“PUBLIC, SCURRILOUS AND PROFANE”:
TRANSFORMATIONS IN MORAL DRAMA AND POLITICAL ECONOMY,
1465-1599

A Dissertation

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This project demonstrates the intense symbolic and material engagement of popular English moral drama with the social and economic forces of the emerging capitalist state. Challenging long held critical assumptions about the “morality play’s” “tedious” rehashing of conservative religious doctrine, I argue that moral drama is an intensely political from its inception, and that playwrights from the late fifteenth century to the height of Elizabethan playing use literary and performance conventions to both veil and articulate inflammatory perspectives on social justice, labor, and commercialism. As the nascent state lends increasing support to those on the leading edge of the shift toward market dependency—from the yeomen of rural East Anglia to London’s merchant-class citizens—moral drama’s criticism of this target audience grows more overt. This critique solicits and defines a “middling” Protestant ethos. By closely reading literary and performance conventions, I reveal that the difference
between early and late moral drama is best grasped not as the break typically depicted in periodizing accounts but as a proliferation of the spirit of innovation intrinsic to moral drama.

Chapter one argues that *Mankind* (1465) implicates yeoman allegiance as the decisive factor in a psychomachic battle between “good,” a nostalgic feudalism, and “evil,” increasingly monetized market relations. Chapter two examines plays by William Wager (1558-69) that solicit and materialize an urban merchant class, prescribing casuistic discernment against the lures of capitalist gain. Chapter three demonstrates how two chronicle plays, *Cambises* (1561) and *Horestes* (1567) test contrasting theories of state to imagine an economically salubrious solution to social discord that renders Christian morality a cultural practice. In chapter four, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* interrogate the relation of the citizen to his own labor, and the subsumption of that labor to the emerging, market-dependent state economy. By chapter five’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), casuistry has become social judgement and virtue is signified by good taste, as Jonson stages a ubiquitous market mentality that infects all social relations.
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PREFACE

For well over a century, moral drama was the formal backbone of a thriving, popular early English theater. In its itinerant and professional form, moral drama emerged in the late fifteenth century from the same tumultuous socioeconomic transformations that gave rise to capitalism and the nation state.\(^1\) Subsequently, moral drama struggled to come to grips with these coterminous forces, interrogating, figuring and even prefiguring what, in turn, shaped it. This intense material and symbolic interaction with market and state produced moral drama as a fiercely political form: a stance veiled by its homogenizing use of convention. Scholars of early modern drama tend to view moral plays as prohibitively “tedious” for precisely this conventionalism (i.e., its didactic rehashing of orthodox doctrine, its basic plot-line, etc.). This perspective mischaracterizes what is, in fact, a vibrant and sophisticated form. In recovering a sense of moral drama’s aggressive and often risky engagement with its audiences, we discover performances designed to provoke, texts that explore volatile issues of market and state with a subtlety that has not been adequately recognized. It is the moral play’s conventional appearance that enables it to draw on exogenous, semantically-charged forms and discourses to convey its topical messages. The stability of the drama’s generic characteristics (personifications, the abstract battle between virtue and vice, etc.) serve as the framework within which popular modes and

\(^1\)There is also an elite form of moral drama whose distinguishing features will be discussed in the first chapter. While cross-pollination between popular and elite forms frequently occurred, there were distinctive differences.
genres—from the courtly love lyric to the civic procession—express the play’s otherwise “silent” critique or warning. Devices themselves carry ideological meaning that astute playwrights emphasize or modify in response to topical issues and events. In this way, moral drama retains its vigor and relevance up through its final transformation on the London stage. The moral play’s presence in London plays is not atavistic but the continuation of a potent mainline tradition. Against periodizing accounts of drama history, I argue that the difference between early and later popular English drama is best understood not in terms of the break so often depicted but as a proliferation of the spirit of innovation intrinsic to moral drama.

1. The Problem

In 1639, approximately seventy years after watching a performance of the now-lost moral play, *The Cradle of Security*, R. Willis set down the following recollection:

In the city of Gloucester the manner is (as I think it is in other like corporations) that when players of interludes come to town they first attend the Mayor to inform him what nobleman’s servants they are, and so to get license for their public playing; and if the Mayor like the actors or would show respect to their lord and master he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the aldermen and common council of the city; and that is called the Mayor’s play, where every one that will comes in without money, the Mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit to show respect unto them. At such a play, my father took me with him and made me stand between his legs as he sat upon one of the benches where we saw and heard very well. The play was called *The Cradle of Security*, wherein was personated a king or some great prince with his courtiers of several kinds, amongst which three ladies were in special grace with him; and they keeping him in delights and pleasures drew him from his graver counselors, hearing of sermons, and listening to good counsel and admonitions, that in the end they got him to lie down in a cradle upon the stage, where these three ladies joining in a sweet song rocked him asleep that he snorted again, and in the meantime closely conveyed under the cloths wherewithal he was covered a vizard like a swine’s snout upon his face, with three wire chains fastened thereunto, the other end whereof being holden severally
by those three ladies, who fall to singing again, and then discovered his face that the spectators might see how they had transformed him, going on with their singing; whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another door at the farthest end of the stage two old men, the one in blue with a Sergeant at Arms, his mace on his shoulder, the other in red with a drawn sword in his hand, and leaning with the other hand upon the other’s shoulder, and so they two went along in a soft pace round about by the skirt of the stage, till at last they came to the cradle when all the court was in greatest jollity, and then the foremost old man with his mace struck a fearful blow upon the cradle; whereat all the courtiers with the three ladies and the vizier all vanished; and the desolate prince, starting up bare-faced and finding himself thus sent for to judgement, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carried away by wicked spirits. This prince did personate in the moral, the Wicked of the world; the three Ladies, Pride, Covetousness, and Luxury, the two old men, the End of the World, and the Last Judgement. This sight took such impression in me that when I came toward’s man’s estate, it was as fresh in my memory, as if I had seen it newly acted.  

One of the few, extended eye-witness accounts of this type of play, Willis is frequently cited in defense of moral drama’s former impact. Yet, few agree about what Willis found so moving. Some cite the “spectacular [stage] business” that ostensibly enriched such plays; others propose its dramatization of homiletic lessons or the glamour of the play’s “figurative [courtly] setting.” Almost always, excerpts from Willis are couched in the barely repressed tone of sympathy tinged with sympathy tinged with

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superiority reserved for those who do not yet know better than to be pleased with what they have. Yet, Willis is a contemporary of the best of the London stage poets. His subsequent, brief comparison of *Cradle* to later London plays trods the familiar, medieval ground of comparing “harmless [educational] morals” to less wholesome “spectacles.”5 The memory of playgoing launches an equally predictable discussion about the education of children, but the description of the play itself offers considerable insight into why popular English moral drama thrived for more than a century, even after alternatives became available.

*Cradle* is inseparable, for Willis, from the conditions of its performance. It is so enmeshed in the social and political fabric of its time and place, that even if the boy Willis does not understand the political, social and economic ramifications of the Lord Mayor’s show, his mind subsequently files away this important, contextualizing information with his memory of the play. He tells us how the performance of *Cradle* relies on another kind of performance: a series of political and economic shows of “respect” between greater and lesser community leaders, mediated by touring players. Thus, the play is associated with home, the “city of Gloucester” in the 1570s; with occasion, “the Mayor’s show”; and with intimacy and privilege, “my father took me with him,” where Willis stood “between his legs.” The description of costumes suggests that they were vividly iconic yet topical: the End of the World resembles “a Sergeant at Arms, his mace on his shoulder,” while the Last Judgement wears red and

5Willis, *Mount Tabor*, 114. For the medieval, clerical distinction between wholesome biblical and moral plays and “sacrilegious entertainments and spectacles” see Lawrence M. Clopper’s *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
wields the sword of judgement, like a post-Resurrection Christ. Some of the gestures were stylized, as seen in the virtuous characters’ movement around the perimeter of the stage, “leaning with the other hand upon the other’s shoulder.” Willis demonstrates theatrical knowledge as he locates them “round about by the skirt of the stage,” and his interpretive skill as he explains what the main characters “personate.”

In this latter half of Mount Tabor, Willis’s memory of the play functions, like the other “occasional observations and meditations” gathered here, as a chronological milestone in what amounts to his memoirs. Appended like an afterthought, the moral of Cradle justifies its inclusion in Willis’s book as proof “out of mine owne experience” that “great care [needs to] be had in the education of children.” Yet, the moral also affords Willis the pleasure of displaying his grasp of his culture’s symbolic strategies. If Willis’s experience is anything like that of his contemporaries, we may infer that moral drama connects with its audience on numerous affective and intellectual levels: it affirms the political and economic operations of Gloucester, and the respectable status of the Willises, “upon one of the [well-situated] benches”; it entertains with its narrative, costumes and music; and it solicits interpretation. The play, for Willis, is a formative experience, on par with the formal education he subsequently describes. Having come to his adult “estate,” the play (still “fresh” in

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7Willis, Mount Tabor, title page.

8Conceivably, the interpretation was part of a didactic epilogue, a common enough feature of moral drama. Yet, if this is so, why isn’t this information included, and why does he save it for the end, just before his thoughts on the play’s personal impact? It seems to me that the interpretation, like the punch-line of a joke, is precisely where the speaker steps out in a platea-like mental space beyond his narrative, to assert his own cleverness.
memory) continues to guide his “meditations,” stimulating thought even as he writes in old age, urging him to make connections between the play and his own work-a-day world.

This world, for the majority of English in the 1570s, was neither private, priggish nor sacred in a way cloistered from worldly affairs. It was socially and politically complex, as Willis’s account suggests, rife with all the tensions that made a swinish prince’s arrest by a Sergeant intriguing to the citizens of Gloucester and their magnanimous Mayor.9 Significantly, Willis’s account also indicates that while religion, especially the Protestant moral code that colors his interpretation, is a feature of the play, it is neither its sole nor arguably its most important element. The subtitle of Mount Tabor is, “the Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner,” but with the exception of the concluding moral (which does not seem to have been spoken by an epilogue), Willis recalls only two overtly religious moments in the play: when the king is tempted away from the “hearing of sermons,” and when he is carried off “by wicked spirits.” Nor does the play evoke particularly religious thoughts. It is not perceived as dramatized doctrine.

Yet, moral plays are commonly assumed to have been sermones corporei.10 This perception has warped our perception of moral drama’s “development,” as a slow, inexorable slide from the lofty religious concerns of Castle of Perseverence, to the

9As Peter H. Greenfield reminds us, not all mayor’s plays were free, “Touring,” A New History of Early English Drama, ed., John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 255.

vulgar, secular clowning of “belated” “hybrids” like Cambises prior to the London stage’s break with its primitive precursors. 11 Willis, and popular moral plays themselves, tell a more interesting story. Read with the conditions of their production, moral plays prove to be a deeply resonant, highly coded but flexible form whose capacity for treating “secular,” politically provocative issues was recognized from the beginning. They also suggest what my research bears out: that moral drama develops in more or less conscious response to the crisis of emerging capitalism and the early modern state. In tracing tropes like labor, amity, and cutpurse theft over more than a century, through eight plays by six different writers, I reveal the degree to which superfluity, commercialism and market relations can be considered core concerns of the genre. Moral drama, like other literary “formal realizations,” is a sign of deeper “corresponding social and historical configurations.” 12

Playwrights who take up moral drama generally have something urgent to convey about the radical changes of the day, but they find themselves in a challenging rhetorical position. Their target audience is usually the sector that profits most from the shift toward market dependency—the yeomen of rural, fifteenth-century East Anglia, the merchant-class citizens of late sixteenth-century London. They need to


coerce without insulting, convey unwelcome messages through traditionally marginalized players who lack authority to instruct. Consequently, moral drama leans heavily on convention to veil its aggression.

While masked aggression is a consistent feature of moral drama, the genre’s conventions, like its targets, must be carefully historicized to account for the semantic shifts that occur with historical change. Thus, for example, the effective, Herodian threats of Mankind’s (1465) Tityvillus become a shameful lack of mannerly comportment in The Longer Thou Livest’s (1567) Wrath. By Jonson’s Every Man Out of His Humour (1599), such martial posturing is reduced to “excellent sport” for sophisticated onlookers; the real power brokers, as Marlowe showed ten years earlier in Jew of Malta, are pious political strategists. Tracking similar conventions through the plays indicates that moral drama’s presence on the London stage is not atavistic, as most believe, but a market-motivated intensification of a tradition of innovation.

Finally, I suggest that moral drama, in its relentless soliciting, hectoring and defining of a middling sort, contributes to a burgeoning class consciousness.

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14 Of the middling sort, historians like Richard Lachman and G.E. Mingay make the following generalities: they are yeomen, rich artisans and higher, but of no higher status than knights by means of birth, education, wealth and/or leisure. Richard Lachman, From Manor to Market: Structural Change in England, 1536-1640 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 97; G.E. Mingay, The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class (London and New York: Longman, 1976), 2. Keith Wrightson makes a good case about the rarity of this term, and how those we might now refer to as “middling” did not understand themselves as such, but generally identified with their social superiors as part of “the better sort.” “Sorts of People’ in Tudor and Stuart England,” The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800, ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 28-51. Nevertheless, I use the term “middling sort” or “type” as the least anachronistic.
2. Genre and Traditions

All extended studies of moral drama include a definition of generic characteristics. This is due to two interrelated circumstances, the second of which is largely an effect of the first. The first is that moral drama is known by a great variety of terms in its period, including “interlude,” “comedie,” “historie,” and “morall.” The second is that moral drama scholarship has been occupied, since at least the 1960s, with making sense of this apparent confusion of kinds. The earliest organizing principle was chronological, and it emerged largely in tandem with the now discredited theory of organic evolutionary dramatic development promoted most famously by E.K. Chamber’s *The Medieval Stage*. This narrative, criticized as early as Jerome Taylor’s 1972 introduction to *Medieval English Drama*, presumed a natural progression from “simple” folk and liturgical ritual to “complex” Renaissance drama, a move which, in effect, reduced all of medieval drama to rehearsals for Shakespeare. Focusing specifically on the link between moral drama and Shakespeare, Bernard Spivack worked out a kind of critical “archeology,” in which successive layers of dramatic bed rock—from the early “Psychomachia” to the “transitional” or “hybrid” period—could be mined for “explanations” for Shakespeare’s “baffl[ing]” villains. If subsequent studies of moral drama tempered...
this Shakespearean telos, they generally retained Spivack’s periodization. In 1962, David Bevington added the clarifying distinction between plays written for “popular” venues and those written for “elite” ones.\textsuperscript{19}

Objections to these categories, while few, have been instructional. Merle Fifield, later supported by W.A. Davenport, argued that wholesale application of generic identifiers effaced important differences between plays, and that a single pattern could never adequately define the moral drama as a genre.\textsuperscript{20} Marion Jones following Robert Potter took specific issue with the extension of the term “Psychomachia” applied to “whole schemes of analysis of the moral tradition.”\textsuperscript{21} Such complaints register a legitimate dissatisfaction with the homogenizing tendencies of moral drama criticism, yet the source of frustration has been mischaracterized as a problem with extant categories. The unsatisfactory alternatives have been to organize plays around a number of “themes,” or eschew the moral drama label altogether, in acknowledgment of the intense cross-fertilization of moral drama with other medieval forms.\textsuperscript{22} This resulted in a rather surreptitious use of old patterns tricked out in descriptors like


\textsuperscript{22}Fifield exemplifies the former, in “Methods and Modes: The Application of Genre Theory to Descriptions of Moral Plays,” Everyman & Company: Essays on the Theme and Structure of the European Moral Play, ed. Donald Gilman (New York: AMS Press, 1988), and Davenport, the latter, in Fifteenth-century English Drama. An interesting line of interrogation that problematizes our separation of Corpus Christi biblical cycle plays, ostensibly “an assertion of solidarity,” from the putatively “individualistic” moral plays is found in Martin Stevens’s Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual
“allegorical,” “hortatory” or “comic design,” which seek to avoid, even as they invoke, the “received” model of which they are already a part. I must concur with Lawrence Clopper that the old definitions may be less helpful than we might wish, but they are certainly more useful than we know how to do without.

Cognizant of such difficulties, and yet encouraged by what genre theorist Alastair Fowler maintains is genre’s necessary flexibility, I want to suggest that “psychomachia” remains the best term to describe early moral plays. In the first place, it invokes the salient features of moral drama: its narrative pattern, the battle metaphor, abstract personifications and its infamous didacticism, or rhetorical stance. Second, because of its power to evoke a very specific form, “psychomachia” encourages us to think about the distance between later moral drama and a play like Mankind. And finally, I am interested in the term’s association, not with Prudentius, but with abstraction—a feature recent criticism has denounced as the product of inadequate reading, and devised methods for overcoming, without wondering if the instincts of earlier critics to homogenize might point to something intrinsic to the form. I have found that moral plays self-consciously work to appear like all other moral plays. Like a cutpurse in a crowd, the well-wrought moral play embraces the anonymity that disguises its purpose. In this way it delivers its message in a manner palatable to as many members of its heterogeneous audience as possible. As much as


23Fifield, “Methods and Modes,” passim.
24Clopper, Drama, Play and Game, 23, 236.
any other genre, moral drama protects the social realm even as it feeds it precisely what it does not want to know. It accomplishes this, from its inception, by cloaking its messages in conventions that homogenize and abstract.

The classic, psychomachic narrative is often described as a movement from innocence, to fall, to redemption.\(^{26}\) It was this pattern that motivated early criticism to pronounce moral plays essentially “comic” in design, a view since complicated by writers like A.C. Cawley and Merle Fifield, who remind us that protagonists of the earliest plays often died out of grace and were only saved subsequently.\(^ {27}\) In light of this, and in anticipation of the more definitively tragic plays of the 1560s and ‘70s, W.A. Davenport’s pattern of “ignorance, experience and realisation” may be more accurate.\(^ {28}\) Some have claimed that the pilgrimage evident in some moral plays is the form’s true narrative pattern but it strikes me as only one possible treatment of a more basic pattern. The pilgrimage, if it is in plays like *Mankind*, or *Enough is As Good as a Feast*, would have to be a purely figurative journey through one short segment of adult life towards death.\(^ {29}\)

The second distinguishing feature of popular moral drama is its verbal or physical confrontations between virtuous and vicious figures for the “soul” or allegiance of a mankind protagonist. Robert Potter and others have tried to downplay the significance

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\(^{28}\) Davenport, *Fifteenth-Century English Drama*, 5.

of the psychomachic battle in order to detach moral drama from its association with Prudentius, but I believe this conflict is not only fundamental to the form, but one of the more fruitful ideological problems it poses its writers.³⁰ Muriel C. Bradbrook is right to insist that moral drama’s very abstraction is the condition for “extreme topicality.”³¹ Over the course of my study, we will see how the form mutates to accommodate contemporary culture, taking on new topical referents and absorbing generic models currently in vogue (the folk game, the chronicle history, the prodigal son play, and the saint’s life). With the addition of new elements, all of which carry their own ideological exigencies, the difficulty of dramatizing a conflict that reveals certain characters to be vicious while others are virtuous, inspires truly novel solutions.

One manner of achieving this is through the manipulation of moral drama’s abstract characterization, the third key characteristic of the genre. As we will see, abstract characters are far more of an aid to interpretation than is generally recognized, though not for lack of revisioning in medieval drama scholarship. The newer way of understanding these erstwhile embarrassments was summed up and further developed by Natalie Crohn Schmitt in her 1982 essay for Drama in the Middle Ages. Recovering the logic inherent in medieval personifications, Schmitt reminds us that in the Middle Ages, the world, the flesh and the devil were considered “things of equal reality,” and the line between what was external and internal to man was far less solid

³⁰For arguments specifically attacking the psychomachia designation see Potter’s English Morality Play, 37-9, and Marion Jones' “Early Moral Plays.” Both are concerned with debunking the genetic link to Prudentius.

than it is today. Clopper, and later Paul Whitfield White, affirmed Schmitt’s assertion that character has always been a part of personifications in that players impart specific qualities to a role in performance. Finally, based on a particular understanding of allegory—as a dynamic of deft horizontal movements between diverse registers that are drawn into tension with one another without being locked into any single hierarchy—Schmitt extends Kolve’s insistence that figures in these plays enjoy “multiple identities” layers of meaning which enhance rather than compete with one another.

Last, but perhaps first among the most despised characteristics of popular moral drama, is moral drama’s didactic rhetorical mode. In his 1969 introduction to English Morality Plays, Schell noted that “we instinctively resent the notion that someone is setting out to teach us how to behave. . .especially when he intends to do so in a place where we expect amusement, excitement, or at the most the raising and quieting of pity and fear.” Such modern impatience still clouds our reception of moral drama, and yet it need not be so for we share with the writers and original viewers of these plays a fascination with persuasive rhetoric. From revisionist histories, to campaign speeches, to stand-up comedy, we eagerly attend the rhetorically adept speaker or writer’s thrusts and evasions even when, or perhaps especially when, they seem


33 Clopper, Drama, Play and Game, 248-9; White, Theatre and Reformation, 78; Schmitt “The Idea of a Person,” 309.


35 Schell, English Morality Plays, vi.
directed toward us. If the rules of engagement have changed, the audience’s ability to
tolerate and even enjoy a degree of aggression and their own ambivalence toward the
aggressor(s), has not. That this ambivalence could tip over into delight or disgust at
any moment merely electrifies the rhetorical scene.

Moral drama does not merely solicit its audience, it features it. Through the platea
work of prologue, epilogue and characters like the Vice, audience is directly
acknowledged as both focus and force. The players may be the Earl of Leicester’s
Men, but their immediate performance is beholden to the goodwill and bounty of its
popular audience. In this way, the rhetorical situation of moral drama itself stimulates
what Michael Bristol claims is a “consideration of collective life and of subjectivity
other than those proposed and legitimated by a hegemonic culture.”36 The players and
playwrights push; the audience pushes back. This communicative dialectic informed
the genre from its beginning, as first priests and later, professional writers trained in
classical rhetoric labored to move without alienating.

Bevington was the first to show how features of this drama developed in response
to the demands of popular, professional playing. 37 By establishing a popular canon,
and then demonstrating how the circumstances of itinerant playing shaped the
structure of plays up to the time of Marlowe, Bevington’s From Mankind to Marlowe
claimed for moral drama a value it had not hitherto enjoyed. It will be noted that, with
the exception of Every Man Out, the plays I examine here are included in Bevington’s

36Michael D. Bristol, Carnival and Theatre: Plebian Culture and the Structure of Authority in

37Bevington’s larger purpose in From Mankind to Marlowe is to demonstrate a continuity between
the dramatic structure of late medieval popular plays, inflected by the exigencies of troupe production,
and that of the plays and dramaturgy of the early London stage as exemplified in the work of Marlowe.
study. And, like Bevington’s, Wickham’s and Weimann’s, my study insists on the
continuity of the popular, native tradition with the “Renaissance” drama of the
purpose-built London stage. 38 But where Bevington’s scope is vast, touching on more
than fifty plays in order to trace out a coherent line of development, specifically from
_Mankind to Marlowe_, my scope is small, dependent on the close reading of little more
than a handful of plays against the conditions of their production to argue that moral
drama’s growth is the direct result of its having been a site for struggle between the
antagonistic and mutually constitutive emergent forces of theater, market and state. 39
Bevington sees Marlowe as the culmination of the “morality” line—at once a
successful reviver of an old form, and the accidental producer of a generic clash
between the new “realistic expression” and the “traditional moral pattern” whose
“moral irresolution” it will take a Shakespeare to fully control. 40 In contrast, my study
understands Marlowe as one of two representatives of moral drama’s thriving
existence and transformation on the London stage, proof positive that the tradition did
not fade into oblivion but was converted into forms we now recognize as Jacobean
tragedy and city comedy as stage poets wrangled with the intensifying issues of
theater, market and state. Bevington and I agree on the flexibility of the genre and the
innovation of its producers until we reach the London stage. Then, in Bevington’s
narrative, the new contradictions between the “old homiletic structure” of moral drama

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38 More on my engagement with Wickham and Weimann, shortly.

39 Closer to my focus is Louis B. Wright’s article, “Social Aspects of Some Belated Moralities,” _Anglia_ 54 (1930), which insists that the later moral plays “concern economic and social problems,” 109. He does no close reading, and plots large numbers of plays along an “inevitable” development to secularism, but he begins to historicize the issues and themes of the plays in a way that remains a rarity in such studies, 107.

40 Bevington, _Mankind to Marlowe_, 251, 261.
and more “lifelike” secular narrative put Marlowe out of his depth.\textsuperscript{41} This might be the conclusion to draw if we were inclined to examine Marlowe’s use of moral drama as some studies have done with Shakespeare’s: identifying the appearance of moral drama devices, motifs and patterns, then reading them as if they themselves were explanations, i.e., “this is Vice comedy,” always and at all times a parody of serious action.\textsuperscript{42} In contrast, I read generic conventions neither as static referents, nor as influences, but for their function within specific plays and historical conditions, something I will explain more thoroughly in the upcoming discussion of my method of reading.

After Bevington, research on the structure and sources of moral drama stalled, leading Alan C. Dessen to lament the fact that for most, “the development (to many readers, the degeneration) of the moral plays has been accurately mapped, with little need for new voyages of discovery.”\textsuperscript{43} The one exception to this rule has been in the area of performance studies. As early as 1958, T.W. Craik made a case for “the effectiveness of these [moral] plays in performance.”\textsuperscript{44} Bevington’s book is also at its most fascinating when it connects the moral plays to the exigencies of popular production. This growing wave of interest in performance and popular form studies, which reached its first peak in the 1970’s, added a much-needed boost to the perceived appeal of these plays. Revivals by groups like the \textit{Poculi Ludique Societas} confirmed William Tydeman’s remark that while “frequently unrewarding to read, these plays

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid, 218, 222.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 229.
\textsuperscript{43}Dessen, Late Moral Plays, 1.
often blossom into life in the warmth of actual presentation."

By the time Robert Weimann’s *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition* was translated, moral drama’s popular, theatrical elements were not so much a source of embarrassment as of attraction.  

Like Glynne Wickham before him, Weimann contested the “heavy literary bias” of older early English drama scholarship, and underscored the ritual function—the social work done by spectacle, gesture and space—retained in moral drama.  

We must indeed concern ourselves with the language of staging, prop, costume and blocking. Producers and consumers of medieval and early modern drama were well versed in this language and expected it to convey meaning. Yet, with few exceptions, the modern reading of performance conventions in moral drama has lacked the nuance to motivate more serious study of individual moral plays. The problem appears to be that the apparent dichotomy of literary versus performance studies prevents those committed to the latter from using the former’s incisive tools. Performance conventions are a crucial part of my study, but I read them in the same way that I read literary conventions, which is to say that any divergence from past

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examples is examined in view of changing historical conditions. For example, Herod, the tyrannical killer of innocents strongly associated with the Biblical cycles, often appears in the plays I study in one guise or another. For the most part, the audience that would have recognized new Herodian incarnations in a play would not have been thinking of literary conventions, but of the performance conventions of mad Herod, running “wode” in the streets. As Weimann suggests, the Chester and York Herods connect Biblical and apocryphal history to contemporary ideas about feudal lordship. In *Mankind*, the Herodian Tityvillus is an absentee landlord who returns to his county seat only when low on cash, or when summoned to solve a dispute. By the time Wager takes up this convention in *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, Herod has become the submerged trope that renders the tyranny of middling officials a typological figure for the Marian persecution of innocents. *Cambises’* Herod, now the alcoholic title character, functions in the play as a test of good counsel, and of the new, market-based bonds of amity that deflect an equally market-inflected antagonism. As we will see, popular moral drama often incorporates other genres as modes or tropes in this manner—a flexibility which enables it to weather the reformation as well as the greater stringency of late sixteenth-century censorship.

