Losing Eden:
Theater and the Fall from Medieval Drama to Milton

Gretchen York
Charlottesville, VA

B.A., Sarah Lawrence College, 2007
M.A., University of Virginia, 2013

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Abstract:

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My dissertation examines the lives and afterlives of biblical drama in Protestant England to argue that the gradual disappearance of scriptural narratives from sixteenth-century stages facilitates religious theater's survival in seventeenth-century poetry; the project locates a renaissance of medieval drama within reformed religious verse. Milton turns out, from this perspective, to be an unacknowledged conduit for mystery pageants' survival. Although contemporary scholars have recognized the influence that biblical drama had upon London's professional playhouses, critics' focus on the institution of the theater has obscured the ways that Christian drama, in the hands of its Protestant preservationists, also shaped conventions of sacred poetry. Long after arguments against Christian theater made biblical storylines unpopular and unprofitable on the secular stage, civic drama—as a form of biblical translation—continued to influence poetic adaptations of scripture. In Renaissance England, cycle plays do not merely exist as vestigial remnants of a bygone age; they are texts in transition.

The Fall narrative provides a particularly apposite lens through which to view the evolving fortunes of religious theater during the Renaissance: when Eve succumbs to the devil's assertion that "ye shall be as gods," Genesis records the first human error as the consequence of a desire to imitate the divine. The question of whether humanity can adequately represent God and his Word preoccupies Protestant reformers and antitheatrical authors alike; in the decades after the doctrine of *sola scriptura* begins to undermine sacred theater, both object to practices that use fallen technologies and scriptural supplements to illustrate sacred persons. But the inadequacy of artistic mediation also troubles those who must evoke prelapsarian Eden using postlapsarian means. "Losing Eden" therefore approaches the post-Reformation history of biblical drama by analyzing attempts to depict Adam and Eve in extra-scriptural dialogue with God. Late mystery pageants and early Protestant polemical drama both foreground the difficulty of translating God and his Word into a vernacular medium, and the biblical stage thus provides Protestant scriptural adaptation with a way to address the risks of turning the word of God into fiction: poetry relieves the consequences of the Fall only by reaffirming the fallenness of its artistry.

Civic cycle pageants (treated in Chapter 1) defend their medium against critics by counterintuively embracing their allegiance with "papist" idols and corrupt materiality: it is better to recognize oneself as an image, they suggest, than to fall to an image. Protestant traditions of scriptural interpretation unwittingly take up the convention and expose themselves to be reflections of the Catholic practices that they condemn. John Bale's reformed mystery cycle (Chapter 2) focuses upon Protestant reading methods as the best antidote to Catholic error. But such an emphasis, instead of divorcing the plays from the dramatic and theological institutions they hope to supplant, only reveals the similarities between Catholic and Protestant approaches to scripture. Protestant theater, even as it tries to forget the civic cycles, remembers their influence. The memory of the religious stage and its strategies in turn provides biblical poetry with a method of theorizing its own estrangement from scripture. Particularly in depictions of unfallen Eden, *Paradise Lost* (Chapter 3) insists upon its inability to do more than imperfectly mediate between mankind and the infallible Word. Milton, writing in the wake of virulent Protestant antitheatricalism, can appropriate the strategies of the religious stage precisely because he is not a playwright. The death of medieval drama enables its resurrection in verse.

For Gretchen Eloise Roach and James Robert York

Contents

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I submitted the defense copy of this dissertation on what would have been the eighty-first birthday of my maternal grandmother, Gretchen Eloise Roach. It is the best tribute I could hope to offer to her determination, her perseverance, and her independence.

Gretchen York
Charlottesville, Virginia

List of Abbreviations

DDC Milton, John. *De Doctrina Christiana*. In *The Complete Works of John Milton Volume VIII: De Doctrina Christiana,* 2 vols. Edited and translated by John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

ECCO Eighteenth Century Collections Online. < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/>.

EEBO Early English Books Online. <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>.

EETS Early English Text Society

DGnL Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*. In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols. Edited and translated by John Hammond Taylor. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983.

DGnM Augustine, *De Genesi ad Manichaeos.* In *On Genesis*, translated by Roland J. Teske. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991.

LW *Luther's Works*. American Edition. 55 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86.

PL *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, *Series Latina*. 221 vols. Paris, 1844-64.

REED *Records of Early English Drama.*

WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke.* Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 61 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-1983.

YPW Milton, John. *Complete Prose Works,* edited by Don M. Wolfe. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.

Introduction

In the extant text of the Chester *Draper's Play*, which dramatizes the Fall of Adam and Eve, the judgment of the first couple closely follows the dialogue recorded in Genesis 3:9-19. The drama, despite significantly altering, expanding upon, and reordering the biblical narrative in other instances, replicates the concision of the Bible's verses immediately after man's sin. The Drapers's God, prior to handing down a series of punishments for the first couple's disobedience, does not speak a lengthy paraphrase of his relatively brief biblical speeches; he only asks the hiding Adam "where arte thou?"[1] God's question, which begins a new action in the play, comes at the head of a stanza (the play, like the rest of Chester's Whitsun pageants, puts the Bible into rhyming stanzas of eight lines (aaabcccb)). Adam's answer then completes the stanza's first quatrain: the first man laments that "A, lorde, I harde thy voyce nowe. / For I naked am, I make avowe, / therfore now I hyd mee" (282-4). He responds to God's question by finishing the pattern that his creator began. The same thing occurs when God addresses Eve: upon learning that she has given Adam the forbidden fruit, God asks "why hast thou donne so?" (293) and Eve explains that "This edder, lorde, shee was my foe / and sothly mee disceaved alsoe, / and made me to eate that meate" (294-6). In the moments after Adam and Eve sin, their words complete the rhyme scheme that God's words began. Adam and Eve, whose speeches elsewhere in the play stand apart from the stanzas of their creator, paradoxically sound closest to God when they acknowledge how far they have fallen short of carrying out his will. The content of the lines, by revealing Adam and Eve's shame and their continued efforts to deflect God's anger, shows the loss of perfect virtue. But the lines' form, whereby the couple's language rhymes with God's,

[1] R.M Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle* (London: Early English Text Society (EETS), 1974), Play II, l.281. Future quotations from the Chester Cycle will come from this edition and be cited in the text by line number.

connects the characters to their creator; it partially repairs what Adam and Eve have broken. The drama finds consolation for human failure in an expression of that failure.

This project takes the estrangement from God in Eden as emblematic of the fate of biblical drama in England after the Reformation. The Chester play recognizes that Adam and Eve's restoration only emerges alongside their simultaneous recognition of humankind's great loss. Inasmuch as the Fall narrative concerns itself with illustrating, accommodating, and finding consolation for postlapsarian imperfection, it reflects concerns about how to represent the divine in art and how to translate scripture into the vernacular that preoccupy authors from the advent of Protestantism in the early sixteenth century to the publication of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The epic, which draws its materials and methods from a range of classical and European sources, also represents the culmination of a particularly English tradition of biblical adaptation that flourished on the stage—and it therefore owes much not only to neo-Latin and reformed responses to Genesis but to the Catholic theology and biblical theater of the Middle Ages. It is the goal of my project to articulate how the civic drama that was performed across England and that was, by the end of the sixteenth century, fiercely denigrated as a heretical distortion of the biblical text, heralds the solutions that Milton's poetry finds to the problem of putting the Word of God into the vernacular. The dramatic conventions of the pageants eventually become a casualty of Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura*, which finds sufficient representation of God in the words of the Bible (Milton, for example, argues that "Our safest way is to form in our minds such a conception of God, as shall correspond with his own delineation and representation of himself in the sacred writings").[2] But the plays survive because they attempt to provide a popular vernacular version of scripture: the cycles' efforts at biblical translation are appropriated as

[2] John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington, *The Complete Works of John Milton Volume VIII: De Doctrina Christiana*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), I:28-9.

evidence of proto-Protestant "light" amidst the errors of medieval Catholicism. The drama dies but lives; it is partially restored because it is also lost.

I.

By the last quarter of the sixteenth century, debates about the propriety of performing scriptural narratives were occurring across England. Chester was the site of one particularly acrimonious battle during the 1570s: the mayor John Savage twice resisted efforts to stop the performance of the cycle, and his decision to disregard an "Inhibition" of the pageants from the Archbishop of York resulted in a summons to defend his actions before Elizabeth's privy council.[3] In advance of the cycle's final performance, in 1575, the clergyman and former Marian exile Christopher Goodman asserted that Savage, with his resolution to "set forthe the sup*er*stitious whitson plays," strove "against God him selffe whose glorious word & blessed sacrame*n*te*s* are hereby shamfully abused & most vnchr*isti*anlyke prophaned."[4] The accusation, which associates the plays with the abuse of God's Word, is one that the pageants themselves anticipate and defend against: in the Late Banns, an advertisement for the pageants set forth before their performance, the Chester cycle contributes to the evolving Renaissance conversation about biblical drama. The Late Banns were composed and revised over the course of the plays' final decades in production, between 1548 and 1572, when hostility towards the drama was increasing.[5] They constitute a lengthy apology for the subject matter, vocabulary, and material

[3] A note about the Archbishop's "Inhibition" appears in a manuscript list of city mayors and events. See REED: *Cheshire including Cheshire*, ed. Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), I: 136. An account of John Savage's encounter with national authorities after the plays' final performance appears in Heather S. Mitchell-Buck, "Maintaining the Realm: City, Commonwealth, and Crown in Chester's Midsummer Plays," *The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555-1575: Religion, Drama, and the Impact of Change*, ed. David Klausner, Helen Ostovich, and Jessica Dell (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 179-182.
[4] Baldwin, Elizabeth, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds, REED*: Cheshire including Cheshire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 168 and 169, respectively.
[5] Lawrence Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle," *Modern Philology* 75.3 (Feb. 1978), 236-40.

conventions of the performances: they cite the "divers yeares they haue bene set out" and the plays' laudable effort to perform the Bible "in A common Englishe tongue" as justification for their continued "playe."[6] But they also spend a good part of their defense acknowledging the legitimacy of the charges against the drama; the Banns hope to carve out a place for civic biblical theater by admitting that it is unfashionable. This strategy, and the particular ways that it develops within the language of the Banns, illustrates the central arguments of my study and provides a summary of its topics.

The Banns ground their justification for the pageants in the long performance history of the cycle, which is intertwined with the illustrious history of the city itself: the plays owe their existence to the legendary first mayor "Sir John Arneway knighte who moste worthilye / contented hym selfe to sett out in playe / the devise of one done Rondall moonke of Chester Abbey" (5-7). In this telling, the plays are as old as Chester's civic structure and part of an extraordinary proto-Protestant legacy in which the "moonke not moonke like" (8) endured great danger to make public "storyes of the Testamente at this tyme... / in A common Englishe tounge neuer read nor harde" (22-3). The Banns argue that the plays deserve attention as remnants of a past whose attention to scripture and whose benevolent government, concerned with the "liuelye comforth" (12) of the populace, is continuous with that of the present. And the Banns hope to maintain the tradition in the future: they ask the plays' audience to "grante vs free passage that all to gether wee / Accompanied with Angells and Endlesse delectation / maye Contynually lawde god" (187-9). This narrative, in which the plays and their audiences participate with the angels in an unbroken song of praise, emerges at the expense of the drama's much more varied

[6] Because the EETS edition does not include either the Late or Early Banns, quotations from the Banns will be taken from F.M. Salter, "The Banns of the Chester Plays," *The Review of English Studies* 16.62 (1940), 137-48. Salter's edition most clearly identifies the revisions to the Late Banns recorded in the various manuscripts of the Whitsun Plays. The above quotations are from l. 29, l.23, and l. 32, respectively. Future citations will be cited parenthetically within the text by line number.

history: the Banns smooth over relatively recent and substantial changes to the structure and content of the performance. Evidence suggests that the cycle that the Banns defend, one performed "For three dayes to gether" (33), did not exist until the cycle was expanded and shifted to Whitsuntide in the sixteenth century.[7] The Banns posit a connection between the present and the distant past that is largely fictional. More, the Banns' narrative of continuity simultaneously depends upon a sense of radical discontinuity: the proclamation excuses the cycle's "grosse wordes" (50) and any "matter or shewe" (44) an audience might "misslike" (45) by asserting that such elements survive from an era marked by relative cultural backwardness in which "the fyne witt at this day aboundinge / at that day and that age had very small beinge" (48-9). The plays salvage the past by defining themselves against it.

The portrait of the Chester cycle as the remains of an alternately familiar and unfamiliar local history illustrates two central propositions of this study. The first has to do with the lacunae left by narratives that hope to find continuity with a distant past: such narratives often exist only by attempting to erase the recent past. The Banns find commonalities with the early fourteenth century by glossing over their debts to the early sixteenth. My dissertation finds these fissures and omissions indispensible to any discussion of how biblical drama survives into the Renaissance: authors' attempts to differentiate themselves from a corrupt dramatic tradition in order to revitalize a "purer" Christian or classical tradition are symptoms of a deep—and deeply anxious—engagement with that tradition. Milton, for example, initially drafts *Paradise Lost* in the form of a tragedy, and although he eventually turns to epic poetry as a more suitable genre for his project, his flirtation with biblical drama reveals that he can neither wholly reject

[7] Clopper, "History and Development of the Chester Cycle." Theodore K. Lerud considers the pageants a sixteenth-century response to Henrician reform: "The Procession and the Play: some Light on Fifteenth-Century Drama in Chester" in *Fifteenth Century Studies* 36 (2011), 65-85 focuses on the absence of the fifteenth century in narratives about the drama, which "serve to legitimate the reconstructed tradition in the eyes of Chester's citizens" by consciously erasing the recent past.

Christian theater nor rewrite Genesis without revitalizing the Catholic predecessors that he hopes to supplant. In this way he epitomizes an early modern era that is similarly unable to wholly divorce itself from the earlier era of Catholic "darkness" that its authors, beginning with John Leland and John Bale, repeatedly define themselves in opposition to.[8] The Renaissance may see the death of the pageants, but it also gives them new life: the extant manuscript witnesses to the Chester plays and to a tradition of Cornish drama were still being created during the seventeenth century.[9] The recent past reemerges despite—and perhaps because of—efforts to forget it. My project therefore reads examples of sixteenth-century Christian theater alongside the conventions and ideologies that came before it; it treats the gaps in the Chester Banns' narrative as central to that narrative's progression and meaning.

The Chester Banns' discussion of the pageants' history also illuminates the strategies involved in creating narratives of discontinuity. In the Banns' account, longevity is the pageants' saving grace. At the same time, that longevity also endangers the cycle: because the drama is old, it seems outdated and unrefined. The Banns encourage skeptical audiences to "goe backe I saye to the firste tyme againe" (47) in order to enjoy the performance; their remedy for the pageants' antiquated conventions depends upon recognizing the difference between the past and the present. The plays' missteps—which include permitting "some thinges not warranted by any writt" (13) to mar their otherwise laudable attempt to acquaint the lay population with scripture—are excusable because they were composed in a former "tyme of Ignorance" (40). The past becomes

[8] See below, 74-7, for a longer discussion of early Protestant authors' characterizations of the literary and religious backwardness of their predecessors. John Leland in particular describes the Middle Ages as a "semi-barbarous age [semibarbaro saeculo]" of literary production in his *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis (*Ed. Anthony Hall (Oxford: Guil. Lancaster, 1709), 414-5)).

[9] For details about the dates and composition history of the various extant manuscripts of the Chester Cycle, see the introduction to Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Cycle*. *Gwreans an Bys*, a Cornish drama about the creation of the world, was recorded in 1611 by William Jordan. See the introduction to Whitley Stokes, esq., ed. and trans., *Greans An Bys: Creation of the World, a Cornish Mystery* (Berlin: Philological Society, 1863).

an easy scapegoat in the event that an audience member finds that the performances "doe not please" (46). If the field of English literary studies still occasionally falls into believing the plays to be the remnants of a "grosse" medieval past, that is at least partly because the characterization exists within the texts themselves. The Banns, by treating biblical drama as occasionally illegible because of the difference between "this tyme" (55) and an unenlightened "that tyme" (55), rehearse a traditional historiographical narrative that sees biblical theater as a crude cultural artifact removed from the tastes and interests of the modern world. But the Banns' defense cannot be taken at face value; it is rhetorical strategy. The Banns' arguments help ensure the pageants' survival: they are repeated in the seventeenth century, when mounting antiquarian interest in the cycle encouraged copyists and their patrons to invest in the preservation of the manuscripts as historical curiosities. My project aims to show that, although the drama became unfashionable, it nevertheless offered sophisticated responses to problems and tensions that remained at the heart of post-Reformation culture. Those responses did not go away because the drama ceased to be played; they rather took on a new form.

At the end of the Banns, several stanzas record an apology for civic theater's seeming backwardness. They warn potential viewers that

> not possible it is these matters to be contryued
> in such sorte and cunninge & by such players of price
> As at this day good players & ffine wittes coulde deuise
>
> ffor then shoulde all those persons that as Gods doe playe
> In Clowdes come downe with voyce & not be seene
> ffor no man can proportion that godhead I saye
> To the shape of man face nose & eyne
> But sethence the face gilte doth disfigure the man that deme
> a Clowdye couering of the man a voice only to heare
> And not God in shape or person to appeare. (193-202)

The Banns suggest that their out-of-date methods and economic limitations are most evident in their approach to staging God: in a wealthier and more technically accomplished theater, advanced special effects and stage machinery would permit the drama to obscure the divine form. The Late Banns here acknowledge changing attitudes towards visual representations of God that by the mid-sixteenth century were calling both the plays' subject matter and medium into question. But instead of altering their practice, the Banns offer a new interpretation of a traditional method for staging God: audience members can "deme" the "face gilte" to be equivalent to a "Cloudy Coueringe of the man." As Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter have noted—and as I will discuss later in this project—mystery cycles regularly represented God the Father, God the Son, the human Christ, and even the virgin Mary with gilded faces, gilded masks, and/or golden wigs and crowns.[10] The Banns re-imagine the practice so that the presence of the face gilt is not so much a marker of divinity's splendor as a sign of the cloud machine's absence. The Banns ask the audience to remember the ways that civic drama falls short; they offer God's person only by embracing their medium's inevitably false aspirations to godliness.

Kurt Schreyer has emphasized the way that the Banns "willingly impose modern interpretations upon traditional stage practices in order to avoid controversy"; "the object's literal stage presence" matters more than any particular significance that the past may have attributed to the object.[11] Even as the Late Banns concern themselves with the plays' fidelity to the scriptural text and with the potential for their spectacle to inappropriately "proportion that Godhead... / To the shape of man face nose & eyne," for example, they also spend a considerable amount of time advertising the performance as a visual spectacle. The Banns promise that wagons will be "well

[10] Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Altershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 220-232.
[11] Kurt A. Schreyer, *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 70.

decked" (87) with players arrayed in "Apparrill comelye" (70). They embrace enjoyment and delight for the eye—things "onely to make sporte" (12)—over and above the assurances of "liuelye comforth" (11) that frame the proclamation. A pun on "wealthilye" (73) (which also means "appropriately") urges the Drapers to sumptuously perform the Creation, the Fall, and the story of Cain and Abel. Another passage asks the Glovers "ffinelye to aduance after the beste fashon" (or "in the proper way") (127). By advertising the plays' beautiful objects with language that simultaneously encourages the performers to rightly set out their matter—"These storyes of the Testamente" (22)—the Banns insist that sensory enjoyment and propriety are compatible. In this context, the Banns' discussion of God's "face gilt" offers an even more explicit attempt to turn splendor into the means by which the plays can "prayse that Kinge of glorye" (189); they reevaluate and redefine the conventions of the biblical stage so that the *things* onstage stay the same. The Banns privilege the material reality through which the theater creates its effects.

The first chapter of my project will discuss how the plays' performances likewise suggest that biblical theater approaches its otherworldly subjects through the kinds of material forms that the Banns defend. This sense of the object as central to the methods of early English drama has recently inspired discussions about how regional biblical theater relates to London's professional theater: Schreyer, as well as Jonathan Gil Harris before him, focuses on the way that the physical evidence of the past reappears on the secular stage of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In both scholars' work, the Renaissance theater is also a medieval theater because it ensures the survival of what Harris calls "untimely matter."[12] Stepping away from the playhouse in order to trace the influence of biblical drama, however, reveals an avenue for the persistence of the religious stage that transcends the institution of the theater but does not entirely leave the playing

[12] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

space behind. Even the material traces of the religious stage disappear when the Long Parliament of 1642 closes the London theaters. In Protestant England, all performed drama, not just Christian drama, finds itself at a dead end, and the fate of the religious stage therefore mirrors that of the secular. The exception to this loss—the "matter" that still persists—is the physical book. As popular as the professional theater was and as unpopular as the Christian theater became, both survive in print and in manuscript; Renaissance drama comes down to us as words on a page. Genres transform and cross-pollinate as historical circumstances change, and just as Shakespeare's plays ultimately triumph despite the suppression of the professional theater, aspects of Christian drama endure despite the loss of its performance tradition.

On the regional religious stage, the literal stuff of drama speaks to the pageants' inadequacy (they cannot "proportion that godhead.../ To the shape of man"), but the Banns reveal that such evidence of inadequacy also signals the pageants' resilience (a little recontextualization enables them to depict the Godhead with a man). The gap between the pageants' ambitions and their abilities creates the opportunity for the representation of God, and this acknowledgment that the likeness of the sacred appears most clearly in what seems most unlike the sacred applies to the drama's sense of itself as scriptural translation—as a version of the Bible that celebrates divinity's borrowed robes. Even as the Banns remind their hearers that the plays herald Protestantism because they adapt "These storyes of the Testamente" (22), they also carefully represent the plays as separate from the scriptures: they propose that the theater is a vernacular Bible that, on account of "some thinges not warranted by any writt" (13), is worryingly unlike the Bible. They thus respond to Protestant accusations that the drama wrests the scriptures out of shape. At the same time, by insisting that their version of scripture is a *version* of scripture, they lay bare a principle that adaptations more supposedly in line with the "literal" sense of the Bible

elide: vehicles for the transmission of God's Word—whether an adaptation, interpretation, or edition of the scriptures—inevitably alter or add to its verses in order to make sense of them. This admission that the pageants participate in a potentially blasphemous endeavor emerges out of the Banns' simultaneous assertion that the drama is an amusement: the "things not warranted by any writ" exist "onely to make sporte" (12) and "to gladd the hearers" (14). The drama eschews false aspirations to godliness and instead makes space for its spectacle because it is mere fiction. It undercuts the seeming irreverence of its practice by denying that it has any claim to authority—it rather instructs audiences to "creditt you the best learned" (149). The very distance from scripture that endangers the cycle also permits its play.

The Banns, by acknowledging that the cycle possesses an attitude towards scriptural translation that privileges mirth instead of accuracy, actually excuse a version of scripture that is, in many places, more "literal" than versions that claim to truthfully interpret the Bible. Although reformers disparage Catholicism and civic drama for their ostensibly indiscriminate distortion of scriptural sense, Protestants take similar license with the Word of God. The reformer and playwright John Bale appropriates and extends the pageants' strategies: his scriptural dramas not only add to the Bible's narratives; they also explicitly allegorize the verses they quote. Bale's characters engage in edifying interpretive struggles, but the very reading practices that they advance also fuel the devil's temptation. The dynamic reappears in *Paradise Lost*, where adding something to the Bible's verses outwardly recuperates fallen man but also signals his degeneracy. Milton's Adam and Eve find themselves caught up in postlapsarian interpretive labor; they find solace through their efforts to understand the promise that Eve's "Seed shall bruise / The serpent's head."[13] Georgia Christopher proposes that Adam's hermeneutic act, through which he

[13] *Paradise Lost*, 10.1031-2. Quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from Gordon Teskey's Norton critical edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005) and will be cited parenthetically in the text by book and line number.

understands that the promise foretells the defeat of "our grand foe / Satan" (10.1033-4), is the culmination of *Paradise Lost,* a moment in which "God's work of re-creation...is accomplished by a whisper of 'literary' interpretation."[14] In this sense, God's work of re-creation is also an act that recalls human imperfection: the possibility of error is what distinguishes literary interpretation—Adam's "conjecture" (10.1033)—from divine prophecy. Adam and Eve must discover the verse's meaning for themselves, and the poem thus yokes its re-presentation of the Bible to the consequences of original sin. Hints of the sacred survive in that which is most distant from the sacred.

II.

The Adam and Eve narrative, with its emphasis on humanity's first experience of God's Word and on Satan's disguise, offers particularly fertile ground for an inquiry into the evolving fortunes of biblical drama after the Reformation. At the beginning of the period, John Bale's drama looks backwards to a tradition of Christian theater associated with the established Church and forwards to the end of that theater. Bale, as my second chapter will detail, is both medieval and early modern—and he perhaps seems so quintessentially early modern because he is so steeped in the Middle Ages. But Bale also anticipates the tensions that will ultimately make Protestant theater untenable, and he therefore becomes the starting point for theories about how and why the drama died—and about the relationship of religious drama to the secular. I want to take a moment to think through his place in these narratives in order to articulate how my project hopes to revise them. Bale's account of the Fall, from the first act of his Old Testament play, *God's Promises*, emphasizes God's Word at the expense of Satan's disguise. His turn from the mystery pageants reveals his unease with the unruly attractions of a theatrical devil: the act

[14] Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 172.

focuses on the judgment of Adam and Eve and thus eliminates the serpent whose disguise evokes issues of visual deception in an age of iconoclasm and whose successful temptation raises the possibility that staged debates about God's commandment might work to satanic ends.

Bale thus seems to anticipate antitheatrical discourses that associate Satan's hypocritical disguise with the attractions of the professional stage. The word "hypocrite" derives from the Greek word for "actor," and antitheatrical authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries do not tire of pointing out that acting has an etymological connection to deception.[15] To William Rankins, actors' misleading performances come directly from the devil: players are "sent from their great captaine Sathan (vnder whose banner they beare armes) to deceiue the world, to lead the people with intising shewes to the diuell, to seduce them to sinne."[16] Critics have suggested that the emphasis on doctrine and debate within Bale's dramas reveals an aversion to "intising shewes" that reflects the rise of such anti-theatrical discourse.[17] Even Paul Whitfield White, who carefully differentiates Bale's critique of Catholic visual display from later reformers who object to the stage in its entirety, notes that Bale writes "iconoclastic theatre."[18] Allegorical dramas like *Three Laws* and *King Johan* present "revered images before the spectators only to discredit them by depriving them of their original sacred context, and substituting a profane or diabolical one instead."[19] Sedition, for example, dresses like a monk and parodies the sacrament of confession. Bale's biblical plays follow suit: in *The Temptation of Our Lord* Satan, like Sedition, appears in the guise of a monk. According to Sarah Beckwith, such methods turn theater into "anti-theater:

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[15] For a longer discussion of the question of hypocrisy, deception and the Renaissance stage, see chapter 3, 156-168.
[16] William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters* (London: I.C., 1587), 2v.
[17] See, for example, James Simpson, "John Bale, *Three Laws*" in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 109-122 and Ritchie D. Kendall, "John Bale: The Cloistered Imagination" in *The Drama of Dissent: The Radical Poetics of Nonconformity, 1380-1590* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Pres, 1986), pp. 90-131.
[18] Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation*, p.34. His full discussion of Bale's "iconoclastic theatre" occurs on pp.34-41.
[19] Ibid., p. 34.

the exposure of the defrocked; the discovery of their true nature as deceivers."[20] The plays use their actors' disguises to expose their hypocritical characters' affinity with actors. Bale's "anti-theater" thus becomes a herald of eventual Protestant distaste for the stage's deceptive surfaces, which find in the theater only "straunge confortes of melodie, to tickle the eare, costly apparrell to flatter the sight, effeminate gesture to rauish the sence, and wanton speache, to whette desire to inordinate lust."[21]

Beckwith's work, which has asked scholars to recognize the ways that cycle drama embraces the gap between God and man as "at once welcome, incitement, invitation, and promise, but also exile, lamentation, and reproach," has transformed the field of medieval drama studies.[22] Her account of Bale's "anti-theater," however, ultimately reproduces the traditional historiographical narrative in which medieval belief—in the rites and rituals of the Catholic Church, in the body as a meaningful "field of expression for the human soul," and in the theater's ability to represent a 'real' substance beyond the accidents that constitute it—collapses under the weight of Renaissance skepticism.[23] To Beckwith, once sacramental theater has been replaced by theater that traffics in disguise, it "will no longer be a form in which we trust."[24] But theater has never been a form in which we trust. Intradiegetic disguise may be "rare before the Tudor period," but it isn't absent.[25] In the cycle plays, Lucifer's dual role in the Adam and Eve narrative (he is simultaneously both serpent and demon) complicates any suggestion that Protestant reform newly associates the theatrical medium with satanic hypocrisy. Onstage, mankind's adversary is both an actor and a demon: he costumes himself as one of God's loyal

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[20] Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in The York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 151.
[21] Stephen Gosson, *Shoole of Abuse* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), 14v.
[22] Beckwith, *Signifying God,* 71.
[23] Ibid., 140.
[24] Ibid., 152.
[25] Ibid., 150.

creatures. The play's pedagogical effect depends upon the Christian audience's ability to see the devil behind the serpent costume, but the person who plays Satan best achieves this effect—he best warns his audience about the devil's wiles—when he behaves most 'like' his character. Two-hundred years before Bale, the serpent thus raises the very concerns that Bale exploits to Protestant ends: if in Bale's drama, "the epistemological lures and satisfactions of disguise in theater are provoked by monks as actors and exposed by actors as monks," cycle drama similarly provokes both the satisfaction of discovering the devil as an actor and exposes the threat that the actor might be a devil.[26] The snake in the garden—the hitch in any theory that blames the decline of Christian drama on the death of medieval enchantment—is the costumed snake in the garden.

Adam and Eve plays stand as evidence of a fall into skepticism well before the fall into Protestant drama. And they therefore reveal the ways that scriptural drama both anticipates the concerns of later skeptics and exploits the resources of its medium to embrace the very features that call Christian theater into question. In the Chester Adam and Eve play, Satan tells the audience that he will perform the part of a serpent and then perhaps changes costume in front of them; there is no presumption that his act is anything but a performance calculated to deceive.[27] And yet, his show seems dangerous to Bale—and perhaps to Milton, who likewise omits the temptation scene from his early drafts for a play about the Fall. The theater, even when it resists belief, inspires faith.[28] Arguments that fulminate against theatrical representation grasp this central truth about drama's methods and effects: antitheatrical authors 'believe' in the theater—in the stage's ability to transform the human soul despite all assurances that a performance is

[26] Ibid., 152.
[27] For a discussion of the devil's speech, see chapter 3 below, 158-9.
[28] The theater participates in the difficulty of belief—a difficulty that Steven Justice describes in "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103.1 (2008), 1-29 and in "Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42.2 (2012), 307-332. Erin E. Kelly applies Justice's question to the disappearance of the religious stage after the Reformation in "Doubt and Religious Drama Across Sixteenth-Century England," *The Chester Cycle in Context: 1555-1575*, ed. Jessica Dell, David Klausner and Helen Ostovich (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 47-64.

mere show. Such clear-eyed faith—such suspesion of disbelief—is the professional theater's stock-in-trade: audience members return to the theater only if they find the show worth their imaginative participation (and their money).[29] The story of salvation told by the cycle drama, which reveals the incarnate Christ "in the likeness of sinful flesh" [Romans 8:3], takes full advantage of the theater's appeal to faith in the absence of credulity: Christ's humanity is a saving disguise that functions only when the Christian both believes in it and sees through it to the God underneath.

And as the Chester Banns indicate, the god underneath is likewise only visible when disguised. In the plays, the gilt mask enables God to be represented because it obscures the human body of the actor who plays him—because "the face gilt doth disfigure the man" (200). The Chester Banns embrace the emptiness of theatrical signs because it is precisely as mere gestures that they work as theater. As a substitute for the more technologically advanced "Clowdye coueringe" (201), the golden mask pictures divinity by turning a "god in shape and person" into "a Voyce onlye to heare" (201-2). The mask that once rendered God and his glory visible now effaces him. In a post-Reformation context, as Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter have pointed out, "[e]ven the mask itself...is not representing God mimetically. It is an emblem or sign, like the cloud machine, which stands for God without actually imitating Him."[30] The stage presents God as a voice behind a mask on an actor and thus hides divinity behind several layers of signs; God is god-like because he appears as nothing more than a disguise.[31] The plays thus justify themselves by their inability to adequately emulate the divine. And the hallmark of such salvific failure is a sign that also connotes idolatry: the Banns promise a potentially

[29] John Parker, "What a Piece of Work is Man: Shakespearean Drama as Marxian Fetish, the Fetish as Sacramental Sublime," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34.3 (2004), 643-72.
[30] Twycross and Carpenter, "Mystery Plays" in *Masks and Masking,* 195.
[31] John Parker, "Persona," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Bryan Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 591-608.

idolatrous face in order to ensure the primacy of God's voice. The cycle defends its transcendent subjects and offers a vision of the Christian savior only through the denigrated and fiercely contested forms that contribute to its spectacle. In the drama, God's staged body enlists the audience's belief or disbelief as nothing more or less than a man-made imitation of divinity.

In the Genesis tradition described on the English stage, original sin occurs because Adam and Eve do not acknowledge the limitations on human artistry that the Banns embrace. Under the influence of Satan, the first man and woman overestimate their abilities and hope to imitate the divine; they falsely imagine that their finite selves might be capable of personating a god. In the N-Town Play, Eve tempts Adam with the suggestion that, upon eating, he will be able "Allthyng for to make"; Eve expresses a desire to recreate themselves in the image of God so that they will, in turn, be able to create like God.[32] Human artistry instead begins after the Fall—both as a mark of the first couple's presumption and as a remedy for it. Christian theologians discover the origins of artistic production in Genesis's account of the fig-leaf aprons that Adam and Eve make for themselves; representation begins with the first couple's struggle to repair the effects of postlapsarian shame.

My project's first chapter therefore examines perspectives on the fallen body as they inform the attempts that sixteenth-century biblical drama makes to grapple with its status as an imperfect copy of divine work. Focusing upon representations of Christ as well as of Adam and Eve, I ask how staging conventions that developed under the influence of Catholic theology resonate in a performance context where images of holy persons—and particularly of Christ on the cross—become objects of iconoclastic fury. Costuming records suggest that, despite this context, the drama consistently allies itself with the degenerate material forms of the sensible

[32] Douglas Sugano, ed. *Creation of the World; Fall of Man* in *The N-Town Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2007), l.134.

world. The garments that the characters wear, likely made of skin-colored leather, provide visual evidence of the fallen condition: the actors' fleshly costumes affirm drama's affinity with a degenerate postlapsarian corporeality whereby persons can, in Augustine's words, "hide lies under the garments of skin."[33] The chapter's primary objects of study—the extant text of the Chester *Crucifixion* and the revised 1565 text of Norwich's Adam and Eve pageant—thus accommodate uncertainty about church icons by confronting anxieties about the theater's representative medium: by advertising the theater's kinship with visual deceit, the dramas acknowledge the partiality of dramatic transformation and expose themselves to antitheatrical criticism. At the same time, their emphasis on the skin suits as fake coverings also anticipates the triumph of the spiritual body at the resurrection. The consciously theatricalized bodies onstage permit the pageants to evoke both the Fall and its consolations.

The first chapter of the project offers a glimpse at an early modern theatrical culture in which a longstanding tradition of scriptural drama coexists with its Protestant critics. The second, however, examines the moment before the theater and the Protestant Bible were at odds with one another. Reformation-era discourses, by emphasizing the importance of unmediated access to the Bible, conditioned audiences to regard pageants' deviations from scripture with disdain. But for a few decades after printed translations of the Bible became widely available, advocates of *sola scriptura* produced their own dramatized retellings of sacred narratives. John Bale, the most prominent of them, directs the erring eye of his audiences towards scriptural subjects. But despite assurances that his drama, unlike that of his Catholic contemporaries, avoids trafficking in "fantasyes fayned," the plays frequently stage episodes wholly unlicensed by scripture: Bale's *God's Promises,* for example, invents a conversation between God and Adam through which

[33] DGnM, II. 21.

Adam comes to recognize and worship Christ.[34] Bale's scriptural plays, which form a Protestant mini-cycle focused on the life of Jesus, treat their aesthetic practice as part and parcel of theological reform; foregrounding the reading process, they ask how scripture functions in the hands of its fallible interpreters. My chapter reads these plays alongside the prefaces and treatises of early Protestant translators of scripture to show how both play and polemic, by aiming to provide scripture to the laity, actually hearken back to Catholic interpretive and dramatic practices. Bale's revision of the cycles—his attempt to redefine the form as a particularly Protestant means of scriptural translation—only makes his predecessors' influence more visible; his efforts to enlist the stage to disseminate the vernacular Bible throws into relief the similar aims of the Catholic tradition that he outwardly repudiates.

My final chapter describes the influence of biblical drama on poetry after the triumph of the theater's opponents in the seventeenth century, when arguments that scripture ought to be the primary object of Christians' attention gave rise to attacks upon all forms of spectacle reminiscent of Catholic sensuality. Milton's prose, which disavows rituals that cater to the "customary ey-Service of the body," recalls antitheatrical treatises that find Christian theater an extension of "popish" error.[35] Despite the poet's efforts to banish the medieval past, however, his works never extricate themselves from a tradition of biblical theater uncomfortably allied with Catholicism. They instead stand as a record of its persistence. One of the five extant copies of the mystery plays performed at Chester, for example, may have been owned by John Egerton, the First Earl of Bridgewater, who commissioned Milton's *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*. In this light, the masque's emphasis on rural show instead of courtly entertainments puts it in conversation with the afterlife of Christian drama. And *Paradise Lost* in turn places Milton

[34] John Bale, *God's Promises*, l. 17
[35] YPW I:520.

within a tradition of staged biblical adaptation that wrestles with its susceptibility to the very faults that it condemns. *Paradise Lost* approaches the possibly satanic allegiances of its representational medium by embracing its association with pleasing lies: by paraphrasing the Bible's verses within episodes alien to traditional expansions of Genesis, the poem supplants God's voice on earth and so insists upon the audacity of its translations of the Bible. The epic thus adopts a strategy common to the religious theater that it replaces: it only "pursues / Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (1.16) by emphasizing its inability to do more than imperfectly mediate between God and man.

Chapter One
The Fallen Body on the Early English Stage

In 1452, the Coventry Smiths' crucifixion play made provisions to clothe the naked Christ on the cross: their records list an "It*em* payed for vj skynnys of whitled*er* to godds g*ar*ment."[1] Untanned "white leather" as Meg Twycross has pointed out, was "as near to [human] skin in colour and texture as a simulation could get, and could be tailored close to the contours of the body in a way stiffer materials of a similar weight could not."[2] Onstage at his passion, the crucified Christ wears a flesh-colored jacket to simulate his nudity. Evidence suggests that sixteenth-century New Testament plays follow similar costuming conventions: records of "gods kote of leddur" show up in Tewkesbury in 1557, in New Romney in 1560, and in Chelmsford in 1562.[3] Cycle drama, which originates in the fourteenth century but is costumed through the end of the sixteenth, inhabits several historical moments simultaneously; it bears significant traces of a Catholic theological past that speaks anew in a Reformation context. Further, the number of extant manuscripts of early English drama compiled, composed, or revised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have led a growing number of scholars to call for an increased awareness of the early modern contexts and post-Reformation performance history of what has hitherto been called "medieval" drama.[4] Crucifixion pageants provide a lens through which to view the

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[1] R.W. Ingram, ed., REED: *Coventry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 25.
[2] Meg Twycross, "Apparell comlye," *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. Paula Neuss (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), 36.
[3] Tewksbury: Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield, eds., REED: *Cumberland, Westmorland, Gloucestershire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 337. New Romney: Giles E. Dawson, ed. *Malone Society Collections VII: Records of Plays and Players in Kent, 1450-1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 208 and 210. Chelmsford: John C. Coldeway, "The Digby Plays and the Chelmsford Records," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, XVIII (1975), 107-8. For a discussion of instances where Christ in the Crucifixion might have appeared only in a loincloth, see William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages: Western European Stage Conditions, c. 800-1576*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 176 and 213.
[4] See, for example, Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson, "The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, Kent Cartwright, ed. (Blackwell, 2010); Theresa Coletti, "The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture" in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (JMEMS)*, 37.3 (2007), 531-47; Gail McMurray Gibson, "Manuscript as Sacred Object: Robert Hegge's N-Town Plays," *JMEMS* 44.3

strategies and shifting fortunes of the drama as the tumult of the sixteenth century plays itself out: the performances continue traditional methods of visually representing Christ well after English communities witness the destruction of such images during the early Reformation, when statues of the crucified Christ were targeted by iconoclasts as objects liable to incite idolatry. The plays' costuming, particularly as it engages with enduring traditions of antitheatricalism and iconoclasm, exposes English biblical drama's longstanding preoccupation with its detractors' anxieties about fallen artistry—anxieties that become particularly acute with the advent of Protestantism.

Attitudes towards the crucifix changed rapidly in the early decades of the sixteenth century: in 1532 men were hanged for burning a crucifix in Dovercourt, but by the summer of 1538, the Rood of Boxley—a mechanical statue that moved its eyes and lips in response to pilgrims—was publicly broken in pieces by a bishop.[5] Henry VIII's injunction against images "abused with pilgrimages or offerings" quickly followed.[6] Whether Christ might be visually represented remained an open question well after the initial wave of iconoclastic furor: a battle broke out in 1560 between Elizabeth and her bishops when the queen ordered a crucifix for the royal chapel.[7] Amidst such prolonged battles, the pageants' production slowed and eventually died out. To be sure, neither concerns about idolatry nor Christ's leather garments were new to post-Reformation England. The dramatic conventions surrounding the representation of Christ, however, do become more visible once the Reformation foregrounds worries about idolatry; the

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(2014), 504-529; Richard K. Emmerson, "Contextualizing Performance: The Reception of the Chester *Antichrist*," *JMEMS* 29.1 (1999), 89-119 and "Dramatic History: On the Diachronic and Synchronic in the Study of Early English Drama," *JMEMS* 35.1 (2005), 39-66; Kurt A. Schreyer, *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Paul Whitfield White, "Reforming Mysteries' End: A New Look at Protestant Interventions in English Provincial Drama" *JMEMS* 29.1 (1999), 121-47.

[5] The Dovercourt incident is recorded in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, VIII.14, which is available at *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), <http://www.johnfoxe.org>. James Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation in England: An Historical Survey*, (London: Macmillan, 1908), 2: 123-32, provides an account of the Rood of Boxley's destruction.

[6] Henry Gee and William John Hardy, eds., "The Second Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII" in *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914), Item 7, 277.

[7] John Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 124-7.

plays' Renaissance context helps us see their strategies more clearly. The Rood of Boxley, for example, came under attack in 1538 because its appearance, "lyke unto a lyvelye thyng," enabled the "false, crafty, and sottell handelyng therof, to the dishonor of God, and illusion of the sayd people."[8] If the Rood of Boxley drew reformers' ire because it seemed too similar to its subject—too "lyke unto a lyvelye thyng"—Church statues were also criticized for being unlike the divine: the Elizabethan homily *Against peryll of Idolatry and Superfluous deckyng of Churches* notes that images, as products of human craftsmanship, "can be no meete figures of the puissaunt and mightie God."[9] Christ's leather suit, in the face of Protestant discourses that denounce man-made representations of God for only being *like* their object, puts skin-colored leather over human skin as a substitute for the flesh it hides; it draws attention to its *like*-ness.

So although questions of confessional allegiance have often guided attempts to mark out the cycles' later development and decline, studies of Christian drama's "appropriation and renovation of traditionalist texts for new reformist contexts," in Theresa Coletti's phrase, might forego a focus on doctrine to ask how the plays' engagement with their own theatricality resonates in the face of growing unease about idolatry.[10] How, for example, might Christ's proclamation in the Chester *Last Supper*, which urges spectators to "make haste, that we maye soone / all figures cleane rejecte," function within a decidedly theatrical event?[11] The lines, by equating the Eucharist with a temporary "figure" instead of God's real presence, suggest the surviving text's Protestant allegiances. But by looking towards a future where Christians can "all figures cleane rejecte," they also seem to undermine the representational foundations of the

[8] From a letter about the Rood of Boxley by Geoffrey Chamber, Thomas Cromwell's commissioner: "Geoffrey Chamber to the Lord Privy Seal. The exposure of the Image called the Rood of Grace" in Henry Ellis, ed. *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, vol. III (London, R. Bentley: 1846), 168-9.
[9] *Against peryll of Idolatry and Superfluous deckyng of Churches, Seconde Tome of Homelyes* (London: 1563), 18v.
[10] Coletti, "The Chester Cycle," 534.
[11] R.M Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle* (London: EETS, 1974), l. 71-2. Future citations from this play will be taken from this edition and cited paranthetically within the text by line number.

theater: they locate significance beyond the realm of human figuration. The metatheatrical question preoccupies civic drama throughout its long history in England and pertains to both Protestant and Catholic frames of reference. Addressing it over questions of doctrine has the advantage of permitting the surviving texts' diverse theological influences to speak together. Claims that drama falsely invests "figures" with undue significance and thereby empties out sacred ritual appear in writings that appear sporadically throughout the pageants' history in England. The charge appears in the fifteenth-century *Treatis on Miraclis Pleyinge*, which condemns religious plays as "signis withoute dede," and reemerges after the Reformation when the Protestant divine Christopher Goodman complains that a 1572 performance of the Chester cycle shows "the sacrament made a stage play."[12] Such rhetoric identifies a fundamental blankness behind both theater and images, whose forms potentially provoke disdain and misguided faith as well as proper reverence. The critique has a long history: Christian authors from Tertullian forward denounce the theater for enticing audiences to participate in spectacles dedicated to Lucifer and the pagan gods. Patristic authors' contempt for the theater provides later Renaissance antitheatrical authors with ammunition in their attacks on the secular stage, and such early warnings against the theater also come to haunt drama that claims to serve the Christian God. According to Philip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses*, for example, plays "of diuine matter" are "most intollerable, or rather Sacrilegious."[13] The absence of any sustained attack on biblical theater prior to its decline, however, has led scholars to question the reasons for the drama's disappearance in England: there is little surviving evidence of an official campaign to shut down

[12] Clifford Davidson, ed., *A Middle English Treatise on the Playing of Miracles* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 40. For Christopher Goodman's "Notes of the absurdities...in the Chester plays," see Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds., *REED: Cheshire Including Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 147.
[13] Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, (London: Richard Jones, 1583), L.Vr.

the pageants on account of their relationship to idolatry.[14] But whatever the reason for the death of England's religious drama, the opinions of later Protestant figures like Stephen Gosson—who in 1582 cautioned against "Corpus Christi Playes" in which "some base fellowe that plaide Christe, should bring the person of Christ into contempt"—speak to the significance that narratives about the drama's idolatrous practice came to possess for the later sixteenth century.[15] But the plays themselves, whose texts and performances directly address visual temptation and depravity, also stand as records of continuing debates about the theater's merit. This chapter will consider the ways that, like Christ's words in Chester, the costuming of biblical drama in the sixteenth century highlights its form and medium in the face of early Protestant arguments against visual representations of God. The project thereby discovers a defense of theater's contested "figures" that emerges out of those figures' very unreliability: ultimately, it is as false skin and as evidence of imperfect human artistry that Christ's costume best exposes the fallenness that creates the need for the crucifixion and the sacrifice that characterizes it. Precisely by remaining rooted in its degenerate materiality, the plays' representation of the physical body recuperates fallen sight and participates in the renewal of the postlapsarian material world.

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[14] An oft-quoted proclamation from the ecclesiastical commission of York, which forbids any pageant in Wakefield "wherein the Maiestye of god the father god the sonne or god the holie ghoste...be counterfeyted or represented; or anything plaied which tende to the maintenaunce of superstition and idolatrie," lends support to theories that civic cycle drama suffered persecution under Elizabeth I. But such an explicit connection between the pageants and idolatry appears in no other official source. The proclamation appears in Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 78. For theories of the decline of biblical drama as a result of Protestant attitudes towards visual media, see Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Theodore K. Lerud, *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), which devotes much of its energy tracing Christian drama's status as a "quick image" in the Middle Ages. For accounts that emphasize economic factors, see Lawrence Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and White, "Reforming Mysteries' End."

[15] Stephen Gosson, *Playes confuted in fiue actions* (London: 1582), E6.

I.

Rather than merely confirm the outcomes of public conversations about visual media, civic drama actively contributes to the discussion—and costuming offers a particularly fruitful lens through which to analyze the drama's engagement with its medium's possible connection to idolatry. As a costume, Christ's skin suit provides a convenient solution for several problems of staging the crucifixion: it can protect an actor during scenes of flagellation and torture; it can conceal containers full of stage blood; and it can signify Christ's nearly-naked form without requiring the guildsman who played the savior to disrobe in public.[16] But if the presence of some kind of covering for the actor seems like a necessity, the particular convention that developed within the mystery plays warrants further scrutiny. The skin garment was by no means inevitable: the twelfth-century *Ordo Repraesentationis Adae*, for example, foregoes strict verisimilitude when it depicts Adam and Eve naked in the Garden of Eden. A stage direction suggests "Let Adam be robed in a red tunic, Eve in a woman's white garment with a wimple of white silk."[17] Medieval drama need not imitate naked flesh just because the Bible calls for nudity—and neither do Passion plays need to accommodate public notions of decorum with a leather garment that visually resembles the bare skin of the suffering savior. In this context, the particulars of Christ's costume at the crucifixion—the suit's materials and its close fit—suggest not only the plays' interest in sustaining the illusion of nakedness but also its interest in advertising the effect as an illusion: a dead animal's skin only substitutes for living human skin through a willing suspension of disbelief. Although the theater's detractors scorn drama's empty images, crucifixion drama responds to the charge by accepting it: like the spectacle it helps compose, Christ's garment simultaneously provokes an audience's belief and reveals that belief to be false.

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[16] William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages,* 176.
[17] David Bevington, ed. and trans., *Ordo Repraesentationis Adae,* in *Medieval Drama* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012), 80.

In an era of sanctioned iconoclasm—and amidst mounting concerns about visual representations of the divine that would later make it impossible to put the Christian God on the secular stage—such suspension of disbelief may well have seemed, in Margaret Aston's words, "akin to submission to misbelief."[18] Idolatrous misbelief and iconoclastic skepticism, however, share many of the same characteristics: like idolatry, iconoclasm directs Christians' attention towards the sacred object and only confirms the object's metaphysical associations. Arguments against images hope to reveal the inherently limited nature of human creation: *Against peryll of Idolatry and Superfluous deckyng of Churches* cautions against church images on the grounds that "they can not once moue, but tarry styll lyke blockes as they are" and so "greatly hurt the simple and unwyse, occasionyng them therby to commit most horrible Idolatry."[19] But *Against peryll of Idolatrie*'s straightforward condemnation of representational art in churches exposes the tension between theory and practice regarding images in the period. Iconoclasm cannot get rid of Christianity's material supports—a god of flesh and blood sits enthroned at the very heart of Christian belief—and iconoclasts' emphasis on the mere "block" in fact reveals that they believe in its strength. Michael Camille, hoping "to understand why it is that the very fabrication of a thing makes it an idol," describes medieval concerns that the artist might blasphemously "usurp God's role as artificer of man and the universe."[20] He argues that it is the "act of destruction, not representation, that excises or neutralizes [idols'] status, since, of course, by scraping away the paint the iconoclast has declared and drawn attention to the image as an illusion made by human hands, which can just as easily be destroyed by human hands."[21] But the act of destruction only

[18] Margaret Aston, "Iconoclasm in England: Official and Clandestine" in *Iconoclasm vs. Art and Drama*, Clifford Davidson and Ann Eljenholm Nichols, eds. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 61.
[19] *Against peryll of Idolatry*, 18v. and 12v, respectively.
[20] Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9 and 33.
[21] Ibid., 71.

emphasizes that the "illusion made by human hands" is too dangerous to be let alone. The artist makes likenesses whose otherworldly powers are only confirmed by their defacement. God creates men, but men invent images that can hold a demon.

Further, in a highly iconoclastic environment, people are well-prepared to be fascinated by images—even (and perhaps most particularly) if such fascination results in the images' destruction. When authorities destroyed the Boxley Rood of Grace, for example, the public spectacle potentially illustrated both a fall into and out of idolatry. The event aimed to expose a holy object as a fraud and so upend notions of sacred and profane.[22] In a letter after the event, John Finch reported that when the Rood had been debunked as a puppet and shattered, "it was a great delight to any one who could obtain a single fragment, either, as I suppose, to put in the fire in their own houses, or else to keep by them by way of reproof to such kind of imposters."[23] Finch interprets the onlookers' actions as supportive of the destruction of Christ's image, but they seem remarkably similar to devout behavior towards a holy relic: audience members desire to obtain the wood and take it home. In Finch's letter, the spectators' motives only appear holy because neither Finch nor his source has access to them—and Finch's "as I suppose" admits as much. The letter affirms the fundamental theatricality of the event, in which a spectacle invites its audience's participation and interpretation but multiplies the possible meanings of its content—even to the point that idolatrous and iconoclastic conduct look the same.

Civic biblical drama acknowledges the polysemous nature of spectacle and harnesses the arguments levied against visual media to provide an answer to the Protestant theater of iconoclasm. And it does so through the material forms that prompt iconoclastic fury. As a fleshly substitute for the crucified Christ's skin, the actor's leather costume invokes a late-medieval

[22] Aston, "Iconoclasm in England," 58.
[23] "John Finch to Conrad Humpard" in *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation,* Vol. 1, Hastings Robinson, ed. (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1847), 607.

theological commonplace based in St. Augustine's claim that Christ descended from heaven "to be clothed with a body of earthly mortality."[24] In fifteenth-century devotional works and sermons, the incarnate God puts on a human mantle of flesh and blood within Mary's womb: Johannes of Verden, for example, writes that Mary "made [her son] a white tunic to put on from her most pure virginal flesh."[25] The visual arts take up the theme as well, and Marian paintings of the fifteenth century recall the Virgin's "spiritual cloth-making" by depicting her spinning a thread that passes across her womb as a symbol of the flesh her body weaves for Christ; as Gail McMurray Gibson points out in her discussion of the paintings, "the Virgin Mary spins both *filum* (thread) and *filium* (son), crafting the garment of flesh and of human mortality for the still embryonic Word."[26] Christ's mother becomes a miraculous clothier, able to enclose God within a mortal body of her own creation. The Towneley crucifixion play explicitly evokes the flesh-garment analogy: Mary cries that Christ's "robe is all to-ryfen / That of me was hym gyffen / And shapen with my sydys."[27] And York's *Death of Christ* yokes mother and son together in lines of lament whose language recalls fabric-making. The Virgin faces her son and remembers the union of his dear flesh with hers, sighing "Allas, for full louely [he] laye / In my womb, þis worthely wight" and asking "why scholde we twynne þus in twoo / Foreuere?"[28] Before "forever"

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[24] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei,*XIII.23. In *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, Vol. 1, ed. and trans. Marcus Dods, M. A. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884), 550.

[25] Johannes of Verden, *Sermones dominicales cum expositionibus evangeliorum, sive Dormi secure de tempore et de sanctis* (Basel: Johann Amerbach, 1484), Sermon 27. (Quoted from Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 50.)

[26] Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 166 and 164, respectively. For a more detailed description of the tradition surrounding the metaphor of Mary's cloth-making and its importance within medieval English drama, see her chapter on "East Anglican Drama and the Cult of the Virgin", particularly 156-166. The chapter features several pictures of Mary spinning a thread that passes over her womb on 165 and 167.

[27] George England and Alfred W. Pollard, eds., *The Towneley Plays* (Oxford: EETS, 1966), l. 387-9. All future citations from the Towneley Plays will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically within the text by line number.

[28] Richard Beadle, ed., *The York Plays*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: EETS, 2009), l. 133-4 and 151-2, respectively. All future citations from the York Plays will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically within the text by line number.

ends her speech and reveals that "twynne" functions as the question's main verb, Mary's phrasing momentarily evokes the flesh that has united them since Christ's time in the womb: "we twin." And while "tweinen" denotes parting, the pun on "twinen," "to join" and "to form a thread by twisting," simultaneously suggests the clothing metaphor that reaffirms her contribution to her son's body: the Virgin spins his flesh and joins their natures.[29] At the passion, Jesus's body is a living textile, a costume for his divinity that originates in Mary's handiwork. And onstage, the actor who plays Mary's son wears a literal flesh costume.

In the extant crucifixion plays, the act of covering Christ's naked body speaks to mankind's relationship to the godhead. Both the humiliations visited upon the living Christ and the reverence shown to him involve the addition or removal of items of clothing: while the soldiers mock Christ by first costuming him as a king (and thereby unwittingly revealing his "real" identity as the king of heaven) and then stripping him, the proto-Christians Joseph of Arimithea and Nicodemus carefully shroud the body for burial. In this context, the Virgin Mary stands out as a figure of particular importance, and the resonance of the leather costume depends upon the popular tradition surrounding her unique involvement in Christ's body and his garments. Mary, in addition to metaphorically clothing Christ in flesh, literally robes her son on the cross: meditations on the passion supplement the gospel narrative with the legend that the Virgin, seeing Christ naked, wrapped his loins with her veil.[30] In other texts, she also weaves the

[29] "Twinen," *Medieval English Dictionary*, University of Michigan, < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>.
[30] Mary offers her veil to protect her son from shame and, therefore, the effects of original sin. The validity of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was being debated by theologians of the thirteenth century at the same time as meditations like those of the Franciscan pseudo-Bonaventure, whose order tended to support the Virgin's conception in the absence of original sin, became popular. There is perhaps in Mary's shielding Christ from shame a reference to Mary's own sinlessness, which she passed onto Christ by covering his divinity in her flesh. For a discussion of this history, see Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, 51-61. In the English tradition, the veiling episode can be found in Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus,* a translation of pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 174).

seamless garment that the soldiers cast lots for on Calvary.[31] The seamless garment accrues particular significance because it establishes the passion as preordained—the gospels report that the soldiers' actions fulfill Psalm 22:18 ("They parte my garments among them, and cast lottes vpon my vesture")—and metonymically signifies the flesh that Christ takes on at the incarnation.[32] In some sources, the tunic is, like Jesus's body, both rent asunder at the crucifixion and representative of the unity of the Church, which constitutes the body of Christ on earth.[33] Worn by Jesus, made by Mary, and destined for the passion, the tunic provides a physical manifestation of the metaphor by which Christ's body becomes a kind of clothing for his divinity.

The connection between the garment and the holy body finds expression in the arts: in the Scrovegni Chapel, for example, Giotto's fourteenth-century representation of the crucifixion places the suffering Christ between his grief-stricken mother and the soldiers, who hold the seamless tunic up by its shoulders and turn it slightly towards the Virgin so that its positioning recalls Christ's posture on the cross. One soldier raises a knife to split the cloth while two others move to stop him. Garment parallels flesh even as the soldiers' concern for the former exposes their cruelty towards the latter. Textile, flesh, and their maker share the frame.[34] English passion plays likewise evoke the relationship between the holy flesh and the seamless garment by juxtaposing the soldiers' behavior towards the tunic with their treatment of Christ's body. In N-

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[31] In regard to the seamless garment (Matthew 27:35 and John 19:23-24), the *Liber de Ecclesia Lateranensi* of Johannes Diaconus, for example, describes "The seamless tunic that the virgin Mary made for her son our lord Jesus Christ, which at [his] death the soldiers cast lots for, [and] was not rent..." ("Tunica inconsutilis, quam fecit virgo Maria filio suo domino nostro Jesu Christo, quae in morte ipsius a militibus sortita est, non scissa...") PL vol. 78, col. 1383D-1384A. For further sources, see Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 218 n. 64.

[32] Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 164

[33] Kathryn M. Rudy, "Introduction: Miraculous Textiles in *Exempla* and Images from the Low Countries" from *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages,* Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert, eds. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brapols Publishers, 2007), 17-19. The tunic was regularly interpreted as figuring the church's unity from the time of Jerome. For a particular instance, see Thomas a Kempis, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, II.xxi (Wright and Kettlewell, trans., New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1892, 147-8).

[34] The Web Gallery of Art reproduces the image: Giotto di Bondone, "No. 35 Scenes from the Life of Christ: 19. Crucifixion," *Web Gallery of Art*, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.wga.hu/html/g/giotto/padova/3christ/chris19.html>.

Town's passion sequence, the stage directions indicate that, as Christ hangs above the spectators, "*þerwhylys shal the Jewys cast dyce for his clothis, and fytyn and stryvyn. And in the menetyme xal oure Lady come with iij Maryes with here and Sen Johan with hem, settyng hem down asyde afore þe cros, oure Lady swuonyng and mornyng.*"[35] The action of the scene relates the destruction of Christ's flesh to the disposal of the seamless tunic that metonymically represents it. In the Towneley manuscript, the competition for the garment begins at the foot of the cross where the torturers' discussion of the tunic's destruction—"Soyn will we this mantyll ryfe" (558)—also recalls the riven body above.

But of the extant cycles, it is Chester in its *Passion* that engages with the parallel between flesh and garment at most length and in greatest detail. The Chester *Passion* put particular emphasis on the casting of lots: it lengthens the episode and rearranges the order of events so that the division of Christ's clothing precedes the agony that the tormentors inflict upon his person. The torturers appraise, remove, and divvy up Jesus's garments while he stands unclothed before them. Christ's presence as his coat is being disposed of juxtaposes his body and the tunic. The play's staging encourages the viewer to remember the parallel, and its language furthers the comparison by foregrounding the Virgin Mary's role as parent and artist. One tormentor notes that "This coate bowt seame / to breake yt were shame, / for in all Jerusalem / ys none such a garment" (97-100), and the next immediately thinks of Christ's mother: "His dame nowe may dreame / for her owne barme-teame; / for nother aunte nor eame / gettes this gaye garment" (101-4). The tormentors' admiration for the seamless garment leads directly to commentary upon its creator. The parallel by which the seamless garment becomes a figure for Christ's incarnate body originates in Mary's identity as both a mother and a woman—she generates Christ's flesh as she sews his tunic—and so, at the casting of lots, the play links Jesus's body to his clothing

[35] Douglas Sugano, ed., *The N-Town Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2007), s.d., 92-93.

through Mary, their maker. In Chester, as in the medieval legends, sermons, and commentary it adapts, the *filum* that Mary weaves is both flesh and fabric.

Mary's work, which produces the human garments for the Word made flesh, turns divine text to holy textile. The Middle Ages found great meaning in the shared etymological root of the words "text" and "textile", both of which come from the participle "textus," meaning "something woven." Devotional material and poetic treatises alike use metaphors of fabric-making to describe the creation of texts, whose words are woven together to form a coherent whole.[36] To theologians, the biblical text is like the seamless garment: inspired by and made possible by God, it is set apart from other human works by the excellence of its weaving. Radbert, Abbot of Corby, notes of the Gospel of Matthew that "all things are woven and so adorned by the shapes of things done and said that it seems one seamless garment, woven from above throughout."[37] But the biblical text is not just the product of God's hands; it is also a product of the hands of men. Weaving signals postlapsarian loss as much as divine wholeness: as part of her punishment Eve acquires a distaff with which to "spyn threede by threede / to hill [cover] mee from the could" (Chester, *Creation*, 503-4). Neither the Church nor her sacred texts is immune to the taint of Eve's fallen labor. Radbert may insist that the Gospel appears to be seamless, but such confidence in the scriptures' unity is itself a fabrication. An anonymous medieval author, in a discourse on Leviticus and the priesthood, writes that Christianity endures because it resembles Christ's garment; he argues that the priest's clothing figures such unity because it "is not split—

[36] For sources and a discussion, see Hanneke van Asperen, "Praying, Threading, and Adorning: Sewn-in Prints in a Rosary Prayer Book (London, British Library, ADD. MS 14042)" *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert, eds. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brapols Publishers, 2007), 94-6. For references to *textere* as a poetic process, see Alan of Lille, *De Planctu Naturae* (in *Literary Works*, Winthrop Wetherbee, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)), 8.18, and James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry, Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's* Anticlaudianus *and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 252 n. 31.
[37] *Expositio in Evangelium Matthaei*, PL vol. 120, col. 0796A-B: "...sed omnia ita sunt contexta, et ita figuris decorata gestorum atque dictorum, ut et una vestis inconsutilis, *desuper contexta per totum* videatur, et mira pulchritudo operum in singulis, ac multiplex variata sententiarum floribus cernatur."

that is, [the priest] does not allow heresies and schism to divide his Church."[38] The commentator insists upon seamlessness in the face of the real divisions that threaten the unity of the Christian Church. The undivided Church that the priestly garment reflects back at its wearer is a fiction; the miraculous, seamless product only exists within the text and as an aspiration to wholeness.

But it is the flaws themselves, which create the need and desire for wholeness, that ultimately enable human creation. The wounds on Christ's body, rather than his seamless tunic, provide the occasion for hope. Seamlessness may denote the glory and mystery of divine creation, but seams recall the fragmentary nature of ordinary earthly invention. Saint Bonaventure, part of a tradition of thinkers that stretches from Isidore of Seville back to Origen and even Horace, denounces combined forms like chimeras and centaurs. He sees such idols as particularly human creative efforts and describes fallen artistry as a process of compilation rather than creation wherein "the soul makes new compositions [from what it receives from the external world] but not new things."[39] It is in light of this tradition that Michael Camille can claim that the medieval image-maker works "by fitting fragments together"—the attitude towards human creativity in the Middle Ages acknowledges mankind's inability to make something up out of whole cloth.[40] In his *Didascalicon*, the twelfth-century Augustinian canon Hugh of St. Victor imagines poets as compilers, "lumping even dissimilar things together" in order to create "a single 'picture' from a multitude of 'colors' and forms."[41] Little wonder, then, that he connects "the work of the artificer" to the invention of clothing: he notes that human creation is

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[38] *Quaestiones super Leviticum* PL vol. 93, col. 0393A-B: "Vestimentum ejus non scinditur, id est, non patitur dividi in haereses et schismata Ecclesiam suam."

[39] Bonaventure: "Anima enim facit novas compositiones, licet non faciat novas res." See translation in Sister Emma Jane Marie Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1953), 111. For a succinct account of the tradition of rhetoric against combined forms and its influence on medieval theories of human artistry, see Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 6-40.

[40] Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 40.

[41] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, III.4, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). James Simpson discusses Hugh of St. Victor's perspective on poets in *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*, 232-3.

characterized by attempts "to put together things disjoined or to disjoin those put together, whence we read, [Gen. 3:7] 'They sewed themselves aprons.'"[42] Seams make human combinatory processes visible by marking the places where distinct and pre-existing materials meet each other to form a new object. Seams both characterize worldly efforts at invention and signal the ways in which they fall short. And so while the emphasis of late medieval Marian devotion on the Virgin's connection to Christ's tunic affirms her status as the one human maker of the incarnate God, the garment's wondrous seamlessness also reinforces the fact that her creative act only takes place through divine intervention.

If the analogy of the seamless tunic expresses the miracle through which God enables Eve's human successor to clothe his son, the process of human making by which Jesus is clothed onstage is decidedly less miraculous. The material conditions of the plays' performances continue and concretize the late-medieval devotional tradition that cloaks divinity in borrowed robes: the theater reproduces Mary's creative labor by replacing an actor's skin with a product of human craftsmanship. In such a context, the prolonged casting of lots in Chester's *Passion*, which juxtaposes Christ's body with the seamless garment, heightens the contrast between two objects that might otherwise be linked. In the play, the mantle's seamlessness provokes wonder: Christ's torturers marvel at the coat, calling it "good and fyne" while noting that "seame is none therin" (74-5). Seamlessness makes the tunic desirable; it differentiates the garment from other, more mundane products of human labor. But by dressing the naked Christ in animal skins, passion plays like New Romney or Coventry invoke Christ's Incarnation by providing evidence of their own combinatory work: the drama presents the Christian savior's earthly garment as undeniably man-made. So when Chester points out the Virgin's relationship to the seamless tunic and reorders the casting of lots to ensure that the naked Christ stands before the crucifiers

[42] *Didascalicon*, I.9.

throughout their game of chance, the pageant incorporates the flesh-tunic analogy only to reverse it: the play associates the broken and salvific body of Christ not with an act of divine creation, but with the human artistry that makes the body available to the audience.

The connection between Christ's flesh and his seamless garment in the popular Christian tradition only draws out the differences between the two on the sixteenth-century stage, where Jesus's flesh is not the miraculous product of Mary's womb, but the work of postlapsarian human hands. During the late Middle Ages, leather garments were both connected to the larger economy of animal products and the work of tanners and clothiers whose professional expertise turned raw materials into valuable commodities.[43] In England, the period saw the wool industry expand and urban wealth increase as the price of manufactured goods rose.[44] Objects made by and for the community took center stage in guild-financed dramas, which drew attention to theater as a process of human labor by displaying their sponsors' works and wares as the means by which biblical narratives became physically present.[45] But as cities' wealth decayed in the sixteenth century, such items became increasingly visible—and increasingly objectionable—as part of the heavy cost of public ceremonies.[46] In the later London playhouses, the display of expensive goods that paying theatergoers enjoyed was part of the return audiences received for their money.[47] The use of costumes, properties, and theatrical effects common to medieval pageants and Catholic ceremony ensured that the pre-Reformation past continued onto the post-

[43] John Parker has elaborated upon the importance of the commodity to English drama in "What a Piece of Work is Man: Shakespearean Drama as Marxian Fetish, the Fetish as Sacramental Sublime" *JMEMS* 34.3 (2004), 643-72.
[44] Sarah Kay, "Legible skins: Animals and the Ethics of Medieval Reading" *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 2.1 (2011), 13–32. Clifford Davidson, *Technology, Guilds, and Early English Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 1.
[45] See Davidson, *Technology, Guilds, and Early English Drama* and Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 42-55.
[46] Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 287.
[47] Parker, "What a Piece of Work is Man," 645-6. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass argue for sumptuous costumes' role in theatrical profits -- and for the continuing centrality of costumes from guild theater to the professional London stage -- in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 176-181.

Reformation stage.[48] Regional performances of biblical drama embedded such history in ongoing local networks of manufacture and trade. In the sixteenth-century theatrical tradition that thrived in places like Coventry, New Romney, and Chelmsford, leather skin did not just approximate living skin; it stood out as evidence of technical skill.

Visible as a product of artistry, Christ's leather costume both embraces and rejects verisimilitude; it (merely) looks like human flesh. In this regard, the stage and the church parallel one another. Late medieval articulable statues—hinged at their joints, used in liturgical celebrations to re-enact miraculous events, and sometimes adorned with wigs and leather coats—perform Christ's body by reproducing its motions, skin, and hair.[49] Such representations acknowledge the very features that Protestant reformers eventually decry; they close the gap between nature and art while also pointing out their inability to precisely imitate their object. The idol is only life-*like*. Christ's hands affirm drama's analogous commitment to keeping representational distance intact: in the Coventry crucifixion play, the naked Christ wears gloves. In 1499, craftsmen were not only paid to make "gods kote of leddur," but also "for makyng of the hands to the same kote."[50] The Coventry costume simulates a wholly separate skin for the suffering god, one both distinct from and more artificial than the actor's own. Placing a skin suit over skin, the plays' performances reflect and imitate the Virgin's artistry because they distinguish between the human body and Christ's staged flesh; because the fleshly costume is, like Christ's earthly garment, a mere costume.

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[48] Jonathan Gil Harris, in *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), and Kurt Schreyer, in *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014) discuss the way that the London theater's stage effects and properties recall and revive regional biblical drama.

[49] I am grateful to Emma Margaret Solberg for pointing out the physical features of these statues to me and for suggesting in her conference paper "Medieval Mechanical Idols and the Statue of Hermione" that their verisimilitude acts as a provocation to faith ("Tudor Shakespeare," Shakespeare Association of America, Vancouver: April 2015). Photos of the statues are available in María José Martínez Martínez, "El Santo Cristo de Burgos: Y Los Cristos Dolorosos Articulados," *Boletin del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arquelogia* 69-70 (2003-4), 246.

[50] REED: *Coventry*, 93.

The presence of the gloves complicates surviving passion plays' thematic focus on the humanity of Christ: he might suffer like a member of the audience, but his tortured body is not a human body. The skin suits, by highlighting the artificiality of Christ's staged flesh, frustrate an audience's affective association with Christ's humanity and thereby undermine scholars' sense that the theatricalized body "blurs the boundaries between the self and Christ."[51] Compounding this focus on Christ's onstage body as an artificial construct, performances not only covered the actor with a leather suit, but often gilt his face, hair, or even hands: in the last decade of the fifteenth-century, the Coventry Smiths also stipulated "Chev*er*els gyld" for Christ and St. Peter.[52] In the Smiths' records, the word "cheverel" seems to denote a "cheveler," or "wig": the term appears when the accounts list expenses having to do with costumes for the face and head of the play's characters.[53] At the crucifixion, golden wig and leather coat communicate Christ's dual nature through a human inventiveness rooted in the material world and its limitations: the coat ties the expression of Christ's humanity to a secondary imitation of living skin, and the manmade wig hints at divinity as a nonliteral sign of holiness. Onstage, Christ's identity as both God and man is pointedly mediated through the work of the play's creators. Both suit and wig estrange the body of Jesus onstage from the human skin he wore as a man, and if the plays evoke Christ as God-man, they do so only by evoking theatrical artifice. Not only is the fullness of Christ's divinity inexpressible except as an abstraction; so is the fullness of his humanity.

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[51] See, for example O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*,86.

[52] REED: *Coventry*, 74. Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 228-32 discusses instances in which the human God wore a gold mask, face or wig.

[53] For an explanation of the words used for "wig," see Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 332-4. They note that "cheverel" often connotes a "cheveler"; they record an instance in the York *Creed Play*, for example, where the ten "*diademata pro christo & apostolis"* consist of "*vna larva* [mask] *& aliis novem cheuerons*" (334). For their interpretation of the Coventry records as indicating a golden wig for Christ, see 199 and 226-8. For particular instances of "cheverel" in Coventry, see REED: *Coventry*, 74, where expenses for Jesus's and Peter's wigs are placed next to a payment for "the devils hede" or REED: *Coventry*, 227, which lists an "It*em* payd for iij cheverels and a berde."

The presentational elements of the drama include rather than exclude Christ's salvific body, and in this way the plays' costuming roots its medium in the potentially idolatrous products of the applied arts. The gilt wig and face potentially signal Christians' avarice as much as God's holiness.[54] Even defenses of images acknowledge gold's troubling duality: in *Dives and Pauper*, a fifteenth-century dialogue on the Ten Commandments that addresses in detail the question of imagery in churches, the godly Pauper argues that statues' "clothys of gold, of baudekyn, of velwet" can be signs that "shewyn mannys deuocioun," but he cannot answer Dives's objection that such garments also "shewyn þat þe loue and þe affeccioun of meen of holy cherche is mechil seth in gold and syluyr and erthely coueytise."[55] Gold looks towards an ideal future in heaven but remains stuck in a present characterized by worldly greed. The Elizabethan homily "Against peryll of Idolatrie" likewise speaks to the probability that images attract "couetous persons" who sin by "seemyng to worship, and peraduenture worshipping in dede not onlye the Images, but also the matter of them golde & syluer."[56] Decrying images "decked with golde and syluer," the homilist goes on to further catalogue the kinds of material abuses present in medieval churches: Christians had "paynted with colours, set them with stone and pearle, clothed them with sylkes & precious vestures, phantasing vntruely that to be the chiefe deckyng and adournyng of the Temple or house of God, and that all people shoulde be the more moued to the due reuerence of the same, if all corners therof were glorious, and glysteryng with golde and precious stones."[57] From the perspective of the homilist, who despises the notion that outward beauty signals God's presence or encourages proper devotion, the plays' gilt wigs and faces, by

[54] Dominic James, in *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), discusses the long history of anxiety surrounding sumptuous decoration in churches: in the Christian church building, does rich ornamentation merely turn God's creation towards its proper end or does it constitute a relapse into worshipping pagan gods?
[55] Patricia Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper* (Oxford: EETS, 1976), I.vii and I.x.
[56] *Against peryll of Idolatrie*, 12v-13r.
[57] Ibid., 12v.

endeavoring to reveal the radiant reality underneath Christ's humanity, might only advertise themselves as crude imitations of it. Gold may refer men's minds to God, but it inevitably retains its link to the men who value and use it.

His skin made of leather and his face or hair covered in gold, the actor playing God's son potentially looks a lot like an articulated church statue in a period when moving idols were prime targets of iconoclastic furor. By thus revealing the representational limits of its fallen medium and exposing itself to reformers' criticism, civic drama advertises sensible objects and the partiality of their transformations as central to its method. Biblical theater, rather than focusing on accidents that only matter inasmuch as they gesture towards an otherwise inaccessible substance—rather than describing a sacramental relation between the actor and his role—instead insists on the accident, on the visible and present object as the focus of a belief that, precisely because it attends to accident, is potentially empty and sinful.[58].[59] In the Chester *Crucifixion*, Caiaphas looks upon Jesus's stripped body and cries "Men, for cockes [God's] face, / howe longe shall pewee-ars / stand naked in that place?" (150-51). Caiaphas only evokes God's face in order to curse and further equates Christ with his own rear end; as Christ suffers in the guise of sinful flesh, Caiaphas makes the holy body profane.[60] Caiaphas's oath recalls the way that God's human form and bodily functions are indeed vulgar—and that vulgarity is reiterated by a dramatic convention that puts a human actor in God's place. More, in the immediate context of

[58] See John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 124 ff., on theological "emphasis on the *fictiveness* of the *actual* bread and wine" (126) and sacred drama that returns spectators to the accidents of the host.

[59] For an account of guild drama as "a theater of sacrament," see Beckwith's *Signifying God.*

[60] There is a history of associating God with his rear end that goes back to Exodus 33:23, in which God promises Moses that when his glory passes, "thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." Luther develops the implications of the verse in his *Heidelberg Disputations*, in which he argues that "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and *rearward* parts of God [*visibilia et posteriora Dei*, my translation] as seen through suffering and the cross." Luther defines "the rearward and visible parts of God" as "his human nature, weakness, foolishness"; Christ is the physical manifestation of God's "rearward parts." He reveals himself as such on Calvary: "it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross" (LW 31:52-3). Latin from WA 1:362.

Chester's dice play, which places the seamless garment and Christ's flesh in opposition to one another, Caiaphas sharply foregrounds the holy body onstage: he draws attention to the naked Christ in the actual absence of a naked Christ. The play increases the flesh suit's visibility and illuminates the inherent falseness of a theatrical ritual that creates and promotes nudity that is not nudity and the "pewee arse" that is not Christ. Instead of evoking an invisible presence within itself, the drama points back at itself as human creation and mere theater.[61] If Christ's theatricalized body counters iconoclastic onslaughts to picture a divinity greater than the drama's human works, it does so only in and through its own contested materials: the flesh onstage functions within a Christian framework precisely because it remains itself.[62]

II.

The story of Christ's leather costume begins with Genesis: the Fall creates the need and precedent for concealing nudity. Immediately after Adam and Eve eat the apple, "the eyes of them bothe were opened, & they knewe that they were naked, and they sewed figtre leaues together" (Gen 3:7).[63] The shame that necessitates human covering has its origins in the perversion of prelapsarian sight. In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St. Victor proposes that human weakness derives from mankind's susceptibility to the corrupt sensible world: "For the mind, stupefied by bodily sensations and enticed out of itself by sensuous forms, has forgotten what it

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[61] Matthew Sergi also focuses on the play's non-naturalism in "Dice at Chester's *Passion*," *The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555-1575: Religion, Drama, and the Impact of Change*, ed. David Klausner, Helen Ostovich, and Jessica Dell (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 65-77. My work extends Sergi's argument that Chester's comedy is "symbolically rich *because* it is simple and flat" (68) to include rather than exclude the suffering savior.

[62] The argument that the transformed matter of the plays bears traces of its original contexts -- that the leather remains an animal's skin even as it is made to represent the human body -- intersects with current work on eco-criticism and theories of materiality. Relevant works include Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); Katie L. Walter, ed., *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Sarah Kay, "Legible Skins: Animals and the Ethics of Medieval Reading"; and Bruce Holsinger, "Of Pigs and Parchment: Medieval Studies and the Coming of the Animal," *PMLA* 124. 2 (2009), 616-23.

[63] This and all biblical citations for this chapter are taken from the 1560 Geneva Bible: Lloyd E. Berry, ed., *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

was, and, because it does not remember that it was anything different, believes that it is nothing except what is seen."[64] The fallen condition deludes persons into only trusting their external vision. As a remedy, Hugh points his students inward, exhorting fallen Christians to "learn not to seek outside ourselves what we can find within."[65] Although scholastic tradition follows Augustine in finding the birth of lust in Satan's seduction of Eve and the first couple's newly "opened eyes," Hugh's treatise exposes a co-existent worry about how postlapsarian Adam and his progeny literally see.[66] Sin, which focuses Adam's attention on his body instead of his mind, both affects and misdirects his physical sight. The problems that Adam and Eve dramas face thus exist because of their subject matter: the drama, facing a history of arguments that condemn the theater for using spectacle to draw men towards false religion, reproduce Satan's disguise—the first spectacle to draw men away from God. Dramatizing the beginnings of fallen sight, the plays tackle concerns about visual representation particularly relevant to the sixteenth century, when Protestant emphasis on the Word of God as the sole means to salvation called media that "serve the Eye and sterve the Eare" into serious question.[67]

Changing how and what the first couple sees, the Fall creates the need for artistry: embarrassed by their physical bodies, Adam and Eve make themselves clothing, and the fig leaf coverings provide the biblical precedent for creative labor. To Hugh of St. Victor, who defines "the work of the artificer" as an attempt to relieve mankind's deficiency through efforts "to put together things disjoined or to disjoin those put together, whence we read, [Gen. 3:7] 'They sewed themselves aprons,'" human invention begins with original sin and with the first couple's

[64] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, I.1.
[65] Ibid.
[66] See, for example, DGnL XI.31: "Casting their eyes on their bodies, [Adam and Eve] felt a movement of concupiscence which they had not known. It was in this respect, then, that their eyes were opened."
[67] William Lambarde, *Dictionarium Anglicae Topographicum & Historicum* (London: Fletcher Gyles, 1730), 460.

remedy for their shame.[68] In the *Didascalicon*, the fig leaves serve as reminders not only of lust and of sinful procreation, but of the need for work that alleviates the effects of the Fall. As composite "first art objects" the aprons illustrate, in Sarah Beckwith's words, "the necessity of mediation and representation associated with covering, disguise, and pitiful lack."[69] Adam and Eve's pathetic attempts to hide their sin from God bind the production of art to shame and to the desire to overcome that shame through illusion. Insufficiency creates the need to look beyond, and art is therefore evidence of a kind of human inadequacy that reaches beyond itself. That, Beckwith concludes, is "why we might celebrate the fig leaf...not so much as a deficiency, but as the very sign of human making."[70] Adam and Eve realize and remedy their defect with the same creative gesture; the body as a space for human invention both represents lack and speaks to the indispensability of fallen artistry.

Adam's and Eve's aprons, which signal the imperfection that postlapsarian Christians cannot escape but must attempt to overcome, provide an analogue to theological perspectives on postlapsarian sight that substitute representation for direct access to the divine. Postlapsarian Adam only comprehends God indirectly: Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* quotes Pseudo-Dionysius to argue that "We cannot be enlightened by the divine rays except they be hidden within the covering of many sacred veils."[71] Aquinas, explaining why scripture uses the "likeness of bodily things" [similitudine corporalium] to represent divine things, reasons that "it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible objects, because all our

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[68] *Didascalicon*, I.9. O'Connell's *Idolatrous Eye* offers a discussion of antitheatricalists' distrust of drama's sensuous appeal to sight on 14-35. See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 57-8 and 63-4, for Augustine's denunciation of theatrical sights. Unlike Tertullian and his Renaissance successors, Augustine validates spectacle that directs the senses towards Christian objects.
[69] Beckwith, *Signifying God,* 45. The phrase "first art objects" originates with Camille, *Gothic Idol,* 40.
[70] Beckwith, *Signifying God,* 55.
[71] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), I.1.9. Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 119 discusses particular plays' references to Aquinas's point.

knowledge originates from sense."[72] Acquiring spiritual awareness requires the imaginary powers to extrapolate from information gathered by the senses: "we apprehend the individual through the senses and the imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual."[73] Later, Aquinas connects this dependence on imagination and sense to the perversions introduced by the Fall: although "the first man did not need to attain to the knowledge of God by demonstration [demonstratio] drawn from an effect," fallen man, who is "impeded in the consideration of intelligible things by being preoccupied with sensible things" and guided by "lower faculties" "such as the imagination," can only understand something of God through such secondary mediums of knowledge.[74] Types of "sacred veils," *demonstratio* and its sub-species *similitudine* tap into a person's sensory experience of the world and enable partial explanations of the divine. Clarifying divine matters for the corruptible senses, *demonstratio* makes a virtue of human susceptibility to deception; by directing the mind to reconfigure the meaning of corporeal forms, it harnesses an imagination made powerful by original sin and orients it towards good ends.

Thomas Aquinas discusses the consequences of the Fall by acknowledging both the fallibility of the senses and their necessity; he explores what it means that words and images might as easily be proper aids to devotion as idolatrous objects. The work owes much to early Christian elaborations on the significance of Christ's human flesh: because God took a corporeal form, that form can be represented in art. The claim receives considerable attention in the eighth century, which saw the most significant pre-Reformation controversy about sacred images: in

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[72] Aquinas, Ibid.
[73] Ibid., I.84.7. For a more detailed explanation of Aquinas' theory of intellection and its relationship to sight, memory, and the mystery plays, see Theodore K. Lerud, *Memory, Images, and the English Copus Christi Drama*, 41-50.
[74] Aquinas, I.94.1 and I.94.4

754, the Synod of Constantinople condemned all icons.[75] Only thirty years later, the Second Council of Nicaea affirmed their necessity, going so far as to connect image-breakers "to those who deny the incarnation and the bodily economy of Christ our true God." Iconoclasm is deemed "the worst of heresies, as it subverts the incarnation of our Saviour."[76] Images of Christ became a necessary means of acknowledging—and even, as Ernst Kitzinger has discussed, enacting—this central doctrine of the Church.[77] Pope Gregory the Great had defended devotional art in an apology that became the foundation for defenses of religious images in the eighth century and into the Middle Ages. In two letters, Gregory underscores icons' didactic function: he calls visual art a Bible for the unlettered and so authorizes images as a means of instruction.[78] During the eighth century, amidst the debate about representational art, a passage that justified icons on the basis of their relationship to Christ's humanity was interpolated into another of Gregory's letters. The Pseudo-Gregory's argument applies the Pope's genuine claim in his *Homilies on Ezekiel* that Christ "appeared visible to show us the invisible" to images of Christ: "we do no harm in wishing to show the invisible by means of the visible."[79] Instead of fostering improper worship, the icon "returns the Son of God to our memory and equally delights the soul concerning the

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[75] See Peter Brown, "A Dark-Age crisis: aspects of the Iconoclastic controversy" in *English Historical Review* 346 (1973), 1-34 for an overview of the debate and of the conditions that led to the Synod. For an overview of the role of pictoral art in religious practice in the eighth and ninth centuries, see Lawrence Nees, "Art and Architecture" in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 2, c.700-c.900,* Rosamond McKitterick, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 809-844, particularly 817-20.

[76] Facing-page Greek and Latin records of the council appear in Philippe Labbe and Gabriel Cossart, *Sacrosancta Concilia Ad Regiam Editionem Exacta*, Tom. VII. (Paris: Typographical Society for Ecclesiastical Books, 1671), col. 187-8 and col. 77-8, respectively. An English translation can be found in Henry Percival, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 14. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), 539 and 534, respectively.

[77] Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 83-150. Reprinted in *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West,* Ernst Kitzinger & W. Eugene Kleinbauer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 90-156. Kitzinger's discussion of the incarnation's relationship to images in the eighth century appears on 141-6.

[78] PL 77: 1027C-1028A ["Icirco enim pictura in Ecclesiis adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt, saltem in parietibus vivendo legant quae legere in Codicibus non valent." "For pictures are used in churches so that the unlettered at least may read upon the living walls what they cannot read in books."].

[79] PL 0984A ["visibilis apparuit, ut invisibilia monstraret"] and PL 77: 0991A-C ["Ab re non facimus, si per visibilia invisibilia demonstramus"]. English from Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 121.

resurrection and softens it concerning the passion."[80] By linking Gregory's comments on the Incarnation to the icons' ability to elicit a deeper understanding of Christ's sacrifice, the passage suggests, in Herbert L. Kessler's analysis, that Christians who "lost the capacity of spiritual vision when Adam and Eve were driven from Paradise...can recover spiritual knowledge from visual things because Christ had entered the physical world."[81] Pseudo-Gregory's argument reminds its readers that God's saving actions reach the fallen soul through the sensible world.

But the Fall, by creating the need for representation and for the Incarnation, also introduces the dangers of artistic labor: in their attempts to represent spiritual truths, the products of human artistry potentially become carnal mockeries of divine creation. The history of Christian opposition to images treats art as the seductive creation of men and an invitation to idolatry; the Synod of Constantinople's denunciation of images in fact begins with the statement that at the Fall "Satan misguided men, so that they worshipped the creature instead of the Creator."[82] By the Middle Ages, theologians posited that the serpent had the head of a woman and thus understood original sin as one of idolatry.[83] Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* argues that the devil "chose a certain kind of serpent, as Bede says, having a virginal face, because like things applaud like."[84] A robust medieval iconographic tradition flourishes in the wake of the legend, and the devil in the Chester cycle's *Creation* accordingly disguises himself in the "maner of an edder" (193) with "a maydens face" (195). As Chester turns Satan into a reflection of Eve, it also articulates the devil's desire to remake man in his image: the serpent hopes that Adam and Eve will "trespasse as did I" (176) and encourages Eve to "doe after mee"

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[80] PL 77: 0991B ["ipsa pictura quasi scriptura ad memoriam Filium Dei reducit, animum nostrum aut de resurrectione laetificat, aut de passione demulcet"].
[81] Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, 122.
[82] Percival, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, 14: 543.
[83] For more on original sin as one of idolatry, see Camille's *The Gothic Idol*, 59-60.
[84] In PL 198 1072B-C: "Elegit etiam quoddam genus serpentis, ut ait Beda, virgineum vultum habens, quia similia similibus applaudunt."

(232). The adder-maiden coerces Eve to sin by simultaneously turning her towards herself and into the likenesses of the devil. The act reproduces idolatry: men and women become more like Satan when they substitute themselves for God. Looking into a mirror as Satan assures her that "ye shalbe as gods" (Gen 3:5), Eve erroneously puts faith in her own created beauty.

The Fall not only introduces idolatry into the world; it casts suspicion on human creation as a secondary but seductive distraction from God. Arguments against devotional images receive royal sanction in the sixteenth century: *Against peryll of Idolatry and Superfluous deckyng of Churches,* published in the *Seconde Tome of Homelyes* of 1563*,* is advertised as "*set out by the aucthoritie of the Queenes Maiestie: and to be read in euery parishe church*."[85] The homily argues that statues' representations of sacred persons only undermine their didactic function:

> They be trymly deckte in Golde, Syluer, and stone...lyke wanton wenches...and therefore can they not teache vs nor our wyues and daughters any sobernes, modestie, and chastitie. And therefore although it is nowe commonly sayde that they be the laye mennes bookes, yet we see they teache no good lesson, neyther of GOD nor godlynes, but all errour and wickednesse.[86]

The homily denies images' ability to help Christians learn about God and so articulates a Reformed rejection of Gregory's defense of images. It suggests that mistaking attractive, manmade icons for God's messengers is, like Eve, to be fooled by the devil. To their detractors, theatrical representations participate in images' depravity; they threaten Christian belief by directing attention towards created objects. The *Treatis on Miraclis Pleyinge* remembers Gregory's defense of images in order to undermine it: plays "ben made more to deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men. And therfore yif they ben quike [living] bookis, they ben quike bookis to shrewidenesse more than to godenesse."[87] As living books, performances

[85] *Against peryll of Idolatry*, title page.
[86] Ibid., 18v.
[87] *A Middle English Treatise on the Playing of Miracles*, 45.

undermine religion by appealing to the body and its desires. The argument that the stage's animate figures seduce its audience forms a commonplace of antitheatrical writing, and Renaissance treatises about secular drama repeatedly invoke the dangers of live spectacles and performers. According to Stephen Gosson's 1582 *Playes confuted in fiue actions*, drama focuses attention on "Gearish appeareall, maskes, vauting, tumbling, dauncing of gigges, galiardes, morisces, hobbehorses," etc.[88] Performance exposes and exacerbates the consequences of the Fall for both audience and performer: in the theater, Adam's postlapsarian sight is given free rein.

Dramatizing the origin of visual deception, Adam and Eve plays ask what constitutes a true or false image and thereby become particularly resonant spaces for drama to confront arguments against the theatrical medium in the period between the *Treatis on Miraclis Pleyinge* and the end of biblical cycles' performances in England. The *Norwich Grocers' Play*, a sixteenth-century civic adaptation of the Fall narrative extant in both a 1534 A text and a 1565 B text, offers a Reformation-era perspective on theatrical artistry that makes centuries of commentary on Genesis tangible on the Renaissance stage. Scholars have attended to the play as an example of Protestant revisions to the Catholic tradition of biblical drama, but the Norwich text is also important for providing a timely reflection on its own medium.[89] The B text of the *Norwich Grocers' Play* includes two prologues that seem designed to avoid any charges of idolatry: assuring their listeners that the "stories with the Skriptures most justly agree" (14) and pointing auditors towards the precise passage of the Bible that the players will perform (9), they

[88] Stephen Gosson's *Playes confuted in fiue actions*, E1. Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye,* 19-20 offers an account of antitheatricalism that stresses its distrust of the fullness of the theater's sensory appeal.
[89] See, for example, Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 66-101 and Kevin J. Harty, "The Norwich Grocers' Play and Its Three Cyclic Counterparts: Four English Mystery Plays on the Fall of Man" in *Studia Neophilologica* 53 (1981), 77-89, esp. 83-89

take great pains to present the play as a biblical translation.[90] Such additions seem like attempts to capitulate to the theater's Protestant critics: the prologues' insistence upon the play's scriptural basis might well justify its existence for those who claim that "true Faithe cometh by hearinge and not by seinge."[91] But the first prologue also informs audiences of what they once could "se" (17) onstage and what the pageant "shewith" (15); the play does not reject its visual medium. The Norwich play bears traces of the pressures placed upon the theater by changing attitudes towards devotional imagery, but by advertising its narrative as something to see, it also offers evidence of a productive Protestant engagement with both visual representation and the Catholic tradition of the cycles' origins.[92]

In the play, Satan's costume heightens rather than downplays the role of sight and deception in the first sin: in both versions, Norwich's Satan looks like an "angell of lyght" (Text B, 40). In the A text, he even tells Eve that "to the, Almyghty God dyd me send" (68). The actor's costume heightens the illusion: according to the Grocers' records, Satan wears a crown.[93] Satan convinces Eve to disobey her creator by appearing to be a servant of the God he undermines, and the play's decision to stage a devil in the guise of an angel thus speaks directly to anxieties about the fallibility of human sight and the efficacy of attractive images. During the early Reformation, both local and national events brought the question of images to the foreground in Norwich. Both surviving versions of the Grocers' play exist only in eighteenth-

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[90] Norman Davis, ed., "Text B," *Norwich Grocers' Play, Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: EETS, 1970), 8-18. Further citations from the Norwich play will be given parenthetically in the text by line number. A list of alternate readings from the earlier Kirkpatrick transcription can be found in the appendix to Joanna Dutka, "The Lost Dramatic Cycle of Norwich and the Grocers' Play of the Fall of Man," *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 35, No. 137 (Feb., 1984), 1-13.

[91] Lambarde, *Dictionarium Angliae*, 460.

[92] In the past decades, scholarship has highlighted English Protestantism's sustained relationship with images and theater. See, for example, Teresa Watt, *Cheap Print and Piety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 178-216, and Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[93] David Galloway, ed, REED: *Norwich 1540-1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 340: "It a new Heer with a crown for ye Serpent 6d".

century transcriptions, but Joanna Dutka, noting that in 1527 responsibility for the city's cycle of pageants shifted from the St. Luke's Guild to several of Norwich's other major trade associations, has surmised that the A text came into being sometime between that date and 1534.[94] During this period, in 1531, itinerant preacher Thomas Bilney was executed in Norwich for heresy, and in the sermons that ultimately condemned him to death, he attacked the veneration of crucifixes and saints' images.[95] Norwich, a major center of trade and receptive to reformist ideas coming out of Northern Europe, harbored considerable sympathy for Thomas Bilney's views: the city's aldermen attempted to prevent Thomas More from claiming that Bilney had recanted at the stake. A recantation would have reinforced orthodox doctrine and permitted More to advertise the execution as a victory for the Church.[96] Given such tensions, the town's sixteenth-century sequence of plays developed in an environment that called for sensitivity to the charges against images; public opinion and Church law pointedly disagreed about whether manmade icons were God's messengers or whether their devotees, deluded by Satan, were playing Eve's part.

Less than eight years after Bilney's execution, Henry VIII's second set of royal injunctions authorized the destruction of the same "abused" Church icons that Bilney had urged be removed.[97] Between the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, official policy about religious imagery changed with each succeeding monarch: Edward VI's advisors oversaw devotional images' removal between 1547 and 1553, but Mary Tudor supported images' restoration. After Mary's death in 1558, Elizabeth I forbade images' adoration in churches, and her 1559 injunctions required that all "monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, and

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[94] Joanna Dutka, "Mystery Plays at Norwich: Their Formation and Development," *Leeds Studies in English* 10 (1978), 107-11.
[95] An account of Bilney's preaching appears in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. See John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition), VIII.7.
[96] Muriel C. McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 62-7.
[97] Henry Gee and William John Hardy, eds., "The Second Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII," 277.

superstition" be destroyed.[98] But on the heels of such prolonged political and doctrinal instability the revision does not downplay the role of sight and deception in the first sin. Instead, it directly engages with mankind's predisposition to be deluded. Satan convinces Eve to sin by appearing to be a servant of the God he undermines; he informs the audience that an "angell of lyght I show myselfe to be" (40). The revision also treats the first couple's disobedience as a fall away from words and towards images. God instructs Adam and Eve to "have my woordes in most high estymacion" (23), and he punishes Adam "for that my voyce thou didst disdayne" (90). When Eve excuses her sin by explaining that "The Serpente deseayvyd me with that his fayer face" (78), God seems perturbed not only by Satan's act, but also by his method: he demands to know why the serpent acted in "this wise" and chose "in this maner to begyle" Adam and Eve (79-80). Satan's disguise dramatizes the danger inherent within false and attractive appearances, and the B text of the *Norwich Grocers' Play* understands its visual medium as potentially very malicious. Enlisting belief in the handsome images they present to their audience, Adam and Eve plays confront and potentially deepen idolatry by repeating its first instance. Like Satan, drama seems both beautiful and like a servant of God.

With its emphasis on visual temptation, the Norwich play recalls a long tradition whose acknowledgment of Christianity's dependence upon the material world—on the scriptures, particularly, but also on visual and verbal art—coexists with a deep suspicion of the senses. The stage, in Michael O'Connell's words, "must make use of one reality to re-present, to make present, another reality"; the theater works like Thomas Aquinas's *demonstratio*, which uses a sensible medium to make an ineffable God known to fallen man.[99] But *demonstratio* only offers escape from sin's consequences by virtue of the very weaknesses that contributed to the Fall—

[98] Ibid., "The Injunctions of 1559," 428.
[99] O'Connell, *Idolatrous Eye*, 20.

the primacy of the senses and of the imagination. To its critics, theater likewise permits the lower faculties to revel in their baseness. Having "ben made more to deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men," drama gives Adam's faulty eyes and bestial affections free rein.[100] Even virtuous content becomes an instrument of the devil's seduction "because," argues Stephen Gosson, "it is the iuglinge of the deuill, to turne himselfe sometimes to an Angel of light, to deceiue vs the sooner."[101] If likenesses can inspire faith, they can also lead to sin: at the Fall, Satan is an apostate angel who looks like another angel. Onstage at Norwich, both Satan and the actor who plays him seem like angels of light. By merely appearing to be the latter, the actor in fact becomes like the demon he represents. The theater thus exposes the similarity between the deceptions practiced by the devil, which use holy appearances to encourage base desires, and *demonstratio*, which co-opts base material to explain holy matters. Postlapsarian knowledge may well depend upon resemblance, but so does a lie.

III.

Adam's faulty sight creates a postlapsarian condition in which representation is simultaneously necessary and suspect, and the *Norwich Grocers' Play* embraces this condition to acknowledge itself both *demonstratio* and deception. As bodied spectacles that take visual forms' delusive capabilities seriously, Fall plays enact the tension between necessary representation and deceit. They raise the same concerns as their detractors, and if on the one hand the false angel at Norwich testifies to theater's depravity, on the other it permits the play to effectively perform its biblical subject. In this way, thearical artistry in Norwich accepts rather than deflects claims that the theater ensnares the eye and promotes idolatry; the play's exploration of the seductiveness of

[100] *Treatise on the Playing of Miracles*, 45. For early Christian arguments against theater's sensuality, see Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 38-65.
[101] Gosson, *Playes confuted*, C6.

material forms incorporates the faults that didactic literature attempts to overcome. The drama thus reveals artistry and fiction to be powerful tools of postlapsarian knowing. Norwich answers its critics by accepting illusion—dangerous but potentially salvific—as the condition of its medium just as illusion is the condition of human perception more generally. The fallen condition creates the solace in which theater takes part.

The topic of the play—the first couple's decision to believe the devil instead of God—raises the question of God's perfect goodness among Christian thinkers and biblical commentators: how does man, created according to God's specifications, fall for Satan's lies if not by the intentional inclusion of some flaw in his nature? Augustine, in an explanation taken up by later centuries, shifts the blame to human will; he suggests that "the woman could not have believed the words of the serpent, had she not already acquiesced in the love of her own power, and in a presumption of self-conceit."[102] Eve consented to being deceived; she had fallen before she'd fallen. Biblical theater, precisely because of its degeneracy, offers a similar solution. The events in prelapsarian Eden cannot escape their postlapsarian origins: born with original sin, the actors who play Adam and Eve are not native denizens of Eden. By the time Eve tempts the actor playing Adam, he too has "already sinned in his heart."[103] Always already fallen, Adam and Eve will inevitably fall each year and in each performance. Both the theater's seductive manipulation of the imperfect world and its doubleness, in which the objects and actors onstage signify other objects and persons but remain themselves, permit biblical drama to evoke original sin, its complications, and its consequences. If fallenness is a condition of art, it is also its consolation; secondariness enhances rather than inhibits the drama's effects.

[102] DGnL, XI.30.
[103] Ibid.

In the Adam and Eve narrative, the fallen body and the reactions it provokes reflect the consequences of sin, and so the drama's costuming becomes a touchpoint for the Norwich play's reflections upon its own artistry. Adam and Eve plays face a representational problem—how to depict prelapsarian nudity in light of postlapsarian shame—that, like the first couple's own nakedness, can only be answered by a creative act: because the disgrace whose presence encapsulates the turn to artistry and illusion dictates that postlapsarian humanity wear clothing, the actors who dramatize the Fall wear costumes. A 1565 inventory of the Norwich Grocers lists "2 Cotes & a payre hosen for Eve stayned" and "a Cote & Hosen for Adam stayned."[104] The sixteenth-century coat was probably a short garment of small yardages whose sturdy materials enabled it to be worn as an outer layer with propriety but whose cut revealed the body's shape—worn with hose, it would have resembled a body-stocking.[105] The coats' materials and coloring, like their shape, could also recall the unclothed body: the Cornish *Creation of the World* includes a stage direction that describes "Adam and Eva," like Christ at the crucifixion, as "aparlet in whytt lether."[106] Simultaneously like but irrevocably distant from the prelapsarian state they depict, the bodysuits affirm the presence of the imperfect and the inadequate in the artistic process; they are fig leaves before the fig leaves. Accommodating human shame in order to figure human excellence, they insist upon illusion as the condition of earthly perception: even the representation of prelapsarian perfection cannot be divorced from postlapsarian corruption.

In Norwich's adaptation of the Fall narrative, the theater becomes a vehicle for faith whose appeal to the eye permits it to work with rather than against fallen sensibilities. Immediately after his sin, Adam responds to his nudity by crying "Alack! alacke! my spouse,

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[104] REED*: Norwich 1540-1642,* 340. Adam and Eve also wear gloves.
[105] Meg Twycross, "Apparell comlye," 39.
[106] Whitley Stokes, esq., trans. and ed., *Greans An Bys: Creation of the World, a Cornish Mystery* (Berlin: Philological Society, 1863), s.d. l.340.

now se I nakid we ar" (65). The playtext makes the perversion of sight a precursor to shame: where the York cycle's Adam laments "Allas, what haue I done, for shame!" (*Fall of Man,* 106) and so decries his actions instead of his appearance, Norwich directs immediate attention towards what fallen man sees. Moments later, Adam hides "For that which I am nakyd" (73). As in the Bible, he feels his nudity to be deeply disgraceful even though he was created naked as the pinnacle of God's perfect creation. For Augustine, such shame deepens sin by privileging a human interpretation of the body over God's own: Adam's answer "was a wretched error, as if a man naked, as God had made him, could be displeasing to him."[107] God loves nudity; he created it. In its adaptation of Genesis, Norwich furthers Augustine's point: God responds to Adam's shame not by inquiring "Who tolde thee, that thou wast naked," as he does in Genesis 3:11, but by asking "Why art thou then naked? Who so hath cawsyd thee?" (74). From the perspective of unfallen creation, man is naked because it pleased God to make him that way. But for postlapsarian Adam, who answers with the words "This woman" (75), it is Eve who "caused" nakedness, at least as he experiences it after the Fall. With its question, Norwich evokes an experience of nudity that comes from God and doesn't produce fear or embarrassment, but it does so only to exclude its characters from any awareness of nudity's original goodness. There is no frame of reference for Adam in which nakedness is not a result of sin. The play's content thus reiterates the point that its costumes have already made: there is no body without shame just as there is no prelapsarian nudity without a postlapsarian nude suit.

Despite theater's association with the problems of fallen sight, the Norwich play insists upon the theater's resonance in a postlapsarian world—and in an England where the question of how one sees had become particularly contentious. As a response to God's question, Adam's words validate postlapsarian disgrace at the expense of literal truth. Although mistaken, his

[107] DGnM II.16.

shameful reaction to his body constitutes a proper response to the change in the human condition; Adam's faulty perception matters more than the precise truth of his circumstances. By highlighting his imperfect awareness of his body, the play asks an audience to recognize Adam's corrupt susceptibility to illusion as both the condition of his earthly existence and appropriate to the fallen couple and their progeny. It affirms fiction as the postlapsarian vehicle for religious knowledge even as it recognizes human perception as untrustworthy. The play thus advocates for dramatic representation; it advances a fundamentally theatrical logic in which, for the postlapsarian characters, the most convincing illusion creates the most appropriate experience. Theatrical modes of comprehension might be depraved, but, Norwich suggests, their depravity makes them most appropriate sights for fallen eyes.

The *Norwich Grocers' Play* points out that although its medium depends upon the perverted perception introduced by the Fall, such postlapsarian weaknesses also make it most capable of reflecting postlapsarian experience. If Adam's shame both belies the reality of God's good creation and accurately reflects his fall, his false skin creates a parallel situation in which what the audience sees is both utterly incorrect (the actor is not nude) and profoundly true (but he is ashamed of nudity). Adam and Eve's coats and hose are both solution and symptom; by hiding the performers' nakedness, they simultaneously expose and conceal postlapsarian disgrace. They provide visual evidence of the Fall's consequences precisely because they clothe the first couple: like the fig leaves, they give shape to the shame that accompanies nudity. The effects of the Fall are thus realized through the costumed bodies of the actors whose pretence at nakedness only reaffirms the depravity that Adam and Eve lament. So if Sarah Beckwith proposes that Christian drama celebrates the fig leaves "not so much as a deficiency...but as the very sign of human making," Adam and Eve plays also celebrate their postlapsarian coverings *as*

marks of deficiency. When, after the Fall, God gives Adam and Eve "coates of skinness" (Gen. 3:21) to clothe their bodies, the coverings come to signify postlapsarian imperfection: in Augustine's *De Genesi ad Manichaeos* they represent "this mortal flesh in which deceitful hearts are hidden."[108] To Augustine, a predisposition towards false displays inheres in fleshliness; postlapsarian corporeality enables men to "hide lies under the garments of skin."[109] Performers and performances exist through the lies that flesh can tell. Permitting the actors to counterfeit Adam and Eve, the costumes realize Augustine's point that the leather garments make humanity's deceptiveness possible. And by clothing their actors in flesh, Fall plays participate in a tradition that locates human depravity in the very consequences of the Fall that the theater depends upon: bodied action and false displays. Just as the actors playing Satan, Adam, and Eve deploy illusion in order to call to mind the dependence upon illusion that constitutes postlapsarian experience, so the actors' leather garments deceive in order to depict the postlapsarian body's affinity for deception. The theater embraces the very qualities that make performance suspect and turns them to its advantage.

Even as the actors wander amidst the staged perfections of prelapsarian Eden, their costumes look towards mankind's forthcoming death sentence; the suits of leather are not just evidence of shame and deceit, but keen reminders of the mortality that Adam and Eve earn by their fall. The Middle Ages regarded the body as a kind of clothing that is gradually and inevitably destroyed by time: Camille's *Gothic Idol* notes that the unadorned human form "was seen in Augustinian terms as a curse, a vestment man had carried with him since the Fall, which...in its decay, [emblematized] his death."[110] As imitations of nakedness, Adam's and Eve's

[108] DGnM, II. 21.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 92. His more extended discussion of the medieval connotations of nudity in response to classical Greek and Latin representations of the naked body occurs on 87-101.

costumes provide a physical representation of the fallen human form as a garment destined for death. And the plays' leather suits compound the link between nudity and death with their materials: after all, concludes Augustine in *De Genesi ad Manichaeos*, "what could more clearly signify the death that we experience in our body than skins which we get from dead animals?"[111] Later commentaries elaborate upon the interpretation, arguing that "the skins, which are not removed except from dead animals, comprise the figure of death."[112] The Norwich play itself refers to the coats of skins as "letherin aprons" (94).[113] Like the tunics of skin, the very existence of the actors' tawed suits depends upon butchering livestock. The play clothes Adam and Eve in the evidence of slaughter, and the first couple's costumes thus evoke death even more vividly than the unadorned body might.[114]

Adam and Eve's onstage garments are necessary accessories to postlapsarian shame and indications of the first couple's depravity, but as references to the body's deceptiveness and its corruptibility, they also conjure the hope of what lies beyond death. Patristic commentary identifies flesh as a husk that the soul discards at the grave: Augustine ends his discussion of Genesis *ad Litteram* with an account of spiritual vision wherein he notes that because "the body is such that the management of it is difficult and burdensome...the mind is much more readily

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[111] DGnM, II.15. The Chester pageant of Adam and Eve refers to this interpretation of the leather garments, explicitly defining the aprons as fit reminders of death:

> Dead beasts' skins, as thinketh me,
> is best you on you bear.
> For deadly now both been ye
> and death no way may you flee.
> Such clothes are best for your degree
> And such shall ye wear. (l. 363-8)

[112] Bede, *In Genesim, Liber Primus,* CH. W. Jones, ed., *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina,* vol. 118A (Brepols, 1967), iii.21. My translation.

[113] Joanna Dutka's "Lost Dramatic Cycle of Norwich" comments on the significance of the Norwich play's translation of "coats of skins" on 6-7, and her analysis, which uses the translation to identify the Great Bible as a likely source for the play, informs my argument for continuity between Catholic and Protestant traditions on the Norwich stage.

[114] Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing,* 20-1 and 269-72, discuss Renaissance commentary on the skins as memorials to mortality.

turned away from the vision of the highest heaven. Hence it must necessarily be carried out of the senses of the flesh in order to be granted this vision."[115] The soul finds its new life in the corporeal body's death. In Augustine, "flesh" serves as a synecdoche for the entire body and its depraved senses—the body's surfaces stand in for the entire thing. Earthly experience is only skin-deep. But so, it seems, is heavenly: in accordance with the Pauline epistles' account of the "spiritual body", the soul's triumph occurs not just in taking off the old human costume, but in putting on a new kind of corporeality. If in Augustine flesh provides an apt metaphor for the ways that the true mind is masked within the material world and the individual body, the "spiritual body" just provides a better mask. There is no person without a costume. The act of clothing the body therefore takes on sacramental importance within the Church as a symbol of spiritual renewal: in the ceremony of holy orders the priest receives new garments, and at baptism a white garment symbolizes the soul's new life.[116] It is in light of this binary, where clothing alternately indicates postlapsarian shame and Christian holiness, that discussions of the resurrection invoke the tunics of skin. The resurrection of the body perfects the coverings men and women earn at the Fall: in a twelfth-century sermon on the ascension, St. Martin of Leon remarks that "once we, united to the garment of Christ, have clearly put aside our first parents' tunics of skin, then we will put on linen garments that have nothing of death in them, but are entirely white."[117] Adam's and Eve's fleshly coverings are not merely discarded; they are

[115] DGnL, XII.35.
[116] For more on the metaphor of "taking the cloth" as a figure for entering the priesthood and on how putting the white linen garment is to be reborn into the body of Christ, see Dyan Elliott, "Dressing and Undressing the Clergy: Rites of Ordination and Degradation," in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 55-69, particularly 58-59.
[117] St. Martin of Leon, *"Sermo Tricesimus: In Ascensione Domini"* in his Book of Sermons. See PL, vol. 208, col.1163B-1163C: "Praeceptis enim Dei lavandi sumus, ut cum ad indumentum Christi comparati, tunicas pellicias primorum videlicet parentum deposuerimus, tunc induemus vestem lineam nihil in se mortis habentem, sed totam candidam..."

replaced. The soul leaves behind the natural body in order to take up its true body; the garments of skin are merely temporary predecessors to the soul's incorruptible vestments.

The end of the Norwich play anticipates such durable Christian costuming in a passage that evokes the Pauline "armour of God" (Eph. 6.11): the Holy Spirit offers Adam a "brest plate of rightousnes... / ...shylde of faythe" and "hellmett of salvacion" (139-41) with which to fight against the allegorical Dolor and Misery. Protecting the first couple against the dangers of the fallen world, the armor redeems the "letherin aprons" that God gives the couple. But because the restoration of the soul occurs at the physical body's degeneration, the positive value attributed to clothing as a representation of the spiritual body's incorruptibility depends upon the simultaneous recognition of the fleshly garments as disposable coverings. Considering the spirit after death, Augustine asserts that "when the soul is made equal to the angels and receives again this body, no longer a natural body but a spiritual one...it will have the perfect measure of its being, obeying and commanding, vivified and vivifying with such a wonderful ease that what was once its burden will be its glory."[118] The doctrine of the resurrection makes the fallen body a necessary precondition for the redeemed soul: the body's perfectibility heightens the soul's perfection, and the old clothing's unmanageability sets off the glorious obedience of the new. At Norwich, the actors' garments of skin present consciously false versions of the naked form to the audience, and their falseness holds out the possibility of reform in and through Christ. The leather garments communicate both the body's corruption and its subsequent transformation precisely because they are fictional and because they are depraved.

[118] DGnL, XII.35. Also *De Civitate Dei,* XIII.23 on the body that will be "a fit inhabitant of heaven...not by losing its nature, but by changing its quality." In Dods, ed. *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, 547.

IV.

The nude suits draw attention to the problems of fallen sight but also surpass them: as mere representations of nakedness, they vividly communicate postlapsarian susceptibility to illusion and death, and as fake coverings, they hold out the promise of the body's eventual perfectibility. Christian theater, inevitably compromised as a product of fallen human artifice, acknowledges itself a prodigal art form: alternately condemnable and salvific, its artistry returns to the Father only by being both. Adam and Eve dramas embrace the physical consequences of the Fall in order to overcome them—and they do so in imitation of Christ, who conquers fallenness by clothing himself in the evidence of fallenness. Christ as the New Adam looks back to and corrects the mistakes of the first Adam, and if cycle plays like Coventry follow costuming conventions similar to those of the *Norwich Grocers Play* or the Cornish *Creation of the World*, Christ's "whitleder" costume likewise recalls and redeems the first couple's costumes. The coat resonates with the garments of Adam and Eve whose faults the suffering savior accepts and surmounts in his role as the new Adam: crucifixion plays, even those unconnected with civic cycle pageants, dramatize the preordained result of sin in Jesus's death, and they clothe Jesus in the proofs of sin and mortality that Adam and Eve receive from God. The Bible notes that the Father sent his Son to mankind "in the likeness of sinful flesh" [Romans 8:3]; by wearing a garment of skin, Christ does not merely take on a body—he takes on the fallen human form. Although commentators associate the body of Christ with the spotless vestments of the risen soul, sixteenth-century crucifixion plays align it with the coats of skin that signify sin and death. The drama does not reject the fallenness that compelled the incarnation; it represents Christ's triumph through rather than despite his costume's similarity to Adam's and Eve's leather aprons.

Christ's appearance raises questions about the propriety of Christ onstage, but the Chester crucifixion play enacts a narrative in which profane actions and skepticism of the events onstage prove salvific. When the Jewish tormentors who gamble for the tunic in Chester's *Crucifixion* imagine that Christ's "dame nowe may dreame / for her owne barme-teame; / for nother aunte nor eame / gettes this gaye garment" (101-4), the play acknowledges a reaction to its events that is grounded in both doubt and present enjoyment. The tormentors' joke puts the tunic, an inanimate substitute for Christ's living flesh, in place of the beloved son, but such seeming irreverence actually resonates with the history of Christian teaching that sees Jesus's death as the joyful beginning of Christian salvation. The crucifiers' glee puts them on the right side of Christ's injunction in *The Judgment* that "my blood nowe shewed ys / that good therebye maye have blys / ... / And evyll also, that dyd amysse, / must have greate sorrowe in sight of this my blood now show-ed is / that good thereby may have bliss" (405-410).[119] At the crucifixion, nothing more than Christ's earthly garment is truly lost, and so Mary's grief might well be more properly directed towards the relatives who are denied their property. The outcasts, who gaze upon the events from a position of disbelief, have their own interpretive advantage.

The artist Jean Fouquet visually represents the point in two fifteenth-century illustrations for the *Hours of Etienne Chevalier*. The paintings offer evidence for a medieval visual tradition that imagines the crucifixion as an event whose benefits accrue with emotional and temporal distance rather than affective association with Christ.[120] Fouquet's representation of "The

[119] For a more complete discussion of the license to enjoy the play that staged versions of the crucifixion grant their audiences, see John Parker, *Aesthetics of Antichrist*, 68-70.

[120] This ultimately comedic perspective on the crucifixion was commonly embodied in the early Middle Ages by the *Christus Victor*, the triumphant Christ on the cross that contrasted with, for example, the suffering Christ in Giotto's *Crucifixion.* Fouquet's Christ also does not outwardly suffer. The more stylized representation of Christ in the painting and in the crucifixion plays troubles narratives that posit increasing naturalism in the visual arts from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance wherein the *Christus Victor* gives way to a realistically embodied and suffering Christ. For a lengthier discussion of the development of the crucifix in the visual arts, see Richard Viledesau, *The*

Crucifixion" offers several versions of Christ's death for the several onlookers; depicting the different ways that Mary, the soldiers, and the curious witnesses perceive the event, it asks its viewers to think about how perspective influences interpretation.[121] The theme is not unique to "The Crucifixion." In the same volume, "The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia" puts a virgin body on display for the heavenly host, the earthly onlookers, and the painting's viewers. The painting is one of the few extant representations of early Christian drama: it features not only a hell-mouth and a city official holding the show's prompt-copy, but also God and his angels positioned within a theater's audience stalls.[122] Fouquet imagines human life—and particularly the fate of the virtuous—as spectacle. "The Crucifixion" puts viewers in the position of the heavenly host, who witnesses holy events from afar. It reveals Jesus's body stretched on the cross high above crowds that, with their backs to the viewer, gaze up. In the foreground, the Virgin Mary faints backwards and the gambling soldiers recline next to the tunic. The illustration is full of spectators, but only the picture's own audience looks upon this three-fold action. The image juxtaposes divinity and mortality by creating two audiences with different perspectives on the seamless garment: for the onlookers within the scene who only see the cross, Jesus's bodily death is the spectacle, but for the audience who can see Christ rising above Mary's grief and the tunic's loss, the scene dramatizes the exchange of a human mantle for divinity.

In Chester, the torturers—unrepentant Jewish characters who are denied the Christian conversion that Longinus experiences at Jesus's death—achieve a kind of insight into the cosmic comedy unfolding before them that Mary and the weeping women cannot share. Despite the

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Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts, from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2006).

[121] The Bibliothèque Nationale de France reproduces Fouquet's illustration: Jean Fouquet, "La Crucifixion," *BnF Exhibitions: The Virtual Galleries of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://expositions.bnf.fr/fouquet/grand/f082.htm>.

[122] Stella Mary Newton, *Renaissance Theatre Costume and the Sense of the Historic Past* (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1975), 27-8, reproduces the illustration. Newton notes that the painting is "so manifestly a morality play in progress" that it "has become one of the most important sources of pictorial information on the medieval theatre."

mourners' professions of faith in the resurrection, their sorrow marks them as participants in the tragedy of the event. But the Chester play counterbalances such sorrow with the tormentors, whose sin lies in carrying out the act that will save the Christian audience but whose glee in its performance encapsulates for the faithful the joyful reality of Christ crucified. In the play, the Fourth Jew exhorts a reluctant Longinus to thrust a spear through Jesus's side, saying "Have this speare and take good heede. / Tho must doe, as the bushoppe [Caiaphas] thee bade, / a thinge that ys of full great neede" (376-8). In their eagerness to injure Christ, only the tormentors recognize the 'need' of the crucifixion. As in the Fouquet, those who view the crucifixion from a distance have access to a perspective denied to those who profess unquestioned belief in Christ's life and death. Longinus in particular embodies the kind of insight that emerges from sightlessness. The character is literally blind; he stumbles and stabs Christ's side in a comic accident that saves both him and the whole world. Longinus confesses that "What I do I may not see / whether it be evil or good" (399-400). It is both: the farce of the moment reiterates the cosmic comedy that underlies the tragedy of the crucifixion. Upon Longinus's pronouncement, the water from Christ's wounds runs onto his face and restores his eyes. Longinus acquires sight—and a Christian perspective—only after he admits the limitations of his knowledge. And it is in fact those limitations that permit him to carry out his part in God's plan: once he sees what he has done, Longinus too mourns.

Longinus possesses a dual perspective: he takes part in the soldiers' (and Christians') triumph because of his blindness and therefore sees Christ's tragedy with opened eyes. His fall into the terrible knowledge of his own sin ultimately results in the miracle of salvation. The drama's characters participate in the divine comedy because of their contact with and contribution to a great evil: the crucifiers have a theologically appropriate reaction to the harm

they merrily perform, and Longinus only accomplishes his preordained role in the absence of sight. Theater, Longinus's example suggests, is both unrepentantly ludic and inevitably sinful—and that is how it overcomes damnation. So when the *Treatis on Miraclis Pleyinge* condemns plays as "signis withoute dede" and when Christopher Goodman complains of the "sacrament made a stage play," the drama's critics grasp the fundamental blankness behind the theatrical spectacle, which is the blankness that haunts every human endeavor, including the first act in Eden and Longinus's saving mistake: that of reaching after divinity with the sure knowledge that it has been forbidden.[123]

Passion plays further encourage the audience to recognize the spectacle onstage as a saving comedy through their costumes: by revealing the deficiencies of human making and questioning their own trustworthiness as the products of creative labor, the drama does not pretend that the savior onstage is anything more than a performer in a costume. Instead, Passion plays clothe the actor in a leather suit and golden wig that abstracts the body of the performer from both Christ's human and his divine roles.[124] They depict Christ as an actor, and, like an actor, his performance's effect surpasses the counterfeited elements that constitute it. If postlapsarian corporeality enables Christians to "hide lies under the garments of skin," it also connects them to the Son of God, whom Jerome identifies as the model for dissemblers: "That very righteous men resort to temporary dissimulation for the sake of their own or others' salvation is not surprising when we recall that our Lord himself, who was free of iniquity and

[123] *Treatis on Miraclis Pleyinge*, 40. Goodman, "Notes of the absurdities..." See above, n. 12.
[124]Crucifixion plays, which dramatize the human actions that torture the savior, have a particular interest in human making. In *Signifying God* (53-55), Sarah Beckwith's discussion of the York *Crucifixion* articulates how the play brings questions of labor to the foreground and connects the spectacle of Christ's tortured body to tensions felt among the city's guilds.

whose flesh was not sinful, pretended to take on sinful flesh."[125] Jerome expands upon a tradition that emerges from Paul's identification of the Christian savior as an actor whose human body is the sign of his role (Christ comes in the "*likeness* of sinful flesh"). Christ is a man who also only seems like a man—just as the leather garment is skin that only seems like human skin. Medieval theories of the atonement reasoned that it was precisely such seeming that freed men from the devil. God countered the guile by which Satan won Adam's disobedience with greater deception: "Christ did without sin take upon Himself the likeness of sin, that the mystery of the Incarnation might be concealed from the devil; and did hunger and thirst, suffered and was affrighted, slept and toiled, after the similitude of sinners."[126] Satan, believing that Christ was a mere man, claimed the Son's soul and took more than he was owed, thereby rendering human souls back to God.[127] God's duplicity makes its way into the cycle dramas: in York's *Harrowing of Hell,* Christ explains to Satan that he lived as a poor man

> for to make þe mased [bewildered] and madde,
> And by þat resoune [means] þus dewly to haue
> Mi Godhede here, I hidde
> In Marie, modir myne. (247-50)

Christ accomplishes the work of salvation because he hides within a human costume.[128] Falseness, the cycle plays proclaim, is an inherent part of Christ's identity as god-man.

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[125] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Andrew Cain (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 106-7. See also John Parker, *Aesthetics of Antichrist*, 160-2 for a discussion of this "theatrical understanding of atonement."

[126] William Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum,* XII.i.4 (translation from *The Sacred Vestments: an English Rendering of the Third Book of the 'Rationale Divinorum Officiorum' of Durandus, Bishop of Mende* by T.H. Passmore (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1899, p. 92).

[127] Gary A. Anderson discusses this theory of the atonement in an early Christian instantiation, that of Narsai, in his *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 121-126.

[128] For discussions of Christ's disguise in the Temptation plays, see Alan H. Nelson, "The Temptation of Christ; or, the Temptation of Satan" in *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*, Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 219-229 and David L. Wee, "The Temptation of Christ and the Motif of Divine Duplicity in the Corpus Christi Cycle Drama" in *Modern Philology*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Aug., 1974), 1-16. For more on Christ's disguise in York, See Parker, *Aesthetics of Antichrist,* 169-178.

As recognizably false skins, the actor's garments highlight the theater's own Christ-like trade in illusion. If dramatic art relies upon likeness to create its illusions—if, in Michael O'Connell's words, the "stage throne is a chair portraying another chair"—English passion sequences point out that their art produces an image of Christ not merely through correspondence of substances (in which the actor is a man portraying the man that was Jesus), but through correspondence of strategy: the plays, like the god they imitate, rely upon deception to attain their ends.[129] The theatrical arts speak the truth about God incarnate and his human mission by making a show of their own falsity. The actor parallels Christ not because he does or says what Christ did and said but because the play acknowledges itself a play: bound by postlapsarian shame and by the composite nature of human creation, Christian drama communicates the salvific effects of the crucifixion through the characteristics and materials that signal its secondary status. The clear artificiality of Christ's staged skin, for example, enhances the fact that his human mantle is only a temporary sheath to be discarded; like Adam's and Eve's leather suits, his man-made costume will be taken off to his, and their, greater glory. At York, the Mercers' Doomsday play stipulates "a Sirke [shirt] wounded" for the enthroned Christ.[130] The textile merchants may well have preferred to put Christ in cloth instead of leather, but if Christ wears linen after the Ascension, the York plays reinforce the association between the body of Christ in heaven and the soul's glory that, as St. Martin of Leon emphasizes, is epitomized by "linen garments that have nothing of death in them, but are entirely white."[131] Christ's heavenly person, like redeemed man, puts down his fleshly garments in order to put on new ones.

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[129] O'Connell, *Idolatrous Eye,* 20.
[130] Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., REED*: York* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 55. (1433). For a discussion of the possible interpretations of this costuming note, see Twycross, "Apparell Comlye," 39
[131] St. Martin of Leon, "Sermo Tricesimus: In Ascensione Domini." See above, note 113.

But before Christ's triumph in heaven, the "likeness of sinful flesh" masks his divinity just as the flesh costume masks the actor. At the Passion, Christ's garments serve as reminders of the death that the savior will endure in order to facilitate the soul's change of costume. As in Adam and Eve plays, the actor's costume resonates as the product of slaughter: medieval drama explicitly connects Christ's flesh to a dead animal's skin. In the Bodley play of *Christ's Burial,* Joseph of Arimithea looks upon the body of the savior and grieves that "this parchement is stritchit owt of syse."[132] Parchment, like leather, depends upon an animal's death. Unlike leather, however, it is not merely a product of human artistry; it enables human artistry. As parchment, Christ's staged body does more than memorialize depravity; it creates the opportunity for immortality. As Bruce Holsinger has pointed out, medieval literary culture survives because of the deaths of animals.[133] A fourteenth-century mortuary role declares that "Human flesh is viler than a sheep's skin / [a sheep's] skin is taken off and written on inside and out; / if a man dies, flesh, skin and bones die."[134] Flesh books live on; they are memorials to the Fall that also transcend the effects of the Fall. At the crucifixion, Christ's skin therefore recalls the new life that he buys with his death.[135]

In some medieval contexts, parchment pages are identified with the crucified savior: Sarah Kay briefly discusses Middle English Charters of Christ in which the Lamb is both the physical document—the "sheep's skin"—and the speaker of the poem.[136] Parchment can retain traces of its origins, and so do the leather skins. Crucifixion plays picture Christ's identity as

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[132] Frederick James Furnivall, ed. *The Digby Mysteries* (London: New Shakespeare Society, 1882), l. 274.
[133] Holsinger, "Of Pigs and Parchment: Medieval Studies and the Coming of the Animal," 619.
[134] Sarah Kay, "Legible skins: Animals and the Ethics of Medieval Reading," 19.
[135] There is also perhaps a connection here between the "stretched" parchment onstage, the saving body of Christ, and the scriptures—the Word of God whereby men discover salvation. Augustine, in *Confessions*, remembers the "skins of dead animals" in a passage that connects the creation of the heavens to the Bible: "You know, O Lord, how you clothed men with skins when by sin they became mortal. In the same way you have spread out the heavens like a canopy of skins, and these heavens are your Book." Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII.15 (trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 322).
[136] Sarah Kay, "Legible Skins," 19-20.

god-man through rather than despite the garments' similarity to the leather aprons. In Tewksbury, churchwardens' accounts note the purchase of "vj sheepe skyns for Christes garmentes," and New Romney's passion play requires half a dozen "shepeskynes for ye godhedd[es] coote"; Tudor productions of New Testament events dressed the naked Jesus in garments whose materials recall his identity as the Lamb of God.[137] The garment displays the corrupt materials and imperfect process of human making with which and by which Christ is clothed for the audience, but the very features that signal its inadequacy also make it most able to represent the crucifixion onstage: as the staged Christ is led to the slaughter, sacrificing himself to God's justice in atonement for original sin, he wears the evidence of slaughter, which itself occurs because of original sin. Christ at the crucifixion becomes the sacrificial lamb that he wears even as that lamb recalls the postlapsarian shame and death that necessitates costumes and clothing like it necessitates a savior. The second skin that the actor wears in order to embody Christ's humanity reveals Christ's divinity precisely because it is a product of fallen artifice; the suit re-imagines and redirects the Augustinian tradition in which Adam's and Eve's coats of skin signify flesh and its errors. The plays, entrenched in the physical reality of wood and leather and cloth, discover the central metaphor of the crucifixion in their own common materials.

Onstage and at the crucifixion, Christ's unadorned and flawed human form becomes, through the materials of his costume, a measure not merely of depravity, but also of holiness. The plays' leather garments recall the transcendent reality of the incarnation at the height of Christ's bodily degradation, and they do so by broadcasting their postlapsarian origins: the skins of dead animals promise new life by evoking death. Christ's costume reflects the complexities of his identity as God-man because leather is the product of slaughter; whatever transfiguration

[137] REED*: Cumberland, Westmorland, Gloucestershire,* 337 and Dawson, *Malone Society Collections VII*, 210.

occurs onstage only happens because the fallen materials remain fallen. The plays' costuming is part of the theatrical illusion but not totally subsumed in the illusion, and the drama therefore takes up the long tradition of Christian antitheatricalism by emphasizing the emptiness behind its transformations: theater in fact shows "the sacrament made a stage play" rather than the stage play made a sacrament. Although both formulations depend upon the gaps between the sign and its significance—and therefore on the actor who can stand in for Christ precisely because he is not Christ—the former counters charges of idolatry by undermining the premise that theater aspires to sanctity. The drama rather discovers its subject in its fallenness: the skin suit firmly roots the meaning of the sacrificial body in the leather that constitutes it. Kenneth Gross's "Poetics of Idolatry" defines an idol as "Human creation that is not quite revealed as such...all of the god and yet none of the god."[138] Theater, in turn, might be described as 'none of the god and so all of the god': it opens itself to the multiplicitous possibilities of divine presence by revealing itself to be a mere image of divinity. If biblical drama invokes the sacred, it does so only in the ordinary matter that adorns the stage, investing in theater's material conditions as themselves transformative.

It is in this context of hope within and because of postlapsarian faults that the Holy Spirit appears at the end of the Norwich play in a scene that offers Adam solace and gestures towards the *felix culpa*. Although Adam must have Dolor "allways in sight" (114), the Holy Spirit assures him "Thy God doth not this the away to cast, / But to try the as gold is tryed in the fyer" (128-9). Adam and his progeny rise through, not despite, their trials. Thus the chorus at the end of the play can sing, despite being confronted with the spectacle of mankind's debasement, "Let us rejoyce / And prayse the Lord alwaye / For this our joyfull daye" (155-7). At the end of *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Augustine's description of a heaven where the soul "will have the perfect

[138] Kenneth Gross, *Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm, and Magic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 35.

measure of its being...with such a wonderful ease that what was once its burden will be its glory" imagines a future of perfected forms where the body's failings will no longer hinder its visions of the highest heaven. Describing the transformation by which the body and soul become free from corruption, Augustine envisions the redemption of materiality itself. The body, restored, enhances the soul. Presenting for the eye the full depravity of postlapsarian bodies, biblical drama's costuming proposes that the theater anticipates and participates in the renewal of physical creation. In a sixteenth-century England beset with doubts about visual media, the Norwich play, which sets forth fleshly costumes and is preoccupied with characters who see imperfectly, accepts and redeems its medium's materials to suggest that Augustine's future is also the imperfect today, "this our joyfull daye." In a world of fallen sight and fallen forms, the theater's burden is also its glory.

Chapter Two
Solo Ludo: Bale's Biblical Drama as Biblical Translation

In the late 1530s, John Bale wrote a series of biblical plays that formed a Protestant mini-cycle focused on scriptural interpretation and Christ's early ministry. In three plays, *God's Promises*, *Johan Baptystes Preachynge*, and *The Temptation of Our Lord*—all of which were, according to their title pages, "Compyled by Johan Bale, Anno Domini 1538"—Bale revised episodes commonly treated in civic biblical pageants to trace the course of God's Word throughout human history.[1] Bale carefully differentiates his plays from the teachings of Catholicism: the prologue of *God's Promises*, which enjoins audience members "To rejoyce in God for your justyfycacyon, / And alone in Christ to hope for your salvacyon" (20-1), emphasizes faith, not good deeds, as the means of Christian deliverance. But in the drama, the distinction between Protestant doctrine and Catholic tradition is by no means as tidy or as stable as the plays' exhortations against any "worke without faythe" (B 483) imply. Bale's theater simultaneously rejects and appropriates its medieval predecessors: as Protestant polemic, the dramas renounce Catholic doctrine, but as a cycle, they imitate Catholic drama. The only confirmed production of Bale's biblical pageants, which took place on the day of Queen Mary's coronation in 1553, reiterates the debt that his drama owes to its Catholic analogues. The pageants' sequential performance in the city streets of Kilkenny, Ireland both paralleled and parodied the cycle pageants that were still being staged in regional centers across England: the production featured actors drawn from the community and a procession during which Bale

[1] Quotations from John Bale's biblical plays will be taken from the second volume of Peter Happé's *The Complete Plays of John Bale*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986) and cited parenthetically within the text by line number. When the title of the play is not specified, quotes from *God's Promises* will be distinguished by GP; quotes from *Johan Babtystes Preachynge* by B; and quotes from *The Temptation of Our Lord* by T.

preached about "what the autoritie was of the worldly powers and magistrates."[2] The spectacle imitated a contemporary civic custom and turned it into a form of protest. That a virulently anti-Catholic reformer should adopt a Catholic medium in order to undermine both Catholic doctrine and the Catholic queen illustrates the interdependence of "medieval" and "Renaissance" drama in Reformation England; even one of the fiercest critics of medieval religious culture cannot entirely repudiate a performance tradition rooted in that culture.

I have worked in the first chapter of this project to show that by questioning their own efficacy as the product of postlapsarian artistry, guild pageants discover in disguise, in idolatry, and in the fallenness of their materials a means of participating in the narrative of salvation. The theater accommodates the very vices that it rejects and so overcomes them. Bale's drama, in turn, hopes to displace the errors that civic cycle plays embrace: his plays revamp the metatheatrical strategies of medieval theater to explore Protestantism's debts to a tradition of scriptural reading that the plays deem corrupt and "darkened / With unfaythfulnesse" (54). The plays reveal how Protestant theater tries to respond to the dangers of artistic representation: Satan's temptations reflect anxieties about reformed reading methods and the inevitably fallible Christian response to scripture. Bale's theater thus occupies a vital position between the guild-sponsored cycle dramas of the sixteenth century, which meditate on their participation in sins of the eye, and Milton's poetry, which worries over its contribution to the Bible's textual errors. Milton, writing after Puritan iconoclastic fervor closed the theaters in 1642, inhabits a period during which antitheatrical treatises commonly attacked staged religious drama on account of its nearness to the Mass: to William Prynne, Catholics have "trans-formed their Masse it-selfe, together with the whole story of Christs birth, his life, his Passion, and all other parts of their Ecclesiasticall

[2] Details of the production are recorded in John Bale, *The Vocacyon of Johan Bale to the bishoprick of Ossorie in Irelande*, ed. Peter Happé and John N. King (Binghamton, NY: Renaissance English Text Society, 1990), 58. I discuss the performances further below, on 85-6.

service into Stage-playes."[3] Such comparisons derive in part from the anti-clerical sentiment of Bale's era, when reformers like Thomas Becon insisted that "the popish mass, which hath utterly degenerated and grown out of kind...is none other thing than a dumb fable or play."[4] But whereas the association between the Mass and the stage had amassed such weight by Milton's day that he ultimately chose not to write *Paradise Lost* as a drama, Protestant dramatists of the early Reformation—and particularly John Bale—revised the medieval theatrical ritual to suit their own doctrinal purposes. Performances of biblical cycles in Renaissance England update a Catholic tradition that found the promise of salvation in drama's potentially satanic reproductions of divine persons. The polemical Protestant theater that develops from the civic pageants imagines a similar solution to the problem of scriptural representation: it finds salvific possibility in its medium's uneasy relationship with biblical text.

Bale's body of work—particularly as it simultaneously re-creates and rejects its past—in many ways epitomizes the paradoxes that beset early Protestant thinkers who defined their era as both born out of documents preserved by the Middle Ages and also formed in opposition to medieval corruption.[5] The antiquarian John Leland, Bale's contemporary and friend, bemoans the Middle Ages as a "semi-barbarous age [semibarbaro saeculo]" of literary production whose primitivism prevented John Gower from adequately imitating Ovid.[6] Bale's prose, in contrast, foregoes aesthetic criticism to lament the period as one of religious barbarism in which "Whyght

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[3] William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix* (London: Edward Allde, Augustine Matthewes, Thomas Cotes and William Iones, 1633), p. 112.
[4] Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Mass* in *Prayers and Other Pieces of Thomas Becon*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 378.
[5] Cathy Shrank discusses Bale's appropriation of the medieval past in "John Bale and Reconfiguring the 'Medieval' in Reformation England" in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, eds. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 179-192. On Bale's use of medieval conventions in his drama specifically, see Katherine Steele Brokaw, "Musical Hypocrisy: The Plays of John Bale," in *Staging Harmony: Music and Religious Change in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Peter Happé, "John Bale's Lost Mystery Cycle" in *Cahiers Élisabéthains: Late Medieval and Renaissance English Studies*, 60 (2001), 1-12; Thora Blatt, *The Plays of John Bale* (Copenhagen: G.E.C Gad, 1968); E.S. Miller, "The Antiphons in Bale's Cycle of Christ" in *Studies in Philology* 48 (1951), 629-38.
[6] John Leland, *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis*, ed. Anthony Hall (Oxford: Guil. Lancaster, 1709), 414-5.

[was] iudged blacke and lyght darkenesse."[7] Both authors bear witness to the contradiction at the heart of early antiquarian endeavors: the Protestant revolutionary mindset depends upon the era that it condemns. Leland and Bale rewrite Britain's history only by consulting the medieval manuscripts that the dissolution of the monasteries made available.[8] Bale's *A brefe Chronycle concerynynge the Examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Iohan Oldecastell*, for example, rails against "that execrable Antichrist of Rome the deuyls owne vycar," but it nevertheless compiles its account from resources housed in former monastic libraries.[9] Bale aims to denounce the system that condemned Oldcastle by using "the bokes and writtynges of those Popyshe Prelates."[10] In order to repair the corruptions of Catholicism and "restore vs to such a truthe in histories, as we haue longe wanted," he anticipates later Renaissance antiquarians and turns to the material evidence of the past.[11] Bale recovers Catholic texts and recuperates their contents to produce a Protestant product.

The entire extant corpus of drama written by John Bale likewise appropriates medieval forms: *King Johan* and *The Three Laws* build upon the morality tradition, and his three biblical plays together imitate the mystery cycles to trace the course of human history from Adam to Christ. Bale's cycle, as it wrestles with Protestant England's Catholic inheritance, claims to supersede an earlier, degenerate era of religious "darkenesse" while also acknowledging the persistence of medieval error. *God's Promises*, the first play in the sequence, opens with an epigraph from John 1:4-5: "In the worde (whych now is Christ the eternall sonne of God) was

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[7] John Bale, *A brefe Chronycle concernynge the Examinacyon and death of the blesssed martyr of Christ syr Iohan Oldecastell the lorde Cobham* (Antwerp: 1544), 9v.
[8] James Simpson discusses John Leland's relationship to the medieval past and the dissolution of the monasteries in the first chapter of *Reform and Cultural Revolution*. *The Oxford English Literary History*, Vol. II (1350-1547), gen. ed. Jonathan Bate, 13 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See particularly 12-17.
[9] Bale, *A brefe Chronycle concernynge syr Iohan Oldecastell*, 3r.
[10] Ibid., 2r.
[11] John Bale, *The laboryouse iourney [and] serche of Iohan Leylande, for Englandes antiquitiees* (London: S. Mierdman, 1549), Biiv-Biiir.

lyfe from the begynnynge and that lyfe was the lyght of men. Thys lyght yet shyneth in the darkenesse, but the darkenesse comprehendeth it not."[12] The epigraph connects the theme of the play—the revelation of Christ's coming to the patriarchs and prophets who preceded Christ—to the particular concerns of early Protestant reform in England, which centered upon access to the scriptures. The edition thus advertises Bale's drama as evidence of Christ's "lyght" amongst those who refuse to follow "the worde"; it implicitly indicts the Catholic ecclesiasts who withhold the vernacular Bible from the laity. At the end of the sequence, the epilogue to *The Temptation of Our Lord* makes the charge explicit by pronouncing "What eneymyes are they that from the people wyll have / The scriptures of God" (420-1). The epigraph from John, which renders the Vulgate's *comprehenderunt* in the present rather than the perfect tense, emphasizes the continuance of such Catholic "darkenesse" and so introduces Bale's cycle as a response to sustained attacks on the Word of God.

But if medieval corruption remains in the era of Protestant "lyght," such corruption is also, contradictorily, a thing of the past. The epilogue to *God's Promises* notes that "Our forefathers were undre the cloude of darkenes" (956) that did not disperse until "Christes dayes" (957). *God's Promises* chronicles the triumph of Christian truth, and its governing metaphor, which connects the coming of Christ with the gradual dawning of the "lyght" of Protestant faith, associates the forefathers' "cloude of darkenes" with an earlier age of religious error; the play claims to reform and supplant a prior tradition of worship. But, as my previous chapter has shown, the theatrical culture that the drama aims to supplant is not just a medieval one: guild-sponsored mystery pageants continued to be performed in England until the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The life of Bale's biblical plays likewise stretches well into the 1570s: the

[12] The epigraph appears on the title page of the second edition of *God's Promises*: John Bale, *A tragedie or enterlude, manifesing the chiefe promises of God vnto man* (London: John Charlewoode, 1577). The title page of the first edition is missing, but the text of the second edition is elsewhere identical to that of the first.

pageants were first published in 1547, during Bale's exile in the Netherlands and Germany, and *God's Promises* was also reprinted thirty years later, in 1577.[13] Bale's drama, published and produced as an alternative version of a popular theatrical genre, differentiates itself from "forefathers" that are also its precise contemporaries. Bale's definition of the "medieval"—one that emphasizes Catholic darkness and corruption—may well have gained currency as the decades wore on, but his efforts to define the Protestant present inevitably reflected the ways that, in the early decades of the Reformation, the "medieval" had yet to truly become the past.

I.

The redefinition of reading methods was one central project in the attempt to clearly differentiate between the "people darkened / with unfaythfulnesse" (GP 54) and those saved by the "lyght of faythe" (GP 53). The "lyght of faythe" dwells in the Word, and early Protestant reformers therefore hoped to allow Christians to access scripture in the vernacular, which would, they insisted, usher in a new era of faith built upon "literal" readings of the Bible. Reformers vilified the Catholic Church for denying scripture to the laity: Tyndale, in the preface to his translation of the Pentateuch (1530), warns his readers about "papists" who withhold the Bible "in the mother-tongue" and thereby collude "to drive you from the knowledge of the scripture...and to keep the world still in darkness."[14] Coverdale's prologue to the first full English Bible (1535) likewise uses the metaphor of light and darkness in its characterization of those who cleave to the Church of Rome. To Coverdale, the Catholic desires "the suppressyng, kepyng

[13]The plays were originally published by Dirik van der Straten in Wesel. For details of Bale's exile and the printing projects he undertook while abroad, see Peter Happé, *John Bale* (New York: Twayne Publishers1996), 10-16. Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), discusses the late printing of *God's Promises* on 162.

[14] Tyndale, *Preface to the Five Books of Moses* in Thomas Russell, ed., *The Works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for E. Palmer, 1831), I:2. Unless otherwise noted, future citations of Tyndale's works will come from this edition.

secrete, and burnyng of the worde of faythe, lest the lyght there of shulde vtter his darknes."[15] With even more outrage, Reformers accuse Church ecclesiasts of concealing the "lyght of faythe" in order to more easily cover their willful distortion of the Bible's content. Tyndale's prologue to the Pentateuch argues that recovering the "light" of the scriptures requires a revolution in reading methods—and that providing the Bible in the vernacular will itself give rise to such a revolution. Tyndale asserts that, in the absence of a "plainly" translated Bible, Catholics "tangle" the scriptures, "wresting" them "unto their own purpose, clean contrary unto the process, order, and meaning of the text."[16] They thereby "delude" the laity by "descanting upon it with allegories" and "expounding it in many senses...when it hath but one simple, literal sense, whose light the owls cannot abide."[17] Access to the "process, order and meaning of the text," according to Tyndale, will confute Catholics' old hermeneutic strategies.

But the very existence of the preface undermines Tyndale's suggestion that the scriptures themselves advocate a particular reading method: by adding introductions and glosses to the text in order to ensure that his audience correctly construes its meaning, Tyndale educates the laity in a reading process that is anything but self-evident. Protestant doctrine, not the biblical text, justifies Tyndale's particular hermeneutic method. The point is made explicit when the volume's Prologue digresses from its discussion of how to read the biblical text to suggest that the outwardly good men and women who suffered humiliation and martyrdom were perhaps "of the Pope's sect, and rejoiced fleshly, thinking that heaven came by deeds, and not by Christ; and that the outward deed justified them and made them holy, and not the inward spirit received by

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[15] Coverdale, *Biblia the Bible, that is, the holy Scripture of the Olde and New Testament* (1535), +iiv. The 1535 edition was printed while Coverdale was in the Netherlands. For an account of that Bible's probable connection to Antwerp, see Guido Latré, "The 1535 Coverdale Bible and its Antwerp Origins" in *The Bible as Book: The Reformation*, ed. Orlaith O'Sullivan (London: The British Library, 2000), 89-102. See also Richard Duerden, "Equivalence or Power? Authority and Reformation Bible Translation," in the same volume, for an analysis of Coverdale's dedication to Henry VIII.

[16] Tyndale, *Preface to the Five Books of Moses,* I:2.

[17] Ibid.

faith."[18] Tyndale takes direct aim at Catholics' emphasis on good works in order to promulgate a Lutheran doctrine that insists that only faith (*sola fide*) can justify Christians in God's eyes. Tyndale's approach, which instructs readers in Protestant doctrine in advance of introducing them to the biblical text that ought to justify that doctrine, mirrors Thomas More's orthodox claim that before attempting to read scripture, a person ought to be "well and surely instructed in all such points and articles of faith the church believeth." Tyndale's preface reveals that the objection to Catholic interpretive strategies is at its heart an objection to Catholic teachings. This chapter will go on to discuss the tensions within Protestant cultures of interpretation that lie beneath Tyndale's attempts to differentiate Protestant from Catholic reading methods, but at present I want only to note that early reformers' use of Catholic practices to renounce Catholicism is made manifest within Bale's biblical theater, which depends upon medieval dramatic traditions. Onstage, polemicists' explicit rejection of their Catholic predecessors only reveals how their defenses of Protestantism emerge out of an implicit appropriation of those predecessors' strategies.

In 1538, when Bale claims he began to compile his extant scriptural drama, the vernacular Bible was just beginning to be lawfully available in England. During the previous decade, William Tyndale's translations of both the New Testament (1525) and the Pentateuch (1530) had been smuggled into the country. In 1536 Tyndale—like his translations before him—was condemned for heresy and burned.[19] But by 1537 a more moderate version of Tyndale's work, which omitted his polemical prologues and glosses, had received royal license in the form of the Coverdale Bible (originally published in 1535): Myles Coverdale combined revisions of Tyndale's New Testament, Pentateuch, and Book of Jonah with his own rendering of the

[18] Tyndale, *Prologues to the Five Books of Moses*, I:8.
[19] For a history of English biblical translation from Tyndale to the Great Bible, see F.F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1961; reprint 2002), 24-80.

remaining books, "faithfully and truly translated out of Douche and Latyn," to produce the first full English Bible.[20] The vernacular scriptures were officially authorized for public use a year later, when Cromwell's Injunctions enjoined the placement of an English Bible in every parish church.[21] A small flurry of competing translation projects arose during the period, including the Matthew Bible (1537), the Taverner Bible (1539), and the Great Bible (1539, which became the version available in churches).[22] Bale began working as a dramatist amidst these events: around 1536, he composed a series of entertainments, several based upon the New Testament, for John de Vere, the Earl of Oxford. None of the plays survive, but the titles of the biblical pageants—which cover the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ—speak to Bale's participation in his contemporaries' efforts to bring scripture to the laity.[23]

Bale would have had the opportunity to be deeply engaged with the Lutheran ideas stirring the country during the earliest stages of the Reformation: prior to his official break with the established Church, Bale spent fifteen years in Cambridge. His time there overlapped with the years that Coverdale, Tyndale, Robert Barnes, Thomas Bilney, Thomas Cranmer, and Hugh Latimer also spent at the university.[24] There is no direct evidence that Bale was swayed by this circle of reformers during the 1520s; in fact, he ruefully recounts later that "at Cambridge I wandered in complete barbarism of scholarship and blindness of mind...until with the word of

[20] Miles Coverdale, *Biblia*, title page. The title page of the 1537 edition, printed in Southwark, advertises the translation as "Set forth wyth the Kynges most gracious lycence."
[21] For the text of the Injunctions, see Alfred William Pollard, ed., "The King's Proclamation for the English Bible to be Set up in Churches" in *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 261-2n.
[22] For specifics on Taverner's contributions to the English Bible, see Andrew W. Taylor, "Richard Taverner (1505?-1575)" in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[23] Bale compiled four bibliographies of his own works that accompany brief autobiographical sketches. The one included in the manuscript *Anglorum Heliades*, written for John Leland c.1536, offers the titles of Bale's earliest plays. A combined transcription of the four lists appears in Happé, *John Bale*, 5-6.
[24] The details about Bale's life included in this paragraph appear in Peter Happé, *John Bale*, 1-10.

God shining forth the churches began to be recalled to the purest springs of true theology."[25] By the 1530s, however, both his attention to the "word of God shining forth" and his concerns about the Church certainly overlapped with theirs: the titles of his early drama suggest that Bale was preoccupied with questions of papal authority (*King Johan*, *The Betrayal by Thomas Becket*), the scriptural basis for Church doctrine (*Against Pervertors of the Word*), and the vernacular Bible. More, a few years after he began writing plays for the Earl of Oxford, Bale came under the direct patronage of Cromwell; he worked for Cromwell just as the latter became Lord Privy Seal and a key figure in the dissemination of the English Bible. During the period, Cromwell actively promoted a Protestant agenda by supporting several polemical authors, including Myles Coverdale, Richard Taverner, and the propagandist Richard Morison, who advised Henry VIII to use plays to educate the populace in Catholicism's dangers.[26] In 1537, Bale became part of this circle of polemicists and promoters of English scripture. He was twice imprisoned for preaching against rituals and doctrine that he believed lacked scriptural authority, and he records that Cromwell "always set me free on account of the comedies I had produced [ob editas comoedias me semper liberavit]."[27] Bale then seems to have had his own troupe, "Balle and his felowes,"

[25] The statement occurs in Bale's autobiographical sketch in *Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Brittaniae*: In omni literarum barbarie ac mentis caecitate illic & Cantabrigiae pervagabar...donec apparente Dei verbo, revocari coeperint ecclesie ad verae theologiae fontes." John Bale, *Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Britanniae*, 2 vols. (Basel:J. Oporinus, 1557-9), 702. Translation from Happé, *John Bale,* 4.

[26] Morison uses the very justification that will be turned against the secular drama in antitheatrical treatises—its appeal to the depraved senses—in support of polemical Protestant drama: he claims that plays ought to be "set forthe and declare truely before the peoples eies the abomination and wickedness of the bishop of Rome" because "in to the common people thynges soner enter by the eies thenn the eares." From *Persuasion that the Laws should be in* Laten, fol. 18r-v., quoted in Tracey A. Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform in Tudor England: The Careers of Sir Richard Morison c.1513-1556* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 89. For a brief discussion of Morison and Taverner as part of Cromwell's circle, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 161. Cromwell's patronage of Coverdale's work on the Great Bible is documented by a letter written to him by Coverdale in which the latter assures his patron "that we be entered into your work of the Bible" and encloses several sample pages for his examination. "Letter III" in *Remains of Myles Coverdale,* ed. Rev. George Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 492-3.

[27] John Bale, *Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Britanniae*, 702.

who were funded by Cromwell until 1540 and who performed at least twice for their patron—once in September of 1538 and once in January of 1539.[28]

Critics have speculated that the 1538 performance, which took place in St. Stephen's Church near Canterbury, may have included the surviving biblical plays: the large payment the troupe received suggests that more than one play was performed, and although the only recorded production of the cycle took place outside, scholars have argued that the plays' staging requirements are also conducive to a church setting.[29] If Bale's cycle was part of his company's repertoire by the latter part of 1538, it would have been in performance just after Cromwell's Injunctions paved the way for the publication of the Great Bible in 1539. By adapting scripture amidst debates about the dissemination of vernacular scripture, Bale's drama provides a popular counterpart to the Bibles of Tyndale and Coverdale. In his prose, Bale often echoes his contemporaries' conviction that Catholics' hostility towards the vernacular Bible reveals their depravity. Catholics "iangle, they jest, they mocke, they mowe, they scoffe, they scorne, they ruffle, they race, wyth dagger and with fyste, and all to stoppe the swete blastes of the scriptures."[30] Both the rhetorical and the actual violence perpetuated by the Catholic Church aims to obscure the biblical text. Bale's extant cycle counters such efforts to conceal the scriptures from view and muddle their meaning by instead making "those matters...that the Gospell specyfye" (GP 5) publicly available in the vernacular; it follows in the footsteps of the reformers like Tyndale, Coverdale, and Cromwell as they popularize the Word of God.

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[28] Peter Happé's *The Complete Plays of John Bale* reprints the records of the performances on 4. Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation*, discusses Bale's patronage under Cromwell on 12-41.
[29] Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation*, describes the plays as they might have been performed in a church setting on 149-162.
[30] John Bale, *An expostulation or complaynte agaynste the blasphemyes of a franticke papyst of Hamshyre* (London: S. Mierdman, 1552), sig. Aiiiv.

Bale's drama, in its determination to demonstrate the clear reemergence of a "lyght of faythe" after medieval darkness, obscures the elaborately recursive acts it must perform in order to produce the appearance of novelty: precisely by rewriting civic cycle drama, it adopts a Catholic method for instructing the laity in vernacular scripture. The fifteenth-century *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, for example, reports that apologists for the pageants—whom the anonymous author sets himself against—claim that "men mowen bettere reden the wille of God and his mervelous werkis in the pleyinge of hem."[31] "Miraclis" provide a more effective form of Christian education than that offered by the written word. Such defenders apply Pope Gregory's rationale for sanctioning sacred images to sacred drama: just as illustrations in churches serve as a Bible for the unlettered, so plays serve as a popular form of scriptural instruction.

But Bale's plays take pains to distance themselves from forms of Christian theater that participate in what he and his fellow reformers deem a Catholic suppression of the Bible. The cycle, with its promise to avoid "tryfelinge sporte / In fantasyes fayned, nor soche lyke gaudysh [trivial] gere" (GP 17-8), anticipates later critiques of mystery pageants that accuse sacred drama of misrepresenting and therefore trivializing scripture. Matthew Hutton in 1568 will refuse to permit the performance of the York Creed play on account of its inclusion of "manie things" that "be disagreeinge from the sinceritie of the gospell," and the Chester Banns will apologize for including "Some thinges not warranted by anye wrytte."[32] The attack re-emerges in treatises that object to the secular as well as the sacred stage: the antitheatrical author Philip Stubbes particularly objects to plays "of diuine matter," claiming that they are "most intollerable, or

[31] Clifford Davidson, ed., *A Middle English Treatise on the Playing of Miracles* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 40.
[32] Hutton's decision is quoted in Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation into the Last Days of the Medieval Renaisance Stage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 73. For Chester's Late Banns, see REED*: Cheshire including Cheshire*, ed. Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), I:333, l. 5.

rather Sacrilegious, for that the blessed word of GOD, is to be handled, reuerently, grauely, and sagely, with ueneration to the glorious Maiestie of God, which shineth therin, and not scoffingly, flowtingly, & iyvingly, as it is vpon stages in Playes & Enterluds"[33] Antitheatricalists and reformers alike object to drama for its inclusion of "gaudysh gere" that is in no way god-like.

Bale's pun reveals the distance between his plays' rhetoric—which repeatedly distinguishes his work from the Catholic drama that adds legendary material and comedic episodes to scripture—and his plays' practice, which draws the traditions closer together. His cycle may hope to shun the "gaudysh gere" of medieval theater, but just as his predecessors use "gaud" to get to "god," so Bale uses their methods of biblical adaptation in order to provide a popular Bible to his audiences. *God's Promises*, with its concern for the Old Testament and its unabashed accommodation of a pre-Reformation liturgical tradition—each act ends with the singing of one of the seven "Great O" antiphons from the week leading up to December 24—exhibits particular interest in the conventions of Catholic worship and church theater. The play uses the medieval *processus prophetarum* tradition as a model to prepare audiences for Christ's advent in the world. Like *processus prophetarum* plays, which have their roots in the liturgical drama of the eleventh century and appear in most extant English cycle pageants, *God's Promises* depicts a parade of biblical figures who foretell the coming of the Messiah.[34] The play updates rather than undermines the strategies of the Catholic liturgy and liturgical drama.

The cycle as a whole further recalls the structure and aims of civic drama; the very tradition that Bale lambasts for disregarding the Word of God helps him disseminate Protestant

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[33] Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, (London: Richard Jones, 1583), L.Vr.

[34] E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols. (Mineoa, NY: Dover Publications, 1996), II:52-7; Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 2:125-71. Marius Sepet discussed the tradition in detail in *Les Prophètes du Christ: Étude sur les Origines du Théâtre au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Didier, 1878; reprint Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), and advanced the theory that *processus prophetarum* was in fact the germ of the mystery cycles. This has been refuted by Hardin Craig, "The Origin of the Old Testament Plays," *Modern Philology* 10.4 (1913), 473-87.

interpretations of that Word. In a series of seven acts that record conversations between the creator and his prophets, *God's Promises* focuses upon seven verses meant to provide solace to the faithful few who weary of the sin of their contemporaries. The drama, which ends in the New Testament with John the Baptist, takes its structure from medieval prophets' plays but its characters from the cycles more broadly: it begins with Adam and continues through Noah, Abraham, and Moses before including David and Isaiah, the more conventional participants in such pageants. Bale's other scriptural dramas follow suit in their willingness to adopt and adapt medieval predecessors in order to focus on the Word in the world: *Johan Baptystes Preachynge* elaborates upon the scene of Christ's baptism performed in cycle dramas but centers upon John's speeches to the crowds around the Jordan, and *The Temptation of Our Lord* expands mystery plays about the Temptation to recount Christ's disputes with the devil. Bale's cycle not only provides a Protestant means of translating scripture for the masses; it puts proper interpretation of the Bible at the heart of the action onstage. In his cycle, Bale recreates an earlier form of theater that instructs the laity in scripture's narratives in order to himself emphasize the centrality of scripture to the life of a Christian.

But Bale also adapts the ritual to serve Protestant ends by appropriating the genre's ability to adapt to multiple circumstances and speak to pressing community concerns. *God's Promises* connection to the Advent liturgy and its debts to the *processus prophetarum* tradition provide compelling reasons to see the play as an occasional work for Christmastime—and Paul Whitfield White argues that the publication history of *God's Promises* (it was printed independently from *Johan Baptystes Preachynge* and *The Temptation of Our Lord*) supports the point.[35] The play's ability to stand alone in many ways speaks to its similarity to its medieval

[35] Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation,* 158. Details about the publication of Bale's plays can be found in the introduction of Happé's *The Complete Plays of John Bale, Vol. 1*, 8-10 and 20.

predecessors rather than its difference from them: individual pageants were often performed for festivals and important civic events. The B Text of the *Norwich Grocers' Play*, for example, includes a prologue specifically written for "when þe Grocers' Pageant is played withowte eny other goenge befor yt."[36] The production of Bale's drama in Kilkenny, Ireland particularly suggests the way that context as well as content enables a cycle to cohere and, in Bale's case, speak back to Catholic tradition. The spectacle mirrored that of civic pageants in that it presented the plays sequentially and in public: "The yonge men in the forenone played a Tragedye of Gods promises in the olde lawe at the market crosse...In the afternone agayne they playd a Commedie of sanct Johan Baptistes preachinges of Christes baptisynge and of his temptacion in the wildernesse."[37] Bale, mounting his plays on the day that "the Ladye Marye" was "proclamed Quene of Englande, Fraunce and Irelande," used the conventions of Catholic drama to protest the coronation of a Catholic queen (58). On the new occasion, and in the context of his accompanying sermon on the authority of "worldly powers and magistrates," the plays' texts—which focus on biblical authority—became a commentary on secular authority. The plays' ability to be reconfigured and re-contextualized was precisely what made them available for Bale's reform: the genre's flexibility ensured its survival.

As I will go on to show in the next chapter, those who preserve the cycles in the seventeenth century will likewise reform the drama in the interests of their age, and such redefinition provides the context for the relationship that Milton's works have to the religious stage. The mid-sixteenth century performance of Bale's pageants offers a preview of such debates about the plays' significance: authorities in Kilkenny on both sides of the confessional divide struggle to control the meaning of the public spectacle. Bale, who was appointed to the

[36] Norman Davis, *Norwich Grocers' Play*, 11
[37] John Bale, *The Vocacyon of Johan Bale to the bishoprick of Ossorie in Irelande*, 59. Future quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

bishopric in Ossory in 1552, writes an autobiography about his tenure in Ireland and his escape from the violence prompted by his strident attempts to "distroye the ydolatries / & dissolve the hypocrites" (54) of a populace deeply devoted to its Catholic heritage. Bale, who understands his assignment as an evangelical mission, takes great pains to control the appearance of the rituals he performs. On the day of Mary's coronation, Bale quarrels with his peers "abought wearinge the cope / croser / and myter in procession" (58) during the public celebration. When Bale refuses the garments and heads out to preach his incendiary sermon on royal authority, the ecclesiastical hierarchy pushes back: "In the meane tyme had the prelates goten .ii. disgysed prestes / one to beare the myter afore me / and an other the croser / makinge .iii. procession pageauntes of one" (59). The clergy attempt to reframe Bale's rebellion and reclaim authority over the civic ceremony. Bale, in turn, subsumes the Catholic display into his own: with the term "disgysed prestes," which Bale repeatedly uses for clergy decked out in vestments, he connects the procession with his cycle of dramas, which depict biblical villains in the guise of Catholic clergy. To Bale, the entire scene is parody: the Catholic attempt to reclaim the event only reiterates his perspective on their vices. But by including his sermon in the scene—by claiming that there are three "procession pageauntes" in one—Bale's text reveals that Catholic and Protestant persuasion depend upon similarly performative means—on empty show and "gaudysh gere."

II.

Bale's plays, in accord with figures like Becon—and later William Lambarde—who write against the Catholic Mass, express concern about forms of worship that "serve the eye and sterve the ear": at one point in *God's Promises*, Pater Coelestis tells David that "I can not abyde the vyce of ydolatrye, / Though I shuld suffer all other vylannye" (584-5).[38] *God's Promises*

[38] William Lambarde, *Dictionarium Anglicae Topographicum & Historicum* (London: Fletcher Gyles, 1730), 460.

rails against idolatry throughout, but it does not find its own practice—that of visually representing the Christian God with the body and voice of a Christian man—idolatrous. Although God will disappear from the stage in the coming decades, Bale's early Reformation plays presume that the abuses of Catholic theater and Catholic worship can be reformed through the theater: one need only dramatize a Protestant God instead of a Catholic. Bale's practice, which invests in an extra-scriptural representational tradition as a didactic tool, uncomfortably co-exists with the doctrine he espouses, which considers "ymage making" (314) and Catholic "disguise" to be idolatrous assaults on God's Word. Bale thus becomes an unwitting herald of the tensions that will eventually make Protestant theater untenable. At the same time, the growing tensions surrounding the representation of scripture and theatrical disguise during the Protestant Reformation are also old anxieties: Satan at the Fall provides an opportunity for civic cycle plays to think through the relationship between art, disguise, and sins of the eye. Bale's theater does not reveal the arrival of new anxieties about theatrical methods; instead, it marks a cultural moment in which those anxieties find a particular outlet in characters who exhibit faulty reading methods.

In Bale's mystery cycle centered on Protestant reading practices, Satan does not appear at the Fall; despite a tradition of Adam and Eve plays that meditate on the propensity for frail humanity to fall victim to mistaken appearances, Bale puts the disguised Adversary onstage only at the Temptation, when the devil cites what "is written" (Luke 4:10) in the Hebrew scriptures and thereby puts questions of biblical interpretation at the heart of the narrative. Instead of addressing Adam's faulty sight, *God's Promises* asks what it means to read the scriptures as a postlapsarian Christian; it concerns itself with men who know God imperfectly and encounter his pronouncements from a position of failure. Bale labeled *God's Promises* a "Tragedye," and its

relentless focus on humanity's inability to avoid offending God in the absence of Christ differentiates it from the other two "comedies" that feature the Son of God. Each act follows the same pattern: it begins with a speech in which God laments the evils of mankind, introduces a biblical character who requests mercy for the sins of his people, and concludes with a sequence in which God comforts his interlocutor with a scriptural promise. The scenes mirror each other not only in their structure but in their obsession with human frailty. The first act of *God's Promises* is framed by verses taken after the first sin, from Genesis 3:14-19: Pater Coelestis begins his dialogue with Adam by asserting that "I wyll first begynne with Adam for hys lewdenesse, / ... / He shall contynue in laboure for hys rashenesse; / Hys onlye sweate shall provyde hys food and rayment" (64-7). Bale's paraphrase of the Bible signals that the act will expand upon the judgment of Adam and Eve, when God metes out punishment to the man, the woman, and the serpent for their sins. This has the effect of bracketing sin's causes to focus on its results and remedy: Bale, whose Pater Coelestis informs the penitent "what thu shalt stycke unto / Lyfe to recover and my good faver also" (111-12), introduces his narrative as one that teaches fallen humanity to interpret the signs of God's grace

In the drama, God's Word originates not in the first speech to mankind that scripture records—the commandment that of "the tre of knowledge of good an euell, thou shalt not eate of it" (Genesis 2:17)—but at the judgment of Adam and Eve after their sin.[39] Pater Coelestis consoles Adam with a prophecy that foretells Christ's triumph over the devil: the woman's "sede shall presse downe hys heade unto the grounde" (119) (Genesis 3:15). Immediately afterwards, God asks Adam to "take yet one sentence with the" (135) as a "sygne" (139) of the promise's veracity and offers a paraphrase of the biblical verses that frame it: "Crepe shall the Serpent for

[39] Biblical citations for this chapter will be taken from the 1560 Geneva Bible: Lloyd E. Berry, ed., *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

hys abhomynacyon; / The woman shall sorowe in payneful propagacyon" (141-2) (Genesis 3:14-16). The very promises that Adam will discover in the visible world ("thu shalt fynde thys true in out warde workynge" (142)) are those that the audience discovers in scripture. Pater Coelestis embeds his prophecy in its biblical context; the lines that pass judgment upon Adam and Eve not only guarantee their salvation but also guarantee the salvation of those who can read both promise and punishment into the biblical "sentence." Adam thus learns the proper way to interpret his postlapsarian experience. But the "sygne" (139) of the promise, God reminds Adam, consists of the serpent's slither and Eve's labor in childbirth. God's covenant to Adam is continually revealed in the consequences of humanity's first error; the promise must be re-read "in out warde workynge" (142) throughout Adam's life. The effects of sin act as the "seale" (139) of a covenant that must be fulfilled by Christ; the Word only consoles fallen man by reminding him of the Fall.

God's pun on "sentence," which forecasts both the law's harshness and Christ's central role in the history of mankind, crystallizes the Protestant changes that Bale makes to the Catholic tradition. Lutheran hermeneutics emphasize that reading the Bible means continually coming to terms with human error: "the commandments show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability."[40] Tyndale reiterates the point in his prologue upon Exodus: "the law was given to utter sin, death, damnation, and curse, and to drive us unto Christ, in whom forgiveness, life, justifying, and blessings were promised."[41] In Bale's play, Adam's neglect of the "commaundement" (65) is likewise inextricable from God's promises. The drama emphasizes that human failure precedes Christ's

[40] Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, LW 31:348. Peter Happé's *John Bale*, 28-32, discusses Luther's influence—and particularly that of *The Freedom of a Christian*—on Bale's thinking.
[41] Tyndale, "A Prologue into the Second Book of Moses Called Exodus," I:22.

triumph: the sequence focuses on man's attempts to renegotiate the terms of his relationship with God in light of his Fall. Adam spends his first lines making attempts to apologize that implicitly shift blame onto Pater Coelestis: "Such heavye fortune hath chefelye chaunced me / For that I was left to myne own lyberte" (83-4).[42] God chafes at the imputation ("Then thu art blameless, and the faulte thu layest to me?" (85)), and Adam tries again to make himself understood. Even though Adam begins the act by recognizing that "I am frayle: my whole kynde ys bu slyme" (77), the play forces him to repeatedly enact his own inability to adequately communicate with God. The turning point only arrives when Adam recognizes himself as a product of divine labor: he begs that God "throwe not awaye the worke whych thu hast create / To thyne owne image" (107-8). The realization propels the act to its resolution, when Adam receives the promise that Christ will crush Satan's head. The first man proves his contrition and experiences relief once he acknowledges that, as the creation of God, finitude is inherent to his nature.

Bale's drama embeds God's promise and the hope it offers within a biblical "sentence" that also memorializes human abjection under the Old Testament. God's "sentence" requires attention to the "literal sense"—God requires that Adam interpret the promise by referring to the punishments contained within the verses that come before and after the prophecy—but deciphering its meaning also requires attention to figurative language. To Tyndale, who introduces his theory of Protestant hermeneutics at length in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, the Bible's verses ask significant interpretive effort of the reader. Although "the scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense," it also "useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or

[42] Bale here takes up a theme within Genesis, which records how the Adam shifts blame onto Eve and Eve onto the serpent (Genesis 3:12-14). Milton's Adam will likewise shift blame God "This woman whom Thou mad'st to be my help / And gav'st me as Thy perfect gift so good, / So fit, so acceptable, so divine / That from her hand I could suspect no ill" (X.137-40).

allegories, as all other speeches do."[43] The "literal sense" does not mean the literal words on the page: "that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense."[44] Because of such "allegories whose literal sense is hard to find," those who approach scripture must "seek out diligently" the literal sense.[45] Within *Obedience*, Tyndale calls Catholic allegorical interpretation the "greatest cause of...captivity and the decay of the faith, and this blindness wherein we now are," but his text also recuperates the interpretation of allegory.[46]

The Old Testament in particular requires readers to interpret "dark and strange speaking": in his "Prologue to Leviticus," Tyndale notes that "a few prophets" of the Old Testament "described [Christ] unto other in sacrifices and ceremonies, likenesses, riddles, proverbs."[47] But when Christians "have once found out Christ and his mysteries," they "may borrow figures, that is to say allegories, similitudes, or examples to open Christ."[48] Right-minded interpreters are thus able to use the "open" texts of the New Testament to discover the "literal sense" of passages in the Old Testament that predict Christ and the salvation of the prophets. In this way, Old Testament "sacrifices and ceremonies" are not mere works; they "stood [the prophets] in the same stead as our Sacraments do us; not by the power of the sacrifice or deed itself, but by the virtue of the faith in the promise, which the sacrifice or ceremony preached, and whereof it was a token or sign."[49] Moses was not saved because he followed the law, but because the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was performed in the full knowledge of Christ's sacrifice to come.[50]

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[43] Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* I.339.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.,I: 343.
[47] Tyndale, "A Prologue into the Third Book of Moses Called Leviticus," I:27.
[48] Ibid., I:28.
[49] Ibid., I:29.
[50] Ibid. Tyndale notes that "all the ceremonies and sacrifices have, as it were, a star-light of Christ...as the scape goat, the brazen serpent, the ox burnt without the host, the passover lamb." James Simpson, in *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), discusses Protestant readings of the Old Testament past on 184-221.

Protestant leaders of the early English Reformation—despite their emphasis on the "literal sense"—determinedly allegorize the Old Testament.[51]

In the works of these reformers, Old Testament figures do not just prefigure or correspond to Christ; they must bear witness to Christ. Tyndale's "Prologue to Leviticus" explains the relevance of Old Testament worship to a Christian audience by arguing that "The New Testament was ever, even from the beginning of the world. For there were always promises of Christ to come by faith, in which promises the elect were then justified inwardly before God."[52] Such a mode of reading solves the problem of how the patriarchs, who lived by a law that could only damn, might have been saved: in a translation of Heinrich Bullinger's *The Old Faith*, Coverdale notes that it is "easye to vnderstande what faith and knowlege Adam had of our lorde Christ: Namely, that he knew in hym very godhede and manhede, and that he sawe in fayth hys passion and crosse farre off."[53] The attempt to read Christ into the Old Testament runs up against another principle of Protestant interpretation: a figurative reading of scripture's verses requires "a like text of another place" to confirm its meaning.[54] Protestant reading dictates that interpreters need to collate text with text to ensure that "the literal sense prove the allegory, and bear it, as the foundation beareth the house."[55] Finding an "open" text to justify Adam's Christian faith, however, risks wresting scripture out of shape.

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[51] Modern scholarship too often downplays the extent to which the anti-allegorical rhetoric of the reformers only justifies their own interpretive leaps instead of accurately reflecting their interpretive practice. See, for example, Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics: Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), who attends more closely to what Luther says about hermeneutics than to how he reads: "The reader is not so much a productive agent acting on the text as one who listens and responds—who reads with the ear and is overtaken and possessed by the text" (147).

[52] Tyndale, "Prologue to Leviticus," I:23.

[53] Miles Coverdale, *The Old Faythe, an euydent probation out of the holy scripture, that the christen fayth (which is the right true, old & undoubted faith), hath endured sens the begynnyng of the worlde* (Antwerp: 1541), sig. Biiiv.

[54] Tyndale, *Obedience*, I:342.

[55] Ibid., I:343.

Early Protestant reformers therefore revise the principles of typology to remake Old Testament figures in the image of Christians. Typology unites the separate biblical prophesies, events, and persons of the Old and New Testaments into one coherent Christian narrative by finding shadows of future events in the past. The events and persons of the New Testament can be interpreted to fulfill those of the Old: Christ as the New Adam, for example, recalls and perfects the Old Adam (I Corinthians 15). The act of proleptically imparting faith in Christ to the patriarchs engages with typology in that it takes Old Testament types seriously as historical persons as well as prophetic signs of the era to come (Adam is both a man who sinned and a shadow of Christ).[56] But reformers, instead of reading the New Testament present into the Old Testament past—instead of acknowledging how history reveals God's redemptive plan to those who believe in the Gospel—read the New Testament future into the Old Testament present. Human knowledge, rather than divine foresight, unifies the New and Old Testaments. The attempt to attribute such knowledge to the patriarchs requires falling away from the "literal sense" and evoking the "mysteries" of God: when Bale discusses such proto-Christian believers, he argues that "S. Johan sayth, that the lambe was slayne from the worldes beginninge, (Apo. 13), that is to saye, in promise, in faithe, & in misterie of their sacrifices."[57] To Bale, the "promise" of Christ has always existed for the elect, but his "like text of another place" evades rather than confronts the difficulty of such an assertion. His proof text serves its purpose only because he adds "in faith" to the biblical language. A clear and "open" defense of Old Testament Christianity requires a pre-existing Protestant framework.

God's Promises accommodates Protestant doctrine and reiterates a reading practice that finds evidence of Christ throughout human history by looking backwards to a medieval dramatic

[56] Joseph A. Galdon, *Typology and Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Paris: Mouton, 1975), 23.
[57] Bale, *Vocacyon*, 44.

tradition; it exploits the thematic concern of the prophets' plays—the descent of Jesus from Jesse—to narrow the grand sweep of the cycle plays to focus on the characters' knowledge of Christ. Each act's central verse, when properly interpreted, confirms the covenant between God and man that culminates in the coming of Christ and thereby imparts knowledge of the Christian savior to characters who lived and preached before Christ's ministry. As if to confirm the presence of such proleptic revelation, Bale has each prophet sing an antiphon at the end of his act that explicitly praises God's son. Bale's Adam, reflecting upon his experience, rejoices that

> Of thys am I sure, through hys hygh influence,
> At a serten daye agayne to be revyved.
> From grounde of my hart thys shall not be removed;
> I have it in faythe and therfore I will synge
> Thys Antheme to hym that my salvacyon shall brynge. (174-8)

Adam's "faythe" prompts him to Christian worship. The Old Testament, rather than lay the groundwork for a Jewish tradition that Christianity will fulfill, offers early examples of Christianity. Pater Coelestis's biblical "sentence" not only reminds audiences of Christ's future coming; it provides proof that Adam knew of it as well. Adam's speech ends the scene; he must perform this last interpretive leap on his own. Milton too will offer his protagonists the opportunity to find the significance of the Word without a gloss from God: after their fall, Adam and Eve regain hope when they call to mind "our Sentence, that thy Seed shall bruise / The Serpents head; piteous amends, unless / Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe" (X.1031-3). Part of Adam's consolation lies in discovering for himself what the "sentence" means.

III.

Bale was probably familiar with a wide variety of the Pre-Reformation entertainments performed in communities across England. East Anglia, where Bale spent most of his youth, had a thriving theatrical culture during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance: thirteen texts of

early English drama survive from the region.[58] It has been proposed that the manuscript of the N-Town plays represents a dedicated attempt to create a "library" of drama from across East Anglia; the manuscript attests to a network of regional drama from the late Middle Ages in which plays and playtexts circulated freely.[59] In addition, scholars have demonstrated that theatrical endeavors—civic, academic, and clerical—thrived in several locations where Bale spent his early years. Evidence of significant community involvement in the production of pageants and interludes has been found in Norwich, where Bale entered the Carmelite friary at the age of 12, at Cambridge where he studied as a young man, in both Ipswich and Doncaster where he served as prior, and at York, where he was licensed to preach in 1534.[60] Bale may well have seen the pageants performed in Norwich as a boy growing up at the local friary or taken part in civic productions later in life: the Carmelites at Ipswich, for example, had an active role in the city's procession and pageants.[61] Whatever extant pageants Bale may have come into contact with, the region's Adam and Eve dramas, and particularly the N-Town *Fall of Man,* offer a picture of how contemporary adaptations of Genesis might have addressed the first transmission of the Word to mankind while themselves attempting to transmit scripture in the vernacular: God's commandment provides an opportunity for drama to reflect upon pre- and postlapsarian encounters with the Word. The tradition of civic theater that developed during the Middle Ages, which ponders the very questions of fallen human intervention in God's Word that preoccupy early reformers, provides a corollary to Bale's drama—and to Protestant emphasis on the English Bible that motivates it.

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[58] Douglas Sugano, "Introduction" to *The N-Town Plays* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2007), 6. All quotations from the N-Town Plays will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically within the text by line number. For an extended discussion of the East Anglian context for biblical drama, see Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
[59] Ibid., 8
[60] Happé, *John Bale* provides a brief overview of Bale's early life and the theatrical cultures he may have encountered or contributed to before 1536. See particularly 4-7 and 111.
[61] A.H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 197-200 and 215-6.

N-Town meditates on its relationship to scriptural translation and transmission through the character of Eve; in her, the play eplores what it means to offer the reader a vernacular version of the Latin Bible through a human intermediary. Eve's ability to act as a conduit for scripture is intimately tied to her closeness to sin. Throughout the play, Eve possesses knowledge that lies beyond her ken. After the fall, she says of her tempter that "I suppose it was Sathanas / To peyne he gan us pete" (225-6). Eve "supposes" the precise identity of a creature about which she has no information except that it looked like a "werm with an aungelys face" (220-1). The play turns Eve's proximity to sin into an insight about the roots of her transgression. Well before she takes the apple, Eve possesses an intuitive understanding of human corruption: "Oure witte were rakyl and ovyrdon bad / To forfete ageyns oure Lordys wyll / In ony wyse" (80-2). The play, by enabling the first woman to imagine sin's cause as a defect in her species, augments a Christian interpretive tradition that finds a predisposition towards disobedience in the female sex. The play finds postlapsarian wisdom in Eve's knowledge of the devil.

If, as a weak and secondary creature, N-Town's Eve is by nature more susceptible to sin than Adam, she is also uniquely aware of her condition. Her insight draws her closer not only to Satan but to a Christian audience that is educated in the Genesis narrative, subject to inherited sin, and susceptible to satanic influence. The play puts onlookers in the same interpretive situation as Adam and his wife: unlike many extant pageants about the Fall of Man, N-Town offers no speech in which Lucifer assumes his disguise and contextualizes his plot. Audience members recognize Satan onstage because of their familiarity with a tradition of scriptural interpretation that connects the snake in Eden to the "old serpent called the devil and Sathanas" in Revelation 12:9 that "deceiveth all the world."[62] Christians, like Eve, know Lucifer because they inhabit a

[62] By way of comparison, the only other English Adam and Eve drama to introduce Satan without a prefatory speech is the other East Anglian mystery cycle: the A Text of the *Norwich Grocers' Play* depicts an Eve so fooled by the

world familiar with the "peyne he gan us pete." Eve repeatedly demonstrates knowledge that allies her with the Christian onlookers: during her dialogue with the snake, for example, she recounts more details of her future punishment than God's warning has revealed. She exclaims that, were she and Adam to eat the apple, "From joye oure Lorde wold us expelle! / We shuld dye and be put out with schame / In joye of paradise nevyrmore to duelle" (92-4). God only mentions death, but Eve intuits exile; she knows what she hasn't formally learned. The play, arming Eve with anachronistic access to the details of her narrative, positions her as a liaison between the all-knowing God and the educated Christian audience.

As an intermediary, Eve remains a perpetually Janus-faced character; she consistently looks both towards the divine and towards the demonic. Within the play—as within in the Christian tradition—Eve acts as Lucifer's go-between: she becomes the instrument by which satanic malice incites Adam's disobedience. In two consecutive scenes, Eve's temptation by Satan mirrors her temptation of Adam. During her exchange with Adam, Eve's language recalls that of the serpent who taught her to sin: when she claims that the fruit will enable Adam "Allthyng for to make / both fysch and foule, se and sond, / Byrd and best, watyr and lond" (135-6), she echoes Satan's earlier promise that she will have "Sunne and mone and sterrys bryth, / Fysch and foule, bothe sond and se, / At your byddyng" (104-6). Her appeal focuses Adam's desire to be "Goddys pere" (a phrase the serpent himself uses earlier in the scene) (133) on the attribute of God they know best—his ability to "make." It also effectively and creatively repurposes Satan's speech. Eve's facility with language has disastrous consequences for her husband and their progeny, but the play also indicates that Eve's capacity to remix others'

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serpent's disguise that she believes "an angell cam from God*es* grace" (74) and consents to eat the apple so "That we do not ow*e*r God*e* offende" (66). Norwich's decision to emphasize Eve's gullibility only highlights N-Town's interest in her perceptiveness. Citations from Norman Davis, ed., *Norwich Grocers' Play* in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: EETS, 1970), 8-18.

language connects the creator to his creatures. God initially commands the couple that they should "Ete not this frute ne me dysplese, / For than thu dyst thu skapyst nowth" (42-3). But when Eve repeats the command to the serpent, she does not merely confirm her knowledge of its contents; she also more closely recalls the language of the Vulgate ["in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris" (Genesis 2:17)]: "What day of that frute we ete / With these wurdys, God dyd us threte / That we shuld dye, our lyf to lete" (95-8).[63] The play transfers God's words to Eve; she comes closest to God's language as she approaches her Fall. N-Town offers a vernacular version of the Bible only by acknowledging human frailty as the essential context for its project. The Bible mediates between God and his fallen creation, and Eve shares in its role. Eve's language identifies her, for good or ill, as Eden's translator.

The tradition that the play emerged out of tended to regard Eve's part in the transmission of biblical language as ill-favored rather than beneficial. In Genesis 3, the serpent asks Eve, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?" (Genesis 3:1, New Revised Standard Version). Eve responds to the question by paraphrasing God's commandment: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die" (Genesis 3:2-3, NRSV). In the Hebrew Bible, Eve's statement adds the preventative conjunction "פֶּן" [pen] to God's original command—the word, when paired with the imperfect tense (as it is in Genesis 3:3), signals a warning.[64] The Nova Vulgata renders this warning as "praecepit nobis Deus, ne comederemus et ne tangeremus illud, ne moriamur" ["God has commanded us that we should not eat and that we should not touch it, lest we die" (my translation)]. But Pre-Tridentine editions of the Vulgate go

[63] *Biblia sacra: iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. Bonifatius Fischer et al., 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1975)).
[64] See "פֶּן" in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. III, ed. and trans. M.E.J. Richardson, (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1996), 936-7, definition 1.

further; they translate Eve's addition to God's Word with an addition of their own: "praecepit nobis Deus, ne comederemus et ne tangeremus illud, ne *forte* moriamur" ["lest *perhaps* we die" (italics mine)]. From Ambrose onwards, commentators argue that *forte* signals Eve's wavering faith; they suggest that Eve lessens the threat of punishment by adding an expression of doubt to God's statement that "thou shalt die the death."[65] *Forte*, however, communicates a sense of uncertainty that is absent in the original: the Hebrew *pen* has no such association. The very tradition that criticizes Eve for distorting the Word of God depends upon a Bible that distorts the Word of God.

As the Hebrew text of Genesis 3:3 became more well-known, English Bibles of the sixteenth century dropped "perhaps." The Vulgate's addition to Eve's speech came to seem like a misrepresentation of God's Word. But Protestant commentators continued to interpret Eve's translation as an egregious error: Martin Luther, a proponent of *sola scriptura* who could read biblical Hebrew and worked closely with the era's most prominent Hebraists, nevertheless adds his voice to those of his predecessors to argue that Eve opens the door to Satan's guile by inserting "the little word 'perchance' [addat particulam 'Forte']."[66] Luther sets aside the primacy of the biblical text in its original language only to argue for the primacy of the biblical text; the chief critic of the authority of Church tradition turns away from the Bible's grammar to uphold Church tradition. He does so in order to stress Eve's sin against the Word. He laments that

> the deceit of the lying spirit met with success. What he sought to achieve above all—to lead Eve away from the Word and faith—this he has now achieved to the extent that Eve distorts the Word of God...it is the

[65] See Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p.121. The A Text of the Norwich Adam and Eve play follows the Vulgate's lead and emphasizes Eve's repetition and alteration of the biblical text: at the moment that Eve responds to the serpent, it quote the Bible's *'ne forte'* (Davis, *Norwich Grocers' Play*, l. 59).

[66] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, LW 1:155. Latin from WA 42:117. For a discussion of Luther's translation of the Old Testament and the circle of Hebraists who helped him, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546*, Vol. 3, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 102-7.

> beginning of one's ruin to turn away from God and to turn to Satan, that is, not to remain constant in the Word and in faith.[67]

The success of the temptation stems from Eve's faulty representation of God's command, which in turn permits the devil to offer his own reading: "when ye shal eat thereof, your eyes shalbe opened, & ye shalbe as gods" (Genesis 3:5). Their conversation, to Luther, demonstrates "Satanic oratory, with which he completely overpowers the pitiable woman when he sees that she has turned away from God and is ready to listen to another teacher."[68] Luther's text, by characterizing God and Satan as rival teachers, brings the struggle for the soul of humankind into the schoolroom; the two entities represent competing hermeneutic factions. But if Eve's encounter provides commentators with a primary text that speaks to contemporary debates about biblical interpretation, it also reveals the degree to which competing hermeneutic factions in the sixteenth century rely upon the semblance of methodological difference to justify doctrinal disputes: Luther, who criticizes Church traditions built upon what he believes to be distortions of the original biblical text, repeats the Vulgate's mistranslation of the Hebrew.[69]

In Luther's text, mistranslation of the Word opens the door to Satan's malicious interpretation of the Word. So although Reformation scholars agreed that the Bible provided an essential foundation for expounding Christianity's central doctrines, debates raged regarding which versions of the Bible could convey proper understanding. The hermeneutic struggle between Satan and Eve played out not only in biblical commentary, but in public affairs. The relationship between mistranslation and misinterpretation found a real-world analogue in the

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[67] *Lectures on Genesis,* Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* for example, objects to calling marriage a sacrament because the proof-text, Ephesians 5:31-2, has been mistranslated in the Vulgate: "where we have [in the Vulgate] the word *sacramentum,* the Greek original has *mysterion,* which the translator sometimes translates and sometimes retains in its Greek form. Thus our verse in the Greek reads: 'They two shall become one. This is a great mystery.' This explains how they came to understand a sacrament of the New Law here, a thing they would never have done if they had read *mysterium*, as it is in the Greek." See LW 36:97.

debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale over the latter's translation of the New Testament.[70] More, at the request of Bishop Tunstal, received a license to read both the banned translation and other heretical materials in order to refute them; his efforts resulted in *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. In refuting Tyndale, Thomas More refers his judgments back to Jerome's Vulgate, a version of the Bible authorized by the Catholic Church. The authorized text, which arrives at the individual reader with the weight of tradition and doctrine behind it, can be approached through a study of the original languages—or even through a translation—but it cannot be superseded.[71]

When the Council of Trent affirms the Vulgate in 1546, the decree cites the "long use of so many centuries" as justification for the version's being "regarded as authentic" by the Church; tangible considerations of custom and use value, rather than any sense that the Church might recover an "original" and inspired text, confers authority. The Council decides to "regard" a text as authentic rather than declare that any inherently "authentic" text exists.[72] Genesis 3:3 illustrates the Catholic tradition's explicit deference to tradition instead of original languages: despite the Hebrew, the authorized Bible of the Catholic Church continued to print "forte" until 1979, when the Nova Vulgata was issued. The Church thus embraces the very perspective that Luther rejected in theory but repeated in practice. The Council affirms its license to control interpretation by condemning those who "shall dare to interpret the sacred scriptures" contrary to the doctrines of "holy mother church, whose function it is to pass judgment on the true meaning

[70] More's response to Tyndale's translation, and the connection between interpretation and mistranslation of the Bible's terminology, is briefly discussed in W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and their Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 14-5.
[71] For a discussion of competing Reformation solutions to the problem of fallible translation and interpretation, see Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation*. More allows for the possibility of a vernacular version of the Bible in *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* III.16, 330-44.
[72] Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., "Session 4: 8 April 1546, Second Decree" in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 663.

and interpretation of scriptures."[73] Erasmus, whose Greek New Testament inspired the reformers but who remained loyal to the Catholic Church (and whose scholarly efforts More defended), paints Luther in a remarkably similar light: "You stipulate that we should not ask for or accept anything but Holy Scripture, but you do it in such a way as to require us that we permit you to be its sole interpreter."[74] To Erasmus, Luther wants to usurp the place of the Church. And one man is more fallible than many. Luther, Tyndale, Erasmus and More all agree that the Bible can be made available in the vernacular (though More has considerable reservations); they disagree about the intentions that their opponents bring to the text.[75]

The commentary tradition locates Eve's sin in a little change to God's Word, and the account of Tyndale's heresy within *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* likewise finds great evil in small matters. More argues that Tyndale has "after Luthers counsayle corrupted and chaunged [the New Testament] frome the good and holsom doctryne of Cryste to the deuylysh heresyes of theyr owne" because "he hath mysse translated thre wordes of grete weyght."[76] *A Dialogue* argues that Tyndale's translation—which renders *agape* as "love" instead of "charity," *metanoia* as "repentance" instead of "penance," and *ekklesia* as "church" instead of "priest"—accords too neatly with Protestant doctrine to represent an accurate account of the Greek text. To More, Tyndale's text does not seem like a work of biblical scholarship; it is polemic. More, with his focus on tradition—on the way that Tyndale's intellectual lineage (his connection to Luther) conditions his translation—emphasizes Tyndale's considered mistranslation of the Bible: "ye

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes,* in Charles Trinkhaus, ed., *Collected Works of Erasmus: Controversies 6*, trans. Peter Macardle and Clarence H. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 204-5.
[75] More worries that the common reader will distort scripture: "how moche is it lesse mete for euery man boldely to medle wyth the exposycyon of holy scrypture / so deuysed and endyted by the hyghe wysedome of god / that it far excedeth in many placys the capacyte and perceyuyng of man." From Thomas M.C. Lawler, ed. et al., *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* Vol. 6, Part I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 335.
[76] More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 285.

may perceyue that he hath thus vsed hym selfe in his translacyon / to the entent that he wolde set forthe Luthers heresyes and his owne thereby."[77] More attributes satanic guile to the mind behind Tyndale's New Testament: he compares the testament to a counterfeit coin that "is neuer the lesse contrary thoughe it be quycke syluered ouer / but so moch the more false in howe moche it is counterfeted the more lyke to the trouth / so was the translacyon so moche the more contrary in how moche it was craftely deuysed lyke."[78] The translation, as evidence of Tyndale's craft and cunning, allies itself with the tempter whose false robes make him more attractive to the unwary. In such an account of translation, Eve is not only complicit in Satan's misinterpretation but an active proponent of it.

If More condemns Tyndale for consciously distorting scripture in the interests of Lutheran doctrine, Tyndale turns the accusation back upon him: More is loyal to a tradition and a Catholic hierarchy that has no basis in scripture. Doesn't even More's "darling Erasmus," he argues, "change this word *ecclesia* into congregation?"[79] More's concern to defend the Church sets him against a translation that even his allies support. The specter of Eve's efforts at translation haunts both sides of this debate: each accuses the opposition of altering scripture in the interests of their own agenda. But just as the Latin tradition cautions against adding words to the Bible even as it adds words to the Bible, Tyndale and More attempt to minimize their debts to extra-scriptural influences while relying upon those influences. To Tyndale, the text in the original language displaces an authorized version. Each new translation carries the same diminished authority; all pale in comparison to the original. Knowledge of Hebrew and Greek therefore equip the exegete to begin interpretive work. When Tyndale writes in the preface to his English edition of the Pentateuch that "I submit this book...unto all them that submit themselves

[77] Ibid., 290.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, II:15.

unto the word of God, to be corrected of them; yea, and moreover to be disallowed and also burnt, if it seem worthy, when they have examined it with the Hebrew, so that they first put forth of their own translating another that is more correct," he admits the provisional nature of his text. The passage acknowledges that his translation is only of use until a better one can be produced. But the performance of modesty is only a performance: the passage asserts his version's superiority by dismissing any challenges from those who don't know Hebrew.

In principle, the Protestant emphasis on original languages justifies their emphasis on scripture alone as the basis of Christian doctrine: the text in its original language is a stable foundation from which to interpret God's will. But, as my next chapter will discuss, humanists' desire to return to the original sources of scripture only reveals the instability of the "original" text—the material witnesses to the Hebrew and Greek testaments are full of errors.[80] Even when the text itself is clear, faithfulness to the original language occasionally takes a back seat to a commentator's pedagogical aims. Like Luther, Protestant interpreters of Genesis 3:3—including Calvin, the Geneva Bible, and the clergyman Andrew Willet [1562-1621]—continue to note Eve's burgeoning doubt.[81] Willet even acknowledges that he persists in the interpretation *despite* the grammar: "though the Hebrew particle *pen*, be not alwaies so taken; yet it appeareth so to bee vsed by the woman: because Sathan hereby taketh occasion to put her out of doubt, that shee should not die at all."[82] Willet relies upon an interpretation of the words' intent—that they were meant to put Eve "out of doubt"—over the evidence of the original language. The dynamics of the Eve-serpent conflict continue even after biblical humanism returned scholars to the scriptures'

[80] See below, the chapter on Milton, pp. [42-43]
[81] Calvin, *A Commentarie of John Calvine, upon the first booke of Moses*, rans. Thomas Tymme (London: George Bishop, 1578), 89-90. Geneva: Genesis 3:3, p. 2 (marginalia). Andrew Willet,*Hexapla in Genesin* (London: Tho. Creede, 1608), 49.
[82] Willet, 49. For commentators that differed on the question of Eve's doubt and its sinfulness, see Williams, *The Common Expositor,* p. 121.

Hebrew sources. Even the attempt to translate the Bible from those sources faltered: although the first English Bible—the Coverdale Bible—owed significant debts to William Tyndale's translations of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, Coverdale himself was not a Hebraist. His translations rather come from the Vulgate, the *Veteris et Novi Testamenti nova translation* (1528) produced by the Catholic Hebraicist Sanctes Pagninus, the German Bible translated by Luther, and the Swiss-German version of Zwingli and Leo Jud.[83] Both Protestants and Catholics follow the example of Eve: returning to the origins of the Judeo-Christian tradition requires an intermediary.

IV.

If the controversy swirling in the decade before the publication of the Great Bible had to do with translation—with Eve's knowledge of God's Word and the ill effects of her attempts to represent it—the focus in the years after Cromwell's Injunctions quickly shifted to the unpredictable and potentially dangerous results of interpretation—to Satan's malign influence on human affairs. Anxiety about reading practices certainly predates Cromwell's Injunctions: a decade earlier, More's concern about English Bibles had resided not in his objection to making scripture available in the vernacular, since "no doubte is there / but that god and his holy spyryte hath so prudently tempered theyr spece thorowe the hole corps of scrypture / that euery man may take good therby," but in his worry for "he that wyll in ye study therof lene prowdely to the foly of his owne wytte."[84] Every man *may* profit from the Bible, but some—like Luther's followers—may also fall into pride: "yf the comen people myght be bolde to cham [chew] [the

[83] Bruce, *History of the English Bible,* 57-9. For a further account of Coverdale's sources, see Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible*, 3rd edition, ed. William Aldis Wright (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1905), 161-4. For a discussion of Pagninus and his influence on English Coverdale, see G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 40-4 and 123-4.
[84] More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 339.

scripture]...and to dyspute it / than sholde ye haue...the more ignoraunt the more besy / the lesse wyt the more inquysytyfe / the more fole the more talkatyfe of great doutys and hygh questyons of holy scrypture and of goddess great and secrete mysteries / and thys not sobrely of any good affeccyon / but presumptuously and vnreuerently."[85] Scripture's readers might easily succumb to an illusion of expertise. Once Cromwell's Injunctions make the Bible available to the public, lay interpretation of its content becomes a matter of public policy. Henrician officials repeat fears common to both sides of the confessional divide: like More's *Dialogue,* writings of the reformers outwardly emphasize the necessity of opening up scripture to the laity while also implicitly worrying that universal access to the Bible might undermine their doctrinal goals. By carefully explicating proper methods of interpretation—even they as pit Catholic allegory against the "literal sense"—such treatises suggest that sound reading practices might be both harder to acquire and less sure than accounts of the "literal sense" acknowledge. Those who expound the Bible—and even those who do so with the best of intentions—might be doing Satan's work.

But uncertainty need not only ally the reader with Satan. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther describes the reformed believer's orientation towards human frailty: he notes that, through *sola fide*, a Christian is "so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception." So although "the more Christian a man is, the more evils, sufferings, and deaths he must endure," the believer's spiritual power nevertheless works so that "'power is made perfect in weakness' [II Cor. 12:9]...there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe."[86] Protestant faith turns

[85] Ibid., 335.
[86] LW 31:354-55. *The Freedom of a Christian* circulated in England from the 1520s forward, and a later translation of it into English by Richard Morison, another one of Cromwell's propagandists, circulated in manuscript. The treatise's doctrine of justification by faith provides one instance in which Bale's theological views diverge from those of his Wycliffite predecessors and accord more closely with Protestant contemporaries like Tyndale and Barnes. See Happé, *John Bale*, 28; Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 108-10; and Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform in Tudor England,* 175.

not only good into bad, but radical disempowerment into power (even "the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation") and good works into acts "of freest servitude [servitutis lierrimae, my translation]."[87] Such liberating constraint profoundly influences reading and interpretive strategies. When Luther recounts his path towards reforming the Church, he remembers his struggle to reconcile God's righteousness [*iustitia Dei*], which justly punishes sinners, with his promise that "The iuste shal liue by faith" (Romans 1:17). Who, given humanity's inevitable depravity, can God righteously deem "just"? Upon his realization that only faith in the grace earned through Christ's death justifies mankind, Luther immediately feels "as though I had entered paradise" and proceeds to re-read familiar scriptural verses with a fresh sense of their possibilities.[88] Reformed reading practices promise liberation in exchange for submission to Protestant doctrine.

Such freedom exists in an uneasy relationship with institutional authority, which emphasizes the Bible's vulnerability to human error. Cromwell's Injunctions of 1538 encouraged lay reading of the scriptures by directing clergy to publicly display the English Bible in churches so that "your parishners may most commodiouslye resort to the same, and rede yt." At the same time, they also attempted to restrict interpretation of the Bible: the subsequent reissue of the order notes that Henry does not grant the scriptures so "that any hys lay subiectes redynge the same, shulde presume to take vpon them, any common dysputacyon, argumente or exposicyon of the mysteries therein conteyned."[89] The Injunctions concern themselves with two opposing threats to public institutions: they expose the government's unease regarding both the potentially divisive effects of public "disputacyon" and the threat of "common...exposicyion" that might

[87] LW 31:355. Latin from WA 7:64.
[88] See Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) for an analysis of the role of grammar in Luther's conversion on 60-8. The quote from Luther's conversion narrative appears on 66.
[89] Pollard, "The King's Proclamation for the English Bible to be Set up in Churches," 262n. and 263, respectively.

unite the lay population against the church or crown. The text's uniformity does not prevent popular dissent once its contents are available for mass interpretation; to those in power, the ideal of a unified Church created and sustained by a "common" text for worship is always on the verge of being undermined precisely because the text is so "common." In the first preface to the Great Bible, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer adds his voice to those that deplore "contention and debate about scriptures." He does so "specyally when suche as pretende to be the favourers and stude[n]tes therof can not agree within the[m]selves."[90] In Cranmer's text, disputes among members of a conceited populace preclude the public interpretation of God's Word. In the early years of the English scriptures, officials regularly reminded readers of the Bible's status as an unstable literary object subject to misinterpretation by a fallen community.

The frontispiece to the Great Bible reiterates the point by emphasizing the need for mediation between citizens and scripture. In the illustration, physical copies of the Bible pass from the king to his ministers, but the laity receives only oral instruction in the Word—preaching, like drama and images before it, provides a popular version of scripture to the masses.[91] The distinction between the officials and the public in the frontispiece plainly acknowledges the illiteracy of much of the lay population. But its top-down vision of scriptural acquisition also affirms the hierarchical principle that governs the ostensibly democratizing gesture of offering God's Word to man. Less than five years later, Henry's government further attempted to manage unorthodox readings of the Bible: facing a populace with the resources to instruct itself in doctrine, Henry VIII decreed that "no women, nor artificers, prentises, iorneymen, seruynge men of the degrees of yomen or vnder, husband men, nor labourers, shall reade within this realme, or in any other the kinges dominions, the bible or new testament in englysh to him selfe, or to any

[90] *The Byble in English* (London: Rycharde Grafton, 1541), sig. +iii.
[91] For a discussion of how Renaissance preaching, in turn, influenced the popular stage, see Bryan Crockett, *The Play of Paradox: Stage and Sermon in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

other priuatly or openly."[92] The king affirms his jurisdiction over the populace and their reading habits. The statute, like the frontispiece, emphasizes that the English Bible as a popular resource exists at the pleasure of the king. Both its dissemination and interpretation therefore lie in the hands of the king's deputies.

But if the prefatory materials and proclamations surrounding the licensing and creation of an authorized biblical text emphasize the dangers that reading scripture posed to the nation's institutional structures, the vernacular Bible also has the potential effect of setting individual readers against their own best interests. In the introductory letter to his translation of the New Testament, Tyndale admits that scripture, while a tool for salvation, is equally likely to endanger the soul: "For the nature of Gods worde is / [th]at whosoever reade it or heare it reasoned & disputed before him / it will begynne ymmediatlye to make him every daye better & better / till he be growe[d] into a perfect ma[n] in the knowledge of Christ...or alse make him worse & worse / till he be hardened that he openly resist the Sprite of God / & then blaspheme / after the ensample of Pharoao."[93] In the Christian scriptures, Tyndale finds a text inherently suited for the work of damnation. And in the common Christian interpreter, Tyndale anticipates a Faustian reader whose knowledge of the Bible drives him into perdition. In *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, those who "are indurate and tough as Pharaoh" are the Catholic clergy who "have put out God's Testament and God's truth, and set up their own traditions and lies."[94] The English Bible thus invites commentaries, prefaces, and treatises that work to make the publicly-available Bible

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[92] Henry VIII, "An Act for the Advancement of True Religion" in *Actes made in the session of this present parlyament holden vpon prorogation at Westm[inster], the .XXII. day of January, in the .XXXIIII yere of the reign of our most drad soueraine lorde Henry the eyght* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1543), A.III.r and A.IV.r. Christopher Hill discusses the revolutionary potential that authorities from the Middle Ages to the Restoration feared from the Bible's ready availability to the masses in the chapter "A Biblical Culture" in his *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1993), 4-44.

[93] William Tyndale, *The Newe Testament dylygently corrected and compared with the Greke* (Antwerp: Marten Emperowr, 1534), sig. *iiiir.

[94] Tyndale, *Obedience*, I:373 and I:371, respectively.

into a Protestant Bible; for advocates of *sola scriptura*, grasping the Bible's true meaning requires extra-biblical instruction in its verses' "literal sense."

An English rhetoric written by Thomas Swynnerton between 1537 and 1540, *The Tropes and Figures of Scripture*, offers one such resource for instructing the Christian reader in particular interpretive methods. As Cromwell and Cranmer worked to disseminate the English Bible and Bale began compiling his biblical plays, Swynnerton theorized the relationship between literary and biblical interpretation in the emergent Protestant faith. *The Tropes and Figures of Scripture* follows in the footsteps of these early reformers; it shows the influence of Tyndale, Philip Melanchthon, and Robert Barnes in its ambitions to make it "playne, howe to behave oure selfes, in placies of Scripture importynge greate clereness, but in dede being darke."[95] Noting how metonymy, for example, "chaunseth also many tymes, apon these wordes, Is, Are, Ben," he adds "a warnynge to the simple. To be well ware that we take not these wordes, Is, Am, Ben, tropically, where they ought to retayne theire naturall significacion. As here. This is my welbelouyd sonne, in whome I am fuly pacyfied."[96] Paradoxically for a treatise concerned with the proper interpretation of scripture's "proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories," the *absence* of metonymy spurs Swynnerton's caution to the reader at this point: God's words upon the baptism of Christ lack figurative signification.[97] Rather than warn readers about the dangers of overlooking "darke" meanings, Swynnerton urges them to remember the literal sense (lest they imagine that Jesus is not the actual Son of God but only "signifieth" a child of God).[98] Even the most straightforward language potentially tempts men to heresy. Swynnerton uses the literal

[95] Information about Swynnerton's influences can be found in Richard Rex's introduction to Thomas Swynnerton, *The Tropes and Figures of Scripture*, ed. Richard Rex (Cambridge: Renaissance Texts from Manuscripts, 1999), 55-76. Quote from100.
[96] Ibid., 144 and 145, respectively.
[97] Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian*, I:339. See above, 20-1.
[98] Swynnerton, *The Tropes and Figures of Scripture*, 145.

sense to illustrate the instability of biblical language: in the Bible, "is" is often not, but sometimes is, what it means.

But more than clarify a "darke" scripture that speaks through figures, Swynnerton's treatise probes the figurative breadth of the literal sense. The work provides tools for negotiating scripture's difficulties, but it also suggests that literary figures best illuminate the mysteries of God's election: rhetorical devices, in addition to helping Christians interpret the signification of God's words, offer particular insight into the workings of faith. Metonymy, which Swynnerton defines as "A trope very frequent in the Scriptures, Whereby (as I saide) we ascribe to Signes and Sacramentes the very vertue, and thynge it self, only ment and betokened by the Sacramentes," provides one example.[99] Swynnerton's understanding of metonymy emerges out of the classical rhetorical tradition that permeated humanist learning in the form of Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*.[100] Quintilian describes one subspecies of metonymy in which "we indicate cause by the effect."[101] Swynnerton's definition, which understands the Bible's words as sacraments, builds upon this sense that a cause-effect relationship links signifier to signified: sacraments are the evidence of God's works accomplished in the world. Once he defines the figure, Swynnerton goes on to argue that faith itself is a kind of metonymy; faith reveals the effect of God's grace rather than effecting it. He reminds his audience not to take the Bible "to meane, that ether Faithe or Workes do Iustifie apon theire worthynes...But they ben only Sacramentes of Iustificacion, thone before god, thother before the worlde."[102] In this formulation, Christians "ascribe" to faith "the very vertue"—in this case, God's justification—"ment and betokened by" faith. As a sacrament or sign of justification that is legible "before god" rather

[99] Ibid., 136.
[100] Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25.
[101] Quintilian, *The Orator's Education,* 5 vols., ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 5:440-1.
[102] Swynnerton, 138.

than "before the worlde," faith can only provide evidence of "the thynge it self." Metonymy thus describes the way that the secret judgment of God works within the souls of Christians—and it can reflect such mysteries because it offers a figure for the gap between human knowledge and divine. Rhetorical forms provide structures for God's motions in the world and in the soul without absolutely prescribing their significance.

Swynnerton's work suggests that literary figures provide a way to understand faith and predestination precisely by locating proper meaning beyond "playne speach."[103] Reading, therefore, does not so much establish God's meaning as engage Christians in a process that reaches for significance while acknowledging that significance to be beyond the ken of fallible mankind. The Bible's narratives and literary figures foreground the necessity of interpretive acts while also troubling such acts' efficacy except as leaps of faith. Swynnerton emphasizes the point with his description of the Israelites' idolatry, which occurs not because they believe that the golden calf substitutes for God, but because God decides to interpret their actions as idolatrous: "We must not looke what we entende, but what God entendeth. The goodnes of oure act lyeth in his acceptacion. It is good, if it like his goodnes to accepte it as good. It is nought, if it please hym not to accepte it."[104] The worshipping Israelites have control over the signs and God over the signification. The treatise thus embraces the Bible's uncertainty as a means of helping Christians think about the divine. Critics of Reformation literature, however, have generally overlooked this sense that the inevitably partial ability of human efforts to grasp God's intentions in fact enjoins rather than represses experimentation and further interpretive labor; by taking authors' insistence upon the "literal sense" at their word—by focusing on hermeneutic theory instead of interpretive practice—scholars have all too often presumed that the period's

[103] Ibid., 113.
[104] Ibid., 132.

focus on "common" readings of the Bible initiated a stifling mode of textual engagement.[105] To James Simpson, for example, Protestant emphasis on scripture's coherence "displaces hermeneutic complexity to the entire life of the Christian."[106] The result is an "ideational institution" that purports to free readers from external authority but actually prescribes an anxious and restrictive relationship with text.[107] *The Tropes and Figures of Scripture* reveals a reading culture that, for all its insistence upon uncovering a unified Protestant doctrine within the Bible, enjoys considerable interpretive latitude.

In Swynnerton's work, attempts to reduce all of the Bible's ambiguities, inconsistencies, and figurative speech to a unified "literal sense" also provide release from the literal sense. Protestant hermeneutic freedom is accomplished by recuperating the figure they had most vilified: reformers advocate for a return to allegorical interpretation. Swynnerton, though he will go on to warn against too frequent use of the form, exclaims that it "dothe excedingly well, delyteth the hearer muche, moveth his affections sore, persuadeth vehemently, and bewtifieth not a litle"; allegory is both effective and beautiful.[108] In *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale argues that, through allegory, new uses for biblical verses emerge once the reader apprehends their true meaning: "when we have found out the literal sense of the scripture by the process of the text...then go we, and as the scripture borroweth similitudes of worldly things, even so we again borrow similitudes or allegories of the scripture, and apply them to our purposes."[109] Tyndale sanctions interpretive efforts that produce new content—provided that the reader adheres to the process outlined in his text. In practice, Tyndale's caveat only means that

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[105] See Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) for an account of how a "common" language of worship actually inititated new forms of textual engagement and thereby helped shape early modern devotional poetry.
[106] Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 140.
[107] Ibid., 141.
[108] Swynnerton, 167.
[109] Tyndale, *Obedience*, I:341.

acceptable allegories have a reformist bent: Tyndale's subsequent assertion that the pope and bishops are the "cursed children of Ham" has no more compelling parallels with the narrative it emerges from than any Catholic reading it might repudiate.[110] Such "allegory historicall," in Swynnerton's definition, which takes some text from the Bible and applies it to the present, celebrates adaptation and invites real participation in the reading process.[111] In the works of Protestant commentators, the effect of reintroducing allegory as a sanctioned response to scriptural narratives is noticeably liberating: out of the restraints imposed by the literal sense, the commentators find "the liberty of the Spirit" and imaginative freedom.[112]

John Bale takes considerable advantage of the interpretive latitude conferred by doctrinal conformity. In a poetic rebuttal to a Catholic verse treatise against Protestantism entitled *Answer to a papystycall exhortacyon* (ca. 1548), Bale follows early reformers in using II Corinthians 3:6 ("The letter killeth, but the Spirit giueth life") to accuse Catholics of inattention to correct reading methods. Bale asserts that "Ye holde fast the letter / And wyll haue no better / The spyryt ye do dysdayne."[113] Protestant interpretations of the verse claim that "the letter" is Moses' law rather than the literal sense of scripture and that "the spirit" means the gospel instead of the spiritual sense.[114] But in its biblical context, the "new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit" that Paul discusses does not refer to any text at all; Paul goes on to define "that Spirit" as the "Spirit of the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:17). Commentators merely interpret the "Spirit of the Lord" in different ways. The hermeneutic freedom that each side enjoys—and that each accuses the other of exploiting—depends upon Paul's metaphor: in Paul's figurative use of the word

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[110] Ibid., I:347-8.
[111] Swynnerton, 167.
[112] Tyndale, *Obedience*, I:341.
[113] Bale, John. *An Answer to a papystycall exhortacyon* (Antwerp: S. Mierdman, 1548), sig. A4r.
[114] Darryl J. Gless, "Shakespeare, Biblical Interpretation, and the Elusiveness of Meaning" in *Literary Studies and the Pursuits of Reading*, Eric Downing, Jonathan M. Hess, and Richard V. Benson, eds. (Rochester, New York: Camden, House, 2012), p. 89. See also David S. Kastan, "'Holy Wurdes' and 'Slypper Wit': John Bale's *King Johan* and the Poetics of Propaganda."

"testament," commentators attempt to find a description of the actual scriptures. The non-literal becomes literal. So when Swynnerton, like Bale, uses II Corinthians 3:6 to criticize his ideological opponents for their inconsistency—he notes that "When it lyketh them, the lettre kylleth, the Scripture is figurate...When it lyketh them, then the lettre kylleth not, then the Scripture is not figurate"—he accurately describes Catholics and Protestants; for both, the Bible is either literal or figurative "When it lyketh them."[115] Bale's lines hope to expose the error in Catholic exegetical methods, but the tradition of elaborate explanations that undergird his reading of II Corinthians only highlights the ways that reading scripture, for Protestants as well as for Catholics, necessitates adding something to its verses.

Bale's adherence to the Protestant perspective on the verse's meaning in turn justifies his later additions to the biblical text. Having "found out the literal sense" of his citation, Bale permits himself to "borrow similitudes or allegories of the Scripture, and apply them" to his purposes.[116] The Protestant interpretation of II Corinthians 3:6 condemns Catholics for their appeal to the allegorical sense of scripture, and Bale, in keeping with this interpretation, assumes that other scriptural texts likewise censure his Catholic interlocutor. Throughout the treatise, Bale supports his arguments by alternating Latin biblical citations with his own loose English translations of the verses. John 16:2, for example ("the tyme shall come that whosoever killeth you will thynke that he doth God seruyce"), becomes "They haue not ther fylle / Tyll they slee and kylle / No innocentes they spare" (A.4v). John's words predict general danger for the apostles after Jesus's death. Bale's text, however, allegorically aligns the apostles with pious Protestant "innocentes" and the persecutors with a particular Catholic "They" who vehemently desire to destroy true Christian souls. Bale suppresses the pious rationale imputed to the

[115] Swynnerton, 99.
[116] Tyndale, *Obedience*, 341.

persecutors in order to emphasize his opponents' viciousness. *An Answer* proposes that "properly" reading the Bible liberates the interpreter who embraces its constraints.

But Bale not only finds hermeneutic liberty in the "literal sense"; he also finds creative liberty. *An Answer* connects the process of scriptural interpretation with that of writing poetry: the text evokes its opponents' inept understanding of the Bible in metaphors that connect Protestant interpretation with proper poetic form. Bale asserts that Catholics "teache nat in meter / With Paule Iohan and Peter"; instead "scrypture they deprave / as madde men that do rave" (A.2r-v). The passage implies that those who "teach in meter" evoke a pattern of meaning and a model for interpretation that the New Testament epistles establish. The Catholic expositors, intent on advancing their own ends, ignore such patterns and therefore "leaue goddes precepte / To haue your owne kepte" (A.7r). Throughout the treatise, Bale attacks his opponents as bad poets as well as bad readers: "These vyle cannell rakers [scavengers] / Are now becumme makers / ther poems out they dashe / With all ther swyber swashe [noxious concoctions]" (A.2r). Asserting that "Your doctryne is chaffe / Your ryme dyrtye draffe" (A.3v), Bale yokes poetic form to responsible biblical instruction. Poor reading produces poor poetry.

By implying that the Bible conveys rules that proper interpreters follow, Bale invokes a mechanical sense of prosody in which form regulates language to create identifiable and imitable patterns. His poetry laughs at Catholics for their irregularity ("ther meters all mangye / Rather, rurall, and grangye" (A.2r)) and counters their lazy reading—and resulting prosodic missteps—with sequences of couplets that mechanically replicate, to quote Susan Stewart, a "determinative and ideal pattern": "Ser Johan now is bolde / In yche place to scolde / Wher men do not care / For pylde [miserable] popyshe ware" (B.3r).[117] If rhetorical and prosodic handbooks celebrate

[117] Susan Stewart, "Rhyme and Freedom" in *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*, Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 32.

works that skillfully marshal the effects of variation, *An Answer* unapologetically values staunchly regular rhyme and meter. Bale's poem, in its prosodic practice, both looks back to and refocuses the anti-clerical satires of John Skelton, whom Bale praises because, "with lively rhetoric and judicious sneers," he "continuously waged war on certain babbling friars."[118] Skelton's short accentual lines were imitated by early Protestant reformers who saw in the lay speakers of poems like *Colyn Cloute* an appeal to a popular, rather than ecclesiastical or courtly, audience.[119] But *Colyn Cloute*, which attacks Cardinal Wolsey's growing state power, outwardly downplays its poetic achievements to assert its didactic ends: "For though my ryme be ragged, / Tattered and iagged, / Rudely rayne beaten, / Rusty and moughte eaten, / If ye take well therwith / It hath in it some pyth."[120] *An Answer* rather insists upon prosody as a measure of its "pyth"; only Catholics produce "mangye" meters. Producing translations "in meter," Bale's doggerel unabashedly metes out literary criticism and stretches biblical citations' meanings into new directions. For Bale, to read the Bible properly is much like writing a poem, and correct reading produces lines that sound much like his own.

V.

In the above, I have tried to articulate the mechanisms by which Protestant reading makes space for interpretation and provides the impetus for artistic labor: *An Answer to a papystycall exhortacyon* demonstrates a mode of interpretation in which adherence to the Protestant "literal sense" frees its practitioners as surely as Catholic "allegorical interpretation" permits the Church

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[118] Bale, *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytanniae*, 651. Translation from Anthony S.G. Edwards, *John Skelton: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1981), 55-6.

[119] For the Protestant afterlife of Skelton's satirical poetry, see Jane Griffiths, *John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158-170 and the introduction to Anthony S.G. Edwards, *John Skelton: The Critical Heritage*. Skelton's appeal to the "popular eare" will be codified—and derided—by later critics of the Renaissance that will insist upon a more refined and "courtly" style. See, for example, George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 69.

[120] John Skelton, *Colyn Cloute* in *Skelton: A Collection from the Poetical Works of John Skelton*, ed. W.H. Williams (London: Ibister, 1902), ll. 53-8

significant hermeneutic latitude.[121] Whether reformed reading practices draw out essential doctrine or illuminate contemporary applications for scripture through "allegory historicall," they are no more free or constrained than those of the institution they criticize: as long as an interpretation accords with Protestant doctrine, the meaning attributed to it and the allegories drawn from it illuminate the "literal sense." Reformers, however, resolutely distinguish between the uses of "allegory historicall" and those of the "literal sense" as key to the distinction between true Christian belief and papist illusions: both Tyndale and Swynnerton repeatedly emphasize that "allegory proveth nothing, neither can do. For it is not the scripture, but an ensample or a similitude borrowed of the scripture, to declare a text or a conclusion of the scripture more expressly."[122] Allegory clarifies lessons drawn from scripture. Even here, Tyndale's account of allegory as just a rhetorical tool admits the ease with which the scriptures' literal content becomes the more flexible "literal sense": the use of "expressly" suggests that the interpreter might be as likely to use allegory to debate an unclear point from the scriptures as expound a clear lesson. That which more *directly* expresses the meaning of a scriptural text also more *persuasively* convinces its audience of its point. The seeming purity of the Protestant representation of scripture—without "tryfelinge sporte / ...nor soche lyke gaudysh gere" (17-8)—hides the elaborate interpretive processes that underpin its teachings.

Bale's biblical theater offers an extensive consideration of the kind of "allegory historicall" that fuels *Answer*'s polemic and haunts Tyndale's attempts to differentiate between Lutheran doctrine and papist distortions of the biblical text: the plays, inasmuch as they attempt to reform Catholic reading practices and Catholic theatrical conventions, use scriptural events to

[121] The epithet comes from Thomas Fuller's account of the "worthies" of England: in his description of Bale's life, Fuller notes that "*Biliosus Balaeus* passeth for his true Character." Thomas Fuller, *History of the Worthies of England* (London: 1662), 61.
[122] Tyndale, *Obedience*, 342. Swynnerton repeats the caution on 165ff. of *The Tropes and Figures of Scripture*.

illuminate contemporary debates about Catholic error. They are themselves elaborate examples of "allegory historicall." And as allegory, Bale's Protestant cycle provides an early, dramatic analogue to Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*, whose poet "nothing affirms and therefore never lieth": the drama "proveth nothing." Allegory, Swynnerton notes, "lyeth not in the wordes expressed, but in the sentence vnderstanded, by the expressed words," and *God's Promises* invites such allegorical reading: with his "sentence," Pater Coelestis both introduces allegorical interpretation and provides the key to deciphering it. When Pater Coelestis hands down the biblical promise and exhorts Adam to remember both the serpent's and Eve's punishments, he also urges that "Lyke as thu shalt fynde thys true in out warde workynge, / So thynke the other, though it be an hydden thynge" (142-3).[123] To find "hydden" meanings in "out warde" show is precisely the project of allegory. And as allegory, *God's Promises* can recontextualize biblical language. In subsequent acts of the play, Pater Coelestis will supplement the biblical texts that he bestows upon the patriarchs with a visible token of his promise: Noah receives a rainbow; Moses is given the Passover lamb; and John the Baptist is graced with a golden tongue. Adam's token, however, *is* the "sentence"; Adam receives the Word itself as proof that Christ will triumph over the serpent. In this case, the "open" text that justifies Adam's allegorical reading of the promise—the scriptural verses that condemn Eve to labor in childbirth and the serpent to crawl on his belly—prove his interpretation's accuracy only because the character of God interprets them first. The "open" text is only open in the context of the drama. The play makes the Bible's language into a clear proof text for God's promise precisely because the drama is allegory—it "proveth nothing."

Bale's drama, rather than replay the events of the Fall or the Judgment, allegorizes God's punishments: the Bible's verses are not treated like the plot of a narrative, but as symbols of "an hydden thynge." Medieval drama is more "literal" than *God's Promises.* As examples of

[123] Swynnerton, 151.

"allegory historicall," the onstage experiences of Adam and the patriarchs map onto a Protestant vision of the Christian experience. Adam, for example, meditates on the gap between the Christian's desire to follow God's commandments and humanity's inability to fulfill those intentions: "Lorde, now I perceyve what power is in man, / And strength of hymselfe whan thy swete grace is absent: / He must nedes but fall, do he the best he can" (92-4). Adam uses his fault to speak to the faults of Christians to come. The play, by banishing the actual Fall from the stage and instead asking Adam to reflect upon the events that led to his sin, makes the biblical Adam's experience into an allegorical lesson. The past becomes present. The play enhances the effect by simultaneously evoking the conventions of cycle dramas about the Fall: Adam's complaint that "I was left to myne owne lyberte" not only blames God for giving him a will and so making him, in Milton's phrase, "free to fall" but also remembers mystery pageants in which the actor playing God literally leaves Adam and Eve alone onstage.[124] The Bible provides no indication as to why—or even if—Eve is alone when the serpent tempts her, but in the cycles both God and Adam exit the playing space. The stage makes the metaphysical absence of God physical; it emphasizes the frailty of man through the actual absence of the Heavenly Father. Bale's play revises the convention and turns God's literal departure—the withdrawal of his "swete grace"—into an allegory. The medieval dramatic past becomes the Protestant present, and the allegorical reading of the Fall narrative becomes its literal sense.

If *God's Promises* provides an extended example of Protestant reading and its strategies, *The Temptation of Our Lord* deals most extensively with the challenges of reading scripture. The play takes as its theme the pitfalls of reading the Bible incorrectly: the devil attempts to lure Christ into distrusting God's Word, misinterpreting God's Word, and blaspheming God's Word. The narrative also fulfills God's promise that Eve's seed might someday bruise Satan's head

[124] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2005), 3:99.

(Genesis 3:15) and thus serves as proof that "man ovyr [Satan] shuld alwayes have vyctorye" (396). Bale gestures towards the Temptation as a moment that clarifies the Bible's "literal sense," but he also finds a prophetic "allegory historicall" within the narrative: the play's prologue emphasizes that Christ's ordeal prefigures the suffering that "wyll folowe in them that seke the truth" (20). Just as "Sathan assaulteth [Christ]... / So wyll he do us if we take Christes part" (22-3); faithful Christians attract the devil. And if following Christ inevitably leads to persecution ("Be ye sure of thys, as ye are of dayly meate, / If ye folowe Christ with hym ye must be beate" (27-8)), encountering the Bible likewise produces potentially dangerous additions to the scriptural text. Particularly in its dramatization of Christ's temptation on the mountaintop, the play depicts—and even validates—a variable and undetermined English word of God that, like Christ himself, attracts Satan's challenges. Milton, in *Paradise Regained,* will also stress this moment on the pinnacle of the temple. Bale will counter Satan's hermeneutic challenge with an example of inspired interpretation, but in Milton's poem Jesus refuses to explain or supplement the verses he quotes: "To whom thus Jesus; Also it is written, / Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood" (IV.560-2). Milton's brevity has spurred energetic criticism from readers eager to understand whether or not Jesus's words refer to himself and so reveal his godhead.[125] *Paradise Regained* invites hermeneutic conflict but defers its resolution.[126] In contrast, Bale's *Temptation* dramatizes rather than provokes such hermeneutic conflict. In its account of

[125] The arguments about this point are numerous. E.M Pope's *'Paradise Regained', The Tradition and the Poem* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), for example, argues for the reading, while Barbara Lewalski, in *Milton's Brief Epic* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1966), advocates for the significance of the moment's ambiguity. A brief summary of the debates surrounding the episode on the pinnacle can be found in the introduction to the poem in the Longman edition of Milton's short poetry cited in note 1, 418-20.

[126] See also Ryan Netzley, "How Reading Works: Hermeneutics and Reading Practice in *Paradise Regained*" in *Milton Studies* 49 (2009), pp. 146-66, for a complementary argument that by denying a clear meaning that readers ought to unearth, the poem does not advocate any particular interpretation so much as the process of rereading. Netzley's 2011 book, *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press), suggests that the poem rejects interpretation as an act that presumes that divine communication—and thus reading—has any particular aim: "superfluous purposelessness is the point or the effect of the poem" (187).

beleaguered Protestant reading, the drama provides the opportunity for an interpretive struggle through which Christians become followers of the Word and enact its promises in the world.

The Temptation of Our Lord pointedly rewrites medieval Temptation plays to further Protestant didactic ends. In the play, disguise emphasizes the relationship between poor reading practices and Catholic error: Satan, dressed as a monk, claims that "Scriptures I knowe non" (257). Bale's biblical plays follow his explicitly allegorical dramas—and anticipate Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*—in casting their villains as members of the Catholic clergy. Satan attempts to instill doubt in Jesus, warning him that although "a voyce in your eare ded rynge" (169), it was meant "to deceyve you it was some subtyle practyse" (172). Satan's procedure recalls that of Lucifer in an Adam and Eve play or a vice in a morality play: the tempter appears onstage to lay out his motivations, adopts his disguise, and proceeds to entice his victim to disregard God's commandment. But the medieval villain returns on Bale's stage to encourage audiences to associate biblical adversaries with contemporary Catholics.

The biblical Temptation narrative puts malicious interpretation on display, and while Bale's *Temptation* foregrounds the dangers of Catholic readers who dissemble like Satan, it also explores the process—and even pitfalls—of interpreting scripture along Protestant lines: Bale's drama features a devil who uses Jesus's knowledge of scripture against him. The play closely follows the gospel of Matthew, in which Satan first tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread and then suggests that he throw himself off of the temple to prove that God will keep him safe. Jesus uses the formula "it is written" after each of Satan's temptations to recall the particular verses that Satan's suggestions undermine: when the devil encourages him to break his fast, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 to argue that "It is written, 'Man shal not liue by bread onely,'" (Matthew 4:4), and when the devil asks him to show that he receives God's favor, he replies by

remembering Deuteronomy 6:16, in which "it is written againe, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'" (Matthew 4:7). Medieval Temptation plays follow the gospels by staging Jesus's triumph over the devil as accomplished through his knowledge of scripture: in N-Town, for example, he outwits Satan by attending to "Goddys Wurde" (100) and by obeying the prescriptions "wretyn in Holy Book" (131).[127] But Bale's Temptation play not only emphasizes Jesus's knowledge of scripture; it illustrates how such knowledge can encourage the devil:

> Whan ye were hungrye I ded ye first persuade
> Of stones to make breade, but ye wolde non of that trade.
> Ye layed for yourself that scripture wolde not serve it;
> That was your bucklar, but now I am for ye fyt.
> For the suggestyon that I now whall to ye laye,
> I have scripture at hande, ye shall it not denaye (191-4)

Jesus's application of scripture to his present circumstance opens the text to Satan's misuse. At the same time, such additions also enable the text's fulfillment: hermeneutic conflict provides the opportunity for Jesus to "subdue the cruell serpent" (243). Interpretation is a hazard from which salvation springs. Although the play outwardly differentiates proper from improper reading practices, the methods of interpretation that it employs signal a more porous distinction between correct and incorrect hermeneutic strategies; the drama divulges the uncertainties latent in Bale's otherwise triumphant account of Protestant reading.

The Temptation reflects upon the process of active reading, its highs and its lows, as an act of revision in which the faithful take part. As a prophetic "allegory historicall," the play is itself a contemporary re-creation of the biblical text and so focuses attention on the drama's performance of scripture; it associates biblical interpretation and theatrical representation. At the first temptation, when Satan encourages Christ to change stones into bread and satisfy his hunger,

[127] The Temptation plays from York and Chester also emphasize the scriptural origins of Christ's response: York reiterates the formula "for written it is" during each of Satan's temptations (Richard Beadle, ed. *The York Plays*, Vol. 1. (Oxford: EETS, 200), ll. 74, 116, 164), and Chester directly quotes the Bible's "it is written" (R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds. *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. (EETS: Oxford University Press, 1974), ll. 122, 138).

Christ refuses to "neglect Gods worde" (132). The line recalls both the biblical text as a whole (Christ will not forsake scripture) and the particular blessing verbally conferred upon Jesus at his baptism ("Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Matt 4:17)). But, as Baleus Prolocutor makes clear in his prologue, the word of God is also, prominently, a product of the theater. The Prolocutor refers his auditors back to "the fathers voyce as ye before have hearde" (2)—audience members have, in *Johan Baptystes Preachynge,* listened to God speak an expanded version of God's blessing ("Thys is myne owne sone and only hartes delyght, / My treasure, my joye, beloved most inteyrlye" (432-3)). When Satan counsels Christ to "denye yourself Gods sonne" (126) and to "beleve not the voyce that ye ded heare" (124), he therefore not only refers to God's pronouncement; he also refers to a specific theatrical event. The very "worde" that Christ reveres simultaneously means scripture itself and the drama's performed and rewritten word of God.

The Temptation exploits its distance from the salvific Word to explore fallen reading practices. In the second temptation, Satan leads Christ to the top of the Temple in Jerusalem and challenges him to leap off of it. He justifies the request by quoting Psalm 91, which assures the faithful that God "shal giue his Angels charge ouer thee to kepe thee in all thy waies" (Psalms 91:11). Satan interprets the verse to mean that "God hath geven a charge / Unto hys Angels that if ye leape at large / They shall receyve ye in their handes tenderley" (209-11). By offering Christ a scriptural justification for presumption, Satan sets up a hermeneutic contest. The Son of God responds accordingly, with his own gloss on scripture. He points out an irony latent within the biblical text: the very psalm that Satan uses also prophesies his downfall. The very next verse asserts that the servants of God "shalt, sayth the Psalme, subdue the cruell serpent, / And treade undre fote the lyon and dragon pestylent" (243-4). Christ returns Satan to "the process of the

text"—Tyndale's phrase for the meaning that the immediate context of a biblical verse suggests.[128] Christ's Protestant reading practice protects him and equips him to provide a gloss on Satan's speech: he asserts that those who do tempt God fall into the devil's snare and "throwe themselves downe into most depe dampnacyon" (265). Christ acts like readers who, having "found out the literal sense of the scripture by the process of the text...borrow similitudes or allegories of the scripture, and apply them to our purposes."[129] He uses Satan's challenge to describe all unholy presumption. He not only speaks the Psalms—an act that literalizes the supposition that the promises of the Old Testament either speak about or are spoken by Christ; he re-presents his experience of Satan—which itself takes place within a version of the biblical narrative—as its own "allegory historicall." In the person of Christ, *The Temptation* reveals scripture to be interpreted and enacted like the theatrical spectacle it exists within. The play does not merely model hermeneutic practice for the audience; it associates a reading process that protects Christians from "the fearce roarynge lyon" (350) with acts of revision.

If Jesus's gloss upon Satan's use of Psalm 91 returns his adversary to the "process of the text" by pointing out the next verse of the psalm, his explication of the verse itself adheres less strictly to Tyndale's exhortation that readers take a text's immediate context and literal sense into account. During the scene, Jesus quotes the words of Psalm 91 that Satan omits ("in all thy ways" (227)) and explains why they do not apply to his circumstance: "Their ways are soch rules as God hath them commaunded / ... / If they passe those rules, the Angels are not bounde / To be their savegarde" (229-32). The explanation rests upon another of Tyndale's rules: in the "Prologue upon the Gospel of St. Matthew," Tyndale asserts that "The right way, yea, the only way, to understand the scripture unto salvation, is that we earnestly and above all things search

[128] Tyndale, *Obedience,* I:341.
[129] Ibid.

for the profession of our baptism, covenants made between God and us."[130] Such covenants exist as an obligation and then as a promise: "The general covenant, wherein all other are comprehended and included, is this: If we meek ourselves to God, to keep all his laws, after the example of Christ, then God hath bound himself unto us, to keep and make good all the mercies promised."[131] Christ's gloss finds a covenant between God and just men. Only if Christians observe "soch rules as God hath them commanded" does God promise "To be their savegarde." And the "open" text that justifies this explication comes from Deuteronomy 8 ("kepe therfore the commaundmentes of the Lorde thy God that thou walke in his wayes"). Christ's speech, however, relies upon an interpretive leap that redefines the ways of just men ("thy ways") in Psalm 91 as the ways of "the Lorde thy God" from Deutoronomy 8 ("his wayes"). The gloss restores the proper progression of covenant and promise only because it somewhat wrests the text in question.

Bale's text, which here equates the ways of just men with those of God, does not outrageously misconstrue the scriptural sense: in a Christian worldview, what defines a "just man" is his relative ability to follow God's ways. But in this sense, Jesus is the only "just" man; all other Christians must be justified by grace precisely because they cannot follow God's ways. The interpretive leap that the Son of God makes—to put "his" in the place of "thy"—only works because he is the one to make it. For the rest of the world, the act promises failure. Bale's text, rather than revealing Christ's gloss to be part of the Bible's "literal sense," actually reiterates the degree to which such annotations are interpretations. Interpretive acts are unstable, and the "literal sense" is conditional. The play thus reveals the condition of early Protestant reformers—and early Protestant plays—as they attempt to differentiate themselves from their medieval, Catholic predecessors. Precisely by trying to put distance between Catholic allegory and the

[130] Tyndale, "Prologue upon the Gospel of St. Matthew," in *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, Henry Walter, ed. (Oxford: Parker Society, 1848), I:469.
[131] Ibid, I:470.

Protestant "literal sense"—between "gaudysh gere" and edifying performance—they pull their adversary closer. Bale's play, by rehabilitating the particular words—"Gods promyse"—that Christ adds to scripture, draws attention to the interpretive process as an act of rewriting that not only leads to the realization of God's Word in the world but also potentially endangers the soul.

In *God's Promises*, the very reading practices that Christ deploys open him up to Satan's influence. In the first temptation, Christ is urged by Satan to "neglect" God's voice, and he triumphs by remembering that "Thys caused Adam from innocencye to fall" (133). By recalling the Fall narrative and the first sin against the Word, he corrects the particular fault—neglect of God's commandment—that led Eve to disobey God. In the tradition of Eve, however, Christ opens the door to future temptation by changing the biblical text. He paraphrases Deuteronomy 8:3, which assures readers that man lives "by al that procedeth out of the mouth of the Lorde," to report only that man lives by "Gods promyse" (130). It is precisely such a "promyse"—"that if ye leape at large / They shall receyve ye in their handes tenderley"—that Satan evokes in his next temptation. Christ's use of scripture not only provides the devil with a general strategy; it teaches Satan what kind of verse to look for. Further, the play provides a satanic example of the very hermeneutic practice that Christ performs. Tyndale emphasizes that scripture—even portions of the Old Testament—contains "the promises and testament of God in Christ."[132] Satan, encouraging Christ to interpret the verse from Psalm 91 as a scriptural promise, adopts an orientation towards the biblical text that recalls Tyndale's own. The very strategies and processes that distinguish proper Protestant interpretation also fuel the devil's guile.

[132] Tyndale, *Obedience*, I:310.

Chapter Three
Milton and the Mystery Cycles

On Michaelmas in 1634, Church of England parishioners heard lines from Revelation read from the pulpit: "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev 12:9).[1] That Michaelmas evening in Shropshire, the First Earl of Bridgewater's household performed John Milton's *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, during which a young lady lost in a wood finds herself plagued by a malign tempter. As Alice-Lyle Scoufos has argued, the Church of England services offer a prologue for Milton's production: the Ludlow entertainment recalls the verses that follow the Epistle, which tell of the persecutions that "a woman clothed with the sun" (12:1) suffers in the wilderness at the hands of the serpent (12:14-17).[2] Milton's *Masque* continues Revelation's narrative to provide the audience with a seventeenth-century mystery play modeled on "The Apocalypse of St. John"—the very book whose "high and stately Tragedy" Milton will admire in *The Reason of Church-Government Urg'd Against Prelaty*.[3] *A Masque* updates earlier Protestant apocalyptical dramas that highlight the woman's association with the Church rather than with the unassailable Virgin: the Lady, although led into danger by false appearances, emerges from the wood to "triumph in victorious dance / O'er sensual folly, and intemperance"; she represents a vulnerable but virtuous Ecclesia

[1] Text taken from Brian Cummings ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 384.
[2] The biblical citations in this essay, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the King James Version. The edition used throughout will be *The English Bible: King James Version*, vols. 1 and 2, Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012). Alice-Lyle Scoufos, "The Mysteries in Milton's *Masque*" in *Milton Studies* VI (1975),113-142.
[3] Quote from *Complete Prose Works*, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), I:815. Quotations of Milton's prose will be taken from this edition, hereafter abbreviated YPW, and cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number. See Scoufos, "The Mysteries in Milton's *Masque*," 134-6.

who is only redeemed through a healing miracle.[4] The masque, which creates an elaborate non-Christian mythopoetics in the Circe-born Comus and the beneficent river nymph Sabrina, also consolidates theatrical forms common to the Christian stage to discover a narrative of earthly temptation and heavenly grace.[5] It finds reformed biblical lessons in local religious drama.[6]

Although many Protestants deride sacred spectacle for enticing citizens to "the Likinge of Popishe Maumetrie," Milton's entertainment updates such spectacle to provide a response to Catholic interpretations of scripture. *A Masque* thus reflects Milton's early efforts to use the stage to revise the past for the needs of the present. Throughout his public career, Milton strove to recuperate English history to support the nation's future: his *History of Britain*, for example, looks backwards in order to diagnose and remedy the inability to maintain independent governance that Milton identified within his countrymen. The history, begun in the late 1640s but not published until 1670, does not use surviving artifacts, archival records, or his contemporaries' scholarship in order to form an evidence-based portrait of the nation's earliest times, as seventeenth-century antiquarians were beginning to advocate; instead, it offers legendary tales and evaluates national character in a style drawn from sources like Geoffrey of

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[4] John Milton, *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* in *Complete Shorter Poems,* Second Edition, ed. John Carey (Harlow, England: Longman, 1997), 973-4. Future citations from Milton's poetry, excluding *Paradise Lost,* will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically within the text by line number. For a discussion of *A Masque*'s relationship to Protestant apocalyptical drama, see Scoufos, 113-124.

[5] The masque draws the non-Christian classical past into conversation with its Christian sources; many layers of myth operate simultaneously within the work. See, for example, Cedric C. Brown on "Kōmos" in *Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 49-58 on how the mythic and Platonic elements of the masque contribute to Milton's project of reform; Stella P. Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair: The Making of the 1645 Poems (Columbia*, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 128-161 on the classical origins of Sabrina. Sabrina's similarity to the workings of heavenly grace has been noted by A.S.P Woodhouse, "*Comus* Once More," 128-161 on the classical origins of Sabrina. Sabrina's similarity to the workings of heavenly grace has been noted by A.S.P Woodhouse, "*Comus* Once More," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 19 (1949-50): 218-23. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 19 (1949-50), 218-23.

[6] William Lambarde, *Dictionarium Anglicae Topographicum & Historicum* (London: Fletcher Gyles, 1730), 459.

Monmouth.[7] The work aims to displace medieval chroniclers by imitating their works. In their attempts to reappraise the Catholic past, Milton's writings reveal an abiding apprehension about a national legacy that they openly disavow but often appropriate; they speak to the continuing hold that Catholicism maintains on the author who would supplant its narratives. More than any particular "Adam as he is in the motions" that Milton may have seen, it is the poet's concern about the lingering trappings of England's "papist" history that informs his works' engagement with the legacy of biblical drama.[8]

When Milton writes most scathingly of drama, he condemns the intrusion of dramatic practices into the world outside of the playhouse. Whether criticizing his schoolfellows' Cambridge performances of "vile things acted by persons either entered, or presently to enter, into the ministry" (YPW I:888) or King Charles I's "Saints vizard" (YPW III:361), Milton's prose—like that of the period's antitheatrical authors—takes aim at hypocritical fronts.[9] Milton's reaction against hypocrisy recalls a conviction, common in Renaissance antitheatrical treatises, that because "the Diuell standes at our elbowe when we see not, speakes, when we heare him not, strikes when we feele not, and woundeth sore, when hee raseth no skinne," theatrical feigning poses a most potent threat to Christians.[10] The treatises reject claims that the vices depicted within plays, because they are feigned, are able to cure vice: "euey man in a playe may see his owne faultes, and learne by this glasse, to amende his manners... Deformities are checked in ieast,

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[7] Graham Parry discusses antiquarian methods and motives in relationship to Milton's work in his "Milton's *History of Britain* and the Seventeenth Century Antiquarian Scene," *Prose Studies* 19.3 (1996), 238-46. See also Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 216-22.

[8] Quote from John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in YPW II:527. Quotations of Milton's prose will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number.

[9] John G Demaray, *Milton's Theatrical Epic: The Invention and Design of* Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 9-11 additionally discusses *On the Fifth of November* in terms of the young Milton's concern for "the division of appearance from reality in evil figures" (10). See also David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 55-62 on *Eikonoklastes*'s reaction against the "disturbing disjunction of image and reality, signifier and signified."

[10] Stephen Gosson, *Shoole of Abuse* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), 20r.

and mated in earnest."[11] Instead, they argue, the appearance of harmlessness actually lulls audiences towards their damnation; it encourages them to "gather grapes among thistles."[12] Even Milton's well-documented antagonism towards the politics of the period's most notorious antitheatrical author, William Prynne, speaks to the poet's awareness of charges that the stage compounds hypocrisy's dangers. Milton's scornful "crop ye as close as marginal P——'s ears" in a draft of "On the New Forces of Conscience," touches upon Prynne's disfigurement for slandering Queen Henrietta in his antitheatrical *Histrio-Mastix*.[13] Milton alludes to the controversy surrounding the seventeenth-century text that most fervently asserted the stage's inextricable connection to men who "seeme that in outward appearance which they are not in truth."[14] Milton's tendency in prose to identify his adversaries and their allies as actors seems to place him firmly within a Puritan tradition that regards the theater with suspicion.[15]

But details within Milton's life and works also suggest his inability to entirely disregard the stage: his early poetic projects include entertainments for academic and aristocratic audiences, he discusses the professional theater in notes appended to both *Paradise Lost* and the closet drama *Samson Agonsistes*, and sketches for projected tragedies survive in an autograph notebook. Herbert Berry has additionally discovered evidence that Milton's father was a trustee of the Blackfriars Playhouse—Milton's adult reaction against the theater might well be a corrective to

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[11] Ibid., 13r.
[12] Ibid., 14r.
[13] Quote from *Complete Shorter Poems*, 299n.17. Barbara Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, mentions Milton's several disagreements with Prynne. See particularly Milton's response to opponents of the trial of Charles I and Prynne's role in the debates regarding punishing Milton for his defense of Charles's execution on 224 and 400, respectively.
[14] William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, (London: 1633), 159.
[15] See YPW IV:309 for a description of an ideological opponent as an actor playing a scene. *Eikonoklastes* (YPW III:337 forward) deploys theatrical metaphors to criticize Charles I and his government. For a discussion, see David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History*, 51-73.

an interest in the professional stage that began in late childhood.[16] As a man of letters and of religion, Milton lived among traditions of scriptural interpretation that drew upon the conventions of the medieval stage. His fiction stands as a record of such influences, particularly when it worries over devotional literature's potential allegiance with hypocrisy and lies. Beneath claims that postlapsarian artistry reaches for the divine lies the anxiety that it also might replicate the devil's descent into the serpent, and Milton's works continually confront the potentially satanic allegiances of their representational mediums. *Paradise Lost*, whose potentially satanic allegiance has been a source of critical conversation since Blake, has provided fertile ground for discussions about how Milton's poetry appropriates the theatrical conventions that his prose approaches with caution. Critics have focused particular attention on the influence that Renaissance dramatic forms had on the development of *Paradise Lost*: they have claimed the influence of Neo-Latin drama, masques, Italian sacred spectacle, and classical tragedy on the epic's structure and imagery.[17] But *Paradise Lost* also adopts strategies of representation common to the Christian drama of the Middle Ages; it preserves biblical drama by remaking the solutions that plays offer for the problem of postlapsarian imperfection. Despite Milton's best efforts, the epic never extricates itself from a tradition of medieval theater uncomfortably allied with the Catholic era that Milton explicitly condemns.

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[16] Herbert Berry, "The Miltons and the Blackfriars Playhouse" in *Modern Philology* 89 (1992), 510-14. There is evidence for Milton's anxiety regarding his theatrical affiliations: when Milton's interlocutor in *Apology for Smectymnuus* takes Milton to task for his knowledge of "old cloaks, false beards, nightwalkers, and salt lotion" (YPW I:886), Milton offers an argument for the criticism's weakness before insisting upon his dislike of the stage. He effectively delegitimizes his antagonist's claim only to then grant its terms. For an argument against Milton's interest in popular drama, see T.H. Howard-Hill, "Milton and the Rounded Theatre's Pomp" in *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World,* ed. P.G. Stanwood (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995).

[17] Alan H. Gilbert, *On the Composition of* Paradise Lost*: A Study in the Ordering and Insertion of Material* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947); J.M. Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Demaray, *Milton's Theatrical Epic*; Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, Paradise Lost *and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

I.

A *Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, which stitches together current and outmoded theatrical forms to provide a Protestant response to Catholic allegory, continues a post-Reformation process of reappraising Christian drama that began within local communities. Just north of Ludlow Castle, in Cheshire, a sense of the historical importance of the region's popular cycle of mystery pageants ensured the survival of multiple copies of its playtexts despite scribes' professed disapproval of its non-biblical episodes and suspiciously Catholic origins.[18] Although performance of the drama died out in the decades preceding the seventeenth century, the pageants' survival in manuscripts and documents copied by Tudor and Stuart scribes made them available for reform in accordance with the interests of their preservers and readers: a seventeenth-century breviary account of Chester's past, for example, simultaneously condemns the Whitsun Plays for daring "to defile with so highe a hand. the most sacred scriptures of god" and preserves details of their production in a chapter on "lawdable exersises yearelye vsed within the Cittie of Chester."[19] The text records the cycle's post-Reformation Banns, which identify the drama as a "deuise" of the influential fourteenth-century monk and historian Ranulf Higden.[20] Claiming that the plays result from Higden's proto-Protestant attempt to bring scripture to the laity, the banns emphasize the cycle's origin and intent in order to mitigate the inclusion of "Some thinges not warranted by anye wrytte."[21] The cycle's sixteenth-century performances, as they are contextualized within the breviary, do the same work as the breviary: they preserve the memory of "lawdable" persons and events unique to Chester. The chapter, by celebrating

[18] David Mills expands upon Cestrian antiquarianism and its role in the preservation of the pageants in *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), particularly ch. 3 and 9. For an account of Cheshire's particular interest in local traditions, see Robert W. Barrett, Jr., *Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195-1656* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).
[19] *REED: Cheshire including Cheshire*, ed. Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), I:345 and I:327, respectively.
[20] Ibid., I:332, l. 27.
[21] Ibid., I:333, l. 5.

practices observed since "tyme oute of the memorye of man," ultimately praises citizens for prioritizing the yearly execution of any given "custome"; the breviary commends civic effort as much as pedagogical effect.[22] To the Protestant scholars whose writings remembered the pageants, the Whitsun Plays contribute to the city's "honor wealthe and good estimation" by demonstrating the community's enduring commitment, in the tradition of Ranulf Higden, to its citizens and to its own past.[23]

With Ranulf Higden, Chester re-imagines its theatrical legacy to complement a Protestant vision of England's proto-Protestant history. And the manuscripts of the Whitsun plays, as the remains of a corrupt past maintained by the post-Reformation present, further signal Cestrians' participation in a reformed era that both corrects the mistakes of its predecessors and respects the contributions that medieval traditions made to the region's civic identity. The copyists' efforts contributed to a widespread antiquarian movement that preoccupied scholars during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Early modern antiquarianism, as Agnus Vine notes, cultivated "an essentially imaginative response to the past": to the Stuart scholar Meric Casaubon, objects "represent unto [antiquarians'] minds former times, with as strong an impression, as if they were actually present, and in sight."[24] Casaubon claims that his fellow scholars esteem the "visible superviving [surviving] evidences of antiquitie" in order to make them live again.[25] The Whitsun plays, whose texts exist in annals and manuscripts produced well after the pageants'

[22] Ibid., I:346.
[23] Ibid., I:326.
[24] Angus Vine, *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4. Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise of Vse and Cvstome* (London: I.L., 1638), 98. See also Peter N. Miller, *Peiesc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 31-2.
[25] Casaubon, *A Treatise of Vse and Cvstome*, 97-8.

final performance in 1575, bear witness to an early modern commitment to the "evidences" of the past that inhere in local artifacts.[26]

While English scholars of antiquarian tastes put renewed effort into recovering documentary evidence of the nation's past prosperity, Cestrian scribes of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries set about preserving the memory of the region's formerly robust civic pageants: the five complete texts of the biblical drama once performed in Chester were all copied after 1590.[27] The Whitsun Plays as they have come down to us today are a product of the Renaissance.[28] Given the dates of the extant manuscripts of the Chester cycle, Milton was only one generation removed from the men who saw, remembered, and recorded regional biblical drama; his birth in 1608 came the year after James Miller finished the last of the five complete manuscripts that provide the basis for modern editions of the Chester Plays.[29] The poet's life began as the era of biblical drama in England was coming to its close—performance of the pageants had died out and the preservation of their scripts had slowed (Miller's 1607 text does not just represent the last extant manuscript of the Chester cycle; it is the last extant manuscript of any full English cycle)—but the proximity of Milton's life to antiquarians' attempts to recover their literary and theatrical heritage also speaks to the continuing purchase that the drama maintained on England's cultural imagination.

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[26] For a discussion of the cycle's development between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Lawrence Clopper, "The History and Development of the Chester Cycle" in *Modern Philology* 75 (1978), 219-46 and R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 165-202. Lumiansky and Mills reproduce documents from 1422 to 1575 that record details of the cycle during the years of its performance on 203-310.

[27]There are pre-Reformation single-play manuscripts: a thirty-four line fragment of the seventeenth play (*The Resurrection*) survives from the fifteenth century, and a late fifteenth-century copy of the Chester *Antichrist* resides in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. For details on these manuscripts, see *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills (EETS: Oxford University Press, 1974), ix-xii.

[28] For more lengthy commentary on the cycle's debts to the Renaissance—and particularly on Chester's relationship to the religious cultures of the period—see Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson, "The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2010), 230-5.

[29] Information on the several extant manuscripts of the Chester plays can be found in the introduction to *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vix-xxvii. Details of Milton's biography come from Lewalski's *The Life of John Milton*.

The rebirth of the drama's performance tradition in manuscript only increased its availability for correction and reform: Chester's pageants survived into the seventeenth century through a combination of local pride and Protestant revisionism that enabled them to be rehabilitated as a historical curiosity. James Miller's 1607 exemplar of the Whitsun pageants, for example, regards the cycle as a past phenomenon in need of explication. With its scriptural citations, careful ruling and rubrication, and table of contents, Miller's work provides organizational structures through which a reader can encounter the pageants, process unfamiliar material, and return to passages of particular interest. Rather than compile an acting text, he produces a scholarly edition.[30] Miller's comparatively extensive emendations within stanzas have led R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills to declare him "the first editor of the Chester cycle": evidence suggests that he freely regularized rhyme and meter and changed his material to accord with particular interpretations of the marginal biblical verses in his text.[31] Miller, in an effort to conserve the pageants for a present moment devoted to the plays as history, alters the documents before him and newly constructs the cycle he records. The Renaissance not only preserves medieval drama; it also recreates it.

Lumiansky and Mills have identified Thomas Egerton, the father of John Egerton, the First Earl of Bridgewater for whom Milton wrote *A Masque*, as one possible recipient of the Cestrian copyists' labors. The Egertons were a prominent family within Cheshire, and Thomas was a literary patron and book collector who founded an archive that now resides in the Huntington Library.[32] The seventeenth-century signature of a "Joh: Egerton esqr" appears in the middle of the 1591 Chester Cycle manuscript, and the sons who both inherited and added to the

[30] Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle,* xxv-vii. For further evidence of Miller's antiquarian interests, see also David Mills, "James Miller: The Will of a Chester Scribe" in *REED Newsletter* 9.1 (1984), 11-13.
[31] R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, 75-6. Quote from p. 76.
[32] Stephen Tabor has published a history of the collection and its owners in "The Bridgewater Library" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 213, ed. William Baker and Kenneth Womack (Detroit, MI: The Gale Group, 1999), 40-50.

collection for three generations after Thomas all bore the name John. [33] Although the evidence linking Thomas's library to the plays is largely inconclusive—the signature does not correspond to the adult hands of the Earls of Bridgewater, and there are other John Egertons among the extended family who might have owned the manuscript—the cycle's possible presence among aristocratic households of the First Earl's acquaintance brings the masque's relationship with sacred drama into relief: the entertainment not only updates the tropes of Christian theater but reflects a determined effort to redefine the legacy of the biblical stage. [34] Milton's connection with the Egertons in turn illustrates a Renaissance afterlife of Christian theater that lies just behind the poet's most strident attempts to excise the corruptions of the Catholic Church. The poet's literary ambitions bring him into close contact with a dramatic legacy that seventeenth-century England never quite leaves behind.

II.

It is this sense of Christian theater as part of a community history that informs the response that Milton's early *Masque* makes to the medieval stage. In the library of John Egerton,

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[33] R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Reduced Facsimile of Huntington Library MS 2* (Leeds Texts and Monographs: Leeds University Press, 1980), viii. The signature appears on f. 41r.

[34] Lumiansky and Mills note that a "John Egerton Esq." earned the rights to do business within Chester at the beginning of the seventeenth century; this John Egerton was living and working in the city proper within a decade of the manuscript's completion. From R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Reduced Facsimile of Huntington Library MS 2*, viii. All that is known about the provenance of the manuscript is that William Cavendish, the sixth Duke of Devonshire, sold a collection containing it to Henry Huntington in the early twentieth century. The Duke purchased many of the plays and playbills included in his collection from John Kemble in 1821, and a catalogue of the Kemble auction records a manuscript of "Coventry and Chester Mysteries." The volume, however, is listed as "copied by George Stevens, Esq. and given to Isaac Reed" (*A Catalogue of the Valuable and Miscellaneous Library, Choice Prints, and Theatrical Portraits of John Kemble, esq.*(London: W.Bulmer and W. Nicol, 1821), lot 1672 p. 57). No such manuscript is known. In 1836, J.P. Collier confirmed that the Chester cycle was in the Duke's hands (Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, xiii). How the manuscript got from its original owners to either Kemble or Devonshire remains obscure, although there is a possibility that it came from the Egertons: many manuscripts in the Bridgewater collection were sold by James Todd during the period when Kemble was amassing his archive of plays and playbills. See Stephen Tabor, "The Bridgewater Library," 47 and "The Kemble-Devonshire Collection" in *The Huntington Library Bulletin* 1 (May, 1931), 42-3. Collier, however, provides an alternate provenance: he notes that the manuscript had only been recently discovered in 1831 and was acquired by a J.B. Nichols from a gentleman in Cheshire (C.W. Dutschhke, *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1989) I:81).

where the Ellesmere Chaucer and Catholic psalters were housed with books of statutes that featured the Magna Carta, the products of the past were not evidence of Catholic degeneracy; they were a record of English achievement.[35] The masque commemorates Bridgewater's penchant for collecting English antiquities: by combining features of contemporary court spectacle, Tudor morality plays, and local mystery pageants, it mimics the work undertaken by aristocratic collections. Both archive and masque secure the past against neglect and destruction by recontextualizing the materials they preserve. Inasmuch as it responds to its patron's particular Cestrian connections and bibliographical interests, the Ludlow entertainment participates in efforts to reclaim the religious drama as a celebration of civic activity and community memory. The masque grounds its conflict and resolution in the landscape: the local woods provide the setting for the Lady's trial, and the nymph of the Severn River comes to the Lady's rescue. The countryside's role in the Lady's peril and in her triumph signals the presence of a tradition of community ritual and myth that exists independently of Bridgewater's court—one that the entertainment itself contributes to. In the masque, "rural dance" (951) contends with the dangerous incursions of Comus's courtly decadence, and the masque's own performance, which shifts the locus of reformed theatrical production from the nation's center to its margins, imitates the rustic ritual it commemorates to provide an example of virtuous country revelry. The work continues the legacy of biblical drama as it was defined by the seventeenth century; like the mystery pageants before it, *A Masque* stands as evidence of a lasting commitment to the preservation of local custom.

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[35] The manuscript items in the Huntington Library inscribed by John Egerton, First Earl of Bridgewater, can be found among the detailed catalogue listings in *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* , I:5-70. The Ellesmere Chaucer appears to have been his acquisition: his signature appears on f.ii (*Guide*, I:50). See also Stephen Tabor, "The Bridgewater Library," 45 and 49.A 1527 catalogue of a portion of the collection notes how Catholic devotional material mingled with Protestant. The catalogue details the Countess of Bridgewater's private library, housed separately in London, and is reproduced in Heidi Brayman Hackel, "The Countess of Bridgewater's London Library" in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 147-54.

The work pays tribute to a culture of entertainments whose survival sixteenth- and seventeenth-century citizens had seen as central to their regional identity. Enacting the kind of "lawdable exersises yearelye vsed" on holidays like Michaelmas, the performance takes up a debate about popular revelry that began in 1618, when James I's *Book of Sports* showed official support for controversial activities "such as dauncing...Archerie for men, leaping, vaulting...May-Games, Whitson Ales, and Morris-dances."[36] Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* explicitly connects theater to the controversy with a promise to give James, "for your sport," the "zealous noise / Of your land's faction, scandalized at toys, / As babies, hobbyhorses, puppet plays"; the play flaunts its status as a "lawfull Recreation."[37] Upon the 1633 publication of William Prynne's antitheatrical *Histrio-Mastix* and Charles I's subsequent reissue of the *Book of Sports*, attitudes towards theater and holy day "toys" became a means of distinguishing conformist supporters of the crown from dissidents who claimed that the traditions' pagan origins profaned the Church.[38] In the wake of these events, Milton's 1634 Michelmas masque showcases "Country Dancers" who will return "next sunshine holiday" (958) and who thereby signal the continuance of rustic traditions like those that Chester's breviary praises for promoting "comforte societye and refresheinge of the Cittisens."[39] Such customs, "beinge truly anchant as any Record or deede of specialtie...proued by the custom belongeinge to the crowne," create a unique sense of regional identity that the Lady and her brothers ornament.[40] Arriving to "triumph

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[36] James I, *The Kings Maiesties Declaration to His Subiects, Concerning lawfull Sports to be vsed* (London: Bonham Norton and John Bill, 1618), 7.
[37] Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Prologue, l. 8 and ll. 3-5, respectively. James I, *Declaration*, 4.
[38] Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3-7 and 178-216 discusses the *Book of Sports* and its reissue as a Laudian political effort to radicalize what was a common sentiment among preachers. For a different narrative—which emphasizes Puritan sabbatarianism's novelty—see Alistair Dougall, *The Devil's Book: Charles I, the Book of Sports and Puritanism in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011).
[39] REED*: Cheshire including Chester*, I:346.
[40] Ibid., I:328.

in victorious dance / O'er sensual folly, and intemperance" (973-4), the siblings counter Comus's depraved spectacle and bring a reformed "court guise" (961) to Shropshire. Milton's adaptation of Revelation 12 offers holiday sports in commemoration of the Lady's escape from the wilderness and thereby casts holy day festivities as a memorial to the area's cultural heritage rather than as an affront to religious decorum.

But *A Masque* ultimately resists the binary that the debate surrounding the reissue of the *Book of Sports* reinforces; it presents holiday recreation as neither wholly sacrilegious nor, given the Lady's inability to escape witnessing the pleasures that Comus lays out for her, wholly harmless. The performance, which avoids the elaborate theatrical machinery and visual effects popular in Caroline court masques while also a participating in the culture of court entertainments, exists in an uneasy relationship with its aristocratic genre.[41] In his masque, and in his representation of Comus's beastly rout, Milton simultaneously deploys and critiques the very spectacle in the theater that he will fulminate against in churches. To Milton, the sensory excesses of the Catholic church survive in Protestant England: in *Of Reformation,* he uses language typically associated with critiques of Catholicism to fulminate against a "new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry" (YPW I:520); he implies that the Anglican Church under Archbishop Laud has likewise fallen into forms of worship that cater "to the outward, and customary ey-Service of the body" (YPW I:520). The audience of Milton's masque finds itself likewise confronted with spectacle: they observe "Midnight shout, and revelry, / Tipsy dance, and jollity" (103-4) as a courtly rabble with beasts' heads presumptuously attempts to "Imitate

[41] See Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton's Puritan Masque* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983);; Cedric C. Brown, *Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments*; Leah S. Marcus, "Milton's Anti-Laudian Masque" in *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Barbara Lewalski "Milton's *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing" in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque,* ed. David Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 296-320. For an argument against the Puritanism of *Comus*, see Catherine Gimelli Martin, "The Non-Puritan Ethics, Metaphysics, and Aesthetics of Milton's Spenserian Masque" in *Milton Quarterly* 37 (2003), 215-44.

the starry quire" (112). The rabble intends its show to appear heavenly, but it instead only replicates the kind of show that court masques' more outspoken Puritan critics argued against—one that causes "all sorts of ribaldry to be no concealed but countenanced vices, favoured wherever they were privately practised because they held such conformity with the court example."[42] Milton's formal antimasque is itself anti-masque.[43] The masque may uphold rural revelry to counteract London extravagance, but it cannot erase the threat that its antagonists' opulence poses to the unwary soul. *A Masque* contains deep skepticism about the benefits its medium might offer spectators; the work's efforts to renew the Christian stage only find solutions that also reinforce the pageants' dangers.

If *A Masque* evokes seventeenth-century records of civic cycle drama in its celebration of regional sports and entertainment, it also finds the spectacle of the medieval stage in the sensual temptations of the Cavalier masque. Court productions mounted under the sponsorship of Catholic Queen Henrietta were particularly criticized for their emphasis "on magnificence and splendor, seeking the spiritual by simulating the senses," and for the conversions to Catholicism that resulted among the performing noblewomen.[44] William Prynne asserts "How ignominious a thing it was reputed among the auncient Romans, for men or women of quality to masque or

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[42] Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson,* ed. Julius Hutchinson (London: T. Bensley, 1808), 59.

[43] Thanks to Clare Kinney for reminding me of this formal feature of the entertainment. Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton's Puritan Masque* notes that "Milton recognized in contemporary masques not only their dedication to royalist political doctrines but also their support of the politics of Laudian Anglicanism. He viewed the Established church's concern with the external forms of worship as analogous to the masque's use of elaborate spectacle to conceal real abuses of monarchical power" (51). The antimasque deploys such spectacle and such aspirations to power. Leah S. Marcus, "Milton's Anti-Laudian Masque" in *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes*, though careful to distinguish Comus's rout from courtiers at Charles I's court, discusses the reversals by which Comus's appeal to "innocent" pleasure (or what might seem like innocent pleasure to a court audience familiar with aristocratic defenses of the *Book of Sports*) becomes a scene of entrapment. Liberty becomes constraint, and the Lady is initially fooled by the appearance of virtuous revelry that is actually a display of power.

[44] Quote from Lewalski, "Politics of Masquing," 297. On the connection between the spectacle of court masques and Catholicism, see also Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11-2, 150-79, 205-9.

dance in publicke."[45] He claims that dancing, even among "Queenses themselves," reflects "the pompe of the Devill, and he that danceth, maintaineth his pompe, and singeth his Masse."[46] To the critics of courtly theater, masques merely update the idolatry of the old Catholic drama: the same preference for sensory delight that once turned the word of God in England into "bawdry, wanton shewes & vncomely gestures" reappears in the masque to lead Protestant audiences astray.[47] It is in this vein that Milton's *Eikonoklastes* compares the frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike* to "a Masking Scene" (YPW III:342); the icon of Charles I, which "would Martyr him and Saint him to befool the people" (343), offers the appearance of piety as a substitute for serious consideration of the king's faults. When Milton's *Masque* casts its villains as purveyors of beautiful and deceptive surfaces, it rejects its Renaissance contemporaries inasmuch as they resemble their idolatrous medieval progenitors.

The masque neither fully embraces nor completely rebuffs the dramatic forms that it attempts to reform, but its suspicion of England's Catholic past and current court entertainments gives rise to a pervasive anxiety about the materials of its medium. *A Masque* presents tangible counterparts to Comus's ability to "cheat the eye with blear illusion" (155): it confronts the captive Lady with "soft music" and "tables spread with all dainties" (657-8, s.d.). As the Lady understands it, the pleasures that Comus's rabble enjoys only form the background to his flattering attempt "to charm my judgement, as mine eyes" (757-8). But the entertainment invests the trappings of luxury with the threat of sexual and moral corruption: Comus's proposal that the Lady "be not coy, and be not cozened / With that same vaunted name virginity" (736-7) emerges from his desire that she drink from his cup of "cordial julep" (671). Comus's power to bewitch resides in his props—in his wand, his "magic dust" (165), and his "orient liquor in a crystal glass"

[45] Prynne, *Histrio-mastix*, 708.
[46] Ibid., 236 and 230, respectively.
[47] Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, (London: Richard Jones, 1583), L.Vv.

(65). His attempts to entice the Lady mirror the theatrical enchantment performed onstage, wherein ordinary items accumulate meaning beyond themselves. As Comus's wand, a stick is no longer a mere stick. The masque's emphasis on the disquieting power of objects to seduce the virtuous mind—and particularly on the chalice whose enchanted contents claim to ennoble those who partake—recalls Protestant accusations that Catholic priests have "transformed the celebrating of the Sacrament of the *Lords supper* into a *Masse-game,* and all other partes of the *Ecclesiasticall service* into *theatricall sights.*"[48] In such accounts, the Mass directs worshippers' attention towards vestments, gestures, and sacramental accoutrements: "the priest when he goeth to mass disguiseth himself with a great part of the passion of Christ, and playeth out the rest under silence, with signs and proffers, with nodding, becking and mowing, as it were jackanapes."[49] Props and pretense replace God's invisible grace with dumb show.

Comus's temptations suggest that drama possesses a kind of magic associated with Catholicism that makes objects seem more than they are and therefore become more dangerous than they seem.[50] The entertainment initially appears to hinge upon the characters' verbal confrontation: the Lady forces an encounter in which Comus's rhetorical efforts will be on display. She separates her body from her will: she insists that even though "this corporal rind / Thou hast immanacled while heaven sees good" (663-4), Comus's spells cannot "touch the freedom of my mind" (662). The Lady sets Comus the task of gaining her consent and responds

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[48] John Rainolds, *Th' Overthrow of Stage Playes* (1599), X.3. For an account of Protestant objections to the theatricality of Catholic worship, see Jonas A. Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 159-165. Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 171 distinguishes between the corrupt communion that Comus advocates and the salvific baptism that Sabrina performs.
[49] Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man* in *The Works of the English Reformers*, ed. Thomas Russell (London: E. Palmer, 1831), I:260. Additionally, Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Mass* (London: A.G, 1637) discusses Catholic vestments as costumes for stage plays and interludes.
[50]Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), discusses reactions against an "assertion of presence in the seeing of theater" (20) in relationship to post-Reformation biblical drama and the professional London stage.

to Comus's temptation as an assault on her reason rather than a threat to her body. But the masque insists that the "liquorish baits fit to ensnare a brute" (699) are not just an excuse for a debate; they are a threat in and of themselves. Once the Lady dismisses the "brewed enchantments" (695), they return: after the characters' verbal exchange, Comus resolves to "try her yet more strongly" (805) and maintains that "one sip of this / Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight / Beyond the bliss of dreams" (810-2). When the cordial itself reappears on the scene, the Lady has no response; the masque silences her. The Lady, who can refuse Comus's cup and deride his spell, nevertheless becomes subject to them: when her brothers fail to sieze Comus's wand, "gums of glutinous heat" (916) pin her to her chair.[51] Although seemingly easy to put by, the liquor and spells become the most potent threats to the Lady's honor.

Comus's props, like the Catholic sacraments, epitomize the paradox of illusion that Protestant objections to the Mass articulate: the changes the objects only seem to undergo can incite actual changes within a soul. In *A Masque*, the Lady's brothers effectively interrupt Comus's temptation because, having been instructed to "break his glass / And shed the luscious liquor on the ground" (650-1), they focus their combative energies upon his tools. But because they neglect to "seize his wand" (652), their attempt to overcome Comus ultimately fails. In Comus's hands, ordinary objects become props: items become invested with suspicious metamorphic powers whose future application the characters cannot contain.[52] I have previously argued that biblical drama aspires to the sacred only through the products of postlapsarian labor: cycle plays consistently remind their audiences that stage properties retain traces of their origins

[51] Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 204-7, discusses the way that the masque refuses to allow the Lady's body to fade into the background, particularly in the context of the Castlehaven scandal and Renaissance attitudes towards rape.

[52] Debora Shuger, "'Gums of Glutinous Heat' and the Stream of Consciousness: The Theology of Milton's Maske" in *Representations* 60 (1997), 1-21 suggests the chalice and chair are "not merely enchanted props" (9). She and I both emphasize the threat the objects pose to the Lady, though we differ on how that threat relates to theatrical enchantment.

in postlapsarian labor. But in the seventeenth century that very commitment to theater's materiality threatens to contaminate even the most reformed entertainment. Both the brothers' effort and the sorcerer's escape emphasize the masque's uneasiness regarding theatrical transformation: *A Masque* suspects that the stuff of theater might not remain enough like itself.

The masque's trepidation regarding dramatic transfiguration also resonates with antitheatrical arguments that accuse drama of permanently altering its participants: acting, which requires the "counterfeiting of person, affections, manners, vices, sexes, and the like," inevitably "transformes the Actors into what they are not; *so it infuseth falshood into every part of soule and body*."[53] False vice becomes actual vice. It is this kind of degeneration, whereby outward show becomes concrete sin which corrupts inner character, that the Elder Brother condemns:

> when lust
> By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
> But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
> Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
> The soul grows clotted by contagion,
> Embodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
> The divine property of her first being. (462-8)

The Elder Brother's description of a soul that becomes bestial ("imbrutes") reflects upon the rout whose "human countenance, / The express resemblance of the gods, is changed / Into some brutish form" (68-70). Milton provides a commentary on masquing practices common to Stuart court entertainments: antimasque figures often appear in fantastic guises and shapes. But here, the actors onstage who appear "headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts" (s.d. 92-3) literalize antitheatrical treatises' warnings that acting turns men into animals: when performing, William Rankins asserts, "men doo then transforme that glorious image of Christ, into the brutish shape

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

of a rude beast."[54] Milton's Elder Brother, who attends to the process by which looks and gestures become bestial substance, recognizes that a sinner's deterioration begins with acting.

But the beastly revelers who exemplify "all the pleasures" (667) that appear before the Lady are not just the victims of the theater; they are also its advocates. In Rankins's argument, the actors' metamorphoses occur because they consent to "deceiue the world, to lead the people with intising shewes to the diuell."[55] Milton's entertainment takes steps to protect spectators from the "intising shewes" of the performers: although the beasts themselves cannot "perceive their foul disfigurement" (73-4), they appear onstage in costumes that reflect their brutish transformation. The audience enjoys a privileged perspective on the state of the characters' souls. The masque likewise withholds from Comus the power to "cheat" the audience "with blear illusion" (156): plotting to entrap the Lady, he explains that "When once her eye / Hath met the virtue of this magic dust, / I shall appear some harmless villager" (164-6). The spell only changes the Lady's perception of Comus's appearance; it does not change his actual shape. Neither Comus nor his rout appear to the audience as anything other than their sinful selves. If the antagonists cannot disguise themselves from the audience, the protagonists are even further removed from the taint of feigning: the actors only play versions of their offstage selves. Alice Egerton and her brothers perform the young Lady and her siblings, and the tutor Henry Lawes acts as the Attendant Spirit who dresses up "in the likeness of a swain, / That to the service of this house belongs" (84-5). Milton addresses the problem of actors' guile by writing a drama obsessed with the transparency of its actors' disguises.

But if the masque attempts to distance itself from the threat that acting poses to its audience and performers, it also suggests that acting might provide protection against that threat.

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[54]William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters* (London: I.C., 1587), 2v.
[55] Ibid.

Throughout the masque, the Lady plays the part of an imperiled witness to Comus's depraved show, but the text fleetingly permits spectatorship to embolden rather than endanger her. At the beginning of the performance, she appears onstage in the space where Comus and his rout had held their revelry. Although she sees "nought but single darkness" (203), she quickly finds that "A thousand fantasies / Begin to throng into my memory / Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire" (204-6). The space, haunted by what occurred there, encroaches upon her imagination. The shadows are soon joined by a different set of impressions: she receives a vision of faith, hope, and chastity (212-4) that assures her of God's protection. She tells her invisible protectors that "I see ye visibly, and now believe" (215); her glimpse of divine spectacle spurs virtue rather than vice. The Lady's experience grows out of a version of Christian theater represented within seventeenth-century commentaries on Revelation. Beginning with David Pareus, authors regularly spoke of Revelation as having "a *Dramaticall* forme"; they argued that it could "truely be called a *Propheticall Drama*, show, or representation."[56] John Smith compared the action to a masque: "*the Prophetical scene* or *Stage upon which all apparitions were made to the Prophet, was his Imagination*; and that there all those things which God would have revealed unto him were acted over *Symbolicallie*, as in a *Masque*."[57] Like a masque, Revelation provides spectacular scenes for its audience, but it reforms the theater's focus on pleasing diversions: its "diverse *shewes* and *apparitions*" are meant to "infuse holy meditations

[56] David Pareus, *A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist Iohn*, trans. Elias Arnold (Amsterdam, 1644), 20. See also Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, trans. Richard More (London: R.B., 1643), 30 and John Smith, *Select Discourses* (London: J. Flesher, 1660), 222. For accounts of the influence and interpretations of Revelation during the seventeenth century, see Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., *Visionary Poetics: Milton's Tradition and His Legacy* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1979) and both Michael Murrin, "Revelation and Two Seventeenth-Century Commentators" and C.A. Patrides, "Something like Prophetick Strain: Apocalyptic Configurations in Milton" in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, ed. C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreigh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[57] John Smith, *Select Discourses*, 222.

in the minds of the Readers, and to lift them up to Heavenly matters."[58] The vision of biblical theater within the seventeenth-century commentary tradition provides a momentary corrective to the masque's ambivalence about its own medium.

Both Joseph Mede and John Smith assert that, although the text of Revelation takes the form of drama, the visions were also performed to John as drama. The English translation of Mede's *Key of the Revelation* includes a letter in which Mede, who was a fellow at Cambridge, explains that the contents of the book of the seven seals "were no otherwise exhibited to *Iohn* and other beholders of this coelestiall Theater, then by a forraigne representation, supplying the roome of a rehersall, not much unlike to our Academicall interludes, where the prompters stand neere the Actors, with their books in their hands."[59] The book becomes the playtext of a drama that John, along with the attending souls, observes as if he were in an audience at university. Christ, who "took the book to unseal and open," performs the primary role in the "Apocalyptique Theater."[60] He enters "bearing the signes" of his "past death"; the Lamb costumes himself with the marks of a performance that literally saves.[61] Christ's death on the cross ennobles spectatorship for those who choose to attend to his act.

John only acquires knowledge of Christ's future work through performance: although the prophecies are recorded in the book of the seven seals, "neither [did] the Apostle himself stand so neere...that he might read" the book.[62] In the commentary, the image of the prompt-book serves as a reminder of the mediated nature of the vision that John receives; Revelation refers back to a divine text unreachable except through the Lamb's representation of its contents. John

[58] Pareus, *A Commentarie upon the Divine Revealtion of the Apostle and Evangelist Iohn*, 20.
[59] Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, Translator's preface.
[60] Ibid., quotes from 38, 30, respectively. See 30-8 for a description of the arrangement of the "Apocalyptique Theater."
[61] Ibid., 38.
[62] Ibid., Translator's preface.

then remediates the performance for his audience: only the book of Revelation provides readers with access to the celestial theater. The example of John's spectatorship hallows the Lady's vision in *A Masque*: because the figures from heaven that comfort the Lady are only visible to her, she adopts the role of a privileged onlooker to a divine show. But if she plays John's part, the audience, which must imaginatively participate in a holy theater that it does not witness, becomes the readers of John's scripture. By binding the vision to its inaccessibility, the masque momentarily embraces a mode of Christian theatricality that finds sacred text within worldly spectacle. The masque recalls the Bible because its audience can only indirectly access its moments of revelation.

III.

Milton continually wrestles with the ghost of biblical theater, particularly as he sets himself the task of writing a version of the Fall: the poet first imagines *Paradise Lost* as a biblical drama. Beginning in the early 1640s, Milton records outlines and sketches for a series of tragedies about scriptural subjects, including the story of original sin. The Trinity Manuscript, a combined autograph and scribal notebook, preserves early drafts and transcriptions of Milton's poetic projects from the early 1630s to the late 1650s.[63] In addition to copies of sonnets, occasional poems, and the court dramas *Arcades* and *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, the manuscript contains four short drafts of a projected Fall play.[64] The drafts sit alongside over fifty subjects for projected biblical tragedies that show the influence of a range of dramatic forms. It is unlikely that the manuscript's contents actually forecast a dramatic project on the scale of John

[63] William Bridges Hunter, *A Milton Encyclopedia,* Volume 8 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press: 1983), 92-3. See also William Bridges Hunter, "A Bibliographical Excursus into Milton's Trinity Manuscript" in *Milton Quarterly* 19.3 (1985), 61-71.

[64]William Aldis Wright, ed., *Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton's Minor Poems, Preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899). Citations from Milton's drafts of biblical material will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically within the text by page number.

Bale's reformed cycle, but as record of Milton's preoccupations during the early decades of his career, the notebook speaks to the poet's engagement with traditions of religious drama both local and imported. Two of the outlines for the Adam and Eve play consist of lists of characters that, like a morality play, include personified versions of Adam's torments ("Labour," "Ignorance," "Death," etc.) and comforts ("Faith," "Hope," and "Charity") (33).[65] The more lengthy outlines, many of which have a chorus and a five-act structure, follow the conventions of Neo-Latin drama—particularly the *Christus Patiens* and *Adamus Exul* of Hugo Grotius, whom Milton met during his travels on the continent.[66] In keeping with Protestant conventions, most of the outlines avoid representing Christ. But the outlines do challenge Protestant decorum: a series of topics that recounts Jesus's last days on earth begins with a "Christus patiens" that depicts Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (39).[67] Milton's manuscript outlines cover events from the Fall through "Christ crucifi'd," and "Christ risen" (38); taken together, the outlines recall the scope of the mystery cycles.

Milton's notebook displays considerable attention to the dramatic and medieval forms that his early prose pledges to supplant: in the years following the English civil war, Milton focused his literary output upon furthering religious reform. From its earliest advocates, the Protestant project in England did not only aim to remove objectionable aspects of Catholic doctrine, but to rescue history from the perceived abuses of medieval authors. Arguments for revisionary Protestant historiography encouraged audiences to cultivate a critical perspective towards England's past chroniclers: Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* insists that readers

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[65] Robert L. Ramsay, "Morality Themes in Milton's Poetry" in *Studies in Philology* 15.2 (1918), 123-158 discusses the morality plots that Milton adapts over the course of his poetic career. Scoufos, "The Mysteries in Milton's *Masque*," traces stock morality characters through Protestant drama

[66] Howard B. Norland, "Neo-Latin Drama in Britain" in *Neo-Latin Drama and Theatre in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jan Bloemendal and Howard B. Norland (Boston: Brill, 2013), 471-543. For discussions of Milton and Grotius, see Watson Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle: The Theme of Paradise Lost in World Literature* (Staten Island, Gordian Press, 1967) and J.M. Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition.*

[67] Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, 89-115, discusses examples of cycle pageants from the sixteenth century.

ought to peruse "the chronicles of England (out of which yet they [prelates] have put a great part of their wickedness,) and thou shalt find them always both rebellious and disobedient to the kings."[68] Milton's own *The Reason of Church-Government Urg'd Against Prelaty* (1642) promises to recuperate a glorious national legacy tarnished by its Catholic past.[69] Milton provides a historically-minded rationale for his burgeoning desire "to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things, among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect" (811-2): he asserts that "if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, *England* hath had her noble atchievments made small by the unskilfull handling of monks and mechanicks" (YPW I:812). Milton goes on to wonder "whether that epic form whereof the two poems of *Homer,* and those other two of *Virgil* and *Tasso* are a diffuse, and the book of *Job* a brief model...or whether those dramatic constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation" (813-15). The passage takes pains to demonstrate Milton's knowledge of his classical and continental predecessors; it justifies the author's first signed foray into nonfiction by advertising his literary credentials. In *The Reason of Church-Government,* revising the past requires a poet—and, perhaps, a playwright.[70]

As *Reason* maps possible avenues for reformed literary production, it not only cites the authors of Greek tragedy as worthy of imitation, but argues that "The Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral drama in the Song of Solomon...And the Apocalypse of St. John is the majestick

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[68] Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, I:374. The work goes on to defend King John, and later Protestant literature will rewrite his legacy accordingly: Bale's *King Johan* and Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* claim him as a proto-Protestant objector to papal control.

[69] Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, 582n.13 notes that although "when Milton worked on the list of topics is not known," *Reason*'s comments upon his literary vocation "seem related to this exercise." Religious drama is part of the context for Milton's discussion of medieval error.

[70] David Loewenstein discusses Milton's sense of his role in the historical process in *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination.* See particularly pp. 25-8 on Milton's use of theatrical language and metaphors in his early prose.

image of a high and stately Tragedy" (815). Milton locates the origins of biblical drama within the Bible itself. Milton's strategy, which sees scripture as a collection of literary forms, has a long history in biblical commentary and literary apology. Milton particularly recalls David Pareus, who relies upon Origen's authority to justify his own understanding that Revelation constitutes "an Heavenly *Dramma* or Interlude."[71] Origen's claim that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs "in dramatic form" corresponds to a tradition, dating back to the book's Old Greek translations, that adds speech prefixes to the first-person text.[72] The prefixes turn the book into a narrative dialogue; like a playscript, they demarcate "lines" for the bride, bridegroom, and attendants. When later Latin texts allegorize the characters as Christ and the Church, medieval scholars like Bede and Haimo of Auxerre elaborate upon in their commentaries.[73] When Milton finds Christian theater in the Song of Songs, he therefore follows a precedent established by both patristic and medieval interpreters of scripture. *Reason* propounds a theory of the Bible's generic diversity developed during the Middle Ages while also eschewing the Middle Ages. More, the commentaries of Bede, Haimo, and their contemporaries rely upon Origen's interpretations but rarely mention the theologian's name—Origen, condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople, remains "merely a shadow, the heretic who can be quoted but not acknowledged."[74] The Middle Ages tries to get around Origen in the same way that Milton wants to get around the Middle Ages. Milton, precisely by attempting to distance his work from the

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[71] David Pareus, *A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John*, 20.
[72] Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson (New York: Newman, 1957), 21-2. For an account of Greek and Latin speech prefixes in early manuscripts of the Song of Songs, see Jay Curry Treat, *Lost Keys: Text and Interpretation in old Greek Song of Songs and its Earliest Manuscript Witnesses*, Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1996, 399-435, UMI 9628015. Treat, on 431, notes that the old Greek Codex Sinaiticus is the earliest known document that records speech prefixes in the form that we have come to associate with drama—with a character's name in full on a line by itself and before the speech. From this perspective, the Song of Songs does not take on the form of a drama; it is the extant source for the form.
[73] E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 57, 99, and 103-4.
[74] Ibid., 39.

discredited theological context that it otherwise depends upon, continues a Christian tradition widespread within the medieval church that he repudiates.

Milton's *ad fontes* attempt to circumvent the Catholic past elides the actual intimacy that reform breeds with the corruptions of its object: controversial writing "must," in Daniel Shore's words, both "rebut and perpetuate, debunk and preserve what it opposes."[75] As a polemicist—and later as the poet of *Paradise Lost*—Milton composes works that never comprehensively exorcise their adversary. Midway through his *History of Britain,* for example, he expresses regret that "Henceforth we are to stear by another sort of Authors" (YPW V:127) and proceeds to condemn his sources, "in one word, Monks," as both poor writers ("in expression barbarous") and "dubious Relaters" (127). The passage nevertheless exposes the imperfect success of *History*'s attempt to repudiate the monks' influence: although it maligns the sources it adapts, Milton's admission that "we are to stear by" medieval authors acknowledges their influence; even as it denigrates Catholic historians, his narrative depends upon the Catholic history they write. Milton takes pains to represent the medieval Church as the enemy of conscionable Protestant writing, but his work ultimately reveals Catholic authors and their faults to be the necessary source for such writing.

The Reason of Church-Government, which depicts a young poet dedicated to surpassing the "monks and mechanicks" who injured England's reputation, likewise charts Milton's future literary course with reference to the Catholic figures whose errors he will amend. It thereby admits the early English stage into his work: from theater's post-classical reappearance in the Easter liturgy to its eruption into fourteenth-century city streets, "monks and mechanicks" shaped the traditions of performance that Milton's generation inherited in manuscript. Milton

[75] Daniel Shore, "Why Milton Is Not an Iconoclast," *PMLA* 127.1 (2012), 25. Shore's more complete discussion of Milton's deployment of controversial writing within his iconoclastic milieu appears on 25-8.

uses the word "mechanicks" to denigrate the clumsy efforts of the country's monks, whom he links with illiterate workers. But the word also recalls Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which terms its amateur actors "rude mechanicals" and which Milton knew well: his early "L'Allegro" frequently alludes to the play.[76] At one point, the poem's speaker recalls Theseus's promise in *Midsummer* to wed Hippolyta "with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling" (I.i.19): the speaker dreams of "pomp, and feast, and revelry, / mask, and antique pageantry" (128).[77] Theseus's anticipatory speech, which instructs the Master of the Revels to prepare the Athenian citizens for the wedding, finds its fulfillment in the rude mechanicals' performance. In "L'Allegro," the speaker's fantasy of comedic pageantry continues with a visit "to the well-trod stage" (131) and culminates in a life "Married to immortal verse" (137). Drama allows escape into a world where the mind produces and enjoys pleasures that in turn produce poetry.[78] A broader definition of "mechanicks," one that sees tradesmen as the makers of amateur theater as well as skilled laborers, exists as part of the context for Milton's writing about spectacle—and the phrase "monks and mechanicks" therefore contains an echo of the dramatic legacy that develops alongside England's Catholic intellectual heritage.

Specifying the erstwhile stewards of England's reputation, Milton simultaneously identifies the medieval custodians of European drama. During the Middle Ages, the religious houses that fostered England's great scholars also witnessed the rebirth of theatrical representation: the tenth-century bishop Aethelwold, for example, both oversaw the education of Aelfric of Eynsham and drafted a handbook for monks that includes dramatically-inflected

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[76] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Peter Holland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), III.ii.10.
[77] Archie Burnett, "Miltonic Parallels: (I) 'L'Allegro' and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" in *Notes and Queries* 27 (1980), 332.
[78] For more on theater's role in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," particularly as it influences Milton's developing sense of a poetic identity, see Brendan Prawdzwik, "'Look on Me': Theater, Gender, and Poetic Identity Formation in Milton's Maske," *Studies in Philology* 110.4 (2013), 826-8.

services for Holy Week.[79] Further, *Reason*'s "mechanicks" recall the unlettered guildsmen whose theatrical records survived sixteenth-century iconoclasm. As tradesmen unschooled in the literary arts, "mechanicks" both metaphorically stand in for the ineptitude of England's early historians and evoke the artisans whose works remained in churches and on public streets until a series of Parliamentary acts sanctioned their destruction in the early 1640s. The creators of religious statues, tombs, and windows that were either commemorative of influential persons or too expensive to remove, illiterate "mechanicks" produced public history.[80] Guild-sponsored drama both showcased such work and influenced it—a circumstance evident in the relationship that scholars have suggested exists between the Norwich cycle and the biblical images carved into the roof bosses of Norwich Cathedral.[81] Invoking "monks and mechanicks" as its literary predecessors, *The Reason of Church-Government* unwittingly reveals the extent to which Christian theater permeates the shared history that its author resolves to revise.

Despite its best efforts to erase the memory of its Catholic predecessors, *The Reason of Church-Government* cannot entirely avoid the medieval authorities whose errors prompt Milton's writing. The dramatic outlines in the Trinity Manuscript, however, engage with their Catholic predecessors by consigning their conventions to the wings: Milton's nascent Adam and Eve dramas do not stage most of the events depicted within guild-sponsored plays about the Fall. The first couple's creation, their happiness in Eden, their separate temptations, their sin, and their

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[79] The handbook was the *Regularis Concordia* (ed. and trans. Thomas Symons (New York: Nelson, 1953)). For an account of the relationship of Aelfric to Aethelwold and the *Regularis Concordia*, see Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, eds. *A Companion to Aelfric* (Boston: BRILL, 2009), 45-50 and 77-8 (n.37).

[80] A summary of the development of the Tudors' attitudes towards commemorative images appears in John Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 53-5, 82-92, 114-8. For discussions of Puritan objections to the continuing presence of images and items of public ornamentation, see Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003).

[81] M.D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 87-104; Alan H. Nelson, "On Recovering the Lost Norwich Corpus Christi Cycle" in *Comparative Drama* 4.4 (1970), 247-50.

judgment are all omitted. The drafts postpone the first couple's entrance until after the Fall, when Eve "appeares confusedly cover'd with leaves" ("Adam Unparadiz'd," 38). The character of Moses, as the prologue, explains to the assembled audience that "they cannot se Adam in the state of innocence by reason of thire sin" ("Paradise Lost," 33). Milton's notebook takes the absolute inaccessibility of the prelapsarian condition seriously; in its pages, as William Poole notes, "Adam is unseen not because he is naked, but because we are sinful."[82] The drama, by banishing Eden and its denizens from the stage, never attempts to represent the perfections that lie beyond the experience of the poet and his contemporaries.

In the half century preceding Milton's drafts, a series of Protestant polemicists had explicitly rejected the premise that theater ought to offer its participants access to other worlds or characters. Renaissance antitheatrical authors commonly insisted that drama encouraged sinful deviation from the self: in his *Histrio-Mastix*, William Prynne maintains that "For God...as he hath given a vniforme distinct and proper being to every creature, *the bounds of which may not be exceeded; so he requires that the actions of every creature should be honest and sincere, devoyde of all hypocrisie*."[83] Prynne condemns acting for its fictions, asking "For what else is *hypocrisie* in the proper signification of the word, *but the acting of anothers part or person on the Stage:* or what else is an *hypocrite, in his true etimologie, but a Stage-player*."[84] Stephen Gosson's sixteenth-century *Playes Confuted in fiue actions* suggests that hypocrisy taints biblical drama in particular: he claims that because Christian scholars like Gregory Nazianzen—the patristic playwright whose *Christ Suffering* Milton admires in his prefatory epistle to *Samson*

[82] William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 131. Scholars have less convincingly suggested that the difficulties of staging nudity spurred Milton's decision to write an epic. See, for example, Thomas J. Burbery, *Milton the Dramatist*, 75-7.
[83] William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 159. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 90-5, discusses antitheatrical authors' conviction that acting distorts the particular self that God has given each person.
[84] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 158. In classical Greek, "hypocrite" means "actor." See John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 16-7 and n. 37.

Agonistes—recognized that "to declare our selues by wordes or by gestures to be otherwise then we are, is an act executed where it should not, therefore a lye," they penned closet dramas. They thus spared audiences the sight of performances "vpon the Stage, where some base fellowe that plaide Christe, should bring the person of Christ into contempt."[85] The lies that Gosson claims disturb Gregory Nazianzen also trouble the young Milton at Cambridge. He reacts to students' performances with the conviction that "if it be unlawful to sit and behold a mercenary Comedian personating that which is least unseemly for a hireling to do, how much more blameful is it to endure the sight of as vile things acted by persons either entered, or presently to enter, into the ministry" (*Apology for Smectymnuus* YPW I:888). Milton's schoolfellows offend because they take on an actor's "part or person" and behave counter to their profession. Deeply aware of actors' inability to access prelapsarian humanity's "proper being," Milton adopts antitheatrical arguments to the extent that he alienates his dramatic outlines from Eden: his plays do not attempt to represent what remains beyond representation.

IV.

"Adam Unparadiz'd," omits much of the action that once appeared in biblical dramas of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, but the devil's soliloquy, the fallen couple's mutual recrimination, and the expulsion from Eden do remain. Even these similarities only highlight the different representational expectations that Milton labors under. Although Lucifer appears "after his overthrow," "bemoans himself," and "seeks revenge on man" (38), as he does in civic cycle pageants, he never appears on Milton's stage as the serpent. The omission of Satan's disguise speaks to the anxieties that surround the theater's allegiance with hypocrisy; drama's emphasis on artificiality and external show potentially puts it in league with Satan. In order to act on stage,

[85] Gosson, *Playes Confuted in fiue Actions*, (London: Thomas Gosson, 1582), E5r and E6r, respectively.

Stephen Gosson argues, "one must learne to trippe it like a Lady in the finest fashion, another must haue time to whet his minde vnto tyranny that he may giue life to the picture hee presenteth, whereby they learne to counterfeit, and so to sinne."[86] When it comes to the bodies of actors onstage, theatrical surfaces are more than mere surfaces; they betoken the deceptions that the actor has learned to perform. Gosson turns fiction into a lie, and Milton's attempts to write an Adam and Eve narrative remain sensitive to such concerns. In its ability to "giue life to the picture," drama's feigning perhaps has an effect on actors and spectators that is all too real.

By refusing to further costume an actor costumed as Satan, Milton's outline attempts to minimize a problem that the antitheatricalists' obsession with hypocrisy creates for dramas about the Fall: how does a performance stage deceit without replicating it? It is a problem that cycle dramas directly confront. In Chester, the demon's soliloquy concerns the process of dressing himself as the serpent: he promises that "Dight me I will anone" and explains that "Therfore, as brooke I my panne / the edders coate I will take one."[87] Without exiting the stage, the character immediately addresses Eve. He perhaps changes his costume in front of the audience.[88] The scene thus makes a show of Satan's show—and of its own. By revealing Satan's guile to be nothing more than a theatrical effect, the drama draws attention to itself as a product of artifice. Satan acknowledges as much when he anticipates that "I shall teach his wiffe a playe" (179); his

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[86] Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in fiue Actions*, E6r.

[87] *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ll. 189 and 205-6. Future citations from the Chester cycle text will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

[88] One version of the scene's stage direction supports my supposition: it says that "The serpent shall come, placed into paradise in the appearance of a demon" (s.d. 160-1, p. 20n. in Lumiansky and Mills, translation mine). The demon-looking actor must become the serpent over the course of the scene. There is another version of the direction, however, which separates the serpent from the devil: it reads, "the serpente shall come up out of a hole, and the dyvell walkinge shall say..." The direction is usually taken to show that "devil," "serpent," and "demon" are all used interchangeably—an argument borne out by the variable speech prefixes that appear within many manuscripts. But in the context of Satan's explicit discussion of costuming, the direction raises the possibility that the serpent and devil are two actors. The devil-actor makes a point to discuss his upcoming disguise in order to explain why another, differently costumed actor takes on the temptation. All three possibilities of managing the difficulty of playing a devil who is himself playing expose the imperfect process of representation to the audience. The play avoids charges of deceitfulness by refusing to deceive.

desire to draw Eve into the act contrasts his own postlapsarian falseness with her unfallen earnestness. But the theater itself, including the actor who performs prelapsarian Eve, already takes part in such postlapsarian sport. Eve knows the "play" and will in fact "play" someone more like her fallen self once her character has sinned. Unlike Milton's schoolfellows, Chester's Eve best communicates her "pure being" when she is pretending to be what Eve ought not be.

By the seventeenth century, the Eden that Chester foregrounds—one available to fallen playing precisely because of the falseness of play—had become inaccessible to Milton. Not only had Reformation-era discourses, emphasizing the importance of unmediated access to the Bible, conditioned audiences to regard biblical pageants as blasphemous, but the period's anxieties about hypocrisy put particular pressure upon Milton's subject: Adam and Eve dramas enact the process of dissimulation. Hypocrites, as John Parker notes, rely upon the practices that they ostensibly reject, and Fall dramas, at their most didactic, do the same: they represent Satan's guile in order to caution against Satan's guile.[89] To the suggestion that such pretence might have a worthwhile effect—that "Deformities" can be "checked in ieast, and mated in earnest"—Stephen Gosson insists that the very show of sin penetrates the audience "by the priuy entries of the eare, slip downe into the heart, and with gunshotte of affection gaule the minde, where reason and vertue shoulde rule."[90] Appearance trumps intent. The actor playing Satan can't represent the temptation without replicating it and therefore becoming like Satan. In treatises across the period, actors take on Satan's serpentine qualities. To Stephen Gosson, their hypocrisy makes them subtle: "There is more in them then wee perceiue...the countrieman is more afeard of the Serpent that is hid in the grasse, than the wilde beaste that openly feedes upon ye mountaines."[91] To

[89] John Parker, *Aesthetics of Antichrist*, 16-7.
[90] Gosson, *The Shoole of Abuse*, 13r and 15r, respectively.
[91] Ibid., 20r.

William Rankins, it makes them bestial.[92] Rankins's tract against plays, *Mirrour of Monsters*, in fact begins with an attack on actors that first compares them to "serpents" and then proposes that "seeme they the limbs, proportion, and members of Sathan" when they most please.[93] The Fall narrative imposes a relationship with guile and hypocrisy upon the actor playing Satan, and in the Renaissance that relationship touches all actors.

The connection between Satan and acting that so fascinates Renaissance antitheatrical authors emerges out of medieval and dramatic traditions that stress the devil's guile.[94] The mystery plays were particularly indebted to a scholastic theological commonplace and iconographic tradition that suggested that a female-headed serpent tempted Eve in the garden.[95] Satan elected to use such a vessel "because," in Peter Comestor's formulation, "like things applaud like."[96] The commonplace survived well into the seventeenth century: Thomas Milles's 1613 adaptation of Pedro Mexía's influential *Silva de Varia Lección*, for example, featured the serpent-maiden, as did the anonymous English version of Giovanno Loredano's 1640 *L'Adamo*.[97] The maiden-headed snake also appeared onstage in Giambattista Andreini's 1613 *L'Adamo*. In Andreini, Eve marvels that "I see / A human face" before detailing its appearance and declaring the sight a "wonder"; Eve's perception of the serpent's unique loveliness emerges

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[92] William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters*, 2v. See above, 17: "men doo then transforme that glorious image of Christ, into the brutish shape of a rude beast."
[93] Ibid.
[94] Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1962), 68-73, 95-100; Anne Wierum, "'Actors' and 'Play Acting' in the Morality Tradition" in *Renaissance Drama* 3 (1970), 189-214; John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist*, 169-177
[95] For a discussion of the snake with a human head as it appears in drama, see chapter 1, 45-6.
[96] Peter Comestor, *Scolastica Historia: Liber Genesis*, ed. Agneta Sylwan (Turnhout: Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 2005), I.22.
[97] Thomas Milles, trans. and compiler, *The Treasurie of Auncient and Moderne Times"* (London: W. Iaggard, 1613), 26. J.S., trans., *The Life of Adam* (from Giovanno Francesco Loredano's *L'Adamo*) (London: HumphreyMoseley, 1659), 24-26.

upon her acknowledgment of its human likeness.[98] While patristic interpretations of Genesis 3:1 insist that the devil used the serpent only because God allowed it to be his instrument, the medieval tradition and its Renaissance successors suggest that Satan was permitted to exercise his cunning and chose to dwell in a particular serpent whose appearance would best attract Eve's admiration.[99] Without entirely overhauling the patristic tradition, Comestor's assertion that the devil "chose" the means by which he tempted Eve accords particular importance to Satan's ability to deceive his victims. The antitheatricalists' devil, who chooses actors as his instruments and whose cunning provides evidence that "In those thinges, that we least mistrust, the greatest daunger doeth often lurke," enters the scene during the Middle Ages.[100]

The devil's subtlety was also stressed outside of the Adam and Eve narrative: the morality play *Wisdom Who is Christ* recalls the very same biblical verse that antitheatrical treatises often turn to when demonizing theater's pleasant appearances. Paul's caution that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14) lies behind Lucifer's decision to

> ...change me in-to bryghtnes,
> & so hym to be-gy[le],
> Sen I xall schew hym perfyghtnes,
> And wertu provyt yt wykkydnes.[101]

Vices in later morality plays and Protestant polemical dramas act like *Wisdom*'s Lucifer; they seduce unsuspecting youths to evil by pretending to be virtuous. They might play the part of a

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[98] Giambattista Andreini, *L'Adamo: Sacre Rappresentazione* (Milan, Geronimo Bordoni, 1617), II.vi, 51: "io veggio / Umano volto" and, a few lines later, "O meraviglia." A partial translation can be found in Watson Kirkconnell's *The Celestial Cycle*, 227-66. John G. Demaray's *Milton's Theatrical Epic* discusses the influence that such *sacra rappresentazione* may have had on the structure of Milton's epic. See particularly 26-7.

[99] Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram* (*DGnL*), 11.2 in volume 2 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, ed. and trans. John Hammond Taylor (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983). See also Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, 181-2.

[100] Gosson, *Shoole of Abuse*, 20r.

[101] F.J. Furnivall and Alfred W. Pollard, eds., *Wisdom Who Is Christ*, or *Mind, Will, and Understanding* in *The Macro Plays* (London: EETS, 1904), ll.375-8.

friend—or, in later interludes, a member of the clergy.[102] By the late sixteenth century, Satan's hypocrisy meant that even offstage he had often "in the likenesse of a merry ieaster acted a Comaedie, but shortly ensued a wofull Tragoedie."[103] The Renaissance inherited a devil who had taken the shape of an actor.

The association of the Fall narrative with drama's potential evils extends beyond its villain. Commentary on the Fall reflects on 1 Timothy 2:14 ("Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression") to stress that Adam sinned in full knowledge of his wrongdoing.[104] To antitheatrical authors, audiences similarly compound the severity of their sin because they willfully ignore warnings "to shunne the occasion as neere he can...nor goe too Theaters for beeing allured"—they go to the theater fully aware of its traffic in deception.[105] Further, spectators imaginatively participate in the shows they attend and endorse vice with their applause; for its clear-eyed commitment to transgression, playgoing ranks among the devil's own sins.[106] Richard Baker's 1661 *Theatrum Redivivum*, in its reaction against William Prynne's attacks on the stage, charged that Prynne "with a little help, would bring it about that the very sin of our first Parent *Eve* as nothing else, but her being a *Player*, where she and the *Serpent* were the *Actours*, and *Adam* the *Spectatour*."[107] Baker exaggerates antitheatrical claims in which playgoing, like the sin of Adam and Eve, becomes the root of vice, but the comment exposes the way the Fall narrative exemplifies antitheatrical opposition to drama. As a spectator, Adam consented to his deception in the same way that audiences seek out their sin. Milton adopts the

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[102] See John Bale, *King Johan* in *The Complete Plays of John Bale* Volume 1, ed. Peter Happe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985: "In every estate of the clargye, I playe a part / Sumtyme I can be a monke in a long syd cowle / Sumtyme I can be a none" (194-6).
[103] Simon Patericke, trans., "Epistle Dedicatorie" to *A discourse upon the meanes of wel governing and maintaining in good peace, a kingdome, or other principalitie* (London: Felix Kingston, 1602), sig. Jiii, verso.
[104] Augustine. *DGnL* XI.xlii and *DCD* XIV.11. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.C.xiii.4.
[105] Gosson, *Shoole of Abuse*, 21r.
[106] See Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 70 and 80-1 for instances of antitheatrical criticism in this vein.
[107] Richard Baker, *Theatrum Redivivum, or The Theatre Vindicated* (London: T.R., 1661), 60-1.

interpretation in *Paradise Lost*: Adam eats "Against his better knowledge."[108] If Adam performs the worst of acts—Milton concludes that "anyone who looked at it a bit more carefully would quite rightly call the sin most atrocious, and a transgression of the whole law. For under this head what did man not perpetrate"—his transgression may well have included watching Eve and Satan play their parts.[109]

But it is Eve's role as an actor that exposes the true danger of the stage. According to Augustine, postlapsarian Eve acquired "the hypocrisy by which men think that they are very wise if they can deceive and beguile whomever they wish. For the woman gave to her man and they ate."[110] Augustine contradicts 1 Timothy's assertion that "Adam was not deceived" in order to emphasize the woman's wrongdoing—and to emphasize how she herself is deceived. Her ability to seduce Adam to sin does not constitute wisdom; it allies her with the devil. The attempt to reconcile the two perspectives on the Fall—that of 1 Timothy and that of the female beguiler—creates the tradition out of which Milton's Adam emerges: Eve, like the serpent, attempts to seduce her husband, who falls despite her arguments rather than because of them.[111] As a consequence of her sin, Eve tries to beguile Adam; her scene with the serpent turns her into a serpent. For antitheatrical authors, the stage channels Satan's ability to disguise himself and changes his victims: Philip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses* asks "for who wil call him a wiseman that plaieth the part of a foole and a vice? who can call him a Christian, who playeth ye part of a deuil, the sworne enemie of Christe; who can call him a iust man, that playeth the part of a

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[108] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2005), 9.998-9. All future quotations from *Paradise Lost* will be taken from this edition and cited parenthetically within the text by book and line number.
[109] Citations from *De Doctrina Christiana* will be taken from the Oxford dual-language edition, designated by *DDC*, and cited by book, section and page number. Ed. and trans. John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington, *The Complete Works of John Milton Volume VIII: De Doctrina Christiana,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), I:11, 413.
[110] Augustine, *De Genesi ad Manichaeos* (*DGnM*), 2.15.23 in *On Genesis*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).
[111] See *Paradise Lost* 9.906, for example: after Eve's soliloquy about the fruit and her perception that it makes them powerful instead of mortal, Adam admits to himself that "Certain my resolution is to die."

dissembling hipocrite?"[112] By the end of his diatribe, the stock character types that Stubbes lists have given way to the charge that antitheatrical authors levy against actors themselves: actors play the hypocrite's part. The difference between character and actor, even within the text itself, erodes. The actor's disguise becomes his identity.

In the treatises, Satan transforms actors into his instruments through the vices that they merely feign. Dramatic fiction becomes all too real: the players truly encourage the sins they enact, and the playhouses therefore court sin in earnest. The theater is not theatrical enough. Another alternative exists, however: Prynne enjoins his readers "to *imitate those* men, those graces which [God's] word prescribes."[113] Rather than inveigh against imitation in all its forms, Prynne pauses to advocate for a particular kind of dissembling, one that looks to scripture as a template for a better form of Renaissance drama.[114] Antitheatrical authors may caution against performance on the grounds that it coerces people to behave in ways that belie their "proper being," but the most appropriate Christian behavior mimics such performance. In such a formulation, Jesus as he is depicted in the Gospels provides the ideal model for Christians, who become actors *par excellence* when they attempt to imitate Christ-like perfections that they can never reach. Christ, as both God and man, further offers a template for performance: his humanity, inasmuch as it involves sin, is merely an act (God sends "his own Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), my emphasis).[115] Milton's incomplete Passion ode recalls the tradition when it praises the "Poor fleshly tabernacle entered, / His starry front low-roofed beneath the skies; / O what a mask was there, what a disguise!" (17-9). Within a passage that

[112] Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses,* M.1r.
[113] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix,* 149.
[114] The claim that Christianity offers a more satisfying theatrical experience than theater itself has a long history in antitheatrical writing. John Parker discusses this tradition and notes that "Tertullian essentially promoted ritual worship of the Christian *personae* as a *superior form* of the drama he used to adore before his conversion" in "Persona," *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Bryan Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 591-608. Quote from 594.
[115] Parker, *Aesthetics of Antichrist,* 160.

refers to the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ, "mask" recalls the Latin *persona*, the word that both distinguishes the parts of the Trinity in Christianity and describes the actors' masks in classical drama. Milton, noting that *persona* "is a term transferred from the theatre" (*DDC* I:14, 481), acknowledges the derivation in his *De Doctrina Christiana*. In "The Passion," Christ sanctifies acting not just because his human person is a "disguise," but because the divine person that the "mask" conceals is only another mask—a *persona*.[116]

In "The Passion," Christ's humble mask, although it only temporarily obscures the divine *persona*, nevertheless expresses humility sincere enough to abide a "stroke of death" (20) alongside Jesus's human "brethren" (21). It thus offers a corrective to the disguises of Satan, whose appearances throughout Milton's work—whether as an "aged man in rural weeds" or as St. Francis with "a hempen rope round his lustful loins"—merely show meekness.[117] Satan's costumes, however, become binding: in *Paradise Lost* the serpentine "fit vessel" (9.89) that he chooses (9.87) for his temptation eventually becomes his prison. As he prepares to hide within the serpent, he recognizes that the course of action will see him "constrained / Into a beast and mixed with bestial slime / This essence to incarnate and imbrute" (9.163-5). His descent inverts Christ's adoption of a lowly human "disguise" not only because the result of the transformation is significantly more debased, but because he truly becomes the snake: Satan finds himself "constrained" into the form in Pandemonium, where he falls "A monstrous serpent on his belly prone / Reluctant but in vain" (10.514-5). As the antitheatrical context for Milton's early work on "Adam Unparadiz'd" indicates, the relationship between Satan's guile and his bestial transformation in *Paradise Lost* also comes, at least in part, from the theater. Milton reveals the temptation as a theatrical event: Satan, "with show of zeal and love / To man and indignation at

[116] See Parker, "Persona," 593-8, for an extended discussion of the term *persona*. Parker's analysis of the Trinity's various masks, to which my argument here is greatly indebted, occurs on 596.
[117] *Paradise Regained*, 314 and *In Quintum Novembris*, 84 (trans. John Carey), respectively.

his wrong / New part puts on" (9.666-7). Satan "in act" (9.668) becomes like "some orator renowned" (9.670) who stands "in himself collected while each part, / Motion, each act won audience" (9.673-4). Ultimately, the participants' debased show turns both tempter and tempted into the creature whose guise they adopt: Satan becomes the monstrous snake and postlapsarian Adam rashly labels Eve "serpent!" (10.867). Milton adopts the logic of antitheatrical authors who cannot completely jettison the drama they hope to destroy: he too relies upon the medieval vision of an actor-tempter and finds the theater insufficiently theatrical.

But *Paradise Lost* also provides a postlapsarian answer to drama. It not only avoids embodiment and the stage by transposing the action into poetry; it sanctifies performance in the person of the Son. In the Trinity's human *persona,* the epic provides an opportunity for a kind of poetic accomplishment that need not transcend the consequences of original sin. Upon Adam and Eve's fall, the Son best intuits their needs and provides fulfillment. When the first couple repents, the poem provides a striking instance of repetition in which Adam first proposes that he and Eve "to the place / Repairing where He judged us prostrate fall" (10.1086-8) and the narrating poet then reports that they "forthwith to the place / Repairing where he judged them prostrate fell" (10.1098-1100).[118] The lines' duplication continues for seven lines. The ritual comes at the end of an extensive dialogue between Adam and Eve in which Eve models repentance and Adam imagines the possibility of forgiveness. But Milton, having shown the process by which Adam and Eve arrive at repentence, never quotes the characters' repentent speech. Sighs and tears instead provide the "sign / Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek" (10.1103-4); in this moment, particular words don't matter except as evidence of "hearts contrite" (10.1103). The poem, which uses repetition to further signal that Adam and Eve's humble behavior match their

[118] Regina Schwartz discusses ritual repetition after the Fall in the fourth chapter of her *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

remorseful intentions, offers significant evidence of sincerity as a corrective to the danger of hypocrisy within postlapsarian ceremony: an actor—or unrepentant sinner—might well feign his tears. But by frustrating readers' expectations for new content, the episode draws attention to the ritual as a poetic construct, one whose deficiencies the Son ultimately repairs. The first couple's display of fallenness permits God's indwelling: requesting that his father "hear [Man's] sighs though mute, / Unskillful with what words to pray" (11.31-2), the Son offers to "Interpret for him" (11.33). God's second *persona* provides the absent sense for Adam and Eve's unreported speech. The poem shows its creatures most directly available to God when they are least able to access him in return.

Christ's postlapsarian fulfillment of Adam and Eve's deficiencies provides an opportunity for a kind of acting that avoids the taint of satanic "becoming" associated with theatrical performance. In the postlapsarian space, the Son discusses Adam's past role as an *act*: when the Son speaks to the first couple after their sin, he reprimands Adam with the assertion that Eve was "unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part / and person hadst thou known thyself aright" (10.155-6).[119] In hindsight, Adam's responsibility towards Eve takes on a new—and, through the addition of "a term transferred from the theatre," a newly dramatic—urgency. Adam faces a future in which his position over Eve not only proceeds naturally from the order of his creation, but also results from the imposition of a mandate: the Son tells Eve that "to thy husband's will / Thine shall submit: he over thee shall rule" (10.195-6). Adam's act will be a poslapsarian endeavor sanctioned by the Son and his human *persona.* But in a fallen world that threatens satanic "becoming" to the human soul, acting like the Son remains mere acting. Thus Michael instructs Adam in the law whose

[119]"Part, n.1," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), 12b, accessed 18 Sept. 2016. The theatrical usage dates from the fifteenth century. See also *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2007), 547n.

> ceremonies
> Cannot appease, nor Man the moral part
> Perform and, not performing, cannot live
> So Law appears imperfect and but giv'n
> With purpose to resign them in full time
> Up to a better covenant. (12.297-302)

The role exists so that Adam can fail and be fulfilled—as he was in his penitent ritual—by the Son. The Son's presence on postlapsarian earth in *Paradise Lost*, which commands the performance of a role that can only ever be a performance, redeems theatricality for fallen man.

V.

Milton cannot write a drama about the Fall, but his poetry illustrates the impertinences of biblical adaptation with more license than the civic pageants that it rejects. When Eve first speaks in *Paradise Lost*, she speaks of herself: she claims to "oft remember" her own creation and instinctive attraction to her reflection, a companion as inferior to herself as she is to Adam (4.448). Her tale emerges out of an awareness of what it means to be *un*like the husband who, she believes, "Like consort to thyself can nowhere find" (4.448), but her continued preoccupation with an image that she now recognizes to be a mere image exposes the dangers that lesser copies of God's creation pose for the unwary. Eve's first conscious moments, which bespeak an instinctive attraction to her reflection, recall that of Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As she awakes, Eve observes a shape in the water

> Bending to look on me. I started back,
> It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
> Pleased *it* returned as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love. There had I fixed
> Mine eyes till now and pined with vain desire
> Had not a Voice thus warned me. (4.460-7)

Her innocent desire fixed upon a figure simultaneously too like and too inferior to its subject, Eve finds herself drawn to an inanimate creature instead of the creator. The event replicates

idolatry and thus layers a Protestant condemnation of images onto a classical vision of vanity. But Eve's vanity is itself a medieval convention: not only does Peter Comestor suggest that she was tempted by a guileful serpent-maiden and attracted to her own beauty, but the figure of female vanity common to expansions of Genesis resonate with particularly medieval adaptations of the *Metamorphoses* episode. Moralizations of Ovid's tale emphasized Narcissus's self-gratification rather than the frustration that he expresses when he cannot access his reflection's reciprocal affection.[120] Milton puts Eve's vanity back into conversation with classical antiquity, but by using Ovid to complement a vision of excessive self-love, he cannot avoid raising the specter of the medieval serpent-maiden who knows that "like applauds like"; with the Narcissus episode, Milton revives the very "Popishe" tradition that he attempts to eschew.

Further, in its persistent departures from scripture, *Paradise Lost* embraces the parabiblical status that earned medieval drama the ire of Protestant antitheatrical authors. In the events at the side of the pool, the poet chooses to describe "Some thinges not warranted by anye wrytte"; he commits the very same transgression that the Chester cycle's Late Banns disavow. His departure from the Genesis narrative deliberately recalls the language of Genesis: in God's speech, the poet combines elements of Genesis 1:27-8, Genesis 2:24, and Genesis 3:20 to direct Eve towards the husband

> Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
> Inseparably thine. To him shalt bear
> Multitudes like thyself and thence be called
> Mother of human race. (4.471-5)

The paraphrase initially advocates for the adaptive practices utilized within *Paradise Lost*: it remembers the Bible's verses in lines that propose marital union and physical reproduction as the means by which to fulfill and even intensify the delight that Eve experiences while gazing at her

[120] Julia M. Walker, *Medusa's Mirrors: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and the Metamorphosis of the Female Self* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 167-179.

image. Eve, enjoying a figure similar to and yet distinct from its original, discovers the pleasures of representation. And the speech that purportedly draws her away from such pleasures only affirms mere likeness: in Eve's future children, the lines promise the eventual satisfaction of her longing for a "like" object of admiration. As "Mother of human race," Eve will replace her reflection's single "shadow" (470) with "multitudes." Milton revises biblical language in order to support derivative creation; his poem defends the acts of adaptation that it performs.

But the lines also suggest that Eve can only experience the pleasures of representation by relinquishing them.[121] To "enjoy" the husband who will make her children possible, Eve must abandon her reflection and rather acknowledge herself to *be* a reflection. The poem, by pointing Eve towards the man "Whose image thou art," echoes Genesis's description of Adam as the "image of God" (1:27) and thus reiterates a theological tradition that understands Eve to be a less perfect creation than her husband.[122] Just as unfallen Adam only approximates God's excellence, so Eve only approaches Adam's "manly grace / And wisdom" (490-1). The episode goes on to incorporate the "smooth wat'ry image" (480) into the hierarchy: the Hebrew word used for "image," *tselem*, also means "shadow" in other biblical contexts.[123] The ephemeral "shadow" (470) that appears in the pool is a mere likeness of Eve in the same way that Eve is a likeness of

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[121] Mary Nyquist, "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*," in *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (Methuen: London, 1987), 99-127, and particularly 120-3, discusses how this episode in *Paradise Lost* creates a seemingly private and autonomous sphere for Eve's subjective experience only to reinforce paternal law: the illusoriness of Eve's pleasurable space creates the conditions for mutual affection between Adam and Eve. The couple's bliss—their conformity to God's intentions for marital love—exists because Eve gives up her erroneous attachment to her reflection; she submits her desire to Adam's.

[122] Even when defending the "common wothines" of humankind, Calvin, for example, notes that "the woman also, was created after the image of God, though in the seconde degree." Calvin, *A Commentarie of John Calvine, upon the first booke of Moses*, rans. Thomas Tymme (London: George Bishop, 1578), 72. Nyquist, "Gendered Subjectivity," reads these commentaries to support her argument that Milton's accounts of Adam's and Eve's creation structurally reiterate that man, not woman, was created in the image of God—and that woman was therefore created "to satisfy his desire for an other self" (118).

[123] See צֶלֶם(tselem) in Ludvig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. III, transl. M.E.J. Richardson (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996): the fourth entry notes that in the context of Psalm 39:6 and 73:20, "tselem" "means silhouette, fleeting shadows" or "a transitory image."

Adam and Adam of God. By including the reflection in this chain of relationships, the lines connect the attraction that Eve feels towards the "shape" (461) to the delight that Adam, "fondly overcome with female charm" (9.999), feels towards his wife. In the context of both characters' struggle with excessive love for a lesser creature, the episode redirects Eve's gaze towards a superior form of representation while also suggesting a surprising solution for misguided human affection: better to recognize oneself as an image than to fall to an image.

It is a lesson that the poem takes to heart: by insisting upon the dangers of its medium in unfallen Eden, the poem attempts to salvage poetic representation for the postlapsarian protagonists and their progeny. *Paradise Lost* thus adapts biblical drama's self-awareness within its poetry's potentially satanic translations of the Bible's verses. Despite Milton's hope that the "Heavenly Muse" (1.6) who visits nightly can inspire his "advent'rous song" (1.13) to heights "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (1.16), he must repeatedly acknowledge the human obstacles—"an age too late or cold / Climate or years"—that may well "damp my intended wing / ...if all be mine, / Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear" (9.44-7). Even—and perhaps most particularly—Milton's account of unfallen Eden remains entrenched in postlapsarian faults. Within Eve's story, Milton depicts a series of interpretive and poetic processes whose fallibility undermine any claims that biblical adaptation might make to access divine authority. When Milton paraphrases scripture in Book 4, he doesn't speak as God: Eve remembers and reports the Voice's counsel.[124] Although the poem's characters often substitute elaborations upon the Bible's verses for direct quotation, Milton's choice to paraphrase Genesis at Eve's creation stands out for closely approximating the book within an episode wholly foreign to traditional expansions of it. The Narcissus episode inserts its author and his preoccupation with classical

[124] Milton will use the same technique when Adam narrates his conversation with God in Book 8 (249-451)—a conversation that, like Eve's in Book 4, is non-scriptural and unique within the Genesis tradition. See below, final paragraph, for my discussion of the effect.

literature into the foreground of the epic at the very moment that the poem first imagines God in the garden. Eve's interest in her image blends into the more ominous vanity of Narcissus, and God disappears behind Eve's—and Milton's—recreation of his word.[125]

Eve's speech advertises the poem's origins in the fallible minds and fallible technologies of fallible creatures. Within the fiction of the poem, Eve's words are the precedent for biblical speech rather than its derivative, but her language only reaches the seventeenth-century reader by way of the Bible. Although available Greek and Hebrew texts purportedly brought Renaissance Christians closer to the language of scripture, they also exposed the progression of imperfect translations and editorial decisions that separated contemporary Bibles from the actual words that God inspired. In the seventeenth century, for example, ire at Catholic authorities' editing practices spurred Bodleian librarian Thomas James to produce a *Treatise of the Corruptions of Scripture, Counsels, and Fathers* that drew attention to the Bible as a text written and rewritten over centuries.[126] And in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton himself cites scripture's imperfect transmission as grounds for believing "the internal [scripture] of the holy spirit" to be a more trustworthy guide to interpretation (*DDC,* I:30, 811). He argues that "the external scripture," particularly the New Testament, "has actually been corrupted, because, [having been] in the charge of diverse untrustworthy custodians, [having] accordingly [been drawn] from diverse and discrepant manuscripts, it was finally transcribed and printed diversely too" (*DDC,* I:30, 811). And Andrew Willet's commentary on Genesis admits that errors in his work have occurred through "the oversight of the Printers."[127] As an altered version of God's commands, Eve's

[125] Nyquist, in "Gendered Subjectivity," discusses the voice's "curiously secondary or derivative status"; noting that the words are "Marked inescapably by literary invention," she argues that they "seem indeed…to be a kind of echo of the divine voice" (121).
[126] Thomas James, *Treatise of the Corruptions of Scripture, Counsels, and Fathers* (London: Humphrey Lownes, 1612).
[127] Andrew Willet, *Hexpla in Genesin* (London: John Norton, 1608), 4.

speech emphasizes that the best shared tool for understanding God's purposes ultimately comes to the reader as the imperfect product of postlapsarian transmission.

God's word remains inaccessible except through human interlocutors whose voices do not precisely align with scripture, and the tradition of commentary that claims to make up for the inadequacy of received scripture only makes the dangers of Eve's mediatory role more evident. In *Paradise Lost,* Satan reinterprets God's warning that "inevitably thou shalt die" (8.330) to claim instead that "ye shall die perhaps by putting off / Human to put on gods" (9.713-4). Satan's substitution of "perhaps" for God's "inevitably" has a precedent in scholastic exegesis: as I discussed above, interpretations of Genesis argue that when the serpent misrepresents God's command in Genesis 3:1, Eve responds with a misinterpretation of her own that ultimately suggests her doubt in His Word. Luther writes that instead of inserting "the little word 'perchance' [addat particulam 'Forte']" into her translation of the command, Eve "ought to have made her statement as a fact, and a certainty. 'If I eat, I shall surely die.' This faith however Satan so assails, with his insidious speech, as to induce Eve to add the expression, 'perchance.'" The substitution proves that Satan had been able "to cause Eve to corrupt the Word of God."[128] The example of Eve, the first interpreter of God's commands, reveals the perils of commentary: the attempt to explain divine law leads to its perversion.

In *Paradise Lost,* as in the commentary tradition that it augments, language provokes a fall before the Fall: the process of explicating divine speech provides the opportunity for evil to spring from God's great goodness. The poem replaces the "perchance" that the tradition ascribes to Eve with Satan's "perhaps." Satan, as Eden's commentator, illustrates the degeneracy of those

[128] LW: 1:155. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis,* I.iii.3. For an account of reformed readings of Eve's temptation, see Mary Nyquist, "Reading the Fall: Discourse and Drama in *Paradise Lost*" in *English Literary Renaissance* 14 (1984), 199-229, particularly 214-221.

who muddle the Bible's clarity with elaborate explication.[129] His likeness to an ill-intentioned expounder of scripture has roots in medieval vernacular adaptations of Genesis: in the York play of the Fall, for example, Satan urges Eve to "Take hede and þou shalte here, / What þat the matere mente."[130] By treating the prohibition as a text in need of interpretation, York's Satan behaves like the commentators that Milton criticizes in *Of Prelaticall Episcopacy* for proceeding "as if the divine Scripture wanted a supplement, and were to be eek't out" (YPW I: 626).[131] Satan implies the postlapsarian deficiency of God's words in prelapsarian Eden. The serpent in *Paradise Lost* also presumes that divine language falls before the Fall: his feigned dismay that "one man except, / Who sees thee? (and what is one?), who shouldst be seen / A goddess among gods adored and served" (9.545-7) gives way to the narrator's note that "So glozed the Tempter and his proem tuned" (549). The poem informs readers that Satan consciously deceives Eve; Milton here uses "gloze" in its intransitive sense. But the pun on "gloss" also highlights the means Satan uses to delude her: he provides a commentary on the suggestion that Eve acknowledge herself an "image" (4.472) of Adam. *Paradise Lost* turns Satan into the first advocate of a corrupt hermeneutic tradition, and the epic thereby participates in a history of biblical adaptation that uses commentary on Genesis 3 to illuminate commentary's fallen origins.

Representation, like commentary, treats the word of God as if it requires a supplement.[132] So if Eve's seduction begins with the augmentation of God's word and a glance towards the

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[129] Neil Forsyth in *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 282-4, discusses Satan and Eve's affinities with biblical commentators.
[130] Richard Beadle, ed., *The Fall of Man* in *The York Plays*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: EETS, 2009), l.43-4.
[131] Arnold Williams, "Milton and the Renaissance Commentaries on Genesis" in *Modern Philology* 37.3 (1940), 263-78, provides a number of examples from Milton's prose that speak to his alternate condemnation of and admiration for commentaries. Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 215-23, discusses how *Of Prelaticall Episcopacy* manages the contradiction inherent in its argument: doesn't the need to write in defense of scripture belie its argument for scripture's all-sufficiency?
[132] Clare Regan Kinney discusses Milton's overt glosses on the action of *Paradise Lost* in the context of the poem's supplementary expansions on Genesis in *Strategies of Poetic Narrative: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), particularly151-60.

commentary tradition that Satan inaugurates, it also calls attention to the process of adaptation that alters the Bible's verses: it is the poet's rather than the serpent's intervention in scripture that earns Eve's attention. Milton's pun on "gloze" connects the serpent's temptation to God's speech in Book 4: Milton's paraphrase of scripture becomes the gateway to Eve's fall. The passage guarantees Eve the attention of "Multitudes like thyself" (4.474), and it is the serpent who first treats Eve like the image she has learned to be. Standing before Eve "as in gaze admiring" (9.524), Satan praises her as "Fairest resemblance of thy Maker fair" (9.538) and confirms that "Thee all things living gaze on" (9.539). Satan's feigned lament that "one man except, / Who sees thee? (and what is one?), who shouldst be seen / A goddess among gods adored and served" (9.545-7) anticipates the admiration of "Multitudes." To draw Eve from the pool, God guaranteed progeny who call her "Mother of human race" (4.475), and Satan makes their future interest a present reality. Eve responds by remembering the very promise that Satan perverts: assuring him that she and Adam can eat from many of the trees in Eden, she describes a time when "more hands / Help to disburden Nature of her birth" (9.624-5). The language of the postlapsarian poem provides grounds for its prelapsarian subject's trust in the serpent. By building a biblical verse that competes with the pleasures at the pool, Milton replaces an Edenic experience of the divine with its poetic substitute—and opens the door to Satan's temptation.

Milton's version of Genesis goes to great lengths to emphasize the pitfalls of its poetic project. By insisting that adaptation provides the opportunity for Satan's malice and by nesting its commentary within a non-biblical episode, the epic puts God and his scriptures at a distance from the reader, cordoned off behind layers of poetic mediation that only refer back to the process of poetry. The absence of God is the fate of postlapsarian humanity—Adam, upon being told of his impending exile, remarks that "This most afflicts me: that departing hence / As from

his face I shall be hid, deprived / His blessed countenance" (11.315-7)—but *Paradise Lost* also presents its reader with an ever-receding point of origin for divine presence on *pre*lapsarian earth; in unfallen Eden, God does not exist except through forms of mediation that multiply as the poem progresses. On both occasions that the creator appears to Adam and Eve prior to their fall, the characters report the past encounter from the perspective of the narrative present. Nor does God's command that "of this tree we may not taste nor touch" (9.651) signify the first couple's direct relationship to God's word; to Adam and Eve the prohibition remains the "daughter of His voice" (9.653). The injunction thus derives from God in the same way that "Multitudes like thyself" derive from Eve: it reminds the first couple of God's presence but does not precisely mirror divine speech. This perspective on Genesis 2:17 emerges from a suggestion by Augustine, confirmed by Peter Comestor, that even prelapsarian Adam and Eve heard God's voice "with the aid of a creature."[133] In the Genesis tradition, a secondary being transmits the command, and Milton's poem accordingly emphasizes that Adam and Eve experience God's voice as somewhat removed from its origin. The epic presents a distant version of God precisely when he is most available to its protagonists. And by embedding the actual communication of the prohibition into Adam's conversation with Raphael—by offering only Adam's description of his contact with the divine—Milton makes storytelling itself the agent of God's displacement from earth: poetry, not an angel or a prophet, stands between the creator and his audience.[134] Even in prelapsarian Eden, Milton's God exists only as the memory of a transcendent encounter.

[133] Augustine, *DGnL* XI.33. Peter Comestor, *Scolastica Historia* I.16.39-41.

[134] Milton's poetry gestures back to a tradition that prevents an unmediated encounter between unfallen man and his creator by assigning angels, prophets, and dreams as go-betweens: it permits an angel to express the reason why mediation is necessary (and to offer an explanation of Milton's poetic practice). Raphael tells Adam "the secrets of another world" (5.569) only "By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms / As may express them best" (5.573-4).

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