleven strokes could take thirty or forty seconds in "Marking Time," 138.

That Faustus may repent and save his soul. (5.2.62-69)

Given eternity or even another day, Faustus thinks, he could find a way to successfully repent. But the more time he has within this scene, the more he swerves from the conversion path. Amid his final despair, he once more makes an aborted attempt to turn, recognizing that Christ's mercy can save him. He understands this truth when he asks his friends to pray for him, and when he starts to pray himself after a vision of the blood of Christ streaming down: "Ah, my Christ!" (5.2.75). Calling on Christ seems to cause him pain, which he attributes to the devil, pleading, "Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ! / Yet will I call on him" (5.2.76-77). But that pain also recalls the ideal heart for a convert, one that has been mollified into a state ready for God's grace. Faustus's heart should be rent; conversion should hurt. If he could die here, calling on Christ and suffering for it, there might be hope for him. "O, spare me" (5.2.77), he continues—and as long as that line remains unfinished, it is a microcosm of all the potential of his despair, a pained cry that could lead him toward heaven or hell. There is a pause before he completes it with the addressee: "O, spare me, Lucifer" (5.2.77). His prayer turns from calling on Christ to pleading with Lucifer within a single line. From there, Faustus drifts further and further into sinful desperation, scrambling to find a way to avoid his damnation just as he has spent the play both fleeing from despair and stuck in it. He would have been better off not stretching the hour, but shortening it, dying while dwelling on repentance and calling on Christ.

Trusting Despair

Time is Faustus's enemy, as he perceives, but not in the way he imagines. In the other plays I have analyzed in this chapter, despair is an intense state that characters pass through, an overwhelming experience that heralds each play's salvific finale. But in *Doctor Faustus*, the

horrified recognition of sin is a transient, repetitive experience throughout the narrative rather than a dramatic turning point leading to the climactic end. Theater audiences could experience both the contingency Faustus clings to and the end that closes the possible meanings of his gestures at despair. Theologically, Faustus certainly experiences final despair, regardless of whether the play is read as predestinarian or not. He cannot or does not convert and succumbs to all-consuming despair; he is taken to hell at the end of the play. But in the experiential time of the play, he may not despair hard enough or long enough. The moments when Faustus's despair is most evident are also the moments when conversion feels most possible—*because* he despairs, repeatedly taking the first step in the conversion journey, only to back away rather than move forward through it.

Northrop Frye, in *Fools of Time*, describes the experience of tragedy as an anticipation of finality:

> The basis of the tragic vision is being in time, the sense of the one-directional quality of life, where everything happens once and for all, where every act brings unavoidable and fateful consequences, and where all experience vanishes, not simply into the past, but into nothingness, annihilation. In the tragic vision death is, not an incident in life, not even the inevitable end of life, but the essential event that gives shape and form to life.[49]

This understanding of tragedy suggests that meaning can only be grasped at the end, that whatever narrative path characters follow can ultimately only be understood once it there is no further to go. Frye's description of tragic time has parallels with the relationship between despair and conversion that I have posited in this chapter, but Marlowe's tragedy simultaneously embraces and resists this forward march. Faustus hurdles forward toward "unavoidable and fateful consequences," but not as a progression from one decision to the next. Instead, he moves

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[49] Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 3.

through a series of inconsequential interludes that remain meaningless, not leading him to his fate except in the sense that none of them feature his determined, complete repentance. Marlowe repeatedly invokes despair's possibilities, creating a sense that Faustus might take the first, necessary step toward his salvation, only to leave him advancing and retreating from this beginning until it is too late.

By continuously raising and dashing the expectations of despair, *Doctor Faustus* disrupts the teleology of conversion and exposes the emotional and spiritual risks demanded of a would-be convert. If the only way to heaven is to pass through hell, *Doctor Faustus* invites audiences to confront how hard that passage might be. Conversion could require the convert to trust in despair, allowing the devastating knowledge of their own degeneracy to overwhelm them in the hope that it might lead to new life—but with the terror that it might lead to damnation. Desperate to avoid the decisive significance of an ending, Faustus keeps returning to the beginning of a possible conversion, then balking at the necessity of seeing the full horror of his looming damnation. For audiences accustomed to seeing plays where despair might be a first step toward conversion, Faustus's broken record of outliving his self-recognition and despair challenges the idea that a narrative with a seemingly redemptive ending that is not death or scripture could offer any certainty. Audiences with mixed, conflicted religious identities were confronted with the knowledge that any attempt at conversion might be a gamble with one's soul.

IV

A Light and a Journey in *Enough is as Good as a Feast* and *The Winter's Tale*

This dissertation began with an image of conversion as a staggering, impenetrable experience, the soul seized and remade by a blinding light from heaven. The introduction featured Caravaggio's *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (1601) in order to focus on the details the painting withheld, but the image of Paul struck down on the road, overwhelmed and transformed by sudden knowledge of a truth he had denied, is ubiquitous in medieval and early modern art, vividly rendered in illuminated manuscripts, mosaics, frescoes, church glass, and altar pieces, and by the sixteenth century there were clear conventions to the iconography. Tiffany Racco describes the characteristic scene as it appears in paintings:

> the moment of Paul's conversion is regularly portrayed as one of illuminated chaos and confusion. It was common for artists to depict a frenetic space of panicked figures, with bodies recoiling in palpable physical discomfort as a divine light, too powerful for their human faculties to withstand, bombards them.[1]

No wonder this is the instant that so often illustrates the life-changing experience of conversion; it captures the intensity of radical alteration, the fear and awe of encountering an irresistible divinity. The archetypal Christian conversion, the model for all that will follow, is visualized as a dramatic climax. And yet, the sudden revelation of a light and voice from heaven is not a comprehensive account of Paul's change.

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[1] Tiffany Racco, "Darkness in a Positive Light: Negative Theology in Caravaggio's 'Conversion of Saint Paul,'" *Artibus et Historiae* 37, no. 73 (2016), 286. For more on the iconography of Paul's conversion, see also Luba Eleen, "The Frescoes from the Life of St. Paul in San Paolo Fuori Le Mura in Rome: Early Christian or Mediaeval?," *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 12, no. 2 (1985): 251–59; Cynthia Stollhans, "Peruzzi's Standing Saint Paul in the Ponzetti Chapel, Santa Maria Della Pace: Tradition or Inovation?," *Notes in the History of Art* 10, no. 3 (1991): 14–20.

The New Testament's "conversion of conversions," as Brian Cummings calls the Pauline turn,[2] is comprised of related, but often incongruous, versions of Paul's transformation. These differing accounts reveal a foundational ambiguity within Christian conversion: Paul's experience is singular, instantly transformative, and personal; it is also continuous, arduous, and communal. Sequentially, the first version is in Acts of the Apostles, and presents becoming Christian as a self-contained event: the overpowering inner change on the road to Damascus. The second version is Paul's own understanding of his experience, described in his epistles not as a singular turn to a new religion, but as a sacred call to many years of devoted work.[3] While these accounts differ in their emphasis, both the sustained labor of Paul's calling-conversion and the high drama of his light-from-heaven conversion combine private miracle and collective bond.

In his epistles, Paul insists on the individual, unmediated nature of his revelation—a calling "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ" (Gal 1.1)[4]—and yet he never describes any revelation separable from his lifelong work of outreach to the Gentiles. Richard Hays's commentary on Galatians explains that Paul never "locates the event of revelation within his own

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[2] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 370.
[3] Most biblical scholars categorize Galatians as one of seven epistles written by Paul and credit it as more accurate than Luke's account in Acts. See Thomas E. Phillips, "When Did Paul Become a Christian? Rereading Paul's Autobiography in Galatians and Biography in Acts," in *Christian Origins and the New Testament in the Greco-Roman Context*, ed. Thomas E. Phillips et al., vol. 1, Essays in Honor of Dennis R. MacDonald (Claremont: Claremont Press, 2016), 180–201; Krister Stendahl, "Call Rather than Conversion," *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 7-23; Dale B. Martin, "The New Testament as a Historical Source: A Comparison of Acts and Paul's Letters," in *New Testament History and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 67–76; Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. XI, XII vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 215-216.
[4] All references to the Bible are from Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, eds., *The English Bible: King James Version*, vol. 2: The New Testament and the Apocrypha (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), unless otherwise noted.

heart" because "introspective individualism is foreign to Paul's thought world; he is describing the dynamic outreach of the gospel to the Gentiles through him."[5] The Road-to-Damascus moment in Acts is more invested in Paul's conversion as a singular, miraculous episode. But if Paul's soul is transformed as it is assailed by heavenly light, his alienation from followers of the growing Jesus movement within Judaism is not so instantaneously mended—and the response of that community has sacred power in his conversion. Rather than remaining with Paul, the narrative in Acts shifts to the disciple Ananias, who also receives a miraculous vision from the Lord. When Ananias's vision directs him to find Saul of Tarsus and lay hands on him to heal his blindness, he initially resists: "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name" (Acts 9:13-14). Ananias obeys when the command is repeated, but his first response is doubtful: him, Lord? Paul's rite of baptism and the restoration of his sight—the signs of his successful conversion and entrance into his new life—depend on Ananias's willingness to reconcile rather than on Paul's miraculous inner transformation.

The tangled relationship between conversion as a private, transformative, distinct process and conversion as a communal, iterative, and continuous labor is ingrained in the prototype of becoming Christian, and it took on new importance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century controversies over salvation. A proliferation of conflicting, ambiguous conversion models was a problem that crossed confessional boundaries. Early modern Christians of all stripes were increasingly confronted with an excess of meanings and means of conversion as they sought to

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[5] Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," 215. John Knox also notes that Paul uses his revelation to assert himself not as a convert, but as an apostle, a far more active role, in "On the Meaning of Galatians 1:15," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 2 (1987): 301–4.

interpret their own relationships to saving grace. A conversion experience was necessary to Christian salvation, but as Kathleen Lynch explains, believers were faced with the fundamental problem of knowing when that conversion experience had been accomplished: "Baldly stated, the question was, how much time did conversion take? Was it an instantaneous experience, or was it a prolonged effort?"[6] In Tudor and Stuart England, conversion was recognized as both a unique event and an endless exercise, individual and yet intimately tied to the faith community.[7] The trouble lay in deciphering the substance of and relationship between the instant of conversion and the life of conversion, variously understood as repentance, sanctification, evidence of election, or a cycle of staggering and intensified recommitment.[8] This was not an abstract theological problem, but an evolving debate with direct impacts on how believers should live and relate to their communities and what significance they should assign to different points in their journeys toward salvation.

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[6] Kathleen Lynch, "Conversion Narratives in Old and New England," in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 428, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199560608.013.0023.

[7] These competing models of conversion are described in David C Steinmetz, "Reformation and Conversion," *Theology Today* 35, no. 1 (1978), 25–32; Judith Pollmann, "A Different Road to God: The Protestant Experience of Conversion in the Sixteenth Century," in *Conversion to Modernities*, ed. Peter van der Veer (New York: Routledge, 1996), 55–72; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially 409–68; Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 58.

[8] On the various ways that Protestants interpreted the relationship between instantaneous conversion and continuous conversion, see Ryrie, *Being Protestant,* 409-414; also Frank A. James, "Theologies of Salvation in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: An Introduction," in *Christian Theologies of Salvation*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (NYU Press, 2017), 181–90; Alister E. McGrath, "Sanctification," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); McGrath, "Justification," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

With this final chapter, I explore how drama could reimagine the overdetermined, conflicting dynamics of spiritual turning. The plays I have studied so far in this project have focused on conversions as distinct personal experiences; those conversions variously succeed, fail, or are left in-process, but all emphasize turning as it is felt in the moment, by the convert, as they enter or attempt to enter into a new life. Quisara's spark waiting to be kindled in *The Island Princess*, the miraculous revelations of Antoninus and Theophilus in *The Virgin Martyr*, Mary Magdalene's sorrow and pardon in both the Digby *Magdalene* and Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce*, the violent vision inflicted on the Jews in the Croxton *Play*, and Faustus's repeated brushes with despair in *Doctor Faustus* all focus on conversion as a crisis point. But drama, inherently collaborative and multivocal, was also uniquely suited to representing how conversion might be a drawn-out, interpersonal undertaking. In this chapter, I turn to two plays that take up the challenge of navigating conversion as at once a unique inner experience and a perpetual outward reformation by giving characters complete, sincere conversion scenes—and then continuing, scrutinizing what comes after the crisis.

These plays engage with the challenge of reconciling conversion that is individual and singular with conversion that is communal and continuous at transitional moments within what Brian Walsh describes as "the cracked religious consensus of post-Reformation England."[9] After an overview of key challenges to reconciling singular and continuous conversion, I analyze William Wager's early Elizabethan moral interlude *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (p. 1570), which enacts a broad Protestant theory of continuing conversion as a sign of the initial experience's authenticity. Written in a period when, in the words of Debora Shuger and Ethan

[9] Brian Walsh, *Unsettled Toleration: Religious Difference on the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

Shagan, the Church of England was "slowly coming into maturity,"[10] *Enough is as Good as a Feast* presents a general reformist salvation theology while also serving a community-oriented pastoral role, emphasizing the ways that a convert's obligations to others continue to matter within a more individualistic, predestinarian soteriological framework. The final section of this chapter focuses on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1610), which uses the abundance of competing conversion paradigms of the early Jacobean religious landscape as a resource for its redemptive turn. In making its sinning protagonist undergo conversion as a sudden, life-altering, and complete revelation and as a constant, repetitive practice, *The Winter's Tale* puts forth an emotional rationale for conversion's patchwork of personal and communal dynamics. Rather than providing a doctrinal explanation for why conversion must be both passive and active or a coherent schema illustrating precisely how individual and interpersonal dimensions intersect, *The Winter's Tale* creates an affective clarity around how conversion might be both done to and done by the convert. While neither play is representative of conversion drama in its period, I see both *The Winter's Tale* and *Enough is as Good as a Feast* as unusually sensitive to connections between continuous conversion and community. In the context of the Reformation's disparate theological and pastoral demands, both plays offered ways of understanding conversion as an unrepeatable crucible of spiritual rebirth and a protracted way of life.

Enough is as Good as a Feast promotes a broadly encompassing reformed theology, placing the relationship between initial and continuing conversion in the context of living a godly

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[10] Shagan and Shuger, introduction to "The Thirty-Nine Articles," in Ethan H. Shagan and Debora Shuger, eds., *Religion in Tudor England: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Baylor University Press, 2016): 104. For an overview of debates among historians over when, why, and how England became predominantly Protestant, see Peter Marshall, "(Re)Defining the English Reformation," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009): 564–86.

life. While *The Winter's Tale* is less explicitly concerned with religion, much has been written about its connection to earlier religious drama,[11] its engagement with iconoclasm debates,[12] and its various Catholic and Protestant qualities.[13] The statue scene in particular, with its echoes of resurrection drama, resemblance to miraculous lively statues of the Virgin, and transubstantiation of stone into flesh, has attracted critical interest for its religious significance. Perhaps because of the focus on this scene, readings of *The Winter's Tale*'s engagement with religion have largely focused on how it evokes Catholic memory. Phebe Jensen sees the play's festive elements "align[ing] the play with a Catholic past and present"; Jill Delsigne reads the statue scene as a Catholic sacrament; Frances Dolan finds parallels between the ghosts of Catholicism haunting post-Reformation England and the ghostly memory of Hermione haunting Leontes; Ruth Vanita argues that through Hermione, the play mourns the loss of a powerful, sacred queen in Mary and

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[11] Darryll Grantley, "'The Winter's Tale' and Early Religious Drama," *Comparative Drama* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 17–37; Karen Sawyer Marsalek, "'Awake Your Faith': English Resurrection Drama and The Winter's Tale," in *"Bring Furth the Pagants": Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*, ed. Karen Sawyer Marsalek and David N. Klausner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 271–91; Sarah Beckwith, "Shakespeare's Resurrections: *The Winter's Tale*," in *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 127–46.

[12] Richard Strier, "Mind, Nature, Heterodoxy, and Iconoclasm in The Winter's Tale," *Religion & Literature* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 31–59; Phebe Jensen, "Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes: Festivity, Iconoclasm, and Catholicism in 'The Winter's Tale,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2004): 279–306; Joseph M. Ortiz, "Shakespeare's Idolatry: Psalms and Hornpipes in The Winter's Tale," in *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 180–212; Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138-142.

[13] Jill Delsigne, "Hermetic Miracles in *The Winter's Tale*," *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern Stage*, edited by Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich (Ashgate: 2014), 91-108; Grace Tiffany, "Calvinist Grace in Shakespeare's Romances: Upending Tragedy," *Christianity & Literature* 49.4 (2000): 421-445; Frances Dolan, "Hermione's Ghost: Catholicism, the Feminine, and the Undead," *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, edited by Dympna Callaghan (Palgrave MacMillan: 2007), 213-237; Ruth Vanita, "Mariological Memory in 'The Winter's Tale' and 'Henry VIII,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 40, no. 2 (2000): 311–37.

other female saints.[14] In critical work specifically on conversion and repentance in *The Winter's Tale*, there has been a similar tendency to focus on the play's response to Reformation theology by identifying Catholic or Calvinist sympathies, or by claiming that it reflects a middle way between the two. Grace Tiffany for instance, argues that *The Winter's Tale* embraces a Calvinist concept of "the inefficacy of the human will and men's and women's consequent need for God's grace," while Richard Strier suggests that "the play seems to accept a Catholic sense of penitence" even as it seems to accept Protestant critiques of idolatry and enthusiasm for married chastity.[15]

Lysbeth Em Benkert, Jay Zysk, and Sarah Beckwith have complicated these arguments by reading *The Winter's Tale* as a play that draws on a mixture of Protestant and Catholic ways of thinking as a creative resource, arguing that the play makes use of inter- and intra-confessional debates over images, the eucharist, and repentance.[16] In reading *The Winter's Tale* alongside *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, I build on these critics in viewing theological debates as an imaginative and emotional resource. Rather than locating the play between Catholic and Calvinist poles, I consider how it makes use a theological problem that prompted a myriad of

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[14] Jensen, "Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes," 281. See Delsigne, "Hermetic Miracles"; Dolan, "Hermione's Ghost"; Vanita, "Mariological Memory."
[15] Tiffany, "Calvinist Grace," 422; Strier, "Mind, Nature, Heterodoxy, and Iconoclasm," 42, 46.
[16] Lysbeth Em Benkert, in "Faith and Redemption in The Winter's Tale," *Religion and the Arts* 19 (2015): 31-50, claims *The Winter's Tale* combines a Protestant embrace of 'faith alone' with Catholic Marian imagery, reflecting a majority of English people who embraced "a livable compromise between pietistic use of images and iconoclasm" (35). Jay Zysk argues that the play makes use of "the semiotics rather than the metaphysics" of inter- and intra-confessional eucharistic disputes to explore the problems of interpreting body and sign in *Shadow and Substance: Eucharistic Controversy and English Drama across the Reformation Divide* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 214. Beckwith argues that the play recovers the abandoned sacrament of penance and reconciliation at a human level where Leontes seeks grace and forgiveness not from heaven, but from Hermione, in *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness,* 127-46.

shifting, contextual beliefs crossing confessional boundaries. By the early seventeenth century, England's religious culture was mixed and changing, made up of second- and third-generation Protestants born into the Church of England, along with converts to Catholicism who had been brought up Protestant, godly "hot" Protestants, recusants, and various other non-conformists.[17] In this uneasily diverse faith environment, dissonance between theological debates over how God worked conversion in humans and practical demands that humans participate in their own salvation intensified the urgency to make sense of doctrines that resisted unambiguous, wholly consistent interpretation. *The Winter's Tale* explores questions about what is static and dynamic, personal and relational, about converting, and embraces ideologically incompatible but emotionally resonant answers to imagine a spiritual status between converted and redeemed, tying Leontes's turn to the mutual bonds between the convert and his community.

Sacramental-Personal-Communal-Continual Turning in the Church of England

The Reformation transformed the already complex layering of singular and continuous conversion by making the question of how humans receive and keep grace a central theological issue. Could grace, once obtained, ever be lost? And could anyone not already converted by the grace of God obtain anything by devoted effort or sacramental ritual? While beliefs about the

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[17] The diversity of thought encompassed within the Church of England is usefully summarized in Peter Marshall, "Settlement Patterns: The Church of England, 1553–1603," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 45–61, and in Diarmaid MacCulloch, "The Latitude of the Church of England," in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, ed. Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, NED-New edition (Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 41–59. On converts to and from Catholicism and recusants, see Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion*. Studies on nonconformity include Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), and Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-49* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2006).

fundamental cause of conversion—the combined gift of God and willing effort of humans or the unfathomable divine will alone—could be broadly labeled as Catholic or Protestant, respectively, beliefs about where the road-to-Damascus moment ended and the continuous process of living conversion began, and how they informed one another, resisted division into fixed ideological positions.[18] The efficacy of baptism, regeneration, repentance, inner calling, or perseverance after conversion was fiercely debated, and while many reformers reached a rough consensus by the middle of the sixteenth century about the use of sacraments and the acceptance of predestination, the specifics were still subject to dispute.[19] For the individual convert and the reforming community, this presented difficulties: various Protestant doctrines could suggest a strict division between converted or not converted, called or not called, while also emphasizing the importance of living in a constant state of conversion.[20] The diverse, evolving beliefs of reformers and the practical and pastoral challenges of establishing a secure English Protestant identity resulted in a religious milieu with ample room for uncertainty.

That room for uncertainty did not mean that there was room for open denominational pluralism, but it did mean that doctrinal ambiguities were built into daily spiritual life. For

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[18] See James, "Theologies of Salvation"; David C. Fink, "Was There a 'Reformation Doctrine of Justification'?," *The Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 2 (2010): 205–35; Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion*, 59.

[19] These disputes are described in Fink, who argues that they led to "multiple, competing orthodoxies" (206) rather than single understanding of justification after the Reformation, in "Was There a 'Reformation Doctrine of Justification'?" See also James, "Theologies of Salvation"; Alec Ryrie, ""Protestantism" as a Historical Category," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (December 2016): 59–77; Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590-1640* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 44-60; Crawford Gribben, "Calvinism, Conversion, and the Science of the Self," in *Cultures of Calvinism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Graeme Murdock and Crawford Gribben (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 37–56.

[20] Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 431-441; James, "Theologies of Salvation," 186-187.

sixteenth-century Reformers struggling to transform England into a Protestant country,[21] defining what sort of 'conversion' the already-Christian people were undergoing—a complete, fundamental change of spiritual death and rebirth or a continuous work across lifetimes—held special challenges. Turning from the Catholic faith toward the new, reformed church was obviously a conversion for the individual believer and for the ecclesiastical institution, but emphasizing a sudden, dramatic departure from past beliefs exposed reformers to the critique that they were disconnected from Christian tradition.[22] Reformers countered by insisting on their own, purer connection to the early church, finding ways to reconcile uninterrupted Christian history and revolutionary break.[23] Reformed theology stressed the utter helplessness of the human will and the absolute prerogative of God to bestow undeserved grace. But perhaps partially motivated by this need to claim continuity with the past, Tudor Reformers generally emphasized conversion as a constant endeavor situated within the religious community rather than as an individual flashpoint. As Bruce Hindmarsh describes, reflecting on the rarity of conversion autobiographies in the sixteenth century:

> Typically, the Reformers spoke not of changes in their personalities but of learning old truths and unlearning bad habits. For the Reformers conversion was understood

[21] I use the term Protestant here for convenience. On the unfixed meanings of "Protestant" in post-Reformation England, see Peter Marshall, in "The Naming of Protestant England," *Past & Present*, no. 214 (2012): 87–128, Alec Ryrie argues for the utility of the term in considering a "Protestant ecosystem" of diverse sects in ""Protestantism" as a Historical Category."

[22] On Protestant anxieties over this critique, see Alexandra Walsham, "The Reformation of the Generations: Youth, Age, and Religious Change in England, c. 1500-1700," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 21 (2011), 99-100.

[23] See W. J. Sheils, "Protestants and the Meanings of Church History, 1540–1660," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 298–314; Avihu Zakai, "Reformation, History, and Eschatology in English Protestantism," *History and Theory* 26, no. 3 (1987): 300–318; and Walsham, "The Reformation of the Generations," 99.

> principally as a continuous and lifelong process of learning faith within the context of the church, often described as a school.[24]

Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed Protestants all agreed that humans could not convert themselves through their own independent efforts. But a Reformed consensus asserted that no human could even effectively work toward conversion—"he cannot turn to prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to good faith and calling upon God"[25]—while in practice, that work was the purpose and sign of a godly life.

Presented with confessional victory at the accession of Elizabeth and the settlement of 1559-63, reformers encountered the potential incompatibility of singular and continuous conversion on an institutional scale: conservatives (including the queen) tended to see the settlement as an end point, a Church converted, while many other reformers saw it as a stopgap for a Church converting.[26] The Church of England that formed under Elizabeth was a firmly Reformed Christian national religion.[27] However, the Church's embrace of Protestant doctrine

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[24] Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26-27. Pollman analyzes the Protestant model of conversion as a lifelong process in "A different Road to God," as does Steinmetz throughout "Reformation and Conversion," especially 30-32.
[25] Church of England, "The Thirty-nine articles," in *Religion in Tudor England: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Ethan H. Shagan and Debora Shuger (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 106.
[26] Marshall overviews these opposing tendencies in "Settlement Patterns," 52–61. See also MacCulloch, "The Latitude of the Church of England," 46-47; Alec Ryrie, "Prologue: When did the English Reformation happen? A historiographical curiosity and its interpretative consequences," *Études Épistémè. Revue de littérature et de civilisation (XVIe – XVIIIe siècles)*, no. 32 (November 28, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.1845.
[27] On the Reformed Protestant character of the Elizabethan church and its use of the Edwardian liturgy and articles, see MacCulloch, "The Latitude of the Church of England,"; Stephen Hampton, "Confessional Identity," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 210–27; Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 30-36.

did not always provide precise solutions to theological difficulties. Instead, as Peter Marshall puts it, "while the Settlement was unambiguously Protestant, it was ambiguous about the kind of Protestantism it was intending to settle."[28] In their introduction to the Thirty-nine articles, Debora Shuger and Ethan Shagan similarly note the tendency to avoid definitive answers to thornier doctrinal issues:

> All doctrinal statements must necessarily decide when to be specific and when to be vague, allowing latitude on some issues and not others, depending upon the needs of the moment. For the most part, the Thirty-nine articles err on the side of vagueness, not forcing precise distinctions that would have unnecessarily made enemies for the nascent and still very weak Elizabethan Church.[29]

The Elizabethan Church committed to the doctrine of predestination but avoided committing to exactly what predestination meant in relation to the daily practice of a godly life, leaving room for disagreement over whether someone who was not elect was inevitably doomed or whether the elect could ever fall. As part of this underlying equivocality, the Church held inconsistent models of conversion in tension: a sacramental initiation and an inner change of heart; a result of predestination and an expectation of living a godly life; an unmediated experience of grace and a spiritual journey facilitated by the church; a radical break and a progression with an adamant connection with the past.

Emphasis on continuous, intentional conversion over sudden, unlooked-for revelation provided a defense against accusations that Protestants broke with the past, but how this lifelong process corresponded with evolving Protestant conversion theology presented another difficulty. Michael Questier explains that the basic idea of conversion including both an inaugural rebirth and an endless labor was shared across confessional boundaries: "Though the word itself

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[28] Marshall, "Settlement Patterns," 50.
[29] Shagan and Shuger, introduction to "The Thirty-nine Articles," 104.

signifies merely a turning, in Christian theology it indicates initially the point at which man enters into a new relationship with Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit (mediated through the Church), and then subsequently embarks on a pilgrimage in grace."[30] A key source of conflict lay in that "initially" and "subsequently." The Council of Trent asserted that these steps were iterations of the same process, the sacred power of the sacrament of baptism replicated and renewed through the sacrament of penance.[31] Both sacraments conferred justifying grace but did not guarantee that grace's permanence; the initial conversion could be real and yet fail, so people needed to continuously convert through repentance in order to be saved. Many Reformers, on the other hand, asserted that conversion was entirely the work of God and so the elect, once called, were incapable of falling, making their acceptance by God complete and irrefutable from the moment it occurred.[32] A lifetime of repentance and dedicated work to be godly might follow or even precede this turn, but while this was concomitant with God's effectual calling, it had in itself no impact on salvation.

Yet if the laborious process of continuous conversion had no causal relationship with God's acceptance of the convert, it also could not be dismissed as superfluous. Alec Ryrie, in his study on the day-to-day religious lives of English Protestants, argues that, "With their need for crisis, and their focus on the importance of the present moment, Protestants were in some sense aspiring to be converted afresh every day."[33] People questioned the best way to apply this idea to

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[30] Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion*, 58.
[31] Council of Trent, "Decree Concerning Justification," in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London, 1852), 29–46.
[32] On the widespread consensus among Reformed Protestants on the premise that God had absolute power to permanently convert, see Hampton, "Confessional Identity," 217-225; Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians,* 264-274, 285; Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion*, 59.
[33] Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 441.

lived experience.[34] In post-Reformation England, configurations of the relationship between the unrepeatable event of conversion—including the sacrament of baptism and the effectual calling—and the life of conversion were diverse, inconsistent, and contextual. A life of conversion might offer assurance of election, understood as evidence rather than as a repetition of the conversion experience; it might be a natural result of being saved; it might, for those not elect, prevent a harsher damnation; or, as a growing movement within the Church of England began asserting in the 1590s, a continual renewal of grace might be somehow necessary to salvation after all.[35] Many potential schema were offered as guides, most famously William Perkins's "Golden Chain," but as Kathleen Lynch argues, these guides were prolific and offered competing systems, none of which could fully resolve the issue.[36]

If the early Elizabethan Church left the exact nature of the relationship between sacrament, conversion event, continuous conversion, and religious community purposefully vague for the sake of a unified Protestant identity, the early Stuart Church saw that identity increasingly splintering and reconfiguring. Tension within unsettled concepts of conversion grew more pronounced, as the contradictions embedded in Church of England theology bred

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[34] On approaches taken by Protestants in understanding how to apply the need for constant conversion to daily life, see Lynch, "Conversion Narratives," 428-432; Gribben, "Calvinism, Conversion, and the Science of the Self," 40-48; Elizabeth K. Hudson, "English Protestants and the Imitatio Christi, 1580-1620," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 4 (1988): 541–58.

[35] This diversity of opinion is described by MacCulloch in "The Latitude of the Church of England." For more on assurance, see Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 48-50, 293-302, and Hudson, "English Protestants and the *Imitatio Christi*," especially 546-547. On Protestant theologians who saw a role for human agency, see Nigel Voak, "English Molinism in the Late 1590s: Richard Hooker on Free Will, Predestination, and Divine Foreknowledge," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 60, no. 1 (2009): 130–77, and Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[36] Lynch, "Conversion Narratives," 430. See also Gribben, "Calvinism, Conversion, and the Science of the Self," 44-45.

numerous, competing ideologies,[37] forming what Anthony Milton describes as "the shifting mass of doctrines and attitudes that was the early Stuart Church."[38] Leif Dixon argues that for later generations of Protestants, the difficulties of applying an either-or approach to conversion became even more pronounced:

> it was becoming necessary for ministers to respond to the practical challenge of 'converting' people who were already being brought up as Protestants. The typical reprobate was no longer a Catholic, but instead a lukewarm Protestant. As such, ministers were forced to think about applying the black-and-white logic of predestination within a context which was, increasingly, all about shades of grey.[39]

For both clergy and laity alike, attempts to understand conversion, still perhaps the most powerful spiritual experience in a Christian life, were faced with intensifying theological divisions and practical complexity. The gap between the model of a clear conversion and the real-life experience was a dominant concern of post-Reformation faith. In Alec Ryrie's words, "Squaring this circle was a major preoccupation of Reformed Protestant piety."[40]

The Worldly Man is Converted? Signs of Damnation in *Enough is as Good as a Feast*

The friction between models of singular and continuous conversion grew in the later years of Elizabeth's reign and under the Stuarts, the consequence of deep ambiguities over what beliefs and practices could be accommodated within the theology of the governing Protestant

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[37] See Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, especially 29-57; Peter Marhsall argues that "the doctrinal consensus of the earlier Elizabethan years began to slowly unravel" by the end of Elizabeth's reign, in "Settlement Patterns," 59.
[38] Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26.
[39] Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 27.
[40] Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 411.

church.[41] But in the 1560s and 1570s, England's status as a majority-Protestant country with an establishment church was far from secure. Politically, England was perhaps 'converted' by 1559—one of several possible dates proposed by historians to demarcate a "post-Reformation" period[42]—but, to borrow Christopher Haigh's phrasing, converting into a Protestant nation did not mean that the people were finished converting into a nation of Protestants.[43] In addition to forming official doctrine and liturgy, clergy needed to communicate to the people how to apply Protestant theology to their lives. This period predates the "practical divinity" approach to theologies of grace that developed in the 1580s and 1590s, which produced various guides for recognizing and interpreting different stages of turning as Protestant clergy applied the contradictory impulses of the Church's conversion models to the lived experiences of their parishioners.[44] In what follows, however, I argue that William Wager's moral interlude *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (ca. 1570) uses competing models of conversion to create its own "practical" approach to the Reformed theology of grace, emphasizing the communal elements of conversion within a Protestant *sola fide*, all-or-nothing soteriology. The work of a Protestant clergyman, *Enough is as Good as a Feast* participated in the ongoing project of reform as

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[41] On the development of those ambiguities and different factions that arose in the Church over this period, see MacCulloch, "The Latitude of the Church of England"; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*; Walsham, "The Reformation of the Generations."
[42] See John Spurr, "The English 'Post-Reformation'?," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 1 (March 2002): 101–19, especially 101-105.
[43] Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 280.
[44] On "practical divinity" in this period, see Michael P. Winship, "Weak Christians, Backsliders, and Carnal Gospelers: Assurance of Salvation and the Pastoral Origins of Puritan Practical Divinity in the 1580s," *Church History* 70, no. 3 (2001): 462–81, especially 464-466; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 29-30; Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*.

Protestantism moved from a persecuted faith to the dominant religion in England.[45] This may be why it seems especially concerned with the homiletic task of explaining not only what people ought to believe or how they are converted, but how they ought to live their conversions. Rather than offering precise explanations for theological inconsistencies, *Enough* takes up the problem of singular and continuous conversion and provides a pastoral, community-oriented solution, using the vagueness enshrined in the Elizabethan Church to its advantage in order to focus on how Protestant conversion theology might be applied and interpreted in a relational, collective Christian society.

A reformist play that draws on the morality model of a representative Mankind character who falls and then repents, *Enough* makes a structural choice that radically transforms the plot: the action focuses more on what happens after the singular conversion episode rather than before or during. This subverts the morality ending so that, as Paul Whitfield White explains, "the final 'comic' phase of repentance and forgiveness is supplanted by a tragic one of persisting impenitence and retribution."[46] Audiences are presented with the opposing fates of Heavenly Man and Worldly Man, although the narrative focuses on Worldly Man's fall rather than on Heavenly Man's dramatically flat piety.[47] Initially persuaded to live a godly life following the spiritual advisor Enough, Worldly Man is convinced by the vice Covetous and his fellows

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[45] Paul Whitfield White describes William Wager's career in *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 70-71.

[46] White, *Theatre and Reformation*, 75.

[47] Martha Tuck Rozett, in *The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), and David Bevington, in *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), argue that this bifurcation of the single main character into two was the precursor to later Elizabethan tragedy.

Temerity, Inconsideration, and Precipitation that he would be better off seeking money and status. Worldly Man becomes consumed with increasing his wealth, abusing his tenants, servants, and workers in the process, until he is struck down by a plague from heaven, struggling and failing to invoke the name of God before death and leaving his family in debt. A gloating Satan appears, encouraging sin and rejoicing that worldly men "oppress the poor" (1449) before carrying Worldly Man off to hell on his back.[48]

Wager's interlude commits to an interpretation of the relationship between the initial conversion experience, on the one hand, and the continuous conversion experience, on the other, that attempts to reconcile reformist emphasis on unearned grace with the importance of human conscience and responsibility to others. *Enough* critiques accumulation of wealth and disregard for the poor by contrasting the content Heavenly Man with the anxiously greedy Worldly Man, who mistreats his dependents in his single-minded attention to amassing "enough" riches to feel secure, an end he can never reach. However, *Enough*'s characterization of Worldly Man is sympathetic, allowing him emotionally complex motives and dangling the chance that salvation might be possible for him before revealing his reprobation. This bait-and-switch is accomplished by giving Worldly Man a sincerely felt, complete conversion scene—but placing that scene at the beginning of the action, creating an obvious narrative problem. Since religious and moral drama typically portrays conversion as a transformative climax to a character's moral journey, experiencing that peak too early is ominous. By depicting a seemingly genuine conversion event and then allowing Worldly Man's continuous conversion to fail, measuring that failure in the

[48] All references refer to William Wager, "Enough Is as Good as a Feast," in *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, ed. R. Mark Benbow, Regents Renaissance Drama (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), except where otherwise noted.

harm it causes others, *Enough* makes the case that without continuous conversion, the conversion event, no matter how sincere, must be false, while remaining vague on whether it is made false by the reprobate's failure or is inevitably false in the instant it occurs.

Enough is as Good as a Feast at first seems to contain a complete, redemptive morality plot compressed into the first 280 lines. Worldly Man is introduced as a typical youth part, "lusty and strong" (88), the sort of Juventus character audiences might expect to convert over the course of the play.[49] And Worldly Man enters in obvious need of conversion: he is rich and materialistic, explicitly raising and dismissing the message that "enough is as good as a feast" (105) as a foolish approach to life. His reasoning is not driven by simple avarice. Worldly Man confides that he watched his generous father die in poverty, abandoned by his selfish friends who "For the value of twelve pence would have cut his throat" (116). Worldly Man comes by his fear of scarcity honestly, perhaps raising the hope that such a sympathetic sinner might be saved. That hope seems to be confirmed in the ensuing action, as Heavenly Man and Contentation enter and confront Worldly Man with his errors:

> Woe (saith our Savior) to those who are rich,
> Which therein only have their consolation.
> He curseth them not because they have much,
> But because they receive it not with contentation. (167-170)

The structure of the conversion scene that follows resembles a play like *Lusty Juventus* (c. 1550) in miniature. Worldly Man at first expresses arrogant spiritual complacency, dismissing entreaties to repent and insisting that he would be foolish to disregard wealth and die a beggar. He offers the excuse of concern for his family—"Then my wife and children that I leave behind,

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[49] On the genre of prodigal youth plays during the period, see Ezra Horbury, "Sparing the Rod and Hating the Son: Early Plays, 1513-77," in *Prodigality in Early Modern Drama* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 43–84.

/ I fear at your hands small relief should find" (179-180)—and then tries to mitigate the harshness of their heavenly sentence against him, insisting that "I take care which way and when / I may get treasure therewith to live in rest" (214-215). Heavenly Man and Contentation persist in challenging him to recognize his sinfulness and repent, describing the love of riches as "wicked, wretched and miserable" (197) and comparing Worldly Man's corruption by greedy ambition to the horror of the Marian persecutors who "burned with fire the child with the mother" (245). The comparison might seem harsh, but as chapter three demonstrated, making sinners see the extremity of their wickedness was a crucial step in turning them to a better path.

Their efforts succeed. Worldly Man repents his past life, dedicating himself to godliness in language that reflects precisely the right feelings of conversion:

> Good Lord, how your words have alter'd my mind;
> A new heart methinks is enter'd in my breast,
> For no thought of mine old in me I can find.
> I would to God you would take me in your company,
> And learn me how I may be an heavenly man;
> For now I perceive this world is but vanity,
> Let a man therefore make of it as much as he can. (267-274)

Worldly Man rejects the way of thinking with which he began the play and describes an inward change that could be a textbook definition of conversion. His mind and heart have been altered beyond recognition; the old man has died, and a new man has been born, echoing the directive in Ephesians 4:22-24 for followers of Christ to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man."[50] The play could end after less than three hundred lines and it

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[50] Alexandra Walsham notes that these lines from Ephesians were "Repeatedly invoked by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century preachers as a metaphor for the process of metamorphosis experienced by real believers," in "The Reformation of the Generations," 114.

would contain a complete arc, lacking only the disruptive entertainment of the vices. When Contentation asks whether Worldly Man speaks what he truly believes and is prepared for the demands of a godly life, he confirms, "I do mean it truly and I will study them night and day, / For I regard neither treasure, children nor wife" (277-278), and he exits with his pious teachers.

The conversion event appears complete. Unfortunately for Worldly Man, no would-be convert is safe until they are dead, and the play does not end here. It is only after his conversion that the vices appear, and while Precipitation and Inconsideration bemoan that Worldly Man has escaped them and "quite becomen anew" (390), Covetous is undaunted by Worldly Man's successful turn from sin:

> COVETOUS.
> Sirs, you tell me the Worldly Man is converted?
> PRECIPITATION.
> Yea faith, that forever from us he is departed.
> COVETOUS.
> Forever (quoth he) ha, ha, ha—no, no I warrant thee, I—
> What this gear meaneth well do I espy.
> Tush, he purposeth to go to heaven and to hell
> And fetch news from thence to the people to tell;
> He will be a prophet that was wont to be a devil. (509-515)

The vice's lines suggest his expectation that Worldly Man may be a hypocrite, but he does not indicate whether Worldly Man's conversion was false from the start—always hypocritical—or if his conversion will be made false, and thus made retrospectively hypocritical, by his eventual fall. When Worldly Man appears again, he is a sincere follower of Enough, cheerfully dedicated to the philosophy that "It is better to have little with the fear of the Lord / Than to have much treasure and yet go astray" (630-631). Worldly Man does not seem ripe for corruption, since he recalls his past sins with regret and expresses wariness of Covetous. His conversion does not seem like an attempt to mislead or a cynical bid to save himself, and he thanks God for his

merciful revelation: "It hath pleased him to open unto me the true light / Whereby I perceive the right path from the broad way" (660-61). At this point in the action, Worldly Man has every reason to believe that he has seen the light. He even—at first—manages to resist Covetous's deceptive efforts to win him back with pretended claims of friendship and rumormongering that the world mocks Worldly Man's poverty, declaring that he hates his former iniquity and is confident that he has chosen the right way to live.

It is only when Worldly Man fails that the play suggests he may always have been doomed to do so. Worldly Man's fall comes about through an error in judgment and a disregard for the advice of his spiritual advisor. After dismissing Covetous's attempts to appeal to his vanity, he succumbs to the idea that Covetous and Precipitation, under the names Policy and Ready Wit, were friends with his father and have been sent to him by God. He believes this so completely that he at first invites them to join him in living a godly life of poverty and labor with Enough, and fails to listen to Enough's warnings not to trust his new friends. From there, Covetous and Precipitation have an easy time persuading Worldly Man that if he returns to his obsession with accumulating more than merely "enough," he will be better able "yourself and many others to sustain" (820), appealing to his generosity. It is in this precarious spiritual moment that the play reveals Worldly Man's initial conversion may not have succeeded after all, but it does so ambiguously, as his moral guide Enough gives up on him, declaring "The worldly man will needs be a worldly man still" (863) and leaving him to his fate.

Enough is as Good as a Feast does not dwell on whether the vices reveal the failure of Worldly Man's singular conversion or lead him to fail in his continuous conversion. Rather than depicting good angels or moral advisors vying for the fate of his soul, the play focuses on increasing proof of Worldly Man's reprobation in his conduct toward the vulnerable. As he

dedicates himself to Covetous, Worldly Man echoes his own earlier description of the false friends who would have cut his father's throat for twelve pence: "let him teach me what he will," he says of the vice, "And I will do it if it were mine own father to kill" (945-46). Martha Rozett notes that after his return to greed, Worldly Man's callous, purposeful harm of others distinguishes him from most protagonists in conversion drama, "whose descent into wickedness hurt only themselves."[51] Unlike the self-destructive degeneracy of a Mary Magdalene or a Lusty Juventus, Worldly Man's corruption is inflicted on others, and audiences are given an extended sequence demonstrating the effects of his cruelty. An elderly, poor tenant laments that Worldly Man has unfairly raised his rent and threatened him with eviction. A servant complains that "we work, we labor, and that night and day, / Yet can we scant have meat and drink the truth to say" (999-1000) and says that Worldly Man treats his servants worse than dogs. A hireling shares that Worldly Man has refused to pay him for his labor. Worldly Man dismisses their pleas, and once they leave, he reveals that he plans to drive Tenant from his home in order to turn the tenement into a buttery—a better use for the land, he claims, since "it is not meet that such a beggar as he / Should dwell so near under the nose of me" (1177-78).

After this disclosure, the judgment of heaven is swift. A prophet provides the ominous warning that the diligent servant will taste God's blessings and the idle servant will be cast into darkness. Worldly Man, preposterously, recognizes the biblical references but fails to understand how they apply to him, and asks for the help of his chaplain, a stereotype of an ignorant Catholic priest. Worldly Man is overcome with a sudden sickness, struck down, according to God's Plague, "because at his prophet's preaching thou amendest not" (1238). With only fifteen lines

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[51] Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 93.

between Prophet's warning and the judgment of God's Plague, the verdict seems sudden, suggesting the harsh foreknowledge of providence: the forces of heaven know that Worldly Man never will repent. His damnation is assured as he tries and fails to say the opening words of his will—what should be "In the name of God. Amen," comes out broken and incomplete:

> Ignorance.
> Héer is Ink and Paper, what shall I write?
> Worldlyman.
> In the name, first of all doo thou in dite.
> Ignorance.
> In the name, in, in, in, in the name, what more?
> Worldlyman.
> Of, of, of, of, what more? (F4v)[52]

Worldly Man then falls down dead, never managing the word "God."[53]

The Worldly Man is not converted after all. As a false convert, Worldly Man's problem is not that his conversion is insincere, but that it is not true—not constant, and thus ultimately not real. While *Enough* is emphatically Protestant, it also avoids committing to a single understanding of how predestination works in Worldly Man's damnation, leaving open the possibility that he was degenerate even as he seemed converted and the possibility that he became degenerate when he accepted the vices into his life. Martha Rozett, Paul Whitfield White, and Heather Hirschfeld read the play as fitting within a Calvinist worldview, but Ineke Murakami argues that it "subscribe[s] to the very non-Calvinist idea that it is largely an

[52] William Wager, *A Comedy or Enterlude Intituled, Inough Is as Good as a Feast* (London, 1570).
[53] R. Mark Benbow, in the Regent's edition, has Worldly Man die after a single "Of" and assigns the next "of, of, of, what more?" to Ignorance, since it mirrors his "in, in, in, in, what more?", but the 1570 quarto—the only early modern edition—gives the full line to Worldly Man. In either case, Worldly Man dies before he can say "God."

individual's choices, rather than election or reprobation, that render one Worldly or Heavenly."[54] I argue that the play manages to convey both of these impulses at once because discovering the precise nature of the relationship between conversion done to the convert and conversion done by the convert—the question of "how grace filtered from its source to its final destination"[55]—is not the point. Instead, *Enough* uses the hazy division between singular and continuous conversion to instruct audiences on a broad Protestant theology of grace that does not release anyone from their obligations to others. In *Enough*, the inability to sustain a state of conversion is not a Faustian tragedy, but an irredeemable sin revealed through the would-be-convert's abuse of his dependents. Later "practical divinity" approaches to conversion were hyper-focused on looking inward to find evidence of sanctification, assurance of continuous conversion within the inner spiritual life of the convert.[56] *Enough is as Good as a Feast* suggests a different way to apply a broad Reformed theology of grace: by looking outward, toward spiritual advisors and toward the most vulnerable in society. Real conversion, in *Enough*, demands more than an individual conversion experience—it demands a constant recognition of our connections to others.

"I could afflict your farther": Enduring Conversion in *The Winter's Tale*

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[54] Ineke Murakami, "Wager's Drama of Conscience, Convention, and State Constitution," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 47, no. 2 (2007), 316. See Rozett, *The Doctrine of Election*, 74-107; White, *Theatre and Reformation*, 70-75; Heather Hirschfeld, *The End of Satisfaction: Drama and Repentance in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 96-105.
[55] Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion*, 63.
[56] Hudson suggests this focus on spiritual life as opposed to outward behavior came from associations of *Imitatio Christi* with Catholic piety throughout "English Protestants and the *Imitatio Christi*." See also Winshop, "Weak Christians."

A Jacobean tragicomic romance like *The Winter's Tale*—a play whose very genre promises a redemptive end—would seem to have little in common with an early Elizabethan moral interlude like *Enough*. Rather than beginning with conversion, the play initially seems to follow a more traditional chronology of fall into sin, redeeming turn, and unearned, miraculous salvation. Leontes spends the first half of the play sinking into tyranny. Only after he has wrecked his court, torn apart his family, and caused the death of his young son in his obsession with the fantasy that his wife has committed adultery does he experience a complete, despair-driven conversion. However, closer parallels to *Enough*'s bleak ending emerge when considering the play's principal source, Robert Greene's *Pandosto* (1588). In *Pandosto*, the apparently-converted king follows a trajectory similar to that of Worldly Man by failing his continuous conversion, unwittingly lusting after his daughter and finally committing suicide out of guilt for his sins.[57] *The Winter's Tale* closely follows the plot of *Pandosto*, but undoes its tragic ending through the extraordinary miracle of Hermione's living presence, facilitated by Paulina, a character who has no corollary in *Pandosto*—and who has also directed Leontes's unceasing, inexhaustible repentance.

The boundless nature of real conversion in *Enough* is revealed through its failure: lingering past the initial experience of turning transforms the plot from that of a conversion play into a tragedy for Worldly Man, offering a lesson on the importance of living a good Christian life in a Protestant cosmos. But *The Winter's Tale* repurposes the problem of competing conversion models to explore how conversion might work outside of eschatology. Applying the theology of conversion to human relationships, *The Winter's Tale* measures the doubling, endless

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[57] Robert Greene, *Pandosto the triumph of time* (London: 1588).

iterations of real conversion against an evil that causes irreparable suffering. Using the overabundance of conversion models that had emerged by the early seventeenth century, *The Winter's Tale* asks how a person can repent the unforgivable—and finds emotional answers in recognizing what a sinner owes to those he wronged. It is this recognition, even more than the expected comic recognitions of lost friends and missing heirs, that creates the affective possibility of the final scene's unlooked-for grace.

The final act of *The Winter's Tale* is filled with reunions. Children and parents, lost spouses, and alienated friends find each other again—but most of these rediscoveries take place off stage, recalled for the audience through the "broken delivery" (5.2.9) of three nameless gentlemen and the rogue Autolycus.[58] Denying audiences firsthand experience of these reunions is a jarring choice, all the more disconcerting because such a recognition scene is usually vital to the conclusion of the play, as it is in Shakespeare's other romances of the same period, *Pericles* (c. 1607-08), *Cymbeline* (c. 1609-10), and *The Tempest* (c. 1610-11). *The Winter's Tale* does not let audiences in on the secret of Hermione's life, and without the knowledge that another, greater reunion is still to come, the play appears to withhold enacting its resolution in favor of recalling that resolution. The gentlemen repeatedly draw attention to this strange remove: each has only witnessed a piece of the scene, and they claim that it was "a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of" (5.2.40-41), an event so wondrous that it "lames report to follow it and undoes description to do it" (5.2.54-55). Yet the brokenly told story, formed by shared and partial memories, is all audiences are given, and the play requires that they notice the discrepancy. The

[58] All references to *The Winter's Tale* are from William Shakespeare, "The Winter's Tale," in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 3121-3204.

storytellers claim that the power of these reunions is not just beyond words; that power is so overwhelming that it un-makes the story as it is told, combining creation and destruction into one act.

In narrating the tale of the meeting between Leontes, whose paranoia and jealousy has caused terrible suffering, and Camillo, one of the many loyal friends he wronged sixteen years prior, the gentlemen describe conflicting ideas and emotions that are impossible to differentiate:

> There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture. They looked as they had heard of a world ransomed or one destroyed. A notable passion of wonder appeared in them, but the wisest beholder that knew no more but seeing could not say if th'importance were joy or sorrow. But in the extremity of the one, it must needs be. (5.2.12-18)

The gentlemen repeatedly invoke this confusion of meaning, collapsing distinctions between joy and sorrow, salvation and damnation, understanding and bafflement. To see the reconciliation of the long-estranged kings Leontes and Polixenes was to see "one joy crown another, so and in such manner that it seemed sorrow wept to take leave of them, for their joy waded in tears" (5.2.42-44). For the penitent Leontes in particular, joy and grief are indivisible. There is no embrace of his lost daughter Perdita without the memory of her mother, and no reunion without confession: "Our king being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter, as if that joy were now become a loss, cries, 'Oh, thy mother, thy mother!'" (5.2.46-49). Celebrating Perdita's survival involves learning that the crew of the ship that carried her was killed; Paulina, embracing the princess as she learns that her husband was torn apart by a bear, "had one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled" (5.2.69-71).

Within the world of *The Winter's Tale*, this overflow of seemingly paradoxical ideas is not mere poetic antithesis; salvific repentance and damning despair, absolution and vengeance, rather than being opposites, are so closely tied together that they are nearly indistinguishable.

The Winter's Tale thrives on excess and overlap, resisting attempts to untangle the tragic from the comic—is that surprise bear horrible or funny?—or to resolve its sorrow into happiness. Contradictions are the magic of the play. Just as Hermione is simultaneously dead and alive, statue and woman, Leontes spends sixteen years at once converted and converting, in a spiritually demanding stasis of continuous repentance. *The Winter's Tale* is not instructive like *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, and it does not reconcile its competing conversion paradigms within a clear doctrinal framework. Instead, it presents audiences with an error so devastating it can never be mended, and then asks how conversion could work in such a context, giving Leontes an overwhelming, transformative revelation, a ritual, a daily practice of deepening conversion, and an unearned miracle of grace, at once too much and inadequate for the task. In Leontes, *The Winter's Tale* uses the early seventeenth century's excess of conversion models to carve out an imaginative space between converted and redeemed, and makes what Leontes owes to heaven inseparable from what he owes to his family, friends, subjects—and what he owes to audiences, who require his suffering to accept the play's miracle.

Before giving Leontes a conversion scene, *The Winter's Tale* spends nearly three acts compounding the enormity of his offense. Chapter three described the recognition of guilt as a crucial step in the conversion process, and showed Mary Magdalene, Lusty Juventus, and Faustus grapple with the revelation of their apparently just damnations. But in those plays, the intensity of the protagonists' realizations of sin and the need to amend their lives involves rejecting the vices or devils that tempt them. Leontes's guilt is bleaker and more destructive than even Worldly Man's willful harm of his dependents or Theophilus's murders, which are all celebrated as martyrdoms and which he matches with his own fearless death for his new religion. *The Winter's Tale* establishes the irrational, pointless horror of Leontes's actions and insists on

his absolute responsibility for them. The mistaken belief that could be his defense—his sincere conviction that Hermione and Polixenes committed adultery—is instead part of what condemns him. Belief, in *The Winter's Tale*, is active and culpable; Leontes is repeatedly given the opportunity to choose to believe otherwise, as first Camillo, then Hermione, then Antigonus, then Paulina, and finally the oracle of Apollo affirm Hermione's chastity and insist on the baselessness of his conviction.

Leontes himself recognizes the *ex nihilo* nature of his suspicion, and decides to believe it anyway, in a convoluted speech of half-thoughts that lead him to outsize conclusions:

> Affection, thy intention stabs the center;
> Thou dost make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with dreams—how can this be?—
> With what's unreal thou coactive art,
> And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent
> Thou mayst cojoin with something, and thou dost,
> And that beyond commission, and I find it,
> And that to the infection of my brains
> And hard'ning of my brows. (1.2.138-146)

Leontes sees that emotion, not reason, has pierced him—"affection," perhaps passionate jealousy, but also perhaps his love for Hermione and Polixenes. He also sees that it is this "affection" which has created the idea that fixates him. Affection, he says, might be "coactive" with what is not real, might imagine something out of dreams even if it emerges from nothing. But then, in a series of vague and twisting "ands," he concludes that this means affection might equally connect with something that is real. At the mere possibility that emotion might sometimes emerge from reality, he decides that he has discovered real adultery through the all-powerful evidence of his own feelings. "I have said / She's an adultress; I have said with whom" (2.1.88-89), he tells the lords present at his wife's arrest, as though offering proof. Later, when Hermione, stripped of her power, isolated from her children, and facing execution, protests, "My

life stands in the level of your dreams" (3.2.78), Leontes attempts sarcasm: "Your actions are my dreams. / You had a bastard by Polixenes, / And I but dreamed it" (3.2.80-82). Leontes did, of course, dream it, but by that point he has chosen again and again to place more value on the evidence of his own belief than on the world perceived by anyone else, his cruelty mounting with each choice: he drives away his friends, he smears the good name of Camillo when the lord will not poison Polixenes, he destroys his wife's reputation and tears her children from her, and he condemns his infant daughter to death by exposure. By the time Hermione is brought to her show trial, Leontes has ceased to recognize any reality beyond his own beliefs.

Leontes's destructive certainty in the supreme authority of his own convictions is more blameworthy than that of his counterpart in the source material. In *Pandosto*, the queen Bellaria and the visiting king Egius are as innocent as Hermione and Polixenes, but Greene provides more reasons for Pandosto's growing anxieties, making them at least understandable. When Apollo's oracle declares Bellaria's innocence, Pandosto immediately repents, accepting the verdict of heaven only to lose his wife and son anyway. Leontes, presiding over Hermione's trial, is given perhaps the most straightforward answer ever provided by an oracle: "Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten; and the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" (3.2.130-133). But as the gathered lords and Hermione begin to celebrate what they believe to be her acquittal, Leontes responds with a chilling rejection: "There is no truth at all i'th' oracle. / The sessions shall proceed" (3.2.136-137).

This refusal to place any value on the reality of others is Leontes's fundamental error, and it leads to the needless, baffling anguish for his family, friends, and subjects. Sarah Beckwith has argued that in the first half of the play, Leontes fails to acknowledge "the independent reality of

Hermione," a reality he only understands in his remorse, which must "involve a remembrance, blasting and perpetual, of his own folly in harming her."[59] But this failure extends beyond Hermione. It encompasses the subjects he insists must see, hear, speak, and think the same way he does, demanding that they "say / My wife's a hobby-horse" (1.2.275-76) or admit to being liars, declaring that "He who shall speak for her is afar-off guilty, / But that he speaks" (2.1.105-6). It encompasses his son Mamillius, whom Leontes imagines becomes sick at the knowledge of his mother's guilt rather than in response to his father's actions. It encompasses Paulina, whom he deems a witch and a bawd for challenging him, and the daughter he seems incapable of recognizing as his own despite the overwhelming physical resemblance, "the whole matter / And copy of the father" (2.3.98-99). It encompasses the reality of a higher power in his rejection of the oracle. It encompasses Leontes's entire world, reduced to nothing beyond the reality of his perception:

> Is this nothing?
> Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings
> If this be nothing. (1.2.292-96)

Leontes's error is all-consuming. When he is finally forced to recognize his own degeneracy — when he finally turns—his genuine, total conversion comes up against this unfathomable depth of harm.

Every convert, in a Calvinist worldview, is an unpardonable sinner convicted and condemned by the Law.[60] But by the time Leontes undergoes his conversion, the magnitude of

[59] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 133.
[60] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960): 351.

the damage he has caused renders him more unpardonable than most. Initially, *The Winter's Tale* presents this conversion as a specific event, prompted by a recognition of sin that emerges from Leontes's suffering. The objections of his court and the divine voice of Apollo cannot turn Leontes away from his persecution of Hermione, but the shock and grief he feels at the loss of his son finally jolts him from his obsession. Upon being told that Mamillius has died, Leontes realizes, "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (3.2.143-144), confessing his shame to the assembled court. Yet Leontes makes another error in this scene, an error that lays the groundwork for the play's more extended meditation on conversion. The king is stricken with self-knowledge, but his first instinct is to attempt to take back the harm he has caused: "Apollo, pardon / My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle," he pleads, "I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo, / Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy" (3.2.150-154). Leontes understands his sins and recognizes the people he has injured by them, an important sign of remorse. The role of penance in achieving salvation might have been rejected by the English Church, but the practice itself was not wholly abandoned. The 1559 Book of Common Prayer's instructions for holy communion command the minister to single out any wrongdoer in the congregation "until he have [*sic*] openly declared him self to have truely repented, and amended his former naughty lyfe, that the Congregation may therby be satisfyed…and that he hath recompensed the parties, who he hath done wrong unto."[61] But Leontes's recognition here still reflects a misunderstanding of what repenting can accomplish: what's done cannot be undone by any degree of penance. The congregation must be satisfied in some other way.

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[61] Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 124.

To experience full conversion, Leontes must be brought lower—brought to despair—and Paulina guides him to it. Emerging to announce the death of the queen, Paulina confronts Leontes with a blunt assessment of his crimes, so overwhelming that the reasonable response to thinking on them would be to "run mad indeed, stark mad" (3.2.180). He has betrayed Polixenes, showing himself to be "a fool, inconstant, / and damnable ingrateful" (3.2.183-84); he attempted to destroy Camillo's honor; he abandoned his infant daughter to the wilderness, "though a devil / Would have shed water out of fire ere done't" (3.2.188-89); he caused the death of the Prince, brokenhearted by the abuse of his mother; and, worst of all these, "the Queen, the Queen, / The sweetest, dearest creature's dead; and vengeance for't / Not dropped down yet" (3.2.197-99). This litany of suffering undoes Leontes's supplication to Apollo listing the ways he would make amends. Paulina forces Leontes to recognize his hopeless damnation and total inability to atone:

> But, O thou tyrant,
> Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
> Than all thy woes can stir. Therefore betake thee
> To nothing but despair. A thousand knees,
> Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting
> Upon a barren mountain and still winter
> In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
> To look that way thou wert. (3.2.204-211).

By convicting Leontes for his sins, Paulina's actions recall other facilitators of conversion—Knowledge of Sinne in Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* provides a similar condemnation—but such figures also remind converts of the hope of forgiveness and encourage repentance. In her rejection of hope, Paulina veers closer to Mephistopheles's scornful condemnation of Faustus: "What, weep'st thou? 'Tis too late; despair. Farewell" (5.1.97).[62]

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[62] Christopher Marlowe, "The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus (B-Text, 1616)," *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

Paulina's injunction captures the paradox of despair as it is felt in the moment, an unknown step toward conversion or damnation. For Leontes, fully understanding all he has done and his helplessness to make amends is a terrifying and bleak leap of faith.

Leontes's conversion scene involves the despairing recognition of his error and the complete transformation of the sinner, an authentic and total turn. But he is asked to make that turn, to embrace sorrow, pain, and difficulty, for an indeterminate amount of time with no promise of redemption. By detaching conversion from its Christian, salvific context, *The Winter's Tale* experiments with what conversion entails when it emerges from the knowledge of our affective obligations to heaven and to one another. Leontes's conversion is inflicted on him, a painful revelation from Apollo, but he also must choose it. After he accepts Paulina's condemnation—"Go on, go on. / Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserved / All tongues to talk their bitt'rest" (3.2.211-213)—the rest of the court admonishes her for her boldness. In response, she gives Leontes his first chance to move on from his conversion—to consider it accomplished—recognizing that "He is touched / To the noble heart" (3.2.218-19) and offering to release him from his guilt:

> I'll speak of her no more, nor of your children;
> I'll not remember you of my own lord,
> Who is lost too. Take your patience to you,
> And I'll say nothing. (3.2.226-329)

Leontes must ask her to keep reminding him, to help him dwell in perpetual conversion. This is the moment when he makes a rite of his repentance, vowing to inscribe the story of his guilt on the shared grave of his wife and son:

> Once a day I'll visit
> The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
> Shall be my recreation. So long as nature
> Will bear up with this exercise, so long

I daily vow to use it. Come, and lead me
To these sorrows. (3.2.235-40)

The ritual Leontes describes is not imbued with the efficacy to absolve him; he does not mention any hope that his confession and dedicated visits to their grace will earn him forgiveness. Rather, he understands that he owes these endless iterations of repentance to Hermione and Mamillius.

Lieke Stelling, reflecting on the difficulty of portraying a character's post-conversion integration (or re-integration) into the community, suggests that in early modern drama, "The most common, and radical, solution to the problem of conversion…is simply death."[63] In life, deathbed conversions might be suspected of being convenient or desperate, but they were possible within both Catholic and Protestant theologies, and the deathbed was a pivotal moment in every spiritual journey.[64] In a play, if a character's sudden conversion is followed by death, especially but not exclusively martyrdom, then that conversion is confirmed, like that of the thief on the cross. Even plays that do not stage their converts' death often provide a similar solution by making the turn part of the resolution, simply ending rather than depicting what comes after conversion. Of the plays studied in previous chapters, only the episodic Digby *Magdalene* depicts a genuine, complete conversion as something other than the culmination of its convert's storyline. But *The Winter's Tale* makes conversion both the center and the end of the plot, an act-

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[63] Lieke Stelling, *Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 141.
[64] On the suspicion around and importance of deathbed behavior, see Richard Wunderli and Gerald Broce, "The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 20, no. 2 (1989): 259–75; David W. Atkinson, "The English Ars Morendi: Its Protestant Transformation," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 6, no. 1 (1982), 1–10; Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 460-468. Peter Lake discusses popular pamphlets narrating the conversion of criminals before execution in Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 145-183.

three revelation and an act-five practice. Paulina reminds Leontes of all he has to repent, but he must invite her to continue tormenting his conscience. When the action returns to Sicilia and Leontes, the passage of sixteen years has been enough to shift the narrative mode from tragic to comic, but not enough to move Leontes a step closer to redemption. He is fixed as he was, ritualizing the process of his conversion every day for sixteen years even though it was total in the first instant—stuck in his repentance, on the edge of salvation or damnation.

Yet this sterile mourning is not treated as excessive. Cleomenes, attempting to convince Leontes to move past the immobility that has gripped king and kingdom since the loss of Mamillius, Hermione, and Perdita, is mistaken when he tells Leontes that because he has "performed / A saint-like sorrow," he has "paid down / More penitence than done trespass" (5.1.1-4). The play rejects Cleomones's suggestion that converting might involve the payment of a finite debt, just as it rejects Leontes's first instinct that his conversion might undo his wrongs. Cleomenes encourages Leontes to forgive himself, in what Beckwith describes as a basic incomprehension of how forgiveness works, since

> the grammar of forgiving yourself is in fact nonsensical. To forgive himself would entail absolving himself, and this would imply that he could, by an act of his will, reclaim the acts and their effects on others back from the lives of those others and order them by dint of will.[65]

Leontes has a better understanding of the unlimited depth of his responsibility and insists that "Whilst I remember / Her and her virtues, I cannot forget / My blemishes in them" (5.1.6-8). He keeps Paulina with him, persistently reminding him of his lost wife and children, recalling her husband Antigonus who cannot "break his grave / And come again to me" (5.1.42-43) because of Leontes's crimes, conjuring the image of Hermione as a vengeful ghost and comparing the

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[65] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 133.

Bohemian prince Florizel to Leontes's dead son Mamillius. Paulina inflicts suffering on Leontes for sixteen years—a suffering he must invite. In making Paulina the primary source of that suffering as well as the guide for Leontes's repentance, the play suggests that revenge and repentance are too tightly bound to separate, and that the convert endures one in enduring the other.[66] Leontes's iterations of conversion are redundant, demanding, and, in the absence of the wronged parties, permanent.

The inseparability of conversion imposed on the convert and conversion chosen by him, of spiritual change and suffering, persists into the play's resolution. Critics routinely describe the scene of Hermione's return in terms of grace. Hermione embodies "the grace that had been granted to Leontes,"[67] her presence providing "the grace to forgive."[68] Leontes's remorse as he stands before her is "the very substance of the grace he is in the process of receiving."[69] Yet the grace of Hermione's return, like the earlier, off-stage reunions, is a flood of conflicting joy and pain, and continues to make demands of Leontes. Presented with the apparent statue of his wife, more wrinkled than he remembers her, Leontes exclaims that this artistic rendering of how she might have lived is "piercing to my soul" (5.3.34). He feels "the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it" (5.3.37-38), and Paulina offers him another chance to leave behind the anguish of conversion. As she once offered to stay silent and let him forget, she offers to draw the curtain and hide the sight that causes him so much distress, since "If I thought the sight of my poor image / Would thus have wrought you—for the stone is mine— / I'd not have showed it"

[66] Frances Dolan has argued that the play's act-three dream of Hermione-as-revenant implies the possibility of vengeance, not just forgiveness, in her later resurrection, in "Hermione's Ghost," 226-229.
[67] Grantley, "*The Winter's Tale* and Early Religious Drama," 24.
[68] Tiffany, "Calvinist Grace," 436.
[69] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 141.

(5.3.57-59). Leontes, once again, must ask her to keep reminding him of his wife, refusing three times to let her hide the statue. When she offers Leontes a final choice, one that will lead to miraculous redemption—though he does not yet know it—she presents it to him as a plunge into grief: "I am sorry, sir, I have thus far stirred you; but / I could afflict you farther" (5.3.74-75). Leontes embraces the affliction with hope and trust, a reversal of his earlier witchcraft accusation against Paulina and a reversal of his insistence that the only reality belonged to him:

> What you can make her do,
> I am content to look on; what to speak,
> I am content to hear; for 'tis as easy
> To make her speak as move. (5.3.91-94)

Only after Leontes refuses the chance to cease looking at what causes him pain does Paulina tell the spectators, "It is required / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95). Hermione's warm presence is a participatory miracle, a grace Leontes cannot deserve, but which is simultaneously granted and received by Hermione, who forgives Leontes and steps back into her life.

Has the congregation been satisfied? Leontes's conversion does not earn him redemption or restore his family, which is only partially mended through the agency of Paulina and Hermione. The losses of the first half are not undone; Antigonus and Mamillius do not return to life, and sixteen years are past recovery. Hermione does not return because Leontes has finally found the right way to convert, or because he has converted long enough, but because her daughter Perdita has been found. In a Christian conception of grace, grace is similarly unearned, but the benefits flow in one direction. God gets nothing out of granting forgiveness. In *The Winter's Tale*, forgiveness becomes one more instance of mutuality: in offering it to Leontes, Hermione also returns herself to life. And though she embraces Leontes, her words, and her life, are for Perdita: "For thou shalt hear that I, / Knowing by Paulina that the oracle / Gave hope thou

wast in being, / Have preserved / Myself to see the issue" (5.3.125-28). Instead of making Leontes's turn a necessary step toward salvation, *The Winter's Tale* makes it part of a communal process of recognition and empathy. Leontes's doubling, perpetual conversion is the only adequate response to his clear-eyed awareness of his mutual, emotional responsibility to others, the sign that he understands his role in a shared reality, accountable to the people he harms even when that harm is beyond repair, and even when he has already 'converted' into a new man.

While the power of conversion as a continuous, relational process as well as a crisis of the soul resonates in both *Enough is as Good as a Feast* and *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's tragicomedy offers no exemplar of how to attain salvation or live a godly life. The explicitly pious *Enough*, like other religious and moral drama, exists in part to assert a particular belief system and a particular way of living within that belief system, attempting to reconcile doctrinal difficulties by making continuous conversion a way to read the success or failure of spiritual change. In Christianity, conversion is the central dynamic in a person's relationship to God, a response perpetually owed to heaven by irredeemable humanity. *The Winter's Tale* transposes the logics and emotions of conversion to an interpersonal, human level, exploring a kind of "conversion" that emerges from recognizing a one's ethical obligations to others.

The gap between *Enough is as Good as a Feast*'s doctrinal commitments and *The Winter's Tale*'s reimagining of conversion theology exemplifies my argument throughout this project. Like the other plays I have analyzed in this dissertation, both moral interlude and tragicomic romance explore the theological complexities of conversion, the most important religious experience in early modern Christian life. But although early modern professional drama maintained a deep interest in the theology of conversion, rather than providing representations of particular belief systems in action or exemplars of converting to a godly life,

these plays used theology as a source of creative and affective power to represent religious and moral states that fit uneasily in strict doctrinal constraints. Throughout this project, I have maintained that examining trans-Reformational depictions of conversion across religious, moral, and professional drama illuminates early modern playhouses as sites of vibrant, contentious engagement with religion, engagement that defies precise categorization into confessional affiliations or ideological arguments. Restricted from directly addressing doctrinal controversies, drama found ways to repurpose religious questions in new contexts and forms. The question of how people convert is a question of salvific potential, individual identity, and community membership, but it is also, more broadly, a question of how people change: whether change is possible, what change feels like, how it might hurt, what it can and cannot mend. Within the dynamic and diverse religious world of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatergoers, plays could guide audiences to collectively imagine experiences of change that were partial, uncertain, and emotionally and spiritually fraught, and to empathize with the painful, demanding process of becoming new.

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Illustrations

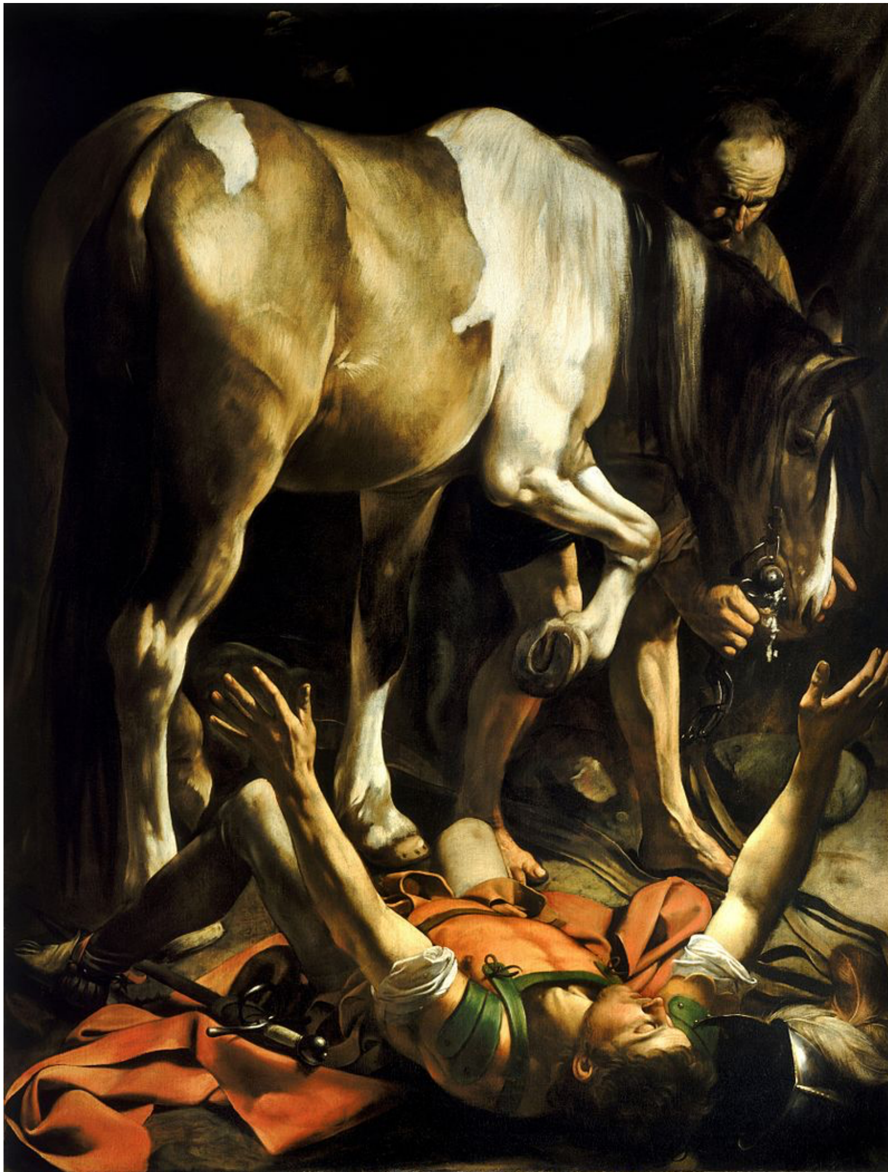

Figure 1: Caravaggio, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, c. 1600-1601, Santa Maria del Popolo, Cerasi Chapel, Rome.