By now, it will be apparent that I engage one other conversation in early modern drama scholarship: what have been called “market and theater studies.” For all the

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variations in stance and emphasis, the grounding assumption of such studies is that the form of early modern theater figured, when it did not actually prefigure, the emerging relations of a market society. For Jean Christophe-Agnew’s seminal *Worlds Apart*, the period of emerging market relations begins around 1550. Subsequent book-length market and theater studies begin later, with “the age of Shakespeare.” My study pushes back the period of intensifying interaction between market, theater and the social world to the late fifteenth century. This complicates yet another way we typically draw distinctions between early modern and medieval drama, for many of the phenomena Agnew, Douglas Bruster or Jean Howard describe as arising from the material and ideological interaction of theater and market are already evident, in recognizable form, in the pre-history of the London stage. For example, Agnew notes how the London stage play takes on the shape of the compact the player-playwright “had struck with his paying audience,” but already in *Mankind*, this compact is being figured and interrogated in the mid-play trick of the pass-the-hat collection, or quête.

My insistence on continuity calls for an improved understanding of popular moral drama’s importance as a key site in the public working out of what we would now call

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51 Agnew briefly discusses fifteenth and sixteenth-century “morality plays,” but his understanding of their relation to cycle plays, their sense of “reality” vs. “illusion” and their evolutionary role in a scheme of development rely on older formulations that have recently changed under scrutiny. He also comments on English estates satire of the early sixteenth century as a forerunner for rogue literature, but in Agnew’s estimation, “it is difficult to know when the truculence . . . betokened a genuine change in social structure as opposed to a mere rising of the bile,” *Worlds Apart*, 104-09; 61.

52 Ibid., 124.
issues of market relations. That this “worldly” engagement occurred earlier and with
greater subtlety and intelligence than is commonly imagined should stimulate new
approaches to the largely ignored sixteenth-century plays performed prior to the
inauguration of the London stage. For example, while my present focus prevents it,
one senses where greater attention to gender or environmental concerns would open
up the extraordinary nexus of matricide, nature and rape in Pickeryng’s Horestes.
Likewise, the juxtaposition of Marlowe’s Barabas with Wager’s Heavenly Man
suggests something intriguing about the trope of martyrdom in the constitution of a
certain idea of ideal citizen subjectivity. Moral plays quite regularly represent a move
in a clash between class positions, and in this, they contain important information
about the development of political consciousness and subjectivity in this period.

3. Organization

For clarity’s sake, each chapter features four discrete sections: criticism; genre and
performance history; economic and topical issues relevant to the particular chapter’s
play(s); and conclusions, in which I make connections between the prior three sections
in order to analyze a play’s function as a symbolic act. This artificial separation of
what are ordinarily densely interwoven objects of study gives me room to elaborate on
elements of a play within relatively focused horizons of interpretation. In other words,
the first section surveys the major scholarship on the chapter’s play(s) and gives a
context for my more pointed critical engagements in subsequent sections. The second
section pinpoints specific literary and performance conventions, and compares their
function in the play(s) to past critical interpretations, and to examples from their
literary and performance history. For example, a convention scholarship has traditionally dismissed as bloodless and unimaginative—say, William Wager’s use of the “personifications,” “Hireling,” and “Tenant” in The Longer Thou Livest—gets contextualized in the genre section to illuminate its relation to earlier abstractions like Mankind’s Myscheff, and later social types like Jonson’s Deliro. What might Wager’s deviations indicate about the mid-century moral play’s contribution to the form’s development? How might this impact or derive from the performance conditions of the itinerant troupe that performed Wager’s work? My third section investigates topical (primarily economic) issues to which the play(s) somehow allude. We might ask, in this third section, how Wager’s abstractions draw new semantic force from local socioeconomic changes. What about class relations, specific to hirelings and tenants in the 1560s, make Wager’s transitional characters preferable to earlier psychomachic abstractions, and what still limits Wager to the use of generalizing names? Is a side of a conflict suppressed by the play, and what might this imply? How might these elements constitute a move in a contemporary confrontation between classes? The fourth, concluding section allows me to consider what fears or fantasies are suppressed and expressed, from the personal level of the playwright to the collective level of the play’s social world. What, to return to our example, might be articulated in Tenant and Hireling’s patient sufferance of Worldly Man’s oppression? What message does the presence of Tenant, especially, convey about the process of change in land allocation and use in this period? In short, I examine conventions against a variety of historical conditions. Whether the convention is Vice negation, the call-for-room, or someone being carried out on the devil’s back, the apparent dead-
end of moral drama cliché can itself be a springboard for getting at levels of meaning latent to the play’s “manifest” or overt, content.

This insight owes much to Fredric Jameson’s approach to reading in *The Political Unconscious.* As first sketched out in “Metacommentary,” Jameson’s approach synthesizes elements of formalism, psychoanalysis and Marxist criticism. One of its initial attractions, for me, was the insistence on starting with a close analysis of the text. My largest complaint about moral drama criticism is its lack of close reading of the individual plays. Risky for genres less dependent on convention, this omission has been deadly to moral drama, an error that will only be amended when more nuanced analyses of the plays become available. Performance studies, while creating an interest in producing and seeing these plays acted, have done little in the way of getting people to *read* them. Jameson offers a way in, based on a certain understanding of the structure of genre, and its function in the social realm.

The work, for Jameson, consists of the “raw material” of lived experience—which is to say a subjective interpretation of experience always already shaped by the social world. This gets refashioned into “manifest content” by a censorship function. As with Freud, the censorship function is performed to some degree at the level of the writer’s unconscious, but for Jameson, who wants to reassert the political content of daily life, it is also accomplished at a larger, social level by genre. Produced collectively in accord with the cultural, political, and economic codes of a particular

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culture, genre renders a lived experience presentable to society, disguising and in other ways repressing whatever about that experience is deemed inadmissible to conscious realization. To Jameson’s Marxian-inflected understanding, the inadmissible is ultimately the realization of our impoverishment at the hands of the social system we occupy. The irresolvable social contradictions and conflicts that impinge on our sense of personal fulfillment become the “latent content” the work strives to conceal, the matter from which the political unconscious that infuses everyday life and individual fantasy, alike—the understanding of history as a history of class struggle—threatens to emerge.  

Convention is genre’s way of diverting us from this “latent content.” It encodes as structural norms such historically contingent things as topical dilemmas and class-specific value systems. To see how this works, I want to briefly recall Jameson’s discussion of the development of romance in the second chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, in which he analyses the way twelfth-century romance reworks the *chanson de geste*. He reads a topical contradiction in the fact that the *chanson’s* central organizing principle, good versus evil, finds itself at odds with the emergent class solidarity of the feudal nobility. Romance solves this problem through the convention of the unknown knight, whose refusal to publish his identity “stamps him as the bearer of the category of evil.” When defeated, the unknown knight reveals his name and is reabsorbed into the good social class, while the “evil” is unbound and contained an account of the social, reducing it to subjective experience, and the political to a family romance. See “Metacommentary,” and *Political Unconscious*, 22-6, 64-8.

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55 Ibid., 20.
56 Ibid., 118-9.
projected into the “free-floating” miasma of sorcery and dark magic that pervades the romance world. The ideological problem (latent content) that could not be reconciled—how the challenger can be thought of as “evil” when he is of the same social class, subject to the same Christian chivalric ethos, etc. as the reader—is resolved through convention: the hostile secrecy of the unknown knight, the unlocalized malice of the romance landscape.\textsuperscript{58}

Jameson’s reading examines convention in a work closely, in relation to larger generic patterns (how is the romance like and unlike the \textit{chanson}?), and in relation to history (what historical changes render the older convention untenable?). It investigates elements shared by examples in what Fowler would call a generic “family,” in order to sharpen our sense of a particular work’s difference from its generic relations.\textsuperscript{59} In the case of moral drama, this calls for thinking not only about a particular play’s relation to its literary history, but to its performance history, as well. For this reason, I extend Jameson’s approach to reading to conventions of dramaturgy.

The strength of this approach is that it permits me to isolate even minute tensions and divergences in a play through close reading, and then consider them at multiple levels: the textual, the intertextual, the performance-related, the synchronic event-level and the diachronic history-as-successive periods level. Like many striving to understand “the social unity of material and symbolic production,” I favor a dialectical approach that assumes a relationship that is not so much reflective (the play mirrors

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 119.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 119.

\textsuperscript{59}Fowler insists that genre is not reducible to classification, but should be thought of in terms of a “family” whose members are all related “without necessarily having a single feature shared by all,” \textit{Kinds of Literature}, 41-2.
historical conditions) as mutually determining.\textsuperscript{60} So, for example, *Mankind’s* depiction of lesser “gentle” men as amoral, theatrical mimics lays the foundation for characters as diverse as Wager’s Moros (*The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art* 1558-69), Nashe’s Jack Wilton (*The Unfortunate Traveler* 1593) and Marlowe’s Faustus (*Doctor Faustus* 1588)—symbolic constructions which both memorialize and effect the way their specific cultures regard their “upstart crow[s].”\textsuperscript{61} Viewed against the arch of diachronic history, which is to say history as successive periods, stages or movements, *Mankind’s* “jentyllman” constitutes an ideological move, reproduced in the century to come (but not in any uncomplicated way by the other works I listed), to shame the most visibly mobile group of its time into social and economic stasis (*Mankind* 483).

I join with recent currents of neo-Marxist and cultural materialist analysis in often moving beyond such classic thematic interests as class struggle, commodification and market imperatives, to raise questions more readily associated with disciplines like anthropology, psychology, and sociology. For example, the analyses here profit from the insights of social anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff, whose thinking about the mechanics of market processes make patterns evident in the plays that are, perhaps, less than accessible to the playwrights, themselves.\textsuperscript{62} The extension

\textsuperscript{60}Jameson, “Actually Existing Marxism,” *Polygraph* 6.7 (1993), 175.


of these theorists, however, like the ideas of Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Freud is strictly anchored to my reading of the plays. This is why, for all the apparent uniformity implied in my method of organization, no chapter deals with precisely the same issues.

Moral drama teaches its writers, through watching, listening, acting, writing, and later, reading, to manipulate a set of genre-specific conventions to both articulate and veil meaning. It does not, in practice, predispose them to any one attitude toward theater, market or state. Identify what we may about a play’s developmental “phase,” its auspices or its author, it is simply not possible to predict its message or position without carefully reading it. Often, the target of a moral play differs radically from the play’s explicit moral message. Ultimately, the organization used here allows me to artificially separate several intertwined semantic layers, in order to expose latent content.

4. Histories

The chronological arrangement of the chapters that follow signals my intention to trace what was a mainline literary and performance tradition’s remarkable operations within and upon its culture(s) over a span of 134 years. Unlike other histories of moral drama, mine posits a tight, generative relationship between the genre and the socioeconomic flux of the period(s) in which it flourished. This is not to say, in the vein of some materialists, that drama derives from the market, but rather, that the plays studied here reveal a pattern of what Scott Cutler Shershow describes as, “an endless interaction of material and symbolic practices that at once oppose, reflect, reciprocally
produce, and thus overdetermine one another.” The shape of this pattern evokes a certain understanding of England’s socioeconomic transition from an agrarian feudal mode of production to a market-based, capitalistic one.

That such a transition took place between roughly the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries is generally acknowledged, but the significance of particular changes and their relation to one another continues to be debated. For so-called “neo-Malthusians” such as M.M. Postan, John Hatcher and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, demographic change is the key factor in historical development. For these writers, as for the majority of economic historians prior to the 1950s, the bubonic plague’s devastation of the population in the mid-fourteenth century initiated an economic “down-shift” during which the value of land fell as the value of labor increased. This, in turn, conditioned the many familiar changes of the period, including technological

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63 Shershow, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 16. Shershow observes that current market and theater arguments tend to create a false dichotomy in their championing of either materialist or idealist causational models. The former camp, in which theater becomes, in essence, an epiphenomenon of the market, includes such writers as Bruster and (less convincingly, for me) Agnew. The idealist approach, in which market is an epiphenomenon of theater, informs works from Stephen Greenblatt’s *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), to Pye’s “The Theater, the Market, and the Subject of History.”

64 A. MacFarlane in *The Origins of English Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) would seem to be the one dissenting voice, claiming that “England was as capitalist in 1250 as it was in 1550 or 1750” according to the criteria of Marx, Weber and others, because of its cultural inheritance of the “Germanic” system of “absolute individual private property”, 195. Problems with this theory are too numerous to rehearse here, but see R.J. Holton’s even-handed discussion of the matter in *The Transition to Capitalism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 42-6.

advances in everything from agriculture to commercial institutions, the demise of
serfdom, the rise of wage labor and the market.\textsuperscript{66}

The 1950s ushered in a new wave of economic studies as Marxists historians
challenged the status quo. Several debates arose during the 1970s, as alternative
explanations were proposed for England’s transition.\textsuperscript{67} Douglass North and Robert
Paul Thomas insisted that new technology was the chief factor of economic change,
citing the establishment of secure private property rights as the key stimulus of the
modern market economy, while Immanuel Wallerstein and Paul Sweezy explained the
transition in terms of a rational reorganization of labor and trade at national and
international levels.\textsuperscript{68}

The major writers in the Marxist camp were R.H. Hilton and Robert Brenner—the
former interested in peasant class consciousness as a crucial but intangible condition
of socioeconomic change, the latter in class conflict as the element responsible for the
transformation of relations of production.\textsuperscript{69} Brenner, especially opposed to the
demographic determinism of the “neo-Malthusians,” argued that the true cause of
change—whether institutional, like North and Thomas’s, or commercial, like

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66}Postan and Hatcher, “Population and Class Relations in Feudal Society,” 30-1, 60-1.
\item \textsuperscript{67}For the clearest, most concise overview of “the transition debate,” or “the Brenner debate,” see
\item \textsuperscript{68}Douglass North and Robert Paul Thomas, \textit{The Rise of the Western World} (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1973); Immanuel Wallerstein, \textit{The Modern World-System}, 2 vols. (New York:
Academic Press, 1974); Paul Sweezy, ed., \textit{The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism} (London:
Verso, 1976).
\item \textsuperscript{69}Other historians, like Wallerstein, identify themselves as Marxists but do not consider class
relations a cause of historical change. Rodney Hilton, \textit{The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages}
Pre-Industrial Europe,” \textit{Past and Present}, 70 (1976), 30-75.
\end{itemize}

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Wallerstein’s—lay in structures of ownership and distribution, which is to say, in the social relationships Marx called a society’s economic “base.”

By the late 1970s, it could be said that the field of economic historical studies was divided roughly into two groups: the politicists, who gave primacy to relations of production (class struggle), and the economists, who focused on the forces of production (technology, labor organization, etc.).

The matter of primacy of forces vs. relations of production has yet to be resolved, but the Marxist politicist narratives most strongly inform my study’s understanding of socioeconomic history. Brenner’s work, which extends Hilton’s in many ways, has been central in helping me to describe the sources and effects of inter- and intraclass tensions in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century in chapter one. The dialectic method Brenner favors, examining conflict from the perspectives of all interested parties, has been especially complementary to my reading of the plays, keeping me alert, as I read against conditions of an historical moment, to missing or suppressed views. Brenner’s scope, however, sometimes extends to continental models and phenomena that are not part of this study.

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71Brenner, like Hilton, de-emphasizes the importance of urban merchant capital and trade-based divisions of labor as stimuli for capitalist growth, and he agrees with Hilton’s claim that peasant resistance and revolt were endemic during the late Medieval period. They differ primarily in the extent to which they see class struggle as imposing limits and possibilities on economic development. Compare Brenner’s more emphatic vision, “Agrarian Class Structure,” with Hilton’s, “Bond Men Made Free, Medieval Peasant Movement and the English Rising of 1381” (London: Temple Smith, 1973).
Richard Lachman’s *From Manor to Market* features a similar emphasis on the primacy of class conflict, but it provides a more in-depth look at the changing class interests at the manorial level in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, by tracking the flow of peasant-generated surplus.\(^{72}\) Most intriguing for my purposes, Lachman includes the clergy in his discussion of manorial class relations, mapping out their role in a struggle for surplus extraction that ended only with the dissolution of monasteries. A bit more cautious than appears necessary, given the findings of Brenner and Lachman, Ellen Meiksins Wood does not discern capitalist features in the English economy until the emergence of the English state in the sixteenth century.\(^{73}\) Yet her insistence that the relationship between capitalism and the early modern state is not one of cause and effect, but of coterminous and intertwined growth derived from the same social transformations, informs my understanding, especially of the importance of extra-economic coercion—violence—in economic developments, often misleadingly described elsewhere as “abstract” and “impersonalized.”\(^{74}\) Finally, my understanding of England’s socioeconomic changes as uneven and fitful eruptions in an ongoing struggle between coexisting modes of production (feudal and capitalist) owes much to Jameson’s insistence that such “overtly ‘transitional’ moments of cultural revolution are themselves but the surfacing of crisis moments in an incessant struggle between various coexisting modes of production.”\(^{75}\)

\(^{72}\)Richard Lachman, *From Manor to Market*.

\(^{73}\)Wood, 98.

\(^{74}\)Ibid., 166-81. Agnew alludes to this idea when he describes how “impersonality” develops to diffuse the greater “antagonism” that arises between partners in market relations, *Worlds Apart*, 4.

\(^{75}\)Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 97.
The story of economic history elaborated in the following chapters is this, in very simplified terms: in fifteenth-century East Anglia, a confluence of circumstances—from the parcelized sovereignty of absentee magnates, to soil conditions, to an unusually large percentage of “freemen”—combined to create a precocious emergence of recognizably capitalistic innovations and imperatives. The allegiance of yeomen farmers, on whom these pressures fell most heavily, became pivotal in a struggle for peasant surplus between lay landlords and the nonmonastic, secular clergy. These struggles continued for decades, with the scales tipping in response to both material and ideological forces (i.e., increasingly commercialized land, Lollardy, etc.), weakening the secular clergy and disenfranchizing the lowest tiers of the commons. The Dissolution ended this particular battle as the Crown augmented its own force by offering new land and office opportunities to middling types (often last century’s yeomen or their sons) at the expense of the disempowered clerical class. At the same time, the Crown managed to tie aristocratic interests more firmly to itself than ever before, and the emerging power block of the London-based Tudor bureaucracy shifted tensions to the relationship between non-aristocratic local office-holders and the increasingly landless poor. The possession of land, once a kind of cultural capital in itself, became truly capitalistic as landowners encouraged competitive production, and reinvested their surpluses. Around mid-century, middling types began to examine their relationship to the emerging state as questions of constitutionalism and absolutism, natural rights and sovereignty arose in the face of increasing conflicts over labor and market control. The relationship between middling types and the state grew more agonistic toward the turn of the century as the Crown struggled to maintain economic
and political control of the most lucrative “projects” and ventures that often rewarded alliances between aristocrats and merchant class citizens. A kind of class consciousness developed in response to a dawning realization of market imperatives’ impact on individual fulfillment, and the state’s interest in perpetuating this dependence.

The associated narrative, which both draws from and adds to the first, describes how moral drama provides a venue for its culture—from playwright to audience—to come to grips with socioeconomic transformations. For all of their apparent differences, *Mankind* and *Every Man Out of His Humour* plot points along the same narrative of socioeconomic revolution. Where the priestly *Mankind* author seeks to comprehend these changes through a religious espisteme, Jonson tests them (good humanist that he is) in theoretical terms as “humours,” and understands them (good artisan that he is) in terms of market relations in late sixteenth-century commercialized London. New Gyse, the coat-cutting Vice of *Mankind*, becomes Fungoso, fetishistically obsessed with fashion, in *Every Man Out*; *Mankind*’s lordly Tityvillus, who has his men steal from his neighbors, becomes the rich yeoman, Sordido, who squeezes the local peasantry by manipulating the grain market. *Mankind*’s Virtue, Mercy, develops into the brutal, but salubriously demystifying Macilente, who educates all other characters about the dangers of overvaluation and market-inflated yearning for profit and prestige.

Finally, there is the story woven throughout my chapters about moral drama’s engagement with the major discourses of its day, such as religion, humanism and morality. The trend is toward a kind of deconstruction. Plays will laud the potential
of a discourse when it is young and untried. Later, plays will interrogate it, and eventually criticize the powerful ideological work a discourse performs once the abuse of it becomes evident. This is in no way a repetition of the old developmental paradigm of simplicity to complexity, for we can already see this final phase in *Mankind*’s Cort of Myscheff episode, in which legal discourse, once ripe with the promise of upholding peasant land rights, is lampooned for its failure to prevent oppression in the weakening manor and ecclesiastical court systems.

The remainder of this study will elaborate the arguments sketched out in this introduction. Each chapter builds upon the conclusions of the ones prior to describe the development of a genre whose historical growth is no more incremental, rational or “natural” than the emerging market society that both feeds and feeds off of it.

The first chapter reveals how the anonymous play *Mankind* (1465) uses and defines moral play conventions to think about the intensifying social discord in East Anglia. The play blames the tension not so much on Lollard unrest, which it does acknowledge, but on the region’s shift toward commercialization. By thematizing and dramatizing superfluity, *Mankind* implicates the middling yeoman’s allegiance as the decisive factor in a manor-bound psychomachic battle between God’s “ordynance,” a nostalgic feudalism, and “the New Gyse,” the increasingly monetized markets and their viciously aspiring, secular supporters—from touring players to magnates.

My chapter on Wager’s plays explores how the plays *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art*, *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, and to a lesser degree, *The Trial of Treasure* (1558-69) take up popular conventions to articulate, through minute deviations, troubling new developments among the rising middling sort of the mid-
sixteenth century. The plays solicit and materialize an urban, merchant class, for whom they prescribe pious, casuistic discretion in the face of the emerging Protestant work ethic that fosters both worldly asceticism and a burgeoning spirit of exploitative capitalism.

The two chronicle moral plays of chapter three contribute to the constitution of a middling class in specific relation to the emerging Elizabethan state. The plays ring changes on the conventions of moral drama to test contrasting contemporary theories of state: constitutionalism in *Cambises* (1561), and reason of state policy in *Horestes* (1567). Both plays’ solution to social discord—an economically salubrious alliance or “amitie”—throws traditional Christian morality into question as something less eternal and divine than habitual and cultural.

Chapter four examines how Marlovian tragedy deforms moral drama conventions in *Doctor Faustus* (1589) and *The Jew of Malta* (ca. 1590) to illuminate the widening gap between ethics and morality, middling citizen and state. These plays express what remains largely latent in early moral plays: the relation of the citizen to his own labor, and the compulsory subsumption of this work (labor *qua* labor in *Faustus*, labor accumulated in the form of wealth in *Jew of Malta*) to the emerging market-dependent state economy. Through the staging of resistance to these imperatives, Marlowe opens the door for antagonistic political ideology—from questions about citizens’ rights to suspicion of religiomoral discourse as a devastating rhetorical weapon of the politically powerful.

The final chapter looks at how Jonson’s first, popular “hit,” *Every Man Out of His Humour*, fires up moral play machinery to stage a ubiquitous social dissatisfaction and
market mentality that renders the world not tragic but mordantly hilarious. Jonson manipulates prologue and Vice conventions to expose how the merchant-class overvaluation of things—a tendency toward a base consumerism that ultimately infects and dehumanizes all Londoners—inflects all social interactions. Casuistry is transformed to social judgement, the social stratification of birth gives way to that of good taste. When moral drama begins to fade from view, it is not so much replaced as transformed, its riches dispersed as modes that continue to inflect the tragedy, comedy, history, and romance—the putatively “mature” genres of the London stage.
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CHAPTER ONE

“PE SUPERFLUOUSE GYSE”: ECONOMICS, SOCIAL CHANGE AND THEATRICALITY IN MANKIND

Early in the English moral play, Mankind, Mercy, the sole virtuous character, addresses the audience in a short speech that serves to connect the prior episode, featuring the first appearance of the mischief figures, to the following one introducing the play’s protagonist, Mankind.\(^1\) Relieved but still peevish, Mercy’s tone reflects the strain

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\(^1\)The single, extant manuscript of Mankind is currently listed in Washington D.C. as Folger MS. V.A.354. Since 1820, when Mankind and two other East Anglian moral dramas, The Castle of Perseverance and Wisdom, were removed from an earlier volume containing Juvenal, a treatise on alchemy and “other dissimilar works,” the rebound collection of three plays has been referred to as, “the Macro Manuscript,” after Rev. Cox Macro (1683-1767), an antiquary and the manuscript’s first identified owner. Earlier ownership has been attributed to a “Hyngham, the monk”, on grounds of a late fifteenth-century Latin verse inscription at the end of both Mankind and Wisdom, but Hyngham’s identity has yet to be narrowed beyond three likely candidates. For further history of the manuscript, see Mark Eccles’ introduction to The Macro Plays, EETS, OS 262 (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969); the introductory materials of Frank Knittel and Grosvenor Fattic in A Critical Edition of the Medieval Play Mankind (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) and David Bevington, The Macro Plays (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), vii-xxiii. Internal evidence, including the play’s East Midland dialect and several specific references to identifiable people and locations, places Mankind’s composition and performance in northern East Anglia (Norfolk, Bury in Suffolk, and villages just south of Cambridge), Eccles, The Macro Plays, xxxviii-xxxix. Initially dated ca. 1475 by A.W. Pollard, based on textual references and the handwriting of the manuscript’s two scribes, in F.J. Furnivall and Alfred W. Pollard, The Macro Plays, EETS, Extra Series, 91 (London: Trubner, 1904), xi, xxviii, the play’s references to contemporary coinage later allowed Donald C. Baker in “The Date of Mankind,” Philological Quarterly 42 (1963) 90-1, to narrow the date to within two years on either side of 1466, a date Bevington adjusted to 1465-70, deemed satisfactory to most critics. Stephen Spector seems to be the one dissenting voice, with the suggestion of 1487 as Mankind’s date, “Paper Evidence and the Genesis of the Macro Plays,” Mediaevalia, 5 (1979), 219-22. The original second leaf of the manuscript, featuring the entrance of New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought as well as Myscheff’s exit, has been lost. All further references to Mankind will be to Eccles’ Macro Plays, which remains the authoritative edition.

The first to suggest that Mercy is a priest, was Sister M. Emmanuel Collins in her dissertation, “The Allegorical Motifs in the Early English Moral Plays” (Yale, 1936), 8, but Sister Mary Philippa Coogan’s extended argument to this effect in An Interpretation of the Moral Play, ‘Mankind’ (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), is the better remembered. Coogan cites Mercy’s Latinized speech, stately manner, and “tendency toward homily” as character signatures underscoring the many instances where the play acknowledges Mercy as a ghostly father (Mankind, 86, 209, 772). At this point,
of having endured the taunts, threats and idle baiting of New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought, who have just departed:

    Thankyde be Gode, we haue a fayer dylyuerance
    Of these three onthryfty gestys
    They know full lytyll what ys ther ordynance.
    I preue by reson thei be wers then bestys.
    . . .
    Thys condycyon of leuyng, yt ys prejudycyall.
    Beware therof; yt ys wers than ony felony or treson.
    How may yt be excusyde before the Justyce of all
    When for euery ydyll worde we must yelde a reson?

    They have grett ease; therfor, thei wyll take no thought.
    But how then, when the angell of hewyn xall blow the trump
    Ande sey to the transgressors that wykkydly hath wrought,
    “Cum forth onto yowr Juge ande yelde yowr acownte”? (Mankind 162-77)

This speech is typical of the play in several ways. It is, for one thing, representative of what has been called since F.J. Furnivall’s tripartite division of the play, Mankind’s “didactic framework”: the opening and concluding scenes in which Mercy solicits the audience to eschew the allurements of the world for the heavenly gift of God’s mercy and eternal salvation. Additionally, it samples the putative “tedious[ness]” of Mercy’s speeches in its redundancy, its grave, aureate Latinity, and its pedantic rehashing of conventional Lenten doctrine. But the excerpt is also characteristic of the play in that this very tedium—Mercy’s predictable deployment of the literary and performance

although there is some dispute as to whether Mercy is a priest or a friar, his identification with religious orders is unquestioned.


3Mark Eccles, introduction, The Macro Plays, xiv. For Mercy’s redaction of Lenten, specifically Shrovetide, themes and motifs see Coogan, An Interpretation of the Moral Play, ‘Mankind,’ or more recently Tom Pettitt’s, “Mankind: An English Fastnachtspiel?” Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth
conventions of the sermon—works to distract us from the less conventional material the lines begin to engage.

This occluded material surfaces in Mercy’s characterization of New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought as “onthryfty” (Mankind 163). In the period of the play, “onthryft” combines the idea of a general moral depravity with economic dissoluteness, for in the fifteenth century, the word’s later sense of “prodigal extravagance” has already emerged to stand side-by-side with “onthryft[y]’s” older connotation of “immoral behavior.” Mercy’s insult, then, adds the broad moral indignation one might expect from a priest confronting wanton youth to a more pointed criticism. Within the Christian moral economy the play constructs, the three N’s “onthryft” constitutes a type of squandering, a profligate outlay of “ydyll worde[s]” (Mankind 173).

While it is well to remember that no separate economic discourse exists at this time, a register we might think of as economic (i.e., the language of commerce, accounting, estate management, etc.) is exceedingly common in Christian moral discourse, regularly coloring the sermon literature of the day. Against a background of homiletic composition, Mercy’s descriptor, “onthryft,” merely elaborates a possibility extant in the main Biblical pretext for this section, that for “every idle word that men shall speak,
they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36-37). Imagining Judgment Day as a kind of audit at which the Lord weighs every man’s “acownte” takes seriously the advice the Compendium on the Art of Preaching and similar manuals urged, to develop “familiar illustrations” for abstract concepts (Mankind 177). In context with the rest of the play, Mercy’s Judgement Day fantasy draws on contemporary activities of local manorial administration, where the final audit of the estate’s recorded payments, sales and purchases was often performed by the manor lord himself. Words in this metaphor become the monies tracked in manorial accounts. Having been put to “ydyll” or profitable use, their sums are tabulated at the end of the fiscal period (eschatological time) to be subjected to an external assessment whose ruling on the rectitude of the “acownte” is eternal.

The equation of words with coins constitutes a central motif in the play, one that I shall argue is linked through Mankind’s affective discourse—its fascinated disgust with superfluity—to a threat it perceives as a new and unnatural surplus; what we might call, in anticipation of England’s shift from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production, a reallocation of surplus. From this perspective, Mercy’s condemnation of the three N’s as “wers then bestys,” felons or traitors is more than self-righteous hyperbole (Mankind


7Mary Poovey writes that double entry accounting was thought to “reiterate the symmetry and proportion with which God invested the world,” A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Science of Wealth and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30-1, 38. Double entry accounting, invented by Italian merchants and householders, involved copying and condensing entries between four separate ledgers. It was not as common to the English manor in the fifteenth century as the manor rolls to which I shall refer.
The three N’s’ true crime is not so much squandering (more of a means than an end), but their perversion of the local “ordynance”—an overturning of sanctioned order, a “proper arrangement” the play normalizes as the natural “condycyon” or disposition of all men (164). In the context of Mercy’s disparagement of the three N’s’ inhuman behavior and his appeal to his auditors’ “reson”—which is to say, in the framework of the scholastic concept of natural law—“ordynance” may be construed as the divine order of the universe, the hierarchy in which man, composed “of a body and of a soull,” occupies a position between animal and angel (194-5).

Considered in light of what I understand to be the play’s concern with matters of socioeconomic status, however, “ordynance” points to that other medieval hierarchical structure known as the feudal contract. Mankind depicts the disruption of this contract in terms of class conflict, pitting lay against clerical powers while concealing within this more general friction the topical, specific one between secular clergy and yeomen. Attempting to persuade the most socioeconomically mobile sector of its audience to return to a traditional mode of surplus allocation, Mankind manipulates clerical antitheatrical discourse to equate the rise of the yeoman with the professionalization of the itinerant player, a move which represents socioeconomic change as a theatrical

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8MED, s.v. “ordynance.”

9In his synthesis of Aristotelian ethics, Roman law, and Christian theology, Thomas Aquinas insisted that natural law, an external and eternal justice which guides animals through instinct, exists in man’s faculty of reason and conscience, exhorting him to do “that which is just.” On natural law, see M.A. Krapiec, Person and Natural Law, trans. Maria Szymanska, Catholic Thought from Lublin, vol. 7 (New York: Peter Lang 1992) and Brian Tierney, The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

transgression of natural, human and divine law. In this manner, *Mankind* shows its ideological hand: a conservative idealization of feudalism against an emerging capitalism which threatens the interests of East Anglian secular clergy, the social class to which *Mankind*’s author is thought to belong.

1. Criticism

In what follows, I want to situate my project, briefly, among the extant arguments that have had the most bearing on my investigation of *Mankind*. The majority of these are formal studies and, later, performance studies, including those initially responsible for the reclamation of the play from what Anne Brannen calls, ”the dustbin of marginalization.” From source studies to analyses of medieval theatricality, these approaches offer useful, but ultimately limited information about the play as a symbolic move in what I take to be the exigency of a larger, extradramatic conflict in East Anglia. In turning to the current auspices argument, I isolate the major problem of literalism in

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11My broad rubric, “theatrical,” combines the idea of feigning (including Stephen Greenblatt’s self-fashioning), a sense of somehow belonging to the burgeoning world of professional theatre, and the medieval, clerical notion of *theatralis*, “whatever is indecorous, given to emotion [histrionic], conducive to sin,” Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 50.

12Based on internal evidence, Walter K. Smart suggests the author was likely to have been a parish priest or a lawyer, “Some Notes on *Mankind*,” *Modern Philology*, 14 (1916), 116-7. Subsequently, critics have generally agreed on the idea of a clerical author, whether priest or friar, Coogan, Appendix II; Siegfried Wenzel, *Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature*, second ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 154; David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 17. Gail McMurray Gibson believes the author to have been a Benedictine monk at Bury St. Edmonds, while Anthony Gash suggests the play is the product of a collaboration between Cambridge clerics and professional actors, Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Gash, “Carnival Against Lent: The Ambivalence of Medieval Drama,” *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology & History*, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986). My sense, based on historical evidence soon to be discussed, is that the playwright was a parish priest.

Mankind criticism (which extends to other studies of moral drama, as well), even as I strengthen the case for Mankind’s popular production.

Studies that situate Mankind within a vital literary tradition typically acknowledge a debt to Sister Mary Philippa Coogan’s 1947, An Interpretation of the Moral Play, “Mankind”, which sought to locate the play’s place in both the literary tradition of penitential tracts, manuals and sermons, and the performance tradition of Shrovetide entertainments.\(^\text{14}\) Her insistence on the play’s wit and literary coherence opposed nearly half a century of scholarship dismissing Mankind as, “ignorant, corrupt, probably degenerate, and vulgar to the point of obscenity.”\(^\text{15}\) Coogan’s work, and that of her successors, has done much in alerting us to Mankind’s artistry and deft engagement with literary and performance traditions, but in these accounts, the imagined function of the play (the dissemination of orthodox doctrine) leaves much unanswered.\(^\text{16}\)

Like Coogan before him, Bevington urged a rethinking of Mankind’s objectionable features—its comic “depravity,” broad, physical humor, etc.—in terms of their function, but Bevington’s emphasis on the exigencies of professional playing opened a novel perspective. Mankind’s comic features were “a culmination of the most popular elements

\(^{14}\)Coogan credits Smart in “Some Notes on Mankind” with both ideas, but it was Coogan who demonstrated through argument and reference to penitential literature, “ . . . that the purpose of the writer of Jacob’s Well is basically the same as that of the author of Mankind: to call men to pence and to a good life,” An Interpretation, 44.

\(^{15}\)Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 350-1. Subsequent scholarship has also extended Coogan’s specific interests in the play. See, for example, Brannen’s recent article for Medieval Perspectives that recasts Coogan’s argument about the play’s well-conceived dramaturgy into a call for the replacement of Everyman with Mankind in general anthologies “A Century of Mankind. Tom Pettit, in his “Mankind: An English Fastnachtspiel” contextualizes Coogan’s observations about the play’s seasonal indicators within contemporary continental traditions of Shrovetide dramatic entertainment, 190-202.

\(^{16}\)A short list of questions would concern the nontraditional figures of Myscheff and Tityvillus, whose overdetermined status I will discuss in upcoming sections, the redundancy of the Vices, and the anomaly of the mid-play collection, or quête.
in the late medieval English stage,” a savvy mingling of stagecraft and religious doctrine calculated to draw, edify and entertain a paying audience.\textsuperscript{17} Weimann affirmed Bevington’s identification of the play as popular drama, and added to our understanding and appreciation of its development of the most vital elements of medieval folk plays and dramatic games.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, even as 1960’s and ‘70’s scholarship rekindled an interest in the play, the predominantly broad, formalistic approach to reading continued to limit what was being said about it. Often, elements of the play were abstracted to be read in conformity to a key organizing principle—orthodox Lenten doctrine of repentance and salvation in the case of writers like Ashley, Stock, Davenport, and Potter, the Vice function in Weimann and Garner.\textsuperscript{19}

My objection to these readings is not with their basic content. \textit{Mankind does} illustrate the process of obtaining God’s mercy through repentance, it \textit{does}, as I will argue, conform to a certain understanding of the psychomachia form, and its Vices \textit{do} function much as Weimann, Spivak and Garner suggest, satirizing and destabilizing authoritative structures, mediating between the fiction of the play and the occasion of watching and/or performing that play.\textsuperscript{20} What seems questionable about these readings is that their overemphasis on tradition obscures the play’s actual relationship to conventions

\textsuperscript{17}Bevington, \textit{Mankind to Marlowe}, 17.


\textsuperscript{20}Weimann, \textit{Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition}, 126-59.
whose meaning shifts drastically in relation to historical context. To focus on Mankind’s conformity to salvation doctrine, for example, reduces the play to a form it shares with all other pre-Reformation moralities. Meanwhile, an anomaly like the mischief figures’ unsatisfactory correspondence to Mercy’s interpretation of them as, “the Dewell, [and] pe World” is wrenched into compliance within doctrinal logic, a move that ironically echoes what one medieval literary tradition satirizes as a comically heavy-handed hermeneutic.\footnote{Chaucer provides the most famous examples of such humorously misapplied allegory, but I am also thinking of Robert Henryson’s The Moral Fables of Aesop, George D. Gopen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987). For further discussion of this tradition, see Jill Mann’s “The Speculum Stultorum and the Nun’s Priest’s Tale” Chaucer Review, 9:3 (1975) and Talbot E. Donaldson’s Speaking of Chaucer (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1983).}

Readings that rely on pre-texts as the key to meaning, whether Prudentius’ Psychomachia, or Jacob’s Well, feature many of the same homogenizing tendencies.\footnote{Early criticism often involved a search for Mankind’s source or sources. While Alois Brandl saw similarities with The Assembly of Gods attributed to Lydgate in Quellen des weltlichen Dramas in England vor Shakespeare, 30 (1898), Siegfried Wenzel in The Sin of Sloth (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967) and Mabel Keiller in “The Influence of Piers Plowman on the Macro Play of Mankind,” PMLA, 27 (1912), 339-55, felt the play was influenced by Piers Plowman. G.R. Owst was the first to propose a homiletic influence in Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), specific nominations for which later included the poem “Merci Passith Ritztwisness” W. Roy Mackenzie’s suggestion in “A New Source for Mankind,” PMLA, XXVII (1912), and Jacob’s Well offered by Coogan in An Interpretation. It is presently believed that “Mankind makes use of familiar doctrines rather than of any known source” Eccles, Introduction, xli.} In addition, the literary privileging of such an approach often overlooks dramaturgy as the “fundamental condition of meaning” it was for early moral drama.\footnote{Garner, “Theatricality in Mankind,” 273.} At the same time, taking the play on what appear to be its own terms has not proven overly illuminating. Often, the unfortunate effect has been that Mankind is judged on its conformity to other examples of moral drama. Compared to Everyman’s gravity Mankind’s humor seemed “irrelevant and unrelated to the dramatic needs of the play”; next to The Castle of

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Perseverance’s symmetry of good to evil forces, Mankind’s pitting five Vices against one Virtue signaled authorial incompetence.\(^\text{24}\)

Even the inspired conception of Vice function worked out by Spivak and Weimann can be reductive if the concept is extended to an entire play as its interpretive key. Such an approach flattens the specifics of vicious characters’ speech to “nonsense,” and limits the meaning of all dialogue to one of two sides of a virtue/vice, declaration/negation dichotomy.\(^\text{25}\) Reading Mankind in this way suggests that the mischief figures parody Mercy’s syntax and vocabulary, a well-known convention of later moral drama Vices, but beyond telling us that Mankind makes conventional use of its Vices, a correct but limited observation, what have we learned?

A newer approach to historical conditions, and one closer to my methods, is demonstrated in articles by Anthony Gash and Janette Dillon.\(^\text{26}\) They put the play’s formal elements (language, performance conventions, etc.) into dialogue with the play’s historical conditions to uncover symbolic and ideological work the play performs. By differing routes, and to diverse ends, both writers arrive at the conclusion that beneath its “broadly orthodox” doctrine, Mankind “is being used to both “express and conceal” an unorthodox critique of the Church.\(^\text{27}\) Invoking several roughly contemporaneous Lollard trials, and also examining ways in which allegory was traditionally used in seasonal folk entertainments to both uphold and parody orthodox doctrine and ecclesiastical practices,

\(^{24}\)Louis B. Wright, “Variety-Show Clownery on the Pre-Restoration Stage,” Anglia, LII (1928), 51.

\(^{25}\)Weimann himself appears fully cognizant of this danger. His article, “‘Moralize Two Meanings’ In One Play: Divided Authority on the Morality Stage,” Mediaevalia, 18 (1995), 427-49, alerts us to ways in which the Vice traditionally breaks up and confounds moral dichotomies.


\(^{27}\)Dillon, “The Politics of ‘Englysch laten’,” 47; Gash 90.
Gash argues that *Mankind* “exploits divisions within the audience” to express the multiple perspectives of opposing factions in the Lollard controversy. While I concur that “the play does not [openly] declare its allegiance,” I side with Dillon in her belief that it does possess an interpretable one. Building on Gash’s identification of East Anglian religious politics in the play, Dillon reveals the subtle political shading of the play’s uses and abuses of Latinate language. Within the dangerous climate of anti-Lollard persecution the play daringly proposes a limited reformation of ministry techniques, expressing “sympathy” for the Lollard position on plainly spoken English even as it delivers a conventional Lenten message in “endorsement of the orthodox church.”

Like Dillon and Gash, I am interested in the link between Lollardy and interclass tensions, but whereas for them, class conflict is a way to talk about religious controversy, religious controversy is viewed in my study as a symptom of a deeper class conflict.

The handful of recent dissertations investigating the way historical exigencies shape and are shaped by *Mankind*, also speak to drama scholarship’s growing willingness to take the play seriously. Again, the Lollard controversy and theatricality emerge as

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28 Ibid., 47.

29 See Dillon’s discussion of Latin as the language of power and the Church’s fear that a translated Bible would “popularize” Scripture, empowering the commons, 44-8. Pettit also speaks of the clash between “official and unofficial mores” in terms of authority, but cuts short an interesting discussion of the interclass struggle from which this authority derives. See, for example, his comments on the insurrection of 1443, “Fastnachtspiel,” 84-5.

major terms within the context of clerical production. Justine Rydzeski’s study, while very similar to mine in its attention to ways in which religious discourse registers and attempts to control the changing English agrarian economy, concerns “apocalyptic literature” of an earlier period.

In 1973, the renewed interest in *Mankind* resulted in a rather unexpected turn, when Richard Southern argued that the play was written to be performed in a great hall. Apparently, the critical modification of the pejorative sense of “popular” drama that took place in the 1960’s and 70’s did not entirely erase the older association of popularity with crudity. Critics impressed with *Mankind*’s sophisticated use of language and dramaturgy soon followed Southern in arguing for elite auspices. At the center of the auspices seems unconvincing given what I understand to be the play’s thematic and performance-related indicators of popular production.

31 Bennett contextualizes the play in the linguistic and political battles waged by and against Lollards, while Richards’ identification of the metaphor of theatricality associating vices with professional players and virtues with the clergy is prescient of what Lawrence Clopper’s later, book length study, *Drama, Play, and Game*. Clopper’s more extensive argument is that in the middle ages theatricality becomes a derogatory metaphor “for things perceived to be not of the church,” and consequently, we need to refine our definition of “antitheatrical” to exclude what would have been considered edifying moral and biblical dramas, 50.

32 Rydzeski’s thesis, “that Langland and the 1381 rebels exhibit “radical nostalgia”—a longing for agrarian Christian roots. . . which projects the traditional social structure of the past onto a renewed, if not millennial, society,” also dovetails with my reading of *Mankind*’s call for a socioeconomic return to an idealized past, “Economics and Apocalypticism: Radical Nostalgia in the Age of ‘Piers Plowman,’” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1997), Abstract. In that some, like Mabel Keiller in “The Influence of Piers Plowman on the Macro Play of Mankind,” *PMLA*, XXVI [1911], have made the entirely plausible suggestion that the *Mankind* author knew *Pier Plowman*, it is conceivable that he picked up this recursive move from the poem. A hundred years after Langland, however, the *Mankind* author’s use of Langland’s symbolic strategies for dealing with socioeconomic upheaval must, by necessity, be highly mediated by the very different material and ideological conditions of the late fifteenth century.


34 Lawrence M. Clopper, “*Mankind* and Its Audience,” *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, 18, second series, (New York: AMS, 1991), and *Drama, Play and Game*, 191-2; Pettit, “Fastnachtspiel,”190-1; see also Gail Gibson, who believes *Mankind* was sponsored by lay and monastic elite, and Claire Sponsler who endorses a seasonal household performance for a mixed audience, Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion*, 110-12, 117-21; Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England*, vol. 10, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 88-9.
debate is *Mankind’s* quête, especially the question of its function. Those arguing for popular production typically assume the mid-play collection was taken in earnest. Clopper, and those pushing for an elite venue, question the necessity of the quête *qua* quête suggesting, instead, that the scene represents a kind of “begging joke.”  

This observation begins to get at what I will reveal to be a far more reactive and aggressive use of dramatic convention than the play is currently allowed. I want to confirm that the quête is, indeed, a joke, but one whose humor—exploiting, among other things, the increasing tension between audience and players during the period of player professionalization—points to a mixed audience under distinctly popular auspices. I support, then, the “orthodox scenario” in the auspices argument, even as I reject this camp’s literal way of viewing its textual evidence. The elite auspices argument has been useful, if in no other way than in exposing the weakness of the customary use of evidence by the popular auspices camp, i.e., a literal reading of the quête and references in the play to a tapster, “pi yerde,” and a football (*Mankind* 561).

The numerous problems arising from this kind of literalism include a foreclosure of semantic possibility. Taking *Mankind’s* quête at face value as a functional collection like any other draws attention away from its peculiarities, many of which are yet to be sufficiently analyzed despite scholarship’s perennial interest in the episode. Why is the quête at the center and not at the end of the play? Why is Tityvillus absent during the

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37 Both Pettit in “Fastnachtspiel” and Clopper in “Mankind and Its Audience” touch on the inconclusiveness of this evidence, an argument I will expand in my later offer of a new way to treat the old evidence.
quête when it is the devil who customarily gathers the coins? And why when he can get no money out of his henchmen does he quickly shift his interest into procuring other men’s horses and whatever else can be stolen?

In the following pages, we will observe what the play tries to pass off as conventional, and in resisting its demand to be read in a certain way—in thinking, instead, about the function of convention in relation to topical issues—we will see how the play attempts to resolve a conflict between secular clergy and yeomen in East Anglia. The first section attempts to recover the way *Mankind* thinks about its relation to genre, and demonstrate how its manipulation of literary and performance conventions gives voice to socioeconomic concerns in a manner palatable to an itinerant company’s mixed audience. The second section, on the play’s relation to socioeconomic history, argues that *Mankind* registers the historical sociopolitical alignment of East Anglian yeomen with aristocratic landowners, a change that enables the commercialization of agriculture that has been implicated in the country’s shift from a feudalist to a capitalist mode of production. In addition, I will discuss here the rise of the itinerant player, to suggest why they might be understood as apt (if scathing) figures for the period’s aspiring middling types (yeomen and lower gentry). Finally, in the concluding section, I will focus on two episodes, the quête and the Cort of Myscheff, to explain how *Mankind* manipulates its matter, including elements delineated in previous sections, to persuade diverse sectors of its audience to specific courses of action, even as it strives to underplay its own involvement with professional playing and its agenda of a return to an idealized feudalism.

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2. Genre and Performance History

Pe New Jett

Perhaps more than genres that eschew didacticism, popular moral genre strives to protect its auditors from the hard realities it shows them. It accomplishes this, even in its earliest examples, by veiling its message in generic convention. *Mankind*’s deviations from convention flag new content that almost always wrestles with a topical socioeconomic and/or political disturbance. To see how this is done, we will compare elements of *Mankind* to those in two plays most often identified as its immediate forerunners: *Pride of Life* (before 1400), and *The Castle of Perseverance* (1400-1425).  


40 All subtitles, and the title for this chapter, as well, are taken from *Mankind*. They appear in the following order: 239; 103; 78; 13; 493; 333; 318; 668; 128; 465; 85; 879; 759; 471.

41 The *Castle of Perseverance*, another of the three East Anglian Macro Plays, has been dated to the first quarter of the fifteenth century based on philological grounds and an internal allusion to the fashion of *crakows* (pointed toes on shoes), Eccles, Introduction, *The Macro Plays*, x-xi. A far longer play than *Mankind* at 3,649 lines, *Castle* has long been admired for its relatively straightforward working out of the moral drama form, the pilgrimage of life motif, abstractions and psychomachic battle between Virtues and Vices. Its preliminary “banns,” which are essentially an advertisement for the play cried in surrounding communities prior to performance, have proven nearly as intriguing to scholars as the appended stage plan, which constitutes the “earliest known illustration in England to show how a play was presented,” Eccles, introduction, x-xxiv. Richard Southern’s argument about the circular staging of *Castle* has been a point of critical contention. Marion Jones’s bibliography concerning “Pageant Staging and Theatre-in-the-Round” lists participants in the discussion, in *Revels History of Drama in English*, 309, but also see Natalie Crohn Schmitt’s cogent “Was There a Medieval Theatre in the Round? A Re-examination of the Evidence,” *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). The 502-line fragment of the moral play we call *Pride of Life* dates to before 1400, and may have been composed in Ireland, Marion Jones, “Early Moral Plays and the Earliest Secular Drama,” 219-20. Fortunately for students of moral drama, *Pride*’s prologue outlines the entire action of this earliest example of the genre, and it is thought the play “seems to have required a similar place-and-scaffold system of outdoor staging [locus and platea] and, with its large cast and pivotal scene of battle, to demand comparable [to Castle] outlay on costumes and effects,” Jones, “Early Moral Plays,” 221. Further references will be to Osborn Waterhouse’s edition of “The Pride of Life,” *The Non-Cycle Mystery Plays*, Together with The Croxton Play of the Sacrament and The Pride of Life, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1909), 88-104.
In this section, I will focus on three ways *Mankind* veers from moral drama conventions. The first of these reveals how Mercy’s transformation, all but obscured by Mankind’s, offers a limited concession to anticlerical criticism. This, as I will argue in subsequent sections, works toward a reconciliation the play would see between yeomen and secular clergy. The second divergence concerns the puzzling redundancy of the three N’s—a superfluity I will later describe as registering an emerging proto-capitalist mode of production. Finally, I will show how Myscheff’s unconventional name is our first clue to his overdetermination by the increasingly unruly institutions of manor politics and professional playing.

Mankind, like *Humanum Genus* in *Castle of Perseverance*, experiences both the classic fall from innocence, and redemption at the play’s end. *Pride*’s protagonist can also be said to follow this pattern, if we understand the King of Life’s initial vaunting to be that specific type of innocence (or ignorance) to which princes surrounded by sycophants are particularly vulnerable. The fall of all three protagonists is depicted as the result of conscious decision-making followed by definitive action: the King of Life issues a challenge to the King of Death, *Humanum Genus* sets out with *Malus Angelus* to serve the World, Mankind, seizing on the rumor of Mercy’s death, runs off to the alehouse to make merry with the mischief figures. Their redemption, in all three cases, depends on the intercession of extrinsic virtuous powers. In *Pride* the intercedent is the Virgin Mary, in Castle, as in *Mankind*, it is Mercy. After narrow escapes from tragedy—certain damnation for the souls of the King of Life and *Humanum Genus*, likely damnation for Mankind, whose suicide is barely averted—the three plays end happily. In this way Mankind, and *Mankind*, dutifully follow their genre’s prescribed narrative pattern.
What is not so readily apparent is that another of Mankind’s characters follows this pattern, as well. Mankind’s flamboyant enactment of the narrative pattern, his delving, which dramatizes’ good intentions, his donning of the short coat signifying his fall, his kneeling to be shriven performing his redemption, effectively draws attention from the similar if more subtle reformation undergone by Mercy. Janette Dillon’s analysis of Mercy’s “different voices” throughout the play—extreme aureation in the beginning, plainer speech mid-play and moderately Latinized speech at the end—suggests that by the conclusion of the action, Mercy has learned to improve his preaching by adopting a “middle style” that avoids both the exclusivity of excessive aureation and the heretical taint of plain vernacularism promoted by Lollardy.42 The play, Dillon suggests, aims at a clerical as well as a lay audience, its earnest message of salvation accompanied by one about the most efficacious way to deliver that message.43 But we can extend Dillon’s thesis even further, for Mercy’s change, or development, goes beyond language.44

As if in refutation of the three N’s insults that he is a “ientyll Iaffrey” and a “Do-Lyttll,” Mercy transforms himself over the course of the play from a mildly condescending pedagogue who can offer only platitudes (“mesure ys tresure”), to Mankind’s active, “bales”-wielding, straight-speaking personal savior (Mankind, 160, 262, 237, 807). A prescription for the improvement of clerical/lay relations, it calls for an awareness of the alienating power of Latinate language combined with a call for more active support and intervention on behalf of those in one’s ministry.

43 Ibid., 48-9.
44 Mercy’s transformation has been recognized by Davenport, Fifteenth-century English Drama, 46, and Dillon, “The Politics of ‘Englysch Laten’,” 58.
In the environment of anticlerical sentiment surrounding the fifteenth-century Lollard controversy in East Anglia, the playwright’s sophisticated use of the mischief figures to deflate Mercy reads like a limited admission of guilt. In *Castle*, the harshness of certain traditionally inflexible Virtues like Truth and Justice may render them accidentally unappealing but in *Mankind* Mercy is intended to be off-putting. The role of Mercy’s change in the context of East Anglian socioreligious conflict will be established more firmly in the upcoming historical section but here, my interest is in the way this considerable divergence from *Pride of Life* and *Castle of Perseverance* is nearly obscured by *Mankind*’s adherence to the conventional narrative pattern of moral drama. In attending to the Mankind figure the genre claims as its focal point, we may miss Mercy’s shadowing of the pattern—his initial innocence (or blindness to context) evident in his blanket application of “Englysch Laten” (124); Nought’s tripping him up materializing the fall he will later experience in the loss of Mankind (113); his redemption, displaced onto Mankind’s confession, really in the hands of a lay audience who by the play’s end, have witnessed Mercy transformation into a priest who backs his rhetoric with action.

Mercy’s willingness to chase the mischief figures from their prey in the episode of Mankind’s near hanging is tempered by his absence during Mankind’s fall. The priest is not a substitute for Mankind’s vigilance. Like *Castle* and *Pride*, *Mankind* emphasizes the role of individual will in determining the outcome of the battle between good and evil. Temptations abound, but it is ultimately we who set up the conditions for our own defeat, dismissing the Bishop (*Pride* 407-16), forsaking the safety of the Castle (*Castle* 2534), or permitting the petty misfortunes of everyday life—the stuck plough, poor seed, stomach virus—to turn us away from the rigors of a virtuous lifestyle (*Mankind* 533-86). To a
large degree, then, *Mankind* follows its predecessors in staging a scaled-down but nevertheless psychomachic war.

The chief difference is that *Mankind*’s virtuous combatants are rather strikingly outnumbered—five to one.\(^4^5\) The symmetry of *Castle*’s fifteen virtuous to fifteen vicious figures, or the slightly less even pitting of The King of Life’s two virtuous counselors against three vicious ones, has not been reproduced in *Mankind*. Medieval drama scholarship has long puzzled over this incongruity, Craig attributing the imbalance at one point, to a touring company’s abridgement of a longer play to suit the size of its cast.\(^4^6\) Especially troublesome—and deadly to Craig’s theory, for why cut only Virtues, retaining five Vices in a company of six players?—has been the apparent redundancy of the “virtually undifferentiated and undeveloped” New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought.\(^4^7\) Siegfried Wenzel complains that, “their [New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought’s] precise meaning is uncertain and they cannot easily be fitted into standard medieval patterns of temptation and evil,” and even Lorraine K. Stock, who argues that the three represent the “three false friends” of the Book of Job, which she claims as pretext for the play, admits

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\(^4^5\) Others have commented on this disparity in more or less disgruntled terms. See Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 350, and Smart, “Some Notes on *Mankind,*” 210. Denny merely notes that the three N’s “function in the allegory [would be] more efficiently performable by a single character,” “Aspects of Staging,” 258. Here, as with the later tally of characters in *Castle* and *Pride,* I do not count universal “Mankind” figures because they are neither ostensibly good nor evil.

\(^4^6\) Craig, *English Religious Drama,* 350.

that in the first scene (lines 1-412), “the logical purpose of New Gyse, Nowadays, and Nought is not very evident.”

What if the “apparently superfluous Vices” are, by design, precisely as they appear—superfluous, or rather embodiments of superfluity? In this case, their number and relative facelessness serve to reinforce the excessive quality they exude in their first scene. Neville Denny, who writes compellingly of the play’s moments of “bizarre” “half-comic, half-eerie artificiality,” comes nearest to understanding that the three N’s power to impress resides in their tendency to provoke that fascination tinged with repulsion that marks the uncanny. Always together, in collusion if not in sync, sharing lines, proclivities—nearly thoughts when we consider the absence of discussion involved in bringing off their diversion of Tityvillus’s quête—the three N’s are less like a company of diverse Vices than they are like the *Castle of Perseverance’s* irreverent Garcio or *Pride’s* cocky *Nuncius*, tripled. As beings that are at once recognizable social types and the unlocalized but powerfully negative social force of novelty and fashion, they defamiliarize the all-too-familiar. Had they been named Avarice, Gluttony and Lechery and given characteristics to match, their outnumbering of the forces of good in *Mankind* might reflect that pessimism about the state of the world registered elsewhere in late medieval satires of court politics or the estates, in which “the abuses of the age” are held up to scorn. Indeed, they might be read as a complaint that the virtuous of the world are

49Denny, “Aspects of the Staging of *Mankind,*” 245, 257; Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’,” *Studies in Parapsychology*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 19-20. The elements of the uncanny that appear most relevant to the three N’s are the figure of the “double” or twin, something “familiar... that has been estranged only by the process of repression”; and “the working of forces hitherto unsuspected,” which Freud intriguingly compares to the medieval belief in daemonic influences, 39-41, 47, 49.
woefully outnumbered. But more specific to what I believe to be the play’s concern with excess, the three N’s redundancy is symptomatic of an unhealthy superfluity which they are designed to express, through scatological joking, unconstrained bodily movement, and incontinence at all levels—from the reflexive quality of their blasphemous cursing, “Crystys curse cum on yowr hedybus,” to Nought’s literal, accidental urination upon his own foot (399, 784).

Compared to *Pride* and *Castle*, then, it is significant that *Mankind* cuts or condenses not its left-of-convention Mysheff, New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought, but moral drama’s more commonplace personifications: its four cardinal Virtues, seven deadly sins, the World. These conventions may already have been exhausted by 1465, or *Mankind* may be, ironically, a herald of English satire’s New Gyse: a more particular, personal, Juvenalian, or “Skeltonic” as Davenport suggests, mode of satire. In any case, the advantage of fashioning more particularized roles is inescapably bound to the characters’ greater capacity for social satire.

Mysheff, for example, is neither a conventional enemy of man, like *Castle’s* *Mundus*, an externalized quality, like *Pride’s* soldier, *Fortitudo*, nor a personified sin. His name invokes “misery” and “grievous calamity,” but in the context of the play’s narrative, his harm is of a specific kind. Like *Detraccio* (Back-biter) who represents in *Castle* both social type (a courtier) and personification, Mysheff links vice, through association, to a particular environment—the East Anglian manor. “Lord or master of the

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50 On this, see W.A. Davenport’s helpful and succinct overview, situating examples of late medieval drama within three main traditions of medieval satire: sermon-based satire, contemporary sociopolitical satire and (distantly) Horatian/Juvenalian satire, *Fifteenth-Century English Drama*, 62-73.


52 MED, 546-6.
other vices” is how Denny describes Myscheff, an idea materialized correctly, I think, in a 1996 Leeds’ revival of the play, where Myscheff is decked out in a gold woolen gown and short black cloak over riding boots and a fine linen shirt. Others have considered him a synecdoche for “all sins generally.” Peter Meredith, who notes, “[while] he is clearly in some way in control of the temptation of Mankind. . .[Myscheff] does nothing towards it himself,” compares him to a “manager.” This is an identification I would modify to “stage manager,” and append it to Denny’s identification of Myscheff as a feudal lord.

To understand how Myscheff can be at once mischief, a manor lord, and a stage manager/lead player requires familiarity with the allegorical mode of characterization. In her re-evaluation of moral play characters, Schmitt describes how moral drama routinely amasses and disperses “multiple identities” around a central structure. Her example of this in Castle of Perseverance is the castle—at once representing the quality of perseverance, the Virgin Mary, Paradise, the New Jerusalem and a moated Medieval fortress, but it might just as convincingly have been Humanum Genus. Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter confirm this characterization as conventional to moral drama where “the boundaries between allegory and representational realism are extremely fluid. . . symbolic and naturalistic action flow[ing] into each other, personified characters


Meredith, Mankind, 18.

mov[ing] from heightened formality to colloquial realism.” Such a construction is further illuminated by Walter Benjamin’s observation that allegory “always brings with it its own court; [a] profusion of emblems...grouped around the figural center.” In moral drama this “center” is likely to be the character’s name, around which diverse registers and even identities may be grouped to elaborate or complicate the central term.

Crucial to this type of structure is a quality of dynamism, for unlike later modes of characterization which subordinate certain aspects of the personality to principle, defining ones, this mode operates on what Maureen Quilligan calls “slippery switches of terms.” In short, I want to suggest that in Mankind the signifier “Myscheff,” for example, finds a referent within the moral discourse of orthodox Christianity, the class conflicts being played out through East Anglian manor politics, and the professionalization of itinerant players with equal force. This tendency toward overdetermination is a feature of other medieval forms, and certainly other moral plays, but it is particularly emphasized in Mankind, a feature which points to the socially diverse audience my upcoming argument about the play’s popular, itinerant auspices assumes.

To see how Mankind’s semantic layering works and conclude our discussion of characterization in the earliest moral drama, I want to take a quick look at a particularly

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60 While it might be argued that such overdetermination reveals the author’s familiarity with and adaptation of the allegorical literature of his day (see, for example, Coogan or Davenport), I think it also speaks to the rhetorical caginess, the equivocal quality often associated with London stage drama, of the writer who anticipates the professional production of his play before a heterogeneous audience.
ambiguous piece of dialogue that has lead to confusion in the past. In the opening episode of the play, lines in Myscheff’s first dialogue with Mercy are habitually construed as an indication that *he*, Myscheff, has been hired as a winter corn-thresher, an idea that, were it true, could seriously undermine my reading of Myscheff as a manor lord. The lines, however, read:

*Mercy*: “Why come ye hethyr, brother? Ye were not dysyryde.”
*Myscheff*: “For a wynter corn-threscher, ser, I haue hyryde.”

(Mankind 53-4)

Myscheff’s answer is equivocal. He may be referring to a thresher *he has hired*. My suggestion—I have come “hethyr” “for” [in order to get] a “wynter corn-threscher” I have hired—is immediately borne out by Myscheff’s sneer that, .” . .ye sayde the corn xulde be sauyde. . . Ande [but] *he* [the “threscher”] prouyth nay. .”(54-6).

This alternative reading should in no way be taken as a call for the resolution of every incongruity. Myscheff, in this introductory episode, is undoubtedly more mischief and lead player than in later scenes, where his identity as manor lord is allowed to dominate. If *Mankind* thrives on such slippage, as I have argued, it would be the most destructive kind of allegoresis to smooth over every hint of inappropriateness, for as is the case with the most successful satire, it is often absurdity itself which binds the disparate levels of *Mankind* together.61

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61 In her formidable reassessment of allegorical language, Quilligan describes “allegoresis” as a type of bad faith hermeneutic distinguished by rigid “verticalness”: a hunt for “one-to-one correspondences between insignificant narrative particulars and hidden thematic generalizations,” *The Language of Allegory*, 32. Allegoresis began, as Quilligan explains, with the Pergamean school’s defense of Homer against the moral attacks of presocratic philosophers, but its influence can be seen today in claims like Stock’s, that Mankind’s injury of New Guise’s “jewellys” with his spade figures the Church-condoned attack on vicious men, referred to as the testicles or “membres” of Antichrist, 29; Stock, “Thematic and Structural Unity,” 394.
In this first episode, for example, while it is probably Myscheff as manor lord who associates proper departure with a fully equipped horse, it is Myscheff as mischief who archly and absurdly insists that he cannot honor Mercy’s request to be left alone because he lacks both horse and tackle. Mischief it is, who has come, like the lead player of a travelling troupe, or perhaps as Tom Pettitt suggests, “the Presenter” of a folk-play, “to make yow [Mercy] game,” to cadge a “halpenye,” and to solicit laughter from the audience (Mankind 52, 69). But later, it will be Myscheff the manor lord who possesses the clout to procure the intervention of Tityvillus on behalf of his servants; Myscheff the manor lord who will try Mankind in his manor court, condemning him to the betrayal of his own conscience.

To Schew Yow Sporte

Here I want to engage the debate about Mankind’s auspices in favor of the position arguing for popular and professional production. Basing my argument on performance conventions and not on the textual references customarily given in evidence, I hope to challenge the growing number of critics arguing for elite auspices. The original view, expressed by Pollard early in the last century, was that Mankind was toured by professionals playing to an audience of uneducated provincials gaping around a makeshift trestle-stage in the courtyard of a local inn. Weimann and Bevington modified this view to feature a more sophisticated audience, but generally strengthened

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63 Pollard’s introduction to The Macro Plays; J. Quincy Adams, Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas: a selection of plays illustrating the history of the English drama from its origin down to Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924).
the play’s reputation as “the most indisputably popular play of the fifteenth century.”

Then, in the same year that Richard Southern’s *The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare* placed *Mankind* in a genealogy of “interludes” written to be performed in a great house hall or other elite locale, Paula Neuss noted that *Mankind*’s Latin wordplay required “some quite literate people among the audience.” Others began to concur with the elite auspices argument, primarily on the grounds of the play’s level of Latin, which Clopper found to be “not merely rhetorical but essential.”

The extent to which an audience without Latin, yet arguably familiar with the Latin liturgy, could have enjoyed the play is debatable, for certainly some of the phrases, like Nowadays’ command, “*osculare fundamentum!*” would have been comprehensible through context and gesture (*Mankind* 142). As Dillon reminds us, the play’s first direct address divides its audience into “ye souerens pat sytt and ye brothern pat stonde ryght wppe,” and its wide ranging materials, from its scatological Christmas song to New Gyse’s Latin witticism about the kinship between friars and the devil, suggest a mixed audience, lay and clerical, commoners and the more exalted (29, 323-6). Most damning for the elite auspices argument, however, is the fact that the earmarks of a strictly elite drama—the lengthy oratory, philosophical debates, characters unaware of the audience, and pageantry we find in *Wisdom* (1460-3) or *Fulgens and Lucrece* (ca. 1497)—are

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66 Clopper, “*Mankind* and Its Audience,” 350.

absent from *Mankind*. Nor are *Mankind’s “popular” elements ornamental, like the subplot of *Fulgens and Lucrece*, but rather, like the quête, they inform everything from narrative movement to characterization, coloring the entire play.

To my mind, the most fruitful result of *Mankind’s auspices* issue concerns the questioning of terms in the text so flexible they cannot be considered definitive indications of auspices for either side of the debate. New Gyse’s address to “the goode-man of thise house,” for instance, could refer with equal appropriateness to an inn-keeper, an alderman or the lord of an estate, given the term’s broad Middle English connotation of “master” of a dwelling (*Mankind* 460). Likewise, references to “the dore” or going “into ye yerde,” cannot be responsibly identified with a great house hall any more than with the often asserted rural inn (154, 554). Within the context of *Mankind’s self-consciously theatrical performance*, the “door” might be a curtain at the back of a trestle stage on the green or a hall screen, while the “yerde” in which Mankind seeks to relieve himself may be no more substantial than the “erth” in which he “digs” with his spade (328). Such terms render the play adaptable to any number of venues—a flexibility drama history now associates with the practical concerns of itinerant, professional players. While elite auspice arguments have done the service of destabilizing proofs

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68 Jones, “Early Moral Plays,” 250-7; *Mankind* also lacks Bevington’s signs of elite purpose, including scene divisions in Latin, a scarcity of action or humor (no scatology), elaborate scenery and special effects, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 27-8.

69 The references to an “ostler” and a “tapster” that have been used to support the theory that *Mankind* was performed in inn-yards have been read out of context: the episode in which they occur takes place in an “ale-house,” *Mankind* 729, 732, 609.

70 Here I narrow the term to Garner’s definition of “theatricality” in “Theatricality in *Mankind* and *Everyman*,” 274, as “refer[ing] to a play’s existence in the moment of performance, in all its physicality and immediacy, and the many ways by which a play calls attention to this moment” (emphasis mine).

that were never terribly solid to begin with, their findings fail to indicate exclusively elite auspices for *Mankind*.

On the contrary, features of *Mankind*’s dramaturgy examined in the context of late medieval drama, appear to bear all the signs of itinerant, professional production: the condensation of material and maximization of effect identified as features of a distinctly popular drama.\(^{72}\) *Mankind*’s numerous calls-for-room are a good case in point. The call-for-room is one of those little remarked conventions of staging common in sixteenth-century moral plays in which “aggressive or self-important characters” command the audience gathered before a localized playing space to give way and let them pass either to or from the space.\(^{73}\) Some have sought to link this convention to the seventeenth-century Mummers’ play. *Mankind*’s calls-for-room closely resemble the device employed by the Presenter of the nearly 100 folk plays studied thus far to signal a new episode—“room, a room! brave gallants, give us room to sport.” In addition, *Mankind*’s central, pass-the-hat collection, or quête scene, has also been invoked as evidence for a Mummers’ play connection, since the quête is most familiar as the conventional coda of Mummers’ plays.\(^{74}\) Building on Smart’s 1907 speculation, scholars like Potter, Pettit and Denny have discussed the degree to which *Mankind*’s author was aware of if not “steeped” in

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\(^{74}\) On the Mummers’ plays, see Chambers’ *The English Folk-Play*, and Brody’s *The English Mummers and Their Plays*. The earliest evidence we have of the Mummers’ or what Brody perhaps more accurately calls the “men’s ceremonial” play, is an account from 1685, 4, 11.
conventions of a possibly prototypical medieval Mumming play. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest that Mummers’ plays existed in the fifteenth century. A tradition of seasonal semidramatic games contemporaneous with Mankind, including an activity called “mumming” existed, but our accounts of these games are not detailed enough to confirm if the call-for-room, or indeed any of the features of later Mummers’ plays, were commonplace. Leery of the lack of evidence of Mummers’ plays prior to the seventeenth century, Weimann more cautiously acknowledges Mankind’s several “points of contact” with the folk form, while Pettit believes, as do I, that the folk features of the play are probably derived from numerous, more-or-less loosely related seasonal, amateur dramatic games.

We come closer to locating an origin of the call-for-room in the Biblical cycle plays, York’s being the earliest, preceding Mankind by at least a century. In the York Smiths’ play of “The Temptation,” Satan enters with the cry, “make room believe, and let me gang!/Who makes here all this throng?” Martin Stevens identifies this cry with “city


76Chambers, The English Folkplay, 3, 18; Walter K. Smart, “Mankind and the Mumming Plays, Modern Language Notes 32 (1917), 23; Neville Denny, “Aspects of Staging,” 255. My skepticism toward the Mumming play connection has been influenced by an argument featured in Maura Nolan’s forthcoming book that Mummers’ plays imagine a world of convention, John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). It may very well be that the direction of influence proceeds from Mankind to the later Mummers’ plays.

77Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition, 61-2

78Ibid., 116; Pettit, “Fastnachtspiel,” passim.


plays, an association the call’s appearance in the Wakefield and Chester cycles renders
doubtful, but his connection of the call to the exigencies of the cycle’s staging is
perceptive. In the terminology of medieval drama studies, this space is called a “locus,”
and it could be anything from a platform erected outdoors to an architectural frame in a
church marked by a distinctive piece of scenery—a throne, a tomb, a tree, etc. The
“platea” is the unlocalized space surrounding the “locus,” which may also accommodate
a limited amount of dramatic action. In the stage configuration of Pride and Castle, loca
were deployed in a circle ringing a central platea.81 York’s cycle, on the other hand, is
thought to have been presented by means of a progress through the city, its pageant
wagons stopping at predesignated “stations” to perform their play(s). Clearly, by 1465,
both methods of staging were known: I want to suggest that Mankind, with the exigencies
of professional, itinerant performance in mind, adapts characteristics from both circular
and pageant wagon staging to its playing area, whether the central locus is on a trestle
stage or one end of a hall.82 Such staging permits itinerant players to transfer the play
from venue to venue with limited adjustments. It features, as we shall see, some elements
superfluous to performance in halls.

As Nelson reconstructs it, the York Satan’s call-for-room emerges in response to a
crowd packed in around the wagon an actor wishes to ascend. The need to get to a
particular wagon, combined with the obstacle of an eager audience and the desire to

81 Alan H. Nelson, “Some Configurations of Staging in Medieval English Drama,” Medieval English
82 The majority of scholars envision Mankind on a trestle stage, but see Merle Fifield’s The Castle in the
Circle (Muncie, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1967) for the argument that Mankind was played
outdoors in a circular space, like Castle. Other kinds of medieval staging include the semicircular
arrangement, depicted, perhaps, in the famous Fouquet miniature of a scene from Le Martyre de Seinte
Appolline, and makeshift staging using the permanent architecture inside and outside of churches, or halls.
For a survey of medieval staging options see A.C. Cawley, “The Staging of Medieval Drama,” 6-34.
remain “in character” motivated some enterprising member of the York Smiths’ guild to clear his path with what soon became the standard call. York’s call functions then, as both a pragmatic blocking device (a way to cross a crowded platea) and a method for establishing character. That later cycles understood this is evident in the fact that only the vicious ever call out for room—the Satans, the Herods, the Pilates. *Mankind* picks up this convention, and intensifies it through repetition and diffusion. To see how this works, we need to review the lead-in to *Mankind’s Court of Mischief* episode.

As the episode begins, the audience’s attention is still focused on Mankind’s disturbing exit to seek out vice. Abruptly, all attention is yanked to the opposite end of the playing space as New Gyse calls out, perhaps from behind, “Make space! For Cokkes body sakyrdre, make space!” and shoves his way up to the stage (*Mankind* 604). There he encounters Mankind, who has re-entered what is now the ale-house. Engaged by New Gyse’s comically wary appraisal of Mankind’s sudden geniality, the audience is taken off-guard when Nowadays shoves his way roughly up to the stage from the right (or left) side of the platea with, “Stonde a rom, I prey the, brother myn!”(624) Before the audience can recover, Nought cuts his way through from the other side, yelling, “a-vante, knavys! Lett me go by!” (629) Straightaway, Myscheff can be heard, bellowing from the rear of the platea, “Here cummyth a man of armys; why stonde ye so styll?/Of murder & manslawter I haue my belly-fyll,” announcing his entrance (631-2). For the space of several minutes, no standing member of the audience can avoid being jostled by player or neighbor, harried and threatened by the vicious characters. Specialists in medieval visual arts like Erwin Panofsky and Madeleine Doran tell us that the quality of copiousness was
a privileged aesthetic. 83 *Mankind* achieves copiousness through the scene’s multisensory engagement of its viewer, through the sight of richly-dressed Vices cleaving through the audience, the clamor of their threats (and any retorts) as they call for room, the feeling of being literally thrown off-balance.

It seems an excessive bit of staging if the play were written to be viewed in a great hall where the “focal point,” or ideal place from which to observe the action, would have been the high table where the most important viewers sat. 84 Here I extend Stephen Orgel’s description of a phenomenon linked to the perspective staging of Jacobean court drama to suggest that at least as early as *Mankind*, a good playwright considered the “one perfect place in the hall from which the illusion achieves its fullest effect.” 85 He may have thought about it in more rhetorical terms, and he certainly would not have confined it to a single viewer’s chair, but *Mankind’s* writer appears to have had an ideal vantage point in mind, and it is not the high table. Even if the platea crossing is not quite as vigorous as I have proposed, the sense of being surrounded by vice would be lost on those extrinsic to the action. Southern’s recreation of great hall staging omits, for clarity’s sake, the crowd of servants and other non-aristocrats standing in the middle of the room, but we can imagine that the experience of watching the call-for-room segue from the high table would be one of biding one’s time, watching one’s servants getting shoved around until the emergence of the mischief figures onstage—a far less immediate experience than that of actually standing on the platea, palpably effected by Myscheff,


Nowadays, New Gyse, Nought, and later, in his moving “ubi es” soliloquy, by Mercy searching through the audience for Mankind (727-764). Mankind’s focal point, then, is the auditors gathered on the platea.

In Castle and Pride, when an actor moved from one locus to another, say, from Mundus’ to Auaricia’s scaffold, he was required to cross through the audience situated in the platea. Mankind adapts this locus and platea strategy, in effect condensing theater in-the-round to three-quarter viewing, to give its characters motivation for their intense audience interaction. Ostensibly, the players could reach the locus/stage space from an “off” of some type, for such a place (behind a screen, or a curtain) seems indicated by what critics agree to be the necessity of the actor playing Mercy to dress for Tityvillus. Alternately, the characters could merely go around the standing crowd instead of barreling through it, but having them come from or go to imaginary loca beyond the perimeters of the platea—in the case of the above scene, from the gallows where New Gyse has narrowly escaped hanging, from a nearby church which Nowadays has robbed, and from prison where Myscheff has killed the jailor (Mankind 615-49)—augments the audience’s feeling that they are part of the action, and that, especially in the earlier quête sequence where Tityvillus sends the three N’s off to rob men in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk, the play is a part of their world (502-20). Mankind reworks the York Satan’s call in order to dramatize and thereby call attention to an evil that is so familiar as to be nearly invisible: as pedestrian as the local ale-house, and everywhere around us.

86 Adams is the earliest, as far as I can tell, to suggest that Mercy and Tityvillus are doubled, Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, 304. Cf. Furnivall and Pollard’s introduction in Macro Plays, for the argument that the lead actor doubles Tityvillus and Myscheff, xiii.
In this respect, *Mankind* makes a significant departure from *Castle*, where evil is reached through a stylized peregrination symbolizing the journey of man’s life. The trivializing effect of having one’s Mankind character run off to the local ale-house instead of to Hell accords with *Mankind*’s humor (consider, *Mankind*’s Devil is presented as a sideshow spectacle), as well as its redefinition of evil as banal, even homely. Toward this latter end, *Mankind* employs props that are the simplest and most ubiquitous of utilitarian items. Though much has been said about the symbolism of these items, their effect as stagecraft has yet to be addressed. Mankind’s spade, for example, has been the object of much attention. As the universal mark of the Fall of Man, the spade associates Mankind with the delving Adam.  

87 His wielding of it to beat back the Vices further identifies him as a “Virtue” in the tradition of psychomachic battles, in which case, the spade is equated with the “traditional symbol for defense by God’s word”—the sword.  

88 As a sign of “peasant identity,” the spade also contributes to the “mythologizing and fetishizing of the peasant that had begun well before the late fifteenth century.”  

89 All of these views are plausible, and could be easily accommodated by what has been identified as moral drama’s emblematic construction of people and things.

The spade has also been associated with the practical concerns of a professional, itinerant troupe.  

90 As a property like Tityillus’ net, the board, or the “bales” (whip/crop), the spade could be borrowed or even rented for a minimal fee at any place the troupe stopped (**Mankind 807**). It would contribute to *Mankind*’s atmosphere of fun.

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88 Ashley, “Titivillus and the Battle of Words,” 138.

89 Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 86.
and personal relevance to know that the neighbor’s spade, the parson’s fishing net, and the local knight’s crop were part of the action. As stagecraft, such props defamiliarize the familiar in ways that kings’ scepters, showers of rose petals, and broadswords cannot—they are canny in the ambiguous manner Freud emphasizes: at once “belonging to the house,” and “obscure, inaccessible to knowledge,” “secret.” The spade can be used like the s[word] of God, to “to eschew ydullnes,” or it can become instrumental in one’s fall to damnation as a source of frustration (329). The “secret” knowledge Mankind attempts to return to its viewer through its use of the everyday item, is the degree to which evil depends upon our reaction to work-a-day frustrations. Extrinsic and exotic daemonic forces are not so much to blame for mankind’s sinful behavior as his own reluctance to cope with set-backs, a lack of “pacyens,” to recast it in medieval terms (536). The moment Mankind hits a snag, the “borde” Tityvillus has buried beneath the ground, he is content to “lett Gode werke,” that is, to leave off properly preparing the field for his corn, and hope for the best (533, 546). The role of will in the matter of his fall is clear as he chooses to believe his dream about Mercy’s disgrace, despite the illogic of its two alternative endings: either Mercy “hath brokyn hys neke-kycher” falling from a horse he has stolen, or “he hangyth . . . wpon pe gallouse” for the theft of the horse (607-8). Like his spade, Mankind is neither particularly good nor evil: his value is contingent, in the final analysis, on his own inclination. Mercy tells him as much when

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92 Stock views Mankind’s lack of patience as the key to his fall, but she gives the mischief figures’ “wiles” far more credit than the play suggests they deserve, “Thematic and Structural Unity of Mankind,” 395.
he tries to shift the blame for his behavior to Tityvillus, New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought.

For the student of moral drama, then, *Mankind*’s props are part of a structure that reduces the grand, external temptations of *Castle’s Humanum Genus* (riches, security, etc.) and the perverse, internal ones of *Pride’s* King of Life (absolute power) to the everyday, cumulative ones experienced by *Mankind*’s protagonist and its audience. Dramaturgically, the props serve much the same purpose as the direct address or the call-for-room, in that they impart a sense of immediacy and relevance—a sense of one’s place in the bigger scheme of the psychomachia that at the same time takes seriously the small work-a-day threats to virtuous living: the spade that refuses to budge, the disturbing dream, the “friends” that stop by to harass one for working too hard.

3. Economic History and Topical Issues

*Condycyons to Rectyfye*

In the following overview of social and economic patterns on late medieval East Anglian manors, I will show how the empowerment of what will become in early modernity a middling sort—especially the wealthy yeomen—created a shift in power relations that had a profound impact on every class of the region. In general, we shall see how yeoman aspirations could be conceived of as at once threatening to the clergy, disloyal to the peasantry, and both supportive of and competitive with other lay landowners (gentry and aristocracy). Specifically, this section supports my claim that *Mankind* articulates, in an oblique manner, the growing class conflict between secular clergy and yeomen. To better understand how and why *Mankind* uses theatricality to
ridicule these ambitious middling types, we shall also examine the rising fortunes of itinerant, professional players, and community reception of the same.

*Pe Contre*

Studies concentrated on the specific locale of *Mankind* in the fifteenth century reveal that, due to a combination of factors, East Anglia saw a precocious emergence of socioeconomic innovations as much as half a century before other parts of the country.\(^{93}\) If what I argue to be *Mankind’s* preoccupation with the reallocation of surplus—its stunningly sixteenth-century like obsession with social climbing and confidence games—is true, East Anglia’s uneven development affords us a cause.

Enabling the region’s shift were conditions such as East Anglia’s unusually high percentage of freemen to serfs, its soil conditions that rewarded regional specialization of crops and husbandry that mixed arable with pastoral agriculture, the proximity of the continent and of major trade routes, and the relatively late organization of the local elite.\(^{94}\) References to enclosures, for example, “are commonplace in land charters from the thirteenth century onwards,” and by 1537, T. Tusser in his contribution to the manual, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandrie*, could refer to Suffolk as a “typical enclosed county.”\(^{95}\) East Anglia’s famous “flexible shift farming” techniques were also honed in the century or two just prior to *Mankind*. This communal rotation of crops initially

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\(^{94}\)M.R. Postgate claims that the proportion of freemen to villein tenants in East Anglia commonly amounted “to over half of the inhabitants of individual townships,” “Field Systems of East Anglia,” *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, ed. Alan R.H. Baker and Robin A. Butlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 306. Douglas claims the establishment of lords in East Anglia of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was “sporadic and irregular,” “The Social Structure ’,68.
peculiar to East Anglia was taken up and modified in the sixteenth century, successfully adopted as the Tudor three-course system of husbandry. In shift-farming, the manor compensates the tenant whose land lays within a “shift,” or fallow period, by allowing him to farm land elsewhere on the estate for the duration of the season. Sometimes this entailed permitting the tenant to farm a portion of the lord’s demesne land in return for the lord’s use of tenant land to “fold” his [and the rest of the tenantry’s] sheep. This method encouraged optimum productivity for all land within the manor, with strips of land alternately sown for “winter” or “summer” crops, manured by the manor’s sheep, or allowed to lie fallow. By the 1460’s, East Anglia was known as “one of England’s most commercialized regions.”

It was not, however, a region immune to economic hardship. But for the small number of enterprising peasants who actually managed to profit, East Anglians of all classes suffered what has been called “one of the most sustained and severe agricultural depressions in documented English history,” in the period from 1430 to 1470. Prior to this extreme depression, economic belt-tightening on the part of the upper classes had already initiated several changes with long-ranging effects, such as “commutation” whereby lords permitted peasants to commute their customary labor obligations to cash payments. Commutation helped allay the slippage of lordly incomes as land prices

100 Fryde, Peasants and Landlords, 144, 162.
plummeted, but it also had a stimulating effect on the market, as peasants sold their produce to make rent.\textsuperscript{101} Meanwhile, with the loss of compulsory labor to work their demesnes, lords turned to paid, wage-laborers. These, in turn, were compelled to turn to the market for food they had formerly cultivated themselves. All of these changes, intricately connected, contributed to a shift toward the capitalistic mode of production.

One of the effects most relevant to this study is the universalization, and normalization of the use of coin.\textsuperscript{102} Lee Patterson reminds us that by the twelfth century, a variety of “vigorous, monetized, and even credit-based” markets (wage labor, land and commodity) existed, not only in progressive urban centers but in a rural world that historians since Brenner are prepared to understand as more socially and economically progressive.\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Mankind} can depend on an audience familiar with not only the variety of coins named in the play, but with some of the more intangible aspects of regular money usage: access to the figural registers of accounting and commerce, and a fear and loathing of counterfeit.

\textit{Pe Yemandry}

By the late fifteenth century, the \textit{Mankind} audience’s familiarity with the cash nexus made it possible to represent counterfeit both literally, as when Tityvillus shares his “powder of Parysch” trick as just one of the “many praty thyngys” he can teach us (570, 572), and figuratively, as Mankind, the yeoman, becomes the human correlative of

\textsuperscript{101} Postgate, “Field Systems,” 307.

\textsuperscript{102} Cottage industries like ale-brewing and yarn spinning, often performed as a supplement to field work, kept peasants familiar with money, as well. See Dyer, \textit{Standards of Living}, 115.

\textsuperscript{103} Lee Patterson, “‘No man his reson herde’: Peasant Consciousness, Chaucer’s Miller, and the Structure of the \textit{Canterbury Tales},” \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly}, 86:4 (1987).
Tityvillus’ transformed coin. Examining documents like the Hundred Rolls, Poll taxes, and court records, Christopher Dyer describes yeomen as those who by virtue of “extensive lands” constituted the top of a hierarchy of commoners which also included “husbandmen,” who owned enough land to support themselves, and “laborers,” who lived primarily on wages, with access, perhaps, to a few acres around a cottage.104 In theory all were legally “peasants,” but in practice, yeomen who owned eighty acres or more generally sublet land, and could live at least partially on rents, farming out work to laborers in a manner that resembled the gentry.105 This last point is of the utmost importance, in that the gentry, comprised of the three ranks of knights, esquires and gentlemen, constituted the lowest tier of the aristocracy.106 To be a yeoman living the lifestyle of a gentleman was to walk a line intended to divide.

The statute of 1363, the first formal sumptuary legislation, suggests that this living above status went well beyond the yeoman’s method of earning income.107 Under item ix, yeomen are forbidden the use of expensive fabrics, ornaments like rings, ribbons and embroidery, and all but the lowest valued furs.108 By contrast, merchants, “citizens and burgesses, artificers” and “people of handycraft” having goods and chattels to the value of £1,000, are permitted to dress like gentry. Unlike the “people of handycraft,” with

104Dyer, Standards of Living, 15. cf. Lachman for definitions of the bewildering array of peasants recognized by English Medieval law, from the unfree “famuli,” who worked the lord’s demesne for food and a cottage, to the relatively autonomous “freeholders”, whose land under common law was as much their own as the manor lord’s was his, From Manor to Market, 31-5.

105Ibid., 22-3.

106Ibid., 15.

107Ibid., 185.

108“Statute Concerning Diet and Apparel (1363),” The Statutes of the Realm, VI (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1810), 380-1. This statute, repealed in the following year, was not enforced until some time later when another nearly identical statute was adopted.
whom yeoman had been grouped in section ix, yeomen’s apparel is not subject to change in reflection of their wealth. To clear up any confusion yeoman possessing goods and chattels of £1,000 may suffer, the section prescribing appropriate clothing for merchants ends with this warning: “And no Groom, Yeoman or Servant of Merchant . . . shall wear otherwise in Apparel than is above ordained of Yeomen of Lords.” While the statute’s establishment of protocol for all classes suggests yeomen are not the only ones living above their prescribed station, their infractions apparently produce the most anxiety, as their limitations are the ones most clearly delineated in both positive and negative terms.

The suggestion of the yeoman’s perceived servile status can be gleaned from his grouping with grooms and servants of merchants in section xi and the location of his section (ix) just after the section outlining the diet and apparel of servants. A freeman who nevertheless rents his land (at a low, fixed rate), the yeoman is considered a servant “of Lords.” Yet, several social rankings above yeoman, the upper gentry, as Dyer reminds us, were also servants of lords, providing “expert [legal and/or administrative] services,” and filling out the retinue of supporters attendant on a magnate. The factor distinguishing the yeoman, and by proxy all members of the common estate, from the aristocracy, then, was neither their wealth, their ability to live on rents, nor their subjection to an overlord, but their association with manual labor, with “the erthe.” In 1363, at a time when the wealthier farmers are already starting to employ laborers to

109Ibid., 381.
110Dyer, Standards of Living, 35, 39.
111Ibid., 22. Patterson claims that Chaucer, in the “Miller’s Tale,” uses contemporary peasants’ appropriation of the ordinarily antipeasant association of peasants with “erthe,” to a similar complimentary end, “‘No Man his Reson Herde,’” 474.
work their land for them, lawmakers were anxious to extend the distinction to the visible realm of apparel.\textsuperscript{112}

To understand why the class infractions of yeomen would be cause for such alarm, however, we need to examine the pivotal position yeomen held in the balance of power at the manorial level. After the plague (1348/9), as land prices dropped and wages rose, landlords attempted to increase their falling revenues through what amounted to a re-enserfment of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{113} It was the alliance of freeholders with less secure peasants, like the unfree “villeins” dependent on the custom of the manor (and will of the lord) for the terms of their holding, that enabled them to effectively resist this “seigneurial reaction.”\textsuperscript{114} By the fifteenth century, peasant solidarity had secured commutation of labor obligations to cash rents, direct tenant/landlord contractual leasing of land at rates superior to those established by pre-plague custom, and the decline of serfdom.\textsuperscript{115}

Yet, as more peasant land was converted into leasehold, “holders of plots [leasehold farmers] had little choice but to treat their holdings as commercial investments, as a source of profit [if they wished to keep them].”\textsuperscript{116} This commercialization of land intensified intra-peasant competition, as in this market, it was the wealthy capitalist

\textsuperscript{112}Fryde, \textit{Peasants and Landlords}, 17.
\textsuperscript{113}Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 57.
\textsuperscript{114}The freeholders’ position was the most secure—immune to rent-raising, arbitrary fines, labor dues, etc.—because the position initially included lawmakers who assured that it was protected by common-law, Fryde, \textit{Peasants and Landlords}, 48. Not all freeholders or “sokemen” as they were called in East Anglia, could be considered yeomen in the fourteenth century, but it seems fair to say that all yeomen were freeholders, even if some of the land they held retained the poorer terms (i.e., a limited lease) of a previous owner.
\textsuperscript{115}Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 83.
\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., 93.
tenant farmer, the yeoman, who was in the best position to accumulate land, often at the expense of smaller landholding neighbors who might be unable to raise the repurchasing fee as their lease came up for renewal.\footnote{Ibid., 31, 87; Holton, \emph{Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism}, 46. Postgate writes that the yeoman were “precocious” in implementing such new agrarian techniques as enclosure, crop rotation, and the use of soil-enhancing legumes, innovations which required the traditionally scattered holdings of East Anglia to be converted, through purchase, to compact fields (307).} Meanwhile, landlords vying for the best tenants created larger, more attractive consolidated holdings through tenant evictions, engrossments, and the partial or entire enclosure of common grazing lands.\footnote{Fryde, 185-6. Robert C. Allen writes, “enclosure following this pattern [engrossment, then conversion of open field systems to enclosed pasture] represented a precipitous leap into capitalist relations,” \emph{Enclosure and the Yeoman} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 66.} Suddenly, after a century of successful unity, the yeomen had become complicit in, or at least the opportunistic beneficiaries of, agricultural/economic “improvements” (i.e., enclosures, engrossments, etc.) that proved disastrous to their less well-situated neighbors. As it would on a countrywide scale in the centuries to follow, this fifteenth-century engrossing and enclosure lead, more or less swiftly, to peasant dispossession as subsistence farmers unable to make a living were forced to sell or simply abandon their land.\footnote{Ibid., 165. Fryde explains that freeholders “could be compensated” for allowing a lord to enclose common pasture and much of the common waste in defiance of manorial custom. Such enclosure was legal, and often compelled cultivators of arable land to leave the manor.} In this manner, copyholders, cotters, and other members of the heretofore complex strata of peasantry began their slide into the undifferentiated status of landless wage laborers, while the few enterprising yeomen who were able to maintain their prosperity through the turbulent century, ascended to the ranks of the gentry and beyond—a polarization of the
peasantry largely completed by the Henrician dissolution, which had the effect of redistributing Church lands to more commercial-minded owners.\textsuperscript{120}

To restate the fifteenth-century crisis being experienced on manors across East Anglia, in places where yeomen are allied with manor lords, these profit from the yeoman’s commercialization and innovative farming techniques at the cost of small, subsistence-farming tenants. Where yeomen maintain their solidarity with other tenants, peasants as a whole maintain more secure tenures at better terms, an arrangement that encourages reproduction of the peasantry, but suppresses the breakaway advantage of the yeoman. This last scenario constitutes the optimal conditions for one social group besides the lowest strata of peasants: the local clergy, for whom tithes derived from the produce of all lands are a more important source of income than rents.\textsuperscript{121} For this reason, the clergy and lay landlords are often in conflict that becomes visible in the ecclesiastical courts if nowhere else.\textsuperscript{122} Obtaining the allegiance of yeomen, like Mankind, in the late fifteenth century becomes the decisive move in an ongoing struggle between the two elite estates.

\textsuperscript{120}In the interest of his thesis, Lachman tends to emphasize the significance of the sixteenth-century dissolution of monasteries at the cost of overlooking similar socioeconomic changes that occurred in the late fifteenth century (i.e. the polarization of the peasantry, enclosure and engrossment of land, rise of markets in land and labor, etc.), 12.

\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., 40. The more owners of a parcel of land, the more tithes.

\textsuperscript{122}The clergy, as judges of clerical courts, traditionally regulated local flows of surplus between peasants and landlords in order to protect their tithe claims, Lachman, \textit{From Manor to Market}, 25. This very old struggle is no doubt overshadowed from the Peasant War on, by more open, and shocking, interclass conflicts.
When historians describe the implementation of various legal and accounting practices, they tend to speak in terms of problems and solutions of the aristocracy. We recall how labor shortages and agricultural stagnation after the plague created a fall-off in aristocratic revenues that elicited a reaction of increased surplus extraction efforts. We also recall how seigneurial effort to squeeze the peasantry after the plague largely failed. How, then, did the first estate manage to stay afloat in the economic decline? Brenner suggests, compellingly, that the increasingly destructive military campaigns waged in the latter part of the fourteenth and early fifteenth century were viewed as a solution to seigneurial woes, through “office in the state apparatus, or from the fruits of battle, especially the ransoming of wealthy prisoners.” Dyer dispels an older picture of aristocratic lavishness, arguing that much aristocratic consumption was balanced by prudent spending, from the buying of goods wholesale, to shopping the markets comparatively for the best prices. In the interest of reduced expenditure, most aristocrats put themselves on what we would now call a budget, significantly reducing the number of houses they owned and visited and concentrating their limited resources on luxuries

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123 For example, see Dyer’s Standards of Living on the adoption of landlord accounting procedures in the face of “financial anxieties,” 27-8, or Zvi Razi and Richard Smith, who contest the received notion that the thirteenth century movement toward keeping written records of all manor court proceedings was done to improve management of the lord’s estates. Instead, Razi and Smith claim that the keeping of court rolls was a defensive imitation of the increasingly popular royal courts whose innovations attracted the local freeholders, “The Origins of the English Manorial Court Rolls as a Written Record: A Puzzle,” Medieval Society and the Manor Court (Oxford: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1996), 37. See Frederic Maitland for the orthodox view in his introduction to Select Pleas in Manorial Courts, ed. and trans. F.W. Maitland, vol. 2, Publications of the Selden Society, (London: B. Quaritch, 1889), xiv.


125 Ibid., 64.
for themselves and a select few.\textsuperscript{126} By cutting costs, and making investments, whether through marriage, commercial landlordship or other commercial enterprises, many of the aristocracy managed to ride out the crisis.\textsuperscript{127} The “most creative seigneurial response” to the crisis, according to Robert C. Allen, was the turn from arable to pastoral farming.\textsuperscript{128}

\textit{Pe Cort of Myschyff}

The manor court was a critical component of the tripartite late medieval English judicial system.\textsuperscript{129} In \textit{Private Jurisdiction in England}, Warren Ortman Ault’s description of the manor as “an economic unit, with tenants who hold of their lord by economic service,” sums up the major interests at work in the local manor court.\textsuperscript{130} For if the manor court began as an inexplicit royal concession to magnates’ right to dispose of their property (including unfree peasants) at their discretion, it became, by the latter half of the fourteenth century, the site of successful peasant resistance, over the course of which


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{127}Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 88.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{128}Allen, \textit{Enclosure and the Yeoman}, 66.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{129}The other two components were the royal courts, which developed in the late twelfth century to adjudicate lordly disputes, hence their restriction to freemen (see Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 54), and the ecclesiastical courts, which were separated from the mixed lay and clerical “hundred court” in 1072 to rule specifically on topics of ecclesiastical concern (i.e., the disposition of Church property, breaches of clerical and lay morals, etc.), Robert E. Rodes, Jr., \textit{Ecclesiastical Administration in Medieval England: The Anglo-Saxons to The Reformation}, (Notre Dame, Indiana and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 15-16, 56-9.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{130}Warren Ortman Ault, \textit{Private Jurisdiction in England} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 7.}
peasants wrested concessions such as the elimination of labor dues and reduced cash rents from their aristocratic overlords.  

After the plague, refusing to take up vacant land on any except their own terms, English peasants gained a new mobility as villeins once bound to their lord’s land sought out better arrangements from lords willing to grant them “copyhold leases” that gave them rights by virtue of the manor courts. These courts set levels of rent, length of tenure, rights to renew or inherit leases based largely on the custom of the particular manor. As lords perceived the loss of serfs, they began to demand that peasants bring charters and other evidence of tenure to the manor court to be copied onto the rolls. In this way, the lords were able, if not to curtail the movement of serfs, to collect fees for the regranting of tenure conditions and in some cases, to enserf new peasants. By the thirteenth century, villeins could expect no legal protection beyond whatever could be wrested from their lord’s manor court “unless the [lord’s] actions went beyond all reason (e.g., maiming and killing),” at which point they might receive a hearing by a justice from the royal courts. 

By the late fourteenth century, “suit” (attendance) at the manor court was compulsory to all villeins at least twice annually. The presence of freeholders was not mandatory, for they had access to the royal courts, but their presence was strategically solicited by both sides: by the lords in hope of controlling “the most influential group of their tenants,” and

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131 In the late twelfth century, Henry II’s legislation extending the king’s law to “freemen” only, threw the unfree peasantry back upon their own and the community’s resources in most conflicts with their lord, Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 48, 54.

132 Lachman, From Manor to Market, 103-5.

by the peasants in order to profit from the yeoman’s savvy and other resources.\textsuperscript{134}
Eventually, it would be landlord-freeholder alliances, a boycotting of the manor courts in which landlords catered purposefully to freeholders to break peasant solidarity, that would hasten the demise of the manor court. This process was completed after the dissolution when the conversion to common law made freehold tenures synonymous with private property, and enabled landholders of all sizes to evict copyholders and convert land into commercially profitable ventures with far greater ease than ever before.\textsuperscript{135}

The manor court was understood by all to be a body of self-government, with all members of the manor serving on juries or in other ways contributing to the setting of “amercements” (fines applied by the manor court for infraction of “assizes,” or labor laws), settling of land and property disputes.\textsuperscript{136} Offices such as warden, bailiff and reeve were allocated to the most prosperous villeins. The steward, however, who “saw to it that the lord’s interests and dignity were not infringed,” who oversaw bailiff and reeve and took on as the role of chief mediator in the court, was originally part of the lord’s household, and generally of gentle status.\textsuperscript{137} The lower offices were, like the gentry-dominated Justice of the Peace position, officially non-paying, but in practice quite lucrative.\textsuperscript{138} Abuses of office, from jury stacking to bribe taking, were notoriously prevalent. Evidence suggests that very rich and/or powerful lords could “buy a jury.”\textsuperscript{139}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{134} Razi and Smith, “Origins,” 46.
\item\textsuperscript{135} Lachman, \textit{From Manor to Market}, 111-113.
\item\textsuperscript{136} Dyer describes amercements as petty fines, usually 2d to 6d per offence, that almost everyone was liable to pay at least one time per year, \textit{Standards of Living}, 115, 135.
\item\textsuperscript{138} Fryde, \textit{Peasants and Landlords}, 15
\item\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 25.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The Court of Myscheff that swears Mankind to the affliction of his neighbors satirizes the corrupt courts that Lachman and other historians suggest secured yeoman complicity, or merely lack of action on behalf of other peasants, in return for money or the opportunity to outbid other tenants.\(^\text{140}\) In general, villeins found it difficult to compete with freemen, whose lack of manorial obligations enabled them to accumulate and offer more money for the same land.\(^\text{141}\) Pressed for cash, landlords granted lands to the highest bidders, and those villeins who tried to resist their own eviction or the selling of their land were often fined in the manor court, or merely run off by the lord’s men.

Nought’s writing of the court roll in the Court of Myscheff episode capitalizes on the strong feelings most fifteenth-century audience members would have harbored for manorial records and accounts (Mankind 670-93). Historians agree that record keeping, which included accounting practices, evolved in response to the intensifying interclass friction between lords and tenants in the thirteenth century.\(^\text{142}\) Instigated by landlords between 1180 and 1220 as prices began to rise, such records sought to remedy “slack management and cheating,” as well as keep track of an estate’s resources, including its servile peasantry.\(^\text{143}\) During the peasant uprisings of 1381, the elites’ use of such records as instruments of social and economic repression was evident as the rebels targeted court

\(^\text{140}\) Lachman, From Manor to Market, 111-12.
\(^\text{142}\) Razi and Smith, “Origins,” 36-8. They tell us that by mid-thirteenth century, court rolls were a mixture of what we would now consider the separate disciplines of accounting, legal and managerial practices, 38-40.
\(^\text{143}\) Dyer, Standards of Living, 28.
rolls and other legal documents in a campaign of destruction.\textsuperscript{144} But the aristocratic landlords had other, older methods of extortion and control.

\textit{An Abyll Felyschyppe}

The “extra-economic compulsion” Brenner associates with feudal lordship as its primary means of subsistence, required the collection and organization of supporters, normally from among the “lesser elements” of the ruling class.\textsuperscript{145} Myscheff’s maternal clucking over his “fayer babys” after New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought sustain injuries in their fight with Mankind, parodies just such a relationship, for gentleman retainers, like the lord’s own children, were valued members of the household (\textit{Mankind} 425-35). In the fifteenth century, retainers could still expect to be fed, equipped, given gifts and eventually granted land and offices in exchange for their willingness to support their lord’s interests, support that often required the use of force.\textsuperscript{146} In his chapter, “Oppression and Injustice on Estates of Some Lay Landlords,” E.B. Fryde explains how under the guise of duty, and counting on the protection of their lord, some gentlemen were “as ready to defy the law and to behave as arrogantly and violently as many of the great lords.”\textsuperscript{147}


\textsuperscript{145} Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 33, 38.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 38-9.

\textsuperscript{147} Fryde, \textit{Peasants and Landlords}, 245.
The personal letters of the Paston family, prized by historians as “the one really large gentry correspondence surviving from the later middle ages,” provide a case in point. The Pastons were an ambitious Norfolk family descended from farmers who eventually rose to the title of Earls of Yarmouth (in 1679). As upstart gentry in the mid-fifteenth century, they became targets for attack by the established local nobility. Between 1465 and 1471, the Duke of Suffolk’s men absconded with over 1,100 Paston sheep and 400 lambs in addition to destroying Paston property. A few years later, men in service to the Duke of Norfolk carried off an additional 600 sheep and thirty neat. Clearly, both Suffolk and Norfolk used their retainers as ‘muscle’ on occasion, an idea *Mankind* exploits in its identification of the responsibilities of Mankind as a retainer to Myscheff as, “stealing, robbing” and “killing” —unambiguously amoral if not illegal acts (708). Even if the practices to which they allude are the more common, lawful ones of “distraining” peasant harvests for the collection of back rents, raiding animals grazed on disputed lands, raising and collecting the “tallage” and other fees, what the episode captures is the lord/retainer relationship’s casual subsumption of violence (economic or physical) to duty.

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Prior to the Reformation, it was the clerical lords—not the weak royal state—that constituted the most substantial check on lay landlord extraction from the peasantry.\(^{151}\) The “secular clergy” maintained an active interest in local manorial affairs in order to protect their direct, independent path to local resources—tithes, in theory a tenth of all produce given to God for having bestowed plenty.\(^{152}\) As judges of the ecclesiastical courts, they had the right to intervene in tenure disputes, and to regulate all flows of surplus between peasants (free and unfree) and magnates at the local level, except the labor obligations of unfree serfs.\(^{153}\) As parish priests, they advocated a work ethic that made productivity nearly synonymous with virtue.\(^{154}\)

As landlords, they tended toward extreme conservatism and were among the harshest enforcers of customary rights. The 1390 reaction of William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury and son to the Earl of Devon, to six tenants’ minor infraction of custom is frequently cited as an example of the landed clergy’s aristocratic contempt for their tenants.\(^{155}\) For delivering their obligatory cartloads of hay to the Archbishop’s palace in secret, avoiding the conspicuous display of their servile status, these respected community leaders were sentenced to walk half-naked around Wingham Church with a

\(^{151}\)Lachman, From Manor to Market, 24.

\(^{152}\)Lachman writes that tithes, which constitute “the principal source of [clerical] income,” were, overall, a more lucrative resource for the Church than manorial rents, From Manor to Market., 24, 40). For the theory and praxis of tithe extraction see Robert E. Rodes, Jr., Ecclesiastical Administration, 50-1.

\(^{153}\)Lachman, From Manor to Market, 25.

\(^{154}\)Dyer tells us this ethic met “with considerable resistance,” Standards of Living, 224. In the ethic Max Weber identified as “traditional,” late medieval workers customarily set themselves goals for cash or consumption and worked only until they achieved their aim, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 29-30.

\(^{155}\)Fryde, Peasants and Landlords, 243.
sack of hay upon their shoulders.\textsuperscript{156} Less than ten years earlier, the protracted struggle between East Anglian clerical landlords and townsfolk resentful of the former’s relentless seigneurial pressure had erupted into violence against monastic houses as important as St. Albans and Bury St. Edmunds.\textsuperscript{157}

The Lollard controversy could be viewed as yet another manifestation of the interclass tension between clergy and commons, especially in East Anglia where Lollards were increasingly of the class of artisans and yeomen—the same type of men “of rising expectations” who lead the rebellion in 1381—those who stood to lose the most by the clergy’s socioeconomic conservatism.\textsuperscript{158} Key in Lollard reform demands, as outlined in the \textit{Twelve Conclusions} nailed to the door of Westminster Hall in 1395, was the curtailment of prelate temporal power as landlords and judges.\textsuperscript{159} The three N’s’ insulting jokes about Mercy as a cleric “more secular than divine,” offer a very Lollard-like assessment of clerical conflict-of-interest, as Gash suggests in “Carnival Against Lent.”\textsuperscript{160} Other sentiments reminiscent of Lollardy include Mankind’s belief that prayer in his field is as good as prayer in the local church—“thys place I asyng as for my kyrke”—a view which leaves him vulnerable to the slothful impulses of his body (\textit{Mankind} 552). Dillon concurs with Gash’s assessment of the impact of East Anglian Lollardy on

\textsuperscript{156}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158}Scase describes the route by which “Lollard” becomes a pejorative term for the Wycliffite reformists, \textit{Piers Plowman}, 150-7. See John A.F. Thomson, \textit{The Later Lollards, 1414-1520} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 125, for East Anglia as the site of intense Lollard activity and especially severe persecution.
\textsuperscript{160}Gash, “Carnival Against Lent,” 91, 95.
the play. In her analysis of the political ground of language in the Lollard controversy, she concludes that what lay at stake in the quarrel over vernacular translations of Latin theological texts (including scripture) was, in the final analysis, access to socioeconomic power.\textsuperscript{161}

\textit{Hys Abhomynabull Presens}

The Lollard controversy also appears to inflect the play’s choice of devil, for Tityvillus is neither the fearsome Satan, nor generic Belial of \textit{Castle of Perseverance}, but a minor demon from the exemplum tradition of sermon literature, who collects the overskipped “words, syllables and even verses” of lazy priests saying mass and the “jangelings” of churchgoers in his sack.\textsuperscript{162} As Davenport explains in his look at the \textit{Mankind} Tityvillus’s debt to this tradition, exempla were narratives “inserted into a sermon to provide illustration of the point and to add variety for the congregation.”\textsuperscript{163} As such, they were condemned by Wycliffe and his followers as “superstitious lore” that distracted the people’s attention from the sustenance of unadulterated doctrine.\textsuperscript{164} If \textit{Mankind}’s Tityvillus comes from this tradition, as Davenport, Ashley, and Dillon have most recently asserted, his being cast as the devil, the focal point of evil in the play, functions to denounce not only evil but to some degree the exemplum tradition, as

\textsuperscript{162}Ashley, “Titivillus and the Battle of Words,” 128, n. 1.
\textsuperscript{163}Davenport, \textit{Fifteenth-century English Drama}, 49.
This would be in line with what I believe to be the play’s limited critique of standard ministry practices, including the use of aureate language, diagnosed as alienating to the East Anglian laity.

Ashley’s research indicates that references to Tityvillus appear in collections of exempla from the early fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and peak at around 1450. These dates suggest several reasons for his rise to “the most popular demon figure in folk mythology,” if we accept the Jamesonian definition of the work as representing, at once, a working out of and a radical questioning of collective experience. The story of the demon and his sack gave what probably began as a simple analogy—the word is like a coin—the captivating force of narrative. Clearly, the tale reinforced, while perhaps updating, an extant association of God’s Word with treasure, but it also conferred a similar value on the average parishioner’s word, transforming the petty verbal, mass-time offenses of both clergy and laity into sins: an improper diversion of funds (God’s word fails to be delivered to the people) and shameless squandering. The original Tityvillus’ function, then, was to revalue the word as a wealth withheld through dutilessness or squandered on scurrility.

The English coin shortage, which peaks in the mid-fifteenth century, as well, assures that the association of coins with riches hit its mark. A Marxian perspective which exposes the structural similarity undergirding the analogy between God’s word and

165 Davenport, Fifteenth-century English Drama, 51; Ashley, “Titivillus and the Battle of Words,” 129; Dillon, “‘Englysch Laten’,” 56.
168 Dyer, Standards of Living, 147.
coinage, adds further justification of the popularity of the Tityvillus exemplum. Both
defer gratification, coin from the time of selling one’s barley to the time of paying off the
landlord; God’s word/Word to the time of Judgement Day, when, like a bond, it may be
cashed in. On this day, those saved by the Word will become “pleyferys wyth pe
angellys”(Mankind 913). Prior to Judgement Day, Tityvillus’ gatherings, tallied up, are
applied to individual accounts where the words and syllables ostensibly manifest as a
deficit balance that must be recouped, presumably through time spent in the debtor’s
prison of Purgatory. The Tityvillus exemplum creates a colorful focal point for a
spiritual economy that apparently lacked immediacy and concreteness for more
parishioners than late medieval preachers would have liked.

Pis Rewelynge

The following section reminds us of why clerics traditionally viewed players with
such hostility: players were an opposing, rivalrous interest for the attention and extra
coins of the parishioners. This, in turn, suggests why comparing the three N’s to players,
if only through their actions, is to brand as theatrical—false, histrionic, potentially
dangerous—a certain type of gentleman. Mankind’s defection to their “sett” renders him
one of their company, a farmer-player in a gentleman's’ coat who has chosen financial
over spiritual compensation for his yeoman’s gifts of mimicry and innovation. The
play’s clear position on this choice, its condemnation of it in a Christian moral register,
articulates the class conflict between clergy and yeoman which the play endeavors
everywhere to suppress.

Since M.C. Bradbrook’s 1962 study, the characterization of itinerant players as “intolerable and dishonest,” has been one well-known to students of early drama. But most of Bradbrook’s knowledge of itinerant players and their social settings was gleaned from documents dated ca. 1576 and later. This was to change in the late 1970s and early 1980s as new evidence recovered by the REED project helped us to place Bradbrook’s later itinerant professionals in a longer tradition, one which suggests that the “social prejudice” by which early moderns would associated professional players with thieves and prostitutes was extant from the inception of professional playing.

We are also much more aware that the unseemliness of professional playing in the late middle ages was rooted in what were as much economic as social improprieties. To understand this, we need to briefly recall the tradition of medieval amateur dramatic production. Playing, as John C. Coldewey has shown, had a long history of economic motive, from the great cycle dramas to less ambitious amateur parish entertainments. The cycles, which showcased the wares of various guilds, attracting consumers from neighboring villages, indirectly benefitted civic interests, while the plays performed at local “church ales,” including those produced for outlying towns (i.e., the Robin Hood or Boy Bishop games), were undertaken specifically to raise funds for the maintenance of

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171 Ibid., v. I am not implying that the playing tradition is anything like unbroken or unchanging. The history is too complex to rehearse, here—see Marion Jones’s chapter, “Mirth and Solace,” for a solid, broad-stroke history of professional playing from Augustan Rome to the staging of Henry Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucrece*, *The Revels History of Drama*, 225-46.

local parish churches and their grounds. Typically, the gathering of a cash reward from the audience, or “quête,” was a pass-the-hat affair occurring at the end of a performance, reminiscent of the type of collection ubiquitous to the extant Mumming plays. It was, in other words, unsystematic or rather, based entirely on the honor system. By the time Leicester’s Men are touring in the 1570s, players lived off a combination of “official rewards” from civic authorities or heads of great households and these unofficial “quête”-type collections.

The novelty in late medieval professional playing, was neither the method nor mode of “reward” but the fact that what hitherto went to the ostensibly communal purposes of stimulating the local economy and maintaining parish property now lined the pocket of a few private individuals. Mankind registers a mounting resentment against what Edward’s VI’s 1551 Statute will someday describe as, “idle persons who live by others’ labor.”

Staying alert, however, to the historically-specific interests behind what sometimes appear to be univocal antitheatrical invective, we must qualify this with an understanding that regulators of peasant labor affronted by player idleness before the dissolution of monasteries are not the same as those after it. In the 1460s, it is the clergy who are

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174 Southern stresses that “gather[ing]” from a playhouse audience was common all the way into Elizabethan times, The Staging of Plays, 34.


177 We can situate the Edwardian statute within Lachman’s narrative of the struggle between lay and clerical landowners for control of peasant surplus, where he describes how the instantiation of labor law machinery run by local gentry after Henrician reform decimated the “structural bulwark” of the clergy, Lachman, From Manor to Market, 27. What this suggests to me is that while player idleness may solicit
most likely to perceive professional theatrical productions as a threat—both ideologically, as *ludi inhonesti* which parody sacred institutions, and economically, as with church ales and a drain on local peasant surplus.\(^\text{178}\)

Compounding these threats was the allure of professional players, themselves. No longer acquaintances—the village smith, butcher or saddler who traditionally performed at local ales—but fascinating strangers like Nought, New Gyse and Nowadays, “large” in their language, and “nyse in ther a-ray”(*Mankind* 295), players represented, in their apparent prosperity and independence from guild and manor, “a life of constant festival.”\(^\text{179}\) When they did acknowledge a master, through the adoption of his name or the wearing of his livery, it could be ascertained that not a groat of the money paid in recognition of the “power and influence” of the patron ever reached his coffers.\(^\text{180}\) Like *Mankind’s* insouciant N’s, professional actors might have appeared to be playing both ends toward the middle.\(^\text{181}\)

4. Conclusions

*Doctrine Monytorye*

Having seen how *Mankind* utilizes the support of convention, both generic and dramatic, to encode its message, and having reviewed some of the historical tensions the

\[^{178}\text{See Clopper for the ideological objections, *Drama, Play and Game*, 63-107.}\]

\[^{179}\text{Greenfield, “Touring,” 259.}\]

\[^{180}\text{Ibid., 256.}\]

\[^{181}\text{The economic reality of the patronage relationship was, of course, far more complex. The players’ touring enlarged and preserved their patron’s political power as the troupe came to symbolize the aristocratic authority under whose goodwill they traveled. The relationship, in current-day terms, is best imagined as an exchange of authorization for free advertising. Kathleen E. McCluskie and Felicity Dunsworth, “Patronage and the Economics of Theater,” *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 428; Greenfield, “Touring,” 256-8.}\]

play seeks to express/repress and resolve, I want to try to *read* it, that is, to think about
the play’s message and the logic of this message’s disguise in relation to its original
historical environment. I have selected two key episodes, the quête sequence and the
Court of Myscheff, on which to anchor my interpretation. While the quête appears earlier
in the play than the Court of Myscheff, it seems prudent to reserve discussion of it until
after having made the more fundamental structural arguments I propose about the play’s
veiled message in the following section on the Court of Myscheff.

*Equyte to be Leyde Onparty* [aside]

If *Mankind* satirizes a decayed feudal contract as a theatre of submission and
extortion, the Court of Myscheff represents this feudalism’s legal and administrative
structure as so much machinery. The episode begins in an “ale-house” where Mankind
has come to seek forgiveness and offer restitution to the three N’s for having beaten them
with his spade (609f). As we saw in our earlier discussion of the call-for-room, the lead-
in to this scene makes dynamic use of the entire playing area. The mischief figures’
disruptive approach through the audience does the doctrinal work of making us
understand Mankind’s fall into confusion on a visceral level and the dramaturgical work
of bringing us into the crowded and turbulent space of the late-night ale-house.

Ale-houses became fixtures on fourteenth and fifteenth-century manors as increased
demand turned ale-brewing from a cottage industry to a lucrative, full-time activity—one
the lords were quick to cut in on with licensing.\textsuperscript{182} Making the ale-house Myscheff’s seat of operations, the place Mankind is constrained to attend with a regularity he once reserved for church at “masse and matens, owres and prime,” depicts the manor court as a place where justice, like the ale-house’s license to operate, is contingent on the lord’s allowance (\textit{Mankind} 664). When New Gyse proposes that Mankind’s apology, and presumably an amercement, be entered in Myscheff’s “bok” as acceptable, the lordly Vice declines, preferring to try the matter, instead (662-66). Like a lead player doling out roles, Myscheff instructs Nowadays to make a bailiff’s “proclamation,” while Nought is made “stewarde,” responsible, in this case, for recording the proceedings on what is presumably the manor roll (665, 670). What ensues is an episode whose dominant feature, satire of manor courtroom procedure, is cleverly glossed by the visual side-gag of tailoring Mankind’s “syde gown” (671).

The manor court is sent up in expected ways, with incompetent officials—“here ys blottybus in blottis,” complains Myscheff, “Blottorum blottibus istis. / I beschrew yowr erys (errors), a fayer hande!”—a judge who passes sentence without hearing the defense, burlesque of manor court conventions—“Oyyt! Oyyyt! Oyet! All manere of men and comun women”—and a convict who is forced to take an oath to wreak havoc on the community (\textit{Mankind} 680-2, 667). All this time, New Gyse and Nought scurry back and forth, busying themselves with the shortening of the defendant’s “syde gown.” Once again, the three N’s prove themselves opportunists, profiting from Mankind’s distracted compliance—“I wyll do for pe best, so I haue no colde”—as he awaits Myscheff’s judgement (673). New Gyse promises that tailoring the “syde gown” will gain Mankind

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{182}Increased demand reflects an overall improvement in peasant diets and disposable income, Dyer,
\end{flushright}
not only a fashionable jacket but money from the sale of leftover material. Not
surprisingly, Mankind never sees a groat of this, and is prevented from even trying on the
jacket by Nought, who, disparaging New Gyse’s tailoring as yet not enough goes off to
“mende it” (699-701). Presumably, New Gyse’s version of the jacket was an acceptable
length, probably matching the three N’s’, but the text suggests that Nought’s
improvement renders the jacket so preposterously short that the purpose of the ruse—the
gain of saleable material—is as glaringly apparent as Mankind’s insufficiently covered
body.

The coat materializes the spiritual transformation that enables Mankind to turn on his
former “felouse,” which, if Mankind is a yeoman, would be other peasants (Mankind
703). Economically aggressive acts like engrossing or enclosing land, outbidding a
neighbor, or merely refusing to support one’s neighbor in the manor court, are
transfigured here into the more blatant violence of “rob[bing], stell[ing], and kyll[ing]”
(708). Perhaps, if Mankind’s service is to be like that of the raiding parties of
contemporary Norfolk and Suffolk, New Gyse’s compliment on the upgraded garment
may be taken as a slur about the true function of the gentleman’s short jacket: that it is
“well made for to ren [escape]” (721).

It has been suggested in the past that Mankind represents a simple, “rural
ploughman,” or “impoverished male agricultural laborer.”183 If this largely uncontested
view is so, how do we account for his sometimes aureate language, his demonstrated

\[\text{Standards of Living, 158.}\]

theorizes that the social status of a particular moral play’s audience closely corresponds to that of its
protagonist. I have found this theory most helpful, although her application of it in the case of Mankind’s
protagonist seems dubious, 293. See also Sponsler, Drama and Resistance, 84.
literacy, and his “syde gown”?184 Ashley’s observation that Mankind’s speech style is meant to manifest his spiritual allegiance seems reasonable but incomplete.185 Aureate when he is open to God’s mercy, his language takes on the syntactic complexity, Latinate words, and neologisms that mark the “elaborate literary style” associated with the East Anglian “high style,” modeled on the poetry of Lydgate.186 Colloquial and flippant when allied with the worldly N’s, Mankind just as easily adopts their monosyllabic expletives—“A tapster, a tapster! Stow, statt, stow!” (Mankind 729) It is not the subsistence-level laborer but the middling type, the rich peasant, like Mankind, or the ambitious gentleman, who will gain access to elite culture and distinguish himself as an excellent mimic over the next fifty years.187

In addition to demonstrating his virtue, as scholars like Davenport suggest, Mankind’s Lydgatian “high-style” also betokens learning, the suggestion of accomplishment borne out when Mankind writes his own Latin badge of arms to wear as a reminder of his “nobbyl condycyon” as “Crystes own knyght” (Mankind 317, 229).188 To do this as a prelude to manual labor implies a certain steeling of himself for work that

184 Examples of aureate language can be found at lines 186-216 and 858-60; Mankind writes “Memento, homo, quod cinis es et in cinerem reurteris,” to wear as a “bagge of myn armys” 321-2; see line 671 for Mankind’s “syde goun.”

185 Ashley’s “Tityvillus and the Battle of Words” offers a concise, fascinating analysis of the play’s use of diction, rhyme and meter to indicate character and, more remarkably, changes in character, 130-2.

186 Davenport, Fifteenth-century English Drama, 135-6.

187 Among the more famous examples are Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell, respectively the son of a butcher and a blacksmith.

188 That unfree peasants were excluded from writing is the orthodox view offered most recently in S. Justice’s Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and M.T. Clanchy’s, From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307 (Oxford University Press, 1993). Zvi Razi and Richard M. Smith, in their identification of several unfree thirteenth and fourteenth-century manorial clerks, recently cast doubt on this opinion, but the scope of their study at present seems too narrow to justify more than a qualification, “The Origins of the English Manorial Court Rolls as a Written Record: a Puzzle,” Medieval Society and the Manor Court, ed. Zvi Razi and Richard M. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 60-8.
feels ignoble. If Mankind has social aspirations, then he can be expected to feel some reluctance toward the performance of manual labor, which Dyer and Fryde have demonstrated to have been a clear sign of peasant status. Even allowing Stock’s argument that the miles Christi topos inflects the above two quotes, Mankind’s ruminating on “the incomparable astat of my promycyon [promise],” as if heaven’s main attraction is the satisfaction of his ambition, speaks to this proclivity (316).

Like the writing of his badge, whose staging presupposes his carrying about his own writing implements, Mankind’s “syde gown” is as Denny has noted, “markedly inappropriate for a simple peasant.” Reconstructing Mankind’s staging to suggest how its “meaning is expressed by action,” Denny is one of the few critics to identify Mankind as a yeoman. His corrective goes no deeper than identification, however, as he echoes Craik’s assertion that the “syde gown” signifies the protagonist’s initial spiritual dignity, and that the three N’s subsequent shortening of it dramatizes his fall to ”worldly conformity.” But, to which world? The 1463 Statute of Apparel suggests that the world to which the short jacket conforms is closed to those “under the estate of a lord, esquire, [or] gentlemen.” This would suggest that Mankind is being not so much coaxed into conformity as lured into a far more offensive class transgression. Mankind’s

189Dyer, Standards of Living, 22; Fryde Peasants and Landlords, 243.
193Ibid., 262.
195The statute declares that, “no knight, under the estate of a lord, esquire, gentlmen [sic], nor none other person, shall use or wear. . . any gown, jacket, or coat, unless it be of such a length that the same may
scornful query of the three N’s, “ye wolde haue me of yowr sett?,” signals his understanding of this project as well as his one-time rejection of it (379).

As we know from our earlier discussion, the dilemma the play invents for Mankind—a choice of living modestly and piously according to age-old precepts of Church and manor, or idling his hours away at the ale-house (when not out preying upon his neighbors)—is simply not available to the lower levels of peasants struggling to maintain control of their land. Likewise, Mankind’s decision to eschew idleness through manual labor—“I do that myn own selff” (323, emphasis mine)—alludes to a choice available only to those farmers prosperous enough to pay wages.196 Clearly, the combination of Mankind’s characteristics identifies him with the higher strata of what was still at this time a socioeconomically diverse peasantry. The yeoman’s fifteenth-century upward mobility, the “peruer[sion]” of his condition, shifts the balance of local power in a direction favorable to the landowning classes. Mankind is a yeoman farmer, then, because it is this particular sub-class, with its socioeconomic growth and social mobility that is engaged in the most dramatic moral dilemma of the day. Like the merchant protagonist of The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind can stand synecdochally for ‘everyman’s’ choice between newfangled opportunity and virtuous tradition because he is so uniquely and visibly poised between both.

To exchange his “syde gown,” then, for “a fresch iakett after the new gyse” is to outfit himself for a life of crime and narrow escape (676). Like the thievery of the quête,

cover his privy members and buttocks,” Statutes at Large, 3:362, qtd. in Smart,”Some Notes on Mankind,” 304-5.

196 The farming out of work between peasants is actually more common than I have, perhaps, suggested. Husbandmen are also capable of affording extra hands, E.B. Fryde, Peasants and Landlords in Later Medieval England (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 17.
the Court of Myscheff episode’s interest in roguery adumbrates one of the distinguishing features of later moral drama: i.e., Nichol Newfangle’s enticement of victims with a “patrimony” (*Like Will to Like*), the Jew’s playing two greedy friars against one another for an endowment (*Jew of Malta*), and Shift’s posting at St. Paul’s of various flyers advertising the dubious opportunities and services by which he makes his living (*Everyman Out of His Humor*).

*Mankind*’s interest in fashion will be another running concern in sixteenth-century moral drama, from Moros’ ludicrous red feather (*The Longer Thou Livest* 1558-69) to Fastidious Brisk’s up-to-the-moment suits (*Everyman Out of His Humor* 1599). At the most basic level, fashion constructs, displays and mystifies distinction—social, economic, political and later, religious. In the Court of Myscheff it also ridicules Mankind’s aspirations, equating the change of his jacket with the putting on of a false role, a counterfeiting of “condcyon” that is no better than Tityvillus’ earlier passing off “brasse” as silver or gold (*Mankind* 569). Fashion is above all superfluous to the putative function of clothing, as the Court of Myscheff scene indicates. Mankind thinks of his clothing pragmatically until the end (a good coat keeps out the cold), an idea perverted by the three N’s twisted practicality (a good coat facilitates escape), but the scene’s fashioning and refashioning of a perfectly good overcoat resembles nothing so much as the excesses involved in keeping pace with “pe new jett” (103).

I have said that such superfluity constitutes the play’s affective discourse. It appears in everything from representations of incontinence (Mankind’s rush to the yard when “nature compellys”; Nought’s accident; the scatological Crystemes songe and other Vice-prattle) to the grotesqueries of Tityvillus’ head “of grett omnipotens,” Mankind’s
obscenely shortened coat, and the N’s bawdy jokes (*Mankind* 560-4, 784, 335-43, 461). It manifests as fashion, as consumption, as a theatricality in movement and language exceeding the needs of expression. Linked to the Vice in later moral drama, superfluity serves here a deep-structural purpose of tying the many discourses surrounding money and language in the play, together. One of the places this becomes most visible is in *Mankind*’s reworking of the Tityvillus exemplum.

In “Titivillus and the Battle of Words in *Mankind,*” Ashley suggests that Tityvillus permits the play to explore the “crucial distinction between God’s word and words of the Devil and the World.”\(^{197}\) Arguing that the original exemplum, the devil who collects surplus janglings and overskipped words in a bag, is a referent for the evil side of the play’s psychomachic “battle of words,” Ashley reads key properties (the spade, Tityvillus’s net) and concepts (labor, idleness) metaphorically, in terms of Lenten penitential doctrine.\(^{198}\) I am more interested in what the Tityvillus exemplum might reveal as a sign. The words Tityvillus traditionally gathers—those left out of the mass by lackadaisical priests or squandered by jangling parishioners—have in common their perceived superfluity. This is, of course, an error whose magnitude becomes apparent in view of the core New Testament figure of God’s word/Word as the supreme gift to man. When one word can create the universe and another redeem it, surely no word can be superfluous. The priest who judges an omission unimportant slothfully undervalues something precious; likewise the garrulous churchgoer who prevents others (and himself) from attending to the sermon. In both cases, the divine word, debased, is diverted from

\(^{197}\) Ashley, “Titivillus and the Battle of Words,” 129.
\(^{198}\) Ibid., 138-41.
its rightful recipient. Tityvillus subsequently gathers up this surplus in his sack, profiting by others’ negligence until those from whom he has taken are called to “yelde [their] acownte” (Mankind 177).

Against the socioeconomic flux experienced in East Anglia at this time the traditional Tityvillus emerges as the wish of a society that desperately wants the word to possess deep, intrinsic value. As we know, the exemplum’s popularity peaks at a time when the word between landlord and tenant is flouted and broken at every turn, when the word of witnesses and justices are known to have a price, and when the use of ecclesiastical Latin or bawdy humor is starting to say less about a speaker than about his powers of mimicry. Shockingly, Mankind’s Tityvillus gathers not other men’s utterances but their horses, a change that implies that words are of little value. Dillon has remarked on this devaluation of the word in the play’s repeated reference to bad characters’ use of “neck-verse” to escape hanging.199 Words, for Tityvillus and his crew, are no more than tools to effect change in their environment. Whether their words correspond to phenomenal reality, their actual intentions or feelings is beside, and in excess of, the point.

In his Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud, a work that discovers structural homologies between psychoanalysis, economics and religion, theorist Jean-Joseph Goux identifies superfluity as the quality that distinguishes what Marx called the “general equivalent” from other commodities.200 The something about the word in “excess above and beyond necessary use-values”—beyond immediate need—is precisely what permits

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199Dillon, “‘Englysch Laten,’” 56-7.
it to be valued as exchangeable for other “ordinary signs.”\(^{201}\) In the period of *Mankind*, this surplus quality is tacitly acknowledged both by Medieval four-fold hermeneutics, which depend on the polysemy of Old Testament language, and by Lenten homiletic injunctions against “jangeling” during lengthy sermons.\(^{202}\) The quality of excess that adheres to the word also links it to money, long noted to be a preoccupation of the play.\(^{203}\) Both are general equivalents, in Goux’s account, and both are firmly associated in the play with Tityvillus: words as something he once collected, no longer worth the effort; money as the thing he would collect, but cannot, until he can think like his underlings and diversify cross-generically, investing himself fully in the new world of popular professional theatre. For all his theatricality, Tityvillus still identifies with the devil of the exemplum, who “tytyll[s]” in Mankind’s ear and hangs a “nett” before his eyes (557, 530).

To some degree, Tityvillus’ inability to detach himself from the exemplum seems determined by his relationship to Mercy. I believe the two characters mirror each other by design. At the mimetic level, we have Tityvillus’ lord temporal opposed to Mercy’s lord spiritual. As we know, this was a manorial relationship with which *Mankind*’s audience would have been well familiar: one crucial to the feudal mode of production which relied on a horizontal rather than a vertical distinction to limit elite extraction. For perhaps a significant percent of the audience a lord is a lord is a lord, an attitude of demystification which appears to slip past the play’s censor to be graphically illustrated

\(^{201}\) Karl Marx, “*Contribution a la critique de l’economie politique*,” 209; Goux, “Numismatics,” 31.

\(^{202}\) Ashley, “Titivillus and the Battle of Words,” 148.

in Mankind’s repetitive kneeling for mercy before opposing factions.\(^{204}\) It is a parity the play needs, but takes pains to disavow, asking us to read similitude as dichotomy instead, both through the psychomachic structure of genre (the battle between good and evil) and the doctrine that supports it. Manipulating these devices, the play pits a virtuous cleric against a vicious magnate; “mesure” against superfluity; Mankind’s ordained “condycyon” against the new guise, nowadays (237, 170).

Literally demonizing the temporal lord obfuscates his socioeconomic similarity to the cleric, who is then elevated in proportion to his nemesis’ debasement. In view of what we know to be the actual relationship between the East Anglian Church and its laity at this time, Mercy’s role as savior of Mankind appears largely prescriptive, suggesting that Dillon’s insight about Mankind’s project to mend the rift between clergy and commons is correct.\(^{205}\) In seeking to detach the clergy from its long reputation for mischief, for truly harmful meddling in lay affairs, Mankind abjects that other traditional target of common complaint, the aristocracy. At the same time, choosing Tityvillus-the-exemplum to be the foil for Mercy argues, or perhaps urges, a healthy distance between the clergy and the kind of distracting, illustrative exempla Wycliffe and his followers disparaged.

If, as I have argued, the play wants to debase Tityvillus and his crew, why have Mercy and Tityvillus been twinned in ways that stress their structural congruity rather than the dichotomy? We are fairly certain, for example, that Mercy and Tityvillus are written to be doubled by the lead actor, no doubt an opportunity for a display of

\(^{204}\) We know Mankind kneels, then rises, first by Mercy’s (218) then Nought’s (661), then Mercy’s (827) directions.

\(^{205}\) Dillon, “‘Englysch Laten’,” 49.
virtuosity, as Davenport and others have suggested. But such virtuosity depends on audience recognition of the difference between the roles in light of the *sameness* of the role-player. A more glaring similarity is the fact this it is Mercy, and not Tityvillus, who talks of words as coins and how we will be called upon to “yelde. . .acownte” for each idle utterance (177). Surely, having Mercy deliver the pith of the Tityvillus exemplum suggests a congruence that works against the abjection of the devil.

Jameson would consider this a contradiction in which the text enacts, and attempts to symbolically resolve an intractable social problem. To read this problem and the latent content of *Mankind’s* solution, we need to go beyond the interclass friction between clergy and aristocracy, between Mercy and Tityvillus, to think about what historical conditions raise it to crisis pitch. Here, Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick’s reading of the Girardian triangle is suggestive. In the classic version of the triangle, two “strong” (usually male) combatants struggle to control a third “weak” (usually female) party. The prize, at its starkest, is the privilege of reproduction: the “maintaining and transmitting [of] patriarchal power.” If we think of this dynamic in terms of both the narrative of the play and a Marxian perspective of socioeconomic change in fifteenth-century East Anglia, the character Mankind is revealed to be the weak third point of the triangle, the key to the continuation of one of two conflicting modes of production: the amoral, opportunistic money-based economy of Tityvillus and his crew, possessing proto-capitalist procedures as discussed in the earlier historical section, or the virtuous,

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206 Brandl is the first to make this suggestion in *Quellen des weltlichen Dramas*; Davenport, *Fifteenth-century English Drama*, 43.


apparently non-material feudalism of Mercy, alluding to a non-extant ideal—a wish with
the features of feudalism. In other words, the psychomachic competition over Mankind’s
soul veils the harsher features of a more mundane fight taking place extradramatically on
manors across East Anglia, to gain the yeoman’s alliance.

The play’s mostly unremarkable doctrine, then, works to veil a call for a return to an
ideal, cast into the past, where the well-to-do freeman, recognizing his enemies instead of
embracing them and their lifestyle, leads the commons in a lifestyle of piety and
ceaseless labor.\textsuperscript{209} That this piety is dictated by a class with a profoundly vested interest
in peasant labor is thoroughly repressed, unless it returns in the form of all other
characters’ outsized desire. The mischief figures’ desire for Mankind’s allegiance—note
that they nowhere claim to have any interest in his soul, but seem to consider him a
resource—could be read as the displaced desire of the clergy to control the mobile
middling types whose innovations are destructive to the tithe system. Mercy, who wants
Mankind to “yelde me nethyr golde nor tresure, but your humbyll obeysyance,” is
sharply contrasted with Tityvillus’ crew and even Mankind, who speaks of his renewed
association with Mercy as having “a lyberall possescion”(\textit{Mankind} 817, 858). Yet Mercy,
whose moderate advice to Mankind and the audience fashion him a champion of
“mesure,” is constrained by the good/evil dichotomy to occupy a position of absolute
abstinence, notably distant from measure. He does not dance, sing, laugh or engage in
any “detestabull plesure” (764). He is nevertheless human, tainted by superfluity until he

\textsuperscript{209}See Gash and Dillon for the play’s few unorthodox statements, such as Mankind’s Lollard belief that
prayer in the field is as good as prayers made in church, Gash, “Carnival Against Lent,” 553; Dillon,
“Englysch Laten’,” 47.
learns to control his “talkyng delectable” (65); only then can he serve as a true model of “mesure.”

The immense energy of the play, then, derives at the deepest level from the tension between two contradictory tendencies—toward a difference the play labors to establish through doctrine and the narrative pattern of the psychomachia, and toward the scandalous sameness it cannot shake. To reinforce the good/evil polarity, the play inflects each position with a temporality. Mercy’s position is diachronic, using the referent of eschatological time to respond to a social need to define the customary, the orthodox, and the authoritative. Identifying these things over and against the trendy, conjuring through contrast and implication a past when the word was gold, the “egall justyse of God” had its proxy in earthly courts, and the “condykyon” of all peasants, richest yeoman to most destitute villein, was to “do truly yower laboure & kepe yower haly-day.” Mankind invents a retrospective that justifies, as traditional and natural, the mediation of the clergy at both temporal and spiritual levels (Mankind 831, 281, 300). The play constructs this superior yesterday as Mercy’s eternal (eschatological) time, allied with God. It is at once a past opposed to Nowadays, a tradition opposed to the New Gyse, a time when words signified more than Nought, and a possible future.

Tityvillus’ time, on the other hand, is that of “the contynuaunce”: the experience of human, contingent time whose successive moments of unexpected change so distract and unhinge Mankind (Mankind 856). As we see dramatized in the episode where Mankind encounters obstacle after obstacle to labor and prayer, this is time as the exigency of ‘now’ that can no longer see itself in relation to any truth larger than immediate gratification or cessation of pain. This is the temporality of the foppish Vices, their busy,
stage-managing master and his overlord, the devil, Tityvillus, around whom the play distills its plethora of social ills, labelling them “nowadays.” In this way, Mankind registers an emerging mode of production (capitalism) and denounces it as a superfluous newfangledness destructive to tradition, the right “ordynacyon” of the older mode of feudal production.

Against the stress of change events, Mercy offers a defensive “doctrine monytorye,” a kind of medieval behavioral modification program that involves thinking about every act in relation to Judgement Day (deterrent from getting into mischief), performing hard labor (distraction from temptation), and keeping one’s “haly-day” (regular reindoctrination at Sunday service) (Mankind 876). Defeat Tityvillus, suggests the play, and transcend the contingent, mutable “contynuaunce.” Yet the very quality of mercy presupposes a change event: repentance. Mercy’s very raison is contingent on the power of “diuerse mutacyon” to sway mankind, and the social, internalized as conscience, to goad him back to the straight and narrow (910). Like money or the other forms of excess so worrisome to the play, the “contynuaunce,” the time of both necessity and its opposite (superfluity), is something Mercy both requires and rejects.

Reading what has been split back together again, against the play’s historical and generic conditions reveals Mankind’s ideologeme to be an appeal to a reinvestment in the feudal mode of production. Through the Mercy/Tityvillus dichotomy, Mankind alternately wheedles and threatens “all the yemandry that ys here” to abandon ridiculous and vicious pretensions to a life of greater ease, and mend their differences with the clergy, their savior of old (333). That the core of the play’s “happy” ending is Mankind’s resolution to rectify his “condycyon” along the lines of this ideal feudal peasantry
(Mercy’s fantasy), confirms the idea that the class perspective Mankind expresses is that of the secular clergy.

*Estis Vos Pecuniatus?*

The quête episode occupies a privileged place at the center of the play. On the level of narrative, the episode represents a significant turning point in the mischief figures’ battle with Mankind as they bring in the heavy artillery, Tityvillus. On the level of dramaturgy, the episode features some of the play’s most memorable action, providing its troupe with an opportunity to showcase the physical talents of its members. On the level of allegory, it functions like a poetic node, ingathering several of the play’s most important semantic threads: the doctrinal, the social and the theatrical.

To quickly review, the episode comes immediately on the heels of the three N’s brief, whispered “interleccyon” (consultation) with Myscheff concerning the unresolved “mater of Mankynde” (*Mankind* 448-9). Myscheff commands Nought to strike up a tune on his “Walsyngham wystyll” as he urges New Gyse and Nowadays to initiate their plan concerning “Si dedero” (454). Myscheff departs, and the collection gets underway, with New Gyse and Nowadays urging the audience to pay up “ellys per xall no man hym [Tytivillus] se” (458). Nowadays scorns offerings of “grotys,” “pens,” or “to pens” as insulting to the devil’s “worschyppull” presence, but the more practical New Gyse suggests, “ye pat mow not pay pe ton, pay pe toper” (463-6). They harrass the audience until Nought complains that he has grown weary of whistling, and Tityvillus enters shortly thereafter, oblivious to the collection ostensibly taken on his behalf. His first
order of business, in fact, is to hit one after the other of the three N’s up for money. Each plead poverty.

The text suggests that the most effective staging would have the three N’s surreptitiously pass between themselves, either behind their own or Tityvillus’ back, a single purse into which all the coins have been placed, along with an empty purse which they could take turns shaking out to demonstrate their penury. The juggling or sleight-of-hand skills we assume to have been in the skill set of itinerant players could be used to augment the dodge. The quête ends as a frustrated Tityvillus orders the three to scour the countryside for horses or whatever else can be stolen for him (Mankind 485-88). In return, he promises to “venge” their “quarell” with Mankind. Before setting out, the three N’s run their mission itinerary past Tityvillus for approval, naming potential victims (historically identified) from the surrounding East Anglian countryside. Tityvillus sends them off with a devil’s blessing, and charges them to return with their “avantage” (451-524).

At one level this scene dramatizes, more than any other in the play, the perceived decay of an idealized feudal contract. As I argued in our earlier discussion of genre, this mimetic level would have been readily apparent to a late fifteenth-century audience at once more attuned to the signs of social differentiation and to stage conventions that render “boundaries between allegory and representational realism” extremely fluid.  

210 In Eccles’ edition, Mankind runs 914 lines. Line 457, the exact middle of the play, in which New Gyse dismisses Myscheff with, “Ye, go pi wey! We xall gaper mony onto,” begins the quête.

211 Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, 11.

212 Twycross and Carpenter, “Masks and Masking,” 245.
For readers of the last century unaware of either these practices or the local historical struggles that inflect them with specific meaning, the social status of *Mankind’s* characters has proven difficult to determine, with by far the most enigmatic case being New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought. Weimann, Kittel and Fattic place the three N’s with “the laboring” or “low-class” order while others, judging them “foppish” and “citified” based on Mercy’s description of them as “nyse in per aray,” imply that they are of a higher status. Many ignore their social identity altogether in favor of their role in moral doctrine as “Worldlings” but this approach misses a vital link in the play’s polemical identification of predatory mischief with local, temporal politics. In the quête sequence, Nowadays’ incensed affirmation, “I am a clen jentylman,” can be taken as evidence of status, because other parts of the play support it (483). In addition to Mercy’s description of their fine “aray,” it is implied when the three N’s cut Mankind’s coat into a short jacket, that they also wear the short jackets of young gentlemen, “lyght to leppe abowte”: so “lyght” as to hinder neither courtly dancing, a “nere rune” (narrow escape), nor, as the above phrase hints darkly, evoking New Gyse’s “twych[ing]” and “swyng[ing]” on the gallows, a hanging (697, 617). In late medieval drama, where “a character is identified by costume,” it makes sense to be especially sensitive to such

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215 This is not the same as pointing to line 729’s call for a tapster as evidence that the play was performed at an innyard. The context of the narrative tells us that Mankind’s call for a tapster here is not primarily extradramatic: the entire scene has taken place in the “ale-house” where Mankind has gone to ask mercy of the three N’s.
indicators of dress. With laudable respect for these cues, Kitty Burrows, costume designer for the 1996 Leeds Mankind, dressed the three N’s in identically cut brocade-trimmed short doublets, brightly colored hose, and feathered caps.

Even in the absence of such visual markers, Mankind’s audience could have identified the N’s’ social status by observing their relationships with characters whose status is less ambiguous. In the cure scene just prior to the quête, with their “goode master” Myscheff, and in the following episode with the “dominus,” Tityvillus, the attitude of New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought—filial solicitation of pity from the former, a smarmy obsequiousness toward the latter, not unlike their attitude toward the “worschypfull souerence” in the audience from whom they also hope to profit—resembles nothing so much as a burlesque of how young gentleman retainers comport themselves with their lord and his (absentee) overlord (Mankind 432, 463, 488). The “si dedero” joke just prior to the quête turns not only on recognition of this popular euphemism for bribery but also on the three N’s enlargement of their master’s boon—what ‘I shall give to you’ being, unbeknownst to Myscheff, both Tityvillus’s aid and his money. The episode lampoons the gentry’s self-interest and propensity for exploitation, locating a weakness in the feudal chain whose effects are as hidden but tangible as Tityvillus, himself. Surplus is being diverted from its correct destination by middling types loyal only to themselves.

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216 Twycross and Carpenter, “Masks and Masking,” 244.
We recall from Lachman’s model that surplus in the feudal mode is supposed to flow upward, coming to rest in the coffers of lay and Church magnates. These magnates are bound, in return, to protect their supporters. The quête parodies this social contract, with Tityvillus, the “dominancium dominus” (*Mankind* 474), arriving on the scene in a flurry of music and activity, like an absentee magnate summoned home by one of his manor lords (Myscheff) to defend three retainers (New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought) against a stubborn freeholder (Mankind). “I know full well what Mankynde dyde to yow,” Tityvillus assures the three N’s, “Myscheff hat informyde of all pe matere thorow. / I xall venge your quarell, I make Gode avow” (499-501). There are, however, more pressing matters for the busy “dominus,” ones he addresses by sending forth the three N’s to procure other mens’ horses for him. Clearly, despite the functional appearance of its structure, *Mankind’s* manor, with its hierarchy of magnate, manor lord, gentleman retainers, and tenant farmers, is in decay.\(^{219}\) Its court may grind on, its ale-house may do a brisk business, but something is amiss, for at the top of the economic ladder Tityvillus is indigent.

The cause, we can guess, may be linked to the improper diversion of funds we have witnessed—a bottleneck in the midsection of the feudal machinery—but all we know for certain is that something has turned the exemplum Tityvillus from a collector of words to a collector of other forms of wealth, and from lordship to more overt forms of robbery. Centuries ahead of economic theory, *Mankind’s* variation on the Tityvillus exemplum

\(^{219}\)By Lachman’s definitions, magnates own at least ten manors (or 5,000 acres), manor lords hold one or more manors (around 1,000 acres), gentry may be as well-situated as manor lords (may, like the Pastons of Norfolk, *become* manor lords) or as modestly outfitted as yeomen, whose large farms cover at least twenty-four acres. Small holdings are considered less than twelve acres, but can be as small as the “cotter’s” half-acre garden behind his rented cottage. Villeins, of course, are without land rights, *From Manor to Market*, 35-9.
identifies the feudal lord as a collector of surplus. Tityvillus is “logically cast,” not only because his history in medieval sermon literature supports the play’s larger doctrinal aims, but because he provides, among other things, a way to talk about the economic position of lordship. And what the play notes, with extreme perspicacity, is feudal lordship’s parasitical dependency on the classes below, a dependency that leaves weaker or absentee lords vulnerable to the corruption or ambition of underlings not overseen.

Underlings of Tityvillus and Myscheff, but socially superior to Mankind given their dress and leisure time, New Gyse, Nowadays, and Nought do not require further differentiation. They are of a pattern because, from the play’s perspective, so are the social types they satirize. If their status seems ambiguous, it only argues what historians like Dyer have retrospectively confirmed: that “gentlemen” occupy a “socially ambiguous” position in the hierarchy of this period. Yet the play does not entirely silence the gentleman’s perspective, although we need to forgo the text in order to access it in the play’s action. Tityvillus may be duped in the quête sequence, but the three N’s are subsequently constrained to steal for him at risk to their own lives. The danger of their labor, which contradicts a text calling them idle, is evinced (though admittedly dampened by humor) in their frequent near escapes from hanging (Mankind 512-3, 604-23, 797-803). In this way, Mankind renders the gentleman’s perspective rhetorically useful: the play’s tacit acknowledgement of the three N’s risks and obligations exposes the ugliness of their eternal carnival, rendering their lifestyle, and by association that of

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220 Ashley, “Titivillus and the Battle of Words, 129.
221 Dyer, Standards of Living, 19-20.
gentlemen retainers and professional players, fundamentally undesirable without having to deny or suppress its appealing qualities.

The “frenetic, assaultive” even self-conscious theatricality of New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought has long impressed readers, from Wright’s censure of their antics as “irrelevant” buffoonery to Mackenzie’s sheepish admission that their “mad pranks” are the highlight of the play. As *Mankind* expresses it, theatricality figures forth a gentry that seem suspiciously close to players. Chopping Latin one moment, singing obscene songs with peasants the next, and “con[ning]” their “neke-verse” to avoid being hung, the three N’s gentility seems as put on as a new, short jacket (*Mankind* 520). Perhaps one generation removed from the “marchande” (merchant) to which New Gyse compares Nowadays, their mercenary mentality permits them to sell what should never be for sale: audience with their master (Tityvillus), “stoff” lifted from “a chyrche,” and confidence in their good intentions (632-5). The quête episode is one of the few that gives voice to all levels of the three N’s identity: Worldling, gentleman retainer, and professional player.

At first glance, the three N’s may seem less like professional players than purveyors of folk *ludi*, with their quête, their calls for room, their “Crystemes songe,” and their “animal” dance (if Tom Pettit is correct about the action in their first scene). This seems, however, intentionally misleading, a projection or abjection that follows a larger

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223 Pettit suggests that the N’s’ first appearance is a type of show-within-a-show, a burlesque of an East Anglian folk custom wherein one player wearing an animal costume (Nought), is made to dance and leap about by the others, “*Fastnachtspiel*,” 193. This seems convincing in that it clears up the enigma of Nought’s complaints to his companions—“xall I breke my neke to schew yow sporte?” and “yt [the costume] ys a narow space”—as well as supporting the idea that the quête lampoons standard folk *ludi* collections, *Mankind*, 78, 97. In *English Moral Interludes* (Dent, London: Everyman Library, 1976), Wickham similarly suggests that the scene parodies a dancing bear and bearwards, 5.
pattern in the play of vilifying a thing, the “vycyouse” New Gyse, for example, in order to obfuscate its parity to something the play cannot afford to reject, the vague “goode New Gyse” that Mercy “wyll not dysalow” but refuses to identify, ostensibly because it is so obvious every man’s “reson” will know it immediately (Mankind 182-3). In fact, the “goode New Guise” functions as a qualification to Mercy’s general condemnation of the “vycyouse guise”—an exception we are flattered into identifying for ourselves. Mercy represents a “new” kind of minister, yes, but certainly new is “goode” in this case. By similar logic, Mankind is a Shrovetide entertainment full of japes, frivolity and distracting spectacle—the very features clerical antitheatrical invective targeted in its attack on folk ludi—224—but Mankind is not a folkplay. It is a moral drama, distinctly opposed to the vile practices of ludi.

Yet, even as Mankind rejects the folk ludi, it cannot help but leave the door ajar for suspicions concerning the practices of its own itinerant professional production. Another way to think about the three N’s’ hoodwinking of Tityvillus is as a burlesque of the perceived relationship between players and aristocratic patron. We have seen that the lord’s benefit in the patronage relationship was political rather than monetary. To what degree was this general knowledge? No doubt the players could be seen at local taverns very much like Mankind’s ale-house, eating, drinking and carousing away money gathered under their lord’s name. The quête episode stages suspicion, as Tityvillus is denied the proceeds from his own show.

Yet, the cheating of Tityvillus draws fire from the quête’s true outrage: the gulling of its audience. We understand, retrospectively, that Tityvillus would have appeared gratis,

224Lawrence M. Clopper, Drama, Play and Game, 50-62.
and that the collection has been taken under false pretences. If only for a fraction of a second, the audience appears to have been taken in by the three N’s. What the joke registers is the developing antagonism between professional players and their audience concerning money. We know from our earlier discussion that the chief difficulty lay not in paying for entertainment, but in the money’s diversion from communal to private use. *Mankind* defuses any tension that might attach to its own players’ professionalism, by allocating the taking of money to vicious characters safely contained by the narrative structure on one hand, and by the distance of abjected folk entertainment on the other.

Vilifying its gatherers in the same way later Mummer’s plays will use Beelzebub or Little Devil Doubt to pass the hat, the play disavows the players’ connection to gathering money and opens a space for more pointed invective as the viciousness of the gatherers gives players license to voice any discontent with the recompense of their labor: 225 “Kepe yower tayll, in goodnes I prey yow. . . he louyth no grotes nor pens or to-pens,/Gyf ws rede reyallys. . ”(453-6). This audacious snub is projected from the speaker of the lines, Nowadays, onto the absent Tityvillus, he who loves no groats, a move which limits the insult to some degree to the reality of the narrative. Some of the joke’s aggressivity escapes containment, coloring the humor dark. New Gyse’s highly equivocal blessing/curse, for example, “ye pay all alyke; well mut ye fare!” presses the increasingly sore spot of social division to goad the elite into paying more than their standing neighbors, who are in turn encouraged to pay as much as their superiors in the hope of “far[ing]” like them (470). Looked at through the lens of the conventions of amateur

225 Brody believes that the quête is the part of a play in which players take “the opportunity for social satire and personal abuse most clearly” and that invective was part of the original purpose of the ritual from whence Mumming plays derive, *The English Mummers*, 65-6.
production, the quête also lets slip a hint of scorn toward those who attend plays like the York “Temptation” solely in anticipation of the grotesque Satan.

Perhaps most remarkable, Mankind’s quête materializes an idea that will later become a major theme, not only in sixteenth-century antiteatrical invective like Gosson’s, but in the plays this study examines in subsequent chapters: the association of players with thieves. Whether it occurs through “cousin cutpurse” of Cambyses (1561), Pilia-borza of Marlowe’s Jew of Malta (1590) or Carlo Buffone of Jonson’s Everyman Out of His Humor (1599), the motif of thievery articulates and rearticulates the suspicion voiced as early as Mankind that cash paid to see a play can somehow never constitute an equitable exchange.\(^{226}\)

As a deviation from the moral drama form, Mankind’s quête might also be perceived as considering the feasibility of the amateur production’s honor-based, pass-the-hat system of collection under the new auspices of professional playing. As we recall from Greenfield’s and others’ studies, the quête’s pass-the-hat collection is a common feature of all popular dramatic productions of the time, professional or amateur. Too easily diverted, Mankind’s collection is represented as a wholly unsatisfactory method for the payment of players, especially those with the mobility and anonymity of professionals. In this way, Mankind’s collection sequence can be said to create the conditions for a consideration of other methods of remuneration, a movement away from the quête to payment-in-advance, a shift that attempts to regulate price (half-pence for groundlings) and fix an exchange value to the product of performance, itself.\(^{227}\) An unplanned effect

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\(^{226}\) Agnew, Worlds Apart, 118.

\(^{227}\) Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, 59.
of this change appears to have been an intensification of the promissory quality of the player/audience relationship, something later expressed in the ambiguous apologies and mock-contracts of the London stage. ²²⁸

Largely repressed is the players’ vulnerability to the old honor system of payment. It will not be until the sixteenth century that this vantage point will find overt symbolic representation in plays written by player/playwrights, and concrete expression in the shift to a payment-in-advance, limited access to performance system, otherwise known as the London playhouse. ²²⁹


²²⁹ Burbage is said to have built The Theatre primarily for the purpose of controlling payments at the door, “instead of going through the audience with a hat as the travelling players did,” Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 82.
CHAPTER TWO

WILLIAM WAGER: AMBITION MONSTROUS,
AND DREAMS OF COMMONWEALTH

The scope of this chapter departs from the previous one in its focus not on a single play, but on the corpus of a single playwright, William Wager. While discussion of three plays at once risks the very homogenizing effect I criticize in studies that fail to closely read moral plays, the gains justify the risk, for in addition to affording an

1Like many plays in the period, the dating of Wager’s plays has proven difficult. I have adopted Bevington’s dates, except for the overly ambiguous “before 1567” for The Trial of Treasure. For reasons that will be discussed, Trial appears to be the earliest of the three plays I treat here. Bevington’s dating of Trial, is however, standard, putting Southern’s 1565 and Benbow’s 1567 into accord. Collier’s dating of The Longer thou Livest the More Fool thou Art to “soon after 1558” and Hazlitt’s 1581 date represent outside limits in a range Bevington narrows along the lines of Halliwell, to ca. 1558-69. Bevington locates Enough as Good as a Feast, dated by Harbage at 1560 and Eccles at ca.1570, between 1558 and 1569, Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, 67; Southern, The Staging of Plays, 476; R. Mark Benbow, Introduction, W. Wager: The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), xix; J.P. Collier, The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare (London, 1879); W.Carew Hazlitt, A Select Collection of Old English Plays, 4th ed., 15 vols. (London: Reeves and Turner,1874-76); J.O. Halliwell, Literature of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: For private circulation only, 1851); Alfred Harbage, Annals of English Drama, 975-1700: an analytical record. . . 3d ed. (London: Routledge, 1989); Eccles, “William Wager and His Plays,” English Language Notes 18 (1981), 262. There are five extant copies of the single 1567 quarto edition of Trial. John S. Farmer’s 1906 edition for Early English Dramatists (Guildford, England: Charles W. Traylen, 1966), based on Hazlitt’s 1874 edition, is the most recent reprint and the one cited here. The play also exists in facsimile (The Tudor Facsimile Texts; London, 1908). Only single quarto copies survive of Longer (British Museum) from its sole printing in 1569 and Enough (Huntington) from its single edition “perhaps the following year,” Benbow, W. Wager, xx-xxii. While keeping Eccles’ emendations in mind, I use Benbow’s edition of the latter two plays, which is based on photostats of the two extant copies, collated with Brandl’s reprint of Longer for Shakespeare Jahrbuch, 36(1900). For more precise textual details see Benbow’s section on “The Text” in his introduction, xx-xxii. Finally, as intriguingly Wager-like as the three-leaf fragment of The Cruel Debtor is (dramatizing the Matthew 18:23-35 parable of “the talents”), I have deemed it too fragmentary to be of use in this study. Adams speculates that the complete play focused on “the miseries wrought by covetousness on two members of the servant class,” English Domestic, 61. This and Debtor’s heavy dependence on its source, something not evident in the more confident Enough and Longer, gave rise to speculation that Debtor is Wager’s earliest play, Adams, 61, n. 15; Leslie Mahin Oliver, “William Wager and The Trial of Treasure,” Huntington Library Quarterly, 9 (1945-6), 419; White, Theatre and Reformation, 98.
opportunity to explore rarely discussed material, a sequential approach enables insight into the development of this mid-century playwright’s increasingly agonistic relationship with his audience, setting Agnew’s claim about the relationship between playwright/players and their audience back decades prior to the inauguration of the London stage.²

Wager’s mastery of the mute poetics of stagecraft seems strikingly Marlovian at times, as in the most frequently cited episode concluding *Enough is As Good as a Feast*, where, straight on the heels of a frenetic, darkly humorous dying scene, Wager permits the power of silence and the presence of Worldly Man’s abandoned corpse to express a nearly existential statement about every man’s ultimate isolation (*Enough* 1427). In its dance between capitulation to and condemnation of its primary audience, however, Wager’s work is more prescient of Jonson’s—from its defensive prologues and mordant sketches of contemporary social types to its anxious, self-aware tics about its own role in the formation and perpetuation of cultural ideology.³ Admittedly, Wager is the lesser poet, a shortcoming of which he himself seems more painfully aware than the period’s convention of self-deprecation dictates. Yet, if the following excerpt attests to a basic-to-fumbling grasp of meter—a moral play characteristic Bevington discerns in Marlowe’s sneer at “jiggyng veins of rhyming mother wits”—it also testifies to his facility with figural language.⁴

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³ In *Trial* the prologue begs the audience to forgive the author and players if “the style be barbarous, not fined with eloquence,” p. 207.

⁴ Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 200. Wager’s plaintive wish in *Enough*, that “truly... I desire with all my heart/That our English meter may be of such kind./Both to leave [alleviate] all grievousness and smart” and subsequent complaints about the inadequacies of “our tongue” identifies the problem of vernacular dramatic verse for which Marlowe’s blank verse will, famously, offer a solution, 31-3; 72-6.
Contentation: For we have seen of late days this canker pestilent
Corrupting our realm to our utter decay.
Ambition, I mean, which chiefly doth reign
Amongst those who should have been example to other.
Yea we see how the Brethren they did disdain,
And burned with fire the child with the mother.
It is often seen that such monstrous ambition,
As spareth not to spill the blood of the innocent
Will not greatly stick to fall to sedition,
The determinations of God therby to prevent;
But God I trust shall disappoint their intent,
And overthrow the power of fading treasure,
And cause us all to wish for the heavenly pleasure.

(Enough 240-52)

Like most mid-century playwrights, Wager is less concerned with novelty than with
decorum and authority, but he is fully capable of executing the surprising move.

Submerged, for example, between the conventional homiletic figures of the
commonwealth body “corrupt[ed]” by the “canker” of ambition, and God as legitimate
anthropomorphized overthrower of usurped power, lies a metaphor taken from the realm
of popular theatre.5

In Enough, the “monstrous ambition” that does not hesitate “to spill the blood of the
innocent” conjures images of the mad tyrant at whose command “the innocents” were
slaughtered in a “sedit[ious]” attempt to overturn God’s ordinance, including an
assassination attempt on the rightful king, Christ (246-8). In Protestant typology,

5The body politic is adapted from the medieval concept of society as “an integrated and yet articulated
organism,” Anton Herman Chroust, “The Corporate Idea and the Body Politic in the Middle Ages,” Review
of Politics, 9 (1947), 1424. The aim of mid-century commonwealth preachers to “synthesize interests of
the monarchy and community into a whole” renders it especially appealing as a way to talk about
socioeconomic “ills,” from Robert Crowley’s The Way to Wealth (1550), to John Cheke’s treatise
concerning plagues sent by God as punishment for sedition, The Hurt of Sedition Howe Greveous it is to a
Commune Welth (1549), Helen C. White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth
Century (New York: MacMillan Co., 1944), 115, 144. On the origins of commonwealth thought, see
Economic Developments of Mid-Tudor England Upon Contemporary Concepts of the Nature and Duties of
Herod’s genocide manifests his membership in the Church of Satan as one of the “line of Cain the tyrant.” In the popular theatre, Hamlet’s 1600/1 rejection of a playing style that “out Herods Herod” reminds us that the Herod plays from the great Biblical cycles remained still fresh in the Elizabethan popular imagination.

In fewer lines than a sonnet, and with a nod to Protestant typology, Wager invokes popular stage history to link Biblical history with the recent history of the Marian persecutions in order to exhort a specific group, those who should be ”example to other,” to eschew corrupting ambition, lest they channel the illegitimate power Enough demonstrates to be a target for God’s wrath. This power’s apparent connection to “sedition” and greed for “fading treasure” comes to light in the context of contemporary sermons excoriating the socioeconomic practices of the “lay lawyers, merchants, gentlemen and rich artisans” who fail to be content with God’s ordinance or their place within it. Yet the use of allegory here deflects overt blame, making Ambition the usurper, a false king that “reign[s]” over other leaders, compelling them to commit acts of atrocity and sedition to the decay of the realm. In this way, the convention of allegory veils without entirely obscuring its critique of the social-climbing middling sort, a message Wager apparently deemed so important and effectively delivered, he

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8The quote is Crowley’s, but the nexus of greed, ambition, and sedition is voiced as early as Cranmer and John Cheke in 1549, after the rebellion of that year, White, *Social Criticism*, 8.
transplanted it from its original position more than halfway through the *Trial of Treasure*, to the first episode of *Enough* with only minor variations.9

The effect is one of emphasis, and the passage should intrigue us for its repetition as well as its semantic density as one of those nodes that embodies what Lacan identifies as marking a traumatic experience in the real.10 In this case, the trauma is represented by an historical event: the infamous burning of “the Guernsey martyrs” featuring a very pregnant Perotine Massey, her mother and her sister. Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* includes the following details, which describe the July 1556 burning:

as the belly of the woman burst asunder by the vehemency of the flame, the infant, being a fair man-child fell into the fire, and eftsoons being taken out of the fire by one W. House, was laid upon the grass. Then was the child had to the provost, and from him to the bailiff, who gave censure that it should be carried back again, and cast into the fire, where it was burnt with the silly mother. . “11

I am not suggesting that Wager attended the execution. On the contrary, facts render his presence in the country at the time highly improbable.12 Nor is the other attractive

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9The term “middling,” inclusive of Mingay’s term “gentry,” remains a vexed one for students of the early modern period. In the sixteenth century, the gentry were considered to be anyone higher than a yeoman by means of birth, education, wealth and/or leisure, and of no higher rank than knight, but the mobility and lifestyles of some yeomen and artisans make this definition problematic, *The Gentry*, 2. “The middling sort,” a category interrogated by Wrightson and others, is the broader category that includes yeomen, rich artisans and citizens of the towns. The difficulty, as Wrightson explains, is that there are very few actual references to a middle sort until the seventeenth century for they “lacked the distinctive political identity” that would later define the bourgeoisie, “‘Sorts of People’,”42, 44. Until the Civil War, the middling tend to self-identify with the ruling elite. Part of what I argue in this chapter is that plays like Wager’s foster a middling political identity, distinct from the aristocracy, earlier than this.


12Eccles asserts that the combination of Wager’s high level of education with his absence from the records of Cambridge or Oxford, point to study abroad, “William Wager,” 258. Study on the continent could explain Wager’s great familiarity with the dual protagonist plot (used in *Trial* and *Enough*), a moral drama variation Roy Mackenzie traces to old French plays like *Bien Avisé, Mal Avisé* and *L’Homme Juste et l’Homme Mondain*, *The English Morality*, 121, n. 2.
possibility, the attendance of Lewis Wager, the minister/playwright identified as Wager’s father by Paul Whitfield White, of particular interest to me here. The “primal scene,” as Freud reminds us, need not have occurred in the phenomenal experience of the subject for it to give rise to the unpleasant repetition we recognize as dream-work. Instead, for Wager the Perotine Massey episode registers a formative trauma at the level of the social real, one Wager’s plays seem compelled to repeat as a form of working out. The Massey incident not only stands out in Trial and Enough as relatively naked manifest content, but is arguably a precondition of Longer’s anxiety about ambition, a function Jameson associates with the properties of latent content. In other words, Massey’s execution haunts even that play in which there is no overt reference to it.

Why she should serve as Wager’s synecdoche for an entire host of socioeconomic evils is best understood in terms of what Theresa Krier identifies as the period’s “nostalgic constructions of motherhood.” The vulnerability of gestation, imagined as a “fusion” between mother and child, freights the sundering of this most “innocent” of social bonds.

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13White’s statement that Lewis is William’s father appears largely based on Mark Eccles’s more tentative suggestion that William is “probably a son or other relative of Lewis,” White, Theatre and Reformation, 70; Eccles, “William Wager and His Plays,” 258-62.


Elizabethan dyads with enormous affect.\(^{18}\) The Guernsey “spill[ing]” of “the mother with the child” trebles this outrage through its repetition of the dyad amongst the four people slain. Their state and Church-sanctioned execution indicates, for Wager, the outer limit of an ambition grown so unnatural the only sin beyond it is a Satan-like sedition.

Ambition is the monster of Wager’s dreams, and he speaks for many of his generation in his identification of it with the various socioeconomic changes occurring around him.\(^{19}\) In seeking to negotiate the tremendous dangers of the time—the peasant rebellions, religious martyrdoms and political conspiracies that cast shadows on daily English existence from the late 1530s to the early ’50s—Minister Wager joins his colleagues in exhorting his flock to social conservatism.\(^{20}\) Yet, over the course of his playwrighting career, his work often exceeds that of his peers in rooting out ambition’s causes, staging its effects, and recommending various solutions—from rigorous self-surveillance in the face of things indifferent to the wisdom of political compromise. In defense of the Perotine Masseys of his world, Wager’s plays “do all things to edify the Congregation” \((Trial,\) motto\), including a risky exposure of the faults of the very middling Protestants whose favor he curries.\(^{21}\) Ambition for prestige and the acquisition of “fading [because

\(^{18}\)This idealization is reinforced by such well-known Christian tropes as the Madonna and child, and arguably the \textit{pietà}, whose distortion of Madonna/child imagery Michelangelo articulated as well as anyone.

\(^{19}\)Here, I refer to Anthony Esler’s take on the older Elizabethan generation in \textit{The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Younger Generation} (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1966). Having witnessed the upheaval of the 1530’s and 40’s, this generation, which included Wager, Elizabeth and Burleigh, was distinguished by a cautious “conservatism” that tempered their own ambition through “devious, precarious compromise,” 9-11, 22.

\(^{20}\)Elser paints a compelling picture of the chronic dread and anxiety of those living in this tumultuous era, in which the fall of the highborn, as well as the exploitation and betrayal of the lowborn, were assigned a common cause: overweening ambition, \textit{The Aspiring Mind}, 9-11.

\(^{21}\)White briefly affirms my conviction about primary audience when he lists \textit{Enough} and \textit{Trial} among the number of plays of this period that “attack the acquisitive spirit and economic abuses of their London mercantile audiences” “Theater and Religious Culture,” \textit{A New History of Early English Drama}, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 133-151.
earthly] treasure” poses a temptation, Longer and Enough suggest, not so much for the oppressed or dominant classes as for those somewhere in the middle. As a “sickness uncurable,” ambition chains sane men to mad ones and fosters complicity: the bailiff just following orders returns the babe to the flames.

Wager’s plays seek to build a commonwealth from the inside out: from the microcosmic level of the individual conscience, where inclination as a tendency toward ambition must be snaffled as Trial of Treasure and Longer urge, not by external authority, but through one’s own internalized aids: discipline, piety, exercitation and contentation. Wager perspicaciously identifies the middling citizen of his own London congregation(s), the same who habitually attends plays and buys them from the local bookseller, as the determining factor in two potential futures. The first is a “commonwealth” whose nostalgic socioeconomic interdependence of estates obscures the radical divergence of Protestant scripture, and conscience-based worldly asceticism, from the traditional, Catholic model. The second future features Godless exploitation and self-centered social indifference, where institutions like civil law and state officialdom permit oppression of the innocent to the profit of the ambitious few. If we are to perceive the many layers of ambivalence in Wager’s dramatization of this message, including the problem of Wager’s own implication in the system he critiques, we must, as in the preceding chapter, separate the various semantic threads comprising the whole, and work out their relationship to synchronic and diachronic levels of history.

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22 “Exercitation” can best be translated as one’s practice or training in a vocation, and “contentation” as contentment, with overtones of gratitude.

23 Wager was rector of St. Benet, Gracechurch (1567-1591) and St. Michael at Queenhithe (1575-91). As rector of St. Benet, he was also permitted to preach in any parish within the London diocese, Eccles, “William Wager and His Plays,” 258-9.
To facilitate this, I have divided the remainder of the chapter into three sections. The first of these explores how the plays orient themselves toward their literary and performance histories in order to complicate contemporary thinking about education and destiny, rethink identity in terms of vocation, and improvise a new social contract between a producer of plays and his audience. The second, historical section which reviews the ambitious middling types’ displacement of both clergy and magnates as the dominant power at the local level, identifies the socioeconomic practices associated with this class to suggest why Wager targeted this group through complaints like those expressed by Enough’s Tenant and Hireling. It also recounts the way discursive practices of the middling sort put humanist knowledges into wider and more practical circulation, rendering it the cultural capital with which the middling sort transformed their social relations and later, the state itself, into a form more consonant with their interests. My final, interpretive section looks at how Wager both targets and solicits middling Protestants in an attempt to staunch the social ills the plays associate with this most mobile of Elizabethan social groups. Focusing on Wager’s treatment of the character Moros and what Jameson would call the “signifying absence” of pleasure over the sequence of plays, I will reveal Wager’s immanent critique of emergent capitalism, and his contribution to an emerging middling, Protestant consciousness. We shall note where

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24 Admittedly, the “state” is rarely used in its modern sense in this period, but this sense’s availability is evidenced in Thomas Starkey’s use of it in A Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset (1538), England in the Reign of King Henry the Eigh, Part II, ed. J.M. Cowper, E.E.T.S. (London, 1871), 46-8, 50-1, 157-64, and Juan Luis Vives’ application of it in De Subventione Pauperum, trans. F.R. Salter, Some Early Tracts on Poor Relief (London, 1926), 6, 9. As Ellen Meiksins Wood observes, “the development of capitalism and the nation state were intertwined in England,” both emerging from the same socio-economic transformations (The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View [London: Verso, 2002], 171). Thus, “the state” in this study should be taken as “emergent”: an entity shaped as much by symbolic practices (i.e., commonwealth tracts, chronicle plays, map-making) as material ones (i.e., enclosures and Tudor labor laws).
the plays precociously touch upon issues like the Protestant work ethic and the commodification of labor.

1. Criticism

The small amount of criticism that addresses Wager’s work does little to inspire serious consideration of the plays. In 1890, F.G. Fleay lumped Wager’s work with the “decadent” moral plays of 1558-78—moribund throwbacks whose authors had somehow missed the humanist recovery of proper tragedy and Plautine comedy—and for years afterward, those who took the time to comment on Wager’s plays did so predominantly in the vein of apology. Charles Mills Gayley pointed out that the double plot of Enough, and Longer’s “skill[ful]” synthesis of generic modes, represented “a decided advance in quality, even if not in kind,” while W. Roy Mackenzie attempted to kindle interest in Wager’s work as a dramatic form of allegory, explaining that the low humor of Longer and Trial undoubtedly suited the tastes of its original, coarser audience. Later critics like Merle Fifield and Ahmad Ramez Kutrieh, contesting the late moral plays’ putatively chaotic structure, endeavored to prove that Enough was organized around five acts. Bevington more convincingly delineated Trial and Enough’s meticulous arrangement of “episodes” around two thematically diverse strands of “the dual protagonist” plot, as


27 Fifield, The Rhetoric of Free Will; Ahmad Ramez Kutrieh, “The Doubling of Parts in Enough Is As Good As a Feast,” English Language Notes, 12 (1974), 79-84.
well as initiating another soon-to-be-common defense of late moral drama: that it is both a transmitter of medieval tradition and a harbinger of the mature London stage.\textsuperscript{28}

Along these lines, Southern’s book-length study on staging before Shakespeare praised Wager’s “polished competence” in elaborating such older forms of dramaturgy as the call for room and the stage clownery of Vices, and later, John D. Cox’s argument for continuity between pre- and post-Reformation drama discovered in Wager’s form of dramatic social satire a medieval “sacramental conception of social cohesion.”\textsuperscript{29} Benbow lauded Wager’s deft application of the medieval “symbolic mode” of stage-craft, while Martha Tuck Rozett praised Wager’s characterizations and introduction of the double plot.\textsuperscript{30} All consistently recognize Wager’s contribution to the reprobate or “homiletic tragedy,” a form widely understood to have been prescient of Jacobean tragedy in its development of the tragic potential of the psychomachia.\textsuperscript{31} Yet credit for the tragic endings of Wager’s plots have customarily gone to more elite playwrights of the period.

\textsuperscript{28}Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, 153-161.


\textsuperscript{30}Benbow, Introduction, W. Wager, xii; Martha Tuck Rozett, The Doctrine of Election and the Emergence of Elizabethan Tragedy (Princeton, New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1984), 92-4. Compare Rozett with the less impressed Mackenzie, who argues that Wager adapted the double plot from French moral drama. If Eccles’s suspicion that Wager attended a continental university is correct, Wager would have had greater opportunity than the average educated Englishman to encounter such old plays as \textit{L’Homme Juste et L’Homme Mondain}, English Moralities, 121, n. 2.

the anonymous courtly writer of *Nice Wanton* (1535-53) or Thomas Ingelend of *The Disobedient Child* (ptd. 1560).32

Difficulties with dating in the period make it hard to ascertain the extent to which such attributions reflect the largely discredited top-down (from court to innyard) approach to dramatic historical development, but the result is that Wager’s elevation in the scheme of literary achievement has remained, over the years, little more than an advance from “decadence” to exemplum.33 With few exceptions, such as Leslie Mahin Oliver’s article arguing Wager’s authorship of the anonymous *Trial of Treasure*, or Kutrieh’s abovementioned essay on structure, studies tend to group Wager’s work with any number of putatively similar late moral plays in order to make observations about a particular period of formal and dramatic development.34 Wager is seldom closely read, and this creates the impression that the plays are far less sophisticated than they are, even

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32 Benbow claims *Nice Wanton* as the first tragic ending play in his introduction to *W. Wager*, xix, while Fifield names *The Disobedient Child* as the “first extant tragic morality,” *Rhetoric of Will*, 42. Both appear to be plays acted by children’s companies under courtly auspices. See Bevington for what continues to be the predominant view on auspices for these two plays, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 65.

33 The top-down view has been asserted as recently as Dorothy H. Brown’s *Christian Humanism*. An early argument against this privileging of elite influences can be seen in C.R. Baskervill’s “English Elements in Jonson’s Early Comedy,” *University of Texas Bulletin*, 178 (1911). The case has gathered momentum by the 1962 *Mankind to Marlowe*, in which Bevington insists, “England’s glory came ultimately from the fact that its courtly drama could borrow life and vitality from its humble brother, while the popular drama, never excluded from the indulgent and even affectionate attention of the court, grew into maturity instead of withering into impotence,” 26.

34 Oliver, “William Wager and *The Trial of Treasure*”; Kutrieh, “Doubling of Parts in *Enough Is As Good As a Feast*.” Oliver’s evidence includes an impressive range of elements including seventy-four lines in common with *Enough*. Wager’s distinctive corruption of names, his use of oaths, classical allusions, treatment of prologues, and the “extremely crude” verse forms “almost identical” with established Wager plays, 426. Thematically and ideologically, *Trial* seems in many ways a rehearsal for *Enough*, and I would add that its diction (“contentation,” “commodity,” “ill-favoured,” etc.) and particular mingling of colloquial with Latinate expressions, comes closer to Wager than to other playwrights of the period. Oliver’s conclusion, that greater differences exist between *Longer* and *Enough* than between *Enough* and *Trial*, seems correct, 428.
where their resourcefulness and dramaturgical skill are noted. Cursory reading over the years has produced two apparently conflicting portraits: Wager is either an unthinking transmitter of socially conservative Protestant propaganda, or an “alert, incisive” social satirist. Both views are correct to a limited degree, an apparent paradox which should alert us to the tensions that energize these plays. Like the anonymous author of *Mankind*, Wager adroitly deploys a relatively orthodox religious moral register to mask a sophisticated critique of contemporary socioeconomic concerns. The diverse conditions surrounding the writing and performance of Wager’s plays (humanism, dissolution, reformation, etc.) push new issues to the foreground, but Wager’s comprehension and manipulation of moral play conventions signal his knowledge of the genre’s function as ideology, on par with the earliest producers of moral drama.

Prior to examining the relation of Wager’s plays to genre, it might be helpful to turn to Appendix B for a brief synopsis of the three plays treated here, since even the few readers familiar with *Enough* or *Longer* can hardly be expected to have read *The Trial of Treasure*, whose authorship is still contested.

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35In *The Tudor Interlude*, Craik’s comments on *Enough* are still the most sensitive reading of that play’s “powerful moral ironies,” 118, 99-118.


37Since Oliver’s 1945 article, there has been no sustained discussion of Wager’s association with this play and critics remain divided on Wager’s authorship of it. Prior to Oliver’s work, Wright in “Social Aspects,” having discovered the seventy-four lines *Trial* has in common with *Enough*, suggested that an anonymous author “lifted” the lines from Wager, a theory Benbow later softened to “adaptation,” *W. Wager*, x. After Oliver, Southern in *Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare* remained unconvinced while others, like Eccles, simply deferred judgment on the nature of the relationship, “William Wager and His
2. Genre and Performance History

This section investigates Wager’s adroit grasp and manipulation of genre as both performance and text. “Genre as performance history” considers how Wager takes up popular, ludic elements not only to vilify the vicious but to ponder contemporary socioeconomic change. We shall see how the prologue becomes the site of Wager’s training an audience in new modes of seeing and judging, a discernment the plays depend upon to read their censure of new social ills in old forms. “Genre as Literary history” explores how Longer’s use of literary genres, from the prodigal son play to the aphorism, puts humanist and Calvinist doctrine in tension in ways that create mutual inquiry. I will also suggest how Wager’s characterizations represent a significant departure from earlier models, adumbrating methods for depicting both social type and interiority on the London stage.

Counterfeiting a Vain Gesture

Indications of a popularizing impulse, such as Wager’s tendency to translate all Latin phrases, the preponderance of colloquial language, and audience addresses like those in Enough (253-66) and Trial (230-1) exhorting diverse estates to different courses of action, lead the majority of scholars to agree on popular auspices for all three plays.

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38 All subtitles for this chapter have been culled from the Wager plays studied here. In order of appearance, these are Longer, stage direction 1, 70; Longer, 834, 1947; Trial p. 230; Enough 246; Trial motto; Enough 957; and Longer 939.

39 Examples include, Craik, Tudor Interlude, 100; Mackenzie English Moralities from the Point of View of Allegory, 132; Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, 55; and Benbow, Introduction W. Wager, xi, but compare White, who speculates that Longer was written as a children’s play for a nobleman’s house, Theatre and Reformation, 110-11, or for an academic setting, “Theater and Religious Culture,” 137.
Venues regularly producing plays like Wager’s are known to have done brisk business “within easy-walking distance” of Wager’s St. Benet’s Gracechurch, but most indicative of a mixed, popular audience, are the particular elements the plays assume to be common knowledge, and those deemed to require explanation.\(^{40}\) Of the latter, the *Enough* Prologue’s patient explication of the functions of Mercurius and the classical “argument” seem as unnecessary to a homogeneously educated university or school audience and probably, by this time, to a courtly audience, as Longer’s glossing of the humanist concepts “*scire*” and “*sapere*”: “to have cunning and wisdom withal” (44-57; 69-70, 1936-7). At the same time, the plays expect audience recognition of Moros’s medley of popular tunes (*Longer* 71-101) and Greedy Gut’s Cotswold “lob” dialect (*Trial* 216f), the latter flagging a social type who, having made good at the dissolution’s redistribution of church property, is perhaps less than a generation away from working the soil.\(^{41}\)

Like the *Mankind* author, Wager depends on his audience’s familiarity with the conventions of popular entertainment, remnants of the folk he takes up to ridicule viciousness. Moros’s parody of Discipline’s creed—i.e., “I will love and fear God above all” becomes “I will love porridge, when they be sod, beef and all” (*Longer* 389, 393)—recalls nothing so much as the inversions of liturgy traditionally performed by Boy Bishops across England until the official suppression in July of 1541.\(^{42}\) The bad

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\(^{40}\)Among the active Elizabethan playing venues near Wager are The Cross Keyes, The Bell and The Bull in Bishopsgate (all inns); the Merchant Taylors’ Hall, Leadenhall and the Draper’s Hall. See White’s map, *Theatre and Reformation*, 131.

\(^{41}\)Helen C. White, *Social Criticism*, 96.

\(^{42}\)This rather endearing figure” was licensed to lead his fellow choirboys in mock liturgical proceedings and other travesties of episcopal functions such as visiting convents and hospitals on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December) or on St. Nicholas’s Day (6 December), Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Ages*, 16-7. Weimann reminds us that boy bishops often collected “tribute” which they subsequently used to treat their mates to a feast, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 22. See Chamber’s *Medieval Stage*, volume 1, 366 for the royal bann on boy bishops.
character’s exit to Hell on the Devil’s back is another device from popular ludi that Wager and his contemporaries soon make as intrinsic to the moral drama form as its ubiquitous songs; Wager’s variations include Time’s whisking Treasure and Lust off to burn in hell (Trial 242), Moros’s irreverent ride to hell on the back of Confusion (Longer 1857-8) and the Enough Satan’s macabre soliloquy as he hoist’s onto his shoulders not a living, protesting soul but Worldly Man’s inert corpse (1428-1471). The engagement of stage convention most revelatory of Wager’s abilities, however, is the Herodian one already touched on in this chapter’s introduction. At the point where it is deployed most overtly, in Longer’s introduction of the Vices, Herodian vaunting is conflated with the call for room to articulate a change in the manifestation of sociopolitical power.

Wrath’s first entrance, presumably shoving his way through the crowd of standing spectators toward the playing space—“Make room! stand back in the devil’s name!/Stand back, or I will lay thee on the face” (Longer 636-7)—would do any fifteenth-century vicious character proud. Yet surprisingly, Wrath is immediately upbraided by Incontinence, “Merry, stand thou back with a very shame./Is there not room enough in the place?” (638-9 italics mine) Idleness attempts to excuse Wrath’s behavior, making

43 See Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, for the “universal expectation” of musical performance in troupe productions of this period, 98. For a short history of moral play exits to Hell on the Devil’s back, concluding with Jonson’s 1626 The Staple of News, see Dessin’s Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays, 20-1.

44 Herod is also indicated when Discipline addresses the audience, describing Moros’s descent into depravity:

Now is he [Moros] come unto plain Impiety
Which persuadeth him God to deny;
And with him is joined Crudelity
Against the innocents to reply. (Longer 1601-4)

In that the call for room was shared by many “evil” characters, including various devils, Vices, and Pilate as well as Herod, it would be more accurate to describe it as a popular “evil” character convention than an Herodian one. The Townley cycle, for example, produces a Herod who calls for room, while the earlier York does not, Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition, 70.
the metatheatrical observation that “Wrath must declare his property” (641), as if the call
for room were a thing proper to the identification of Wrath. Incontinence relents, but not
without what might be imagined as an eye-rolling sigh to the audience and Idleness,
“stand back and give him liberty,” which might give rise to an exaggerated step backward
by the two Vices (643). The wind properly out of his sails, Wrath grumbles sheepishly,
“I had went it had been another,/I thought to have given thee a blow” (644-5).

By the 1560’s, the call-for-room that permitted the character Youth in The Interlude
of Youth (ca. 1513-1529) to menace his opponents during Henry VIII’s reign, has become
the “shame[ful]” trait of an ineffectual blow-hard (Longer 638). In the Elizabethan
political climate, discussed more thoroughly in the upcoming historical section, blind
Herodian displays of temper accomplish less than politic behind-the-scenes maneuvering.
As physical compulsion is steadily replaced by economic compulsion, the classic signs of
wrath—the sword rattling threats of Castle of Perseverance’s Ira or Jacke Jugeler’s
(1550-63) Careawaye—are perceived as ever more laughable.45 Through the other Vices’
castigation of Wrath for unmannerly, outmoded behavior, Wager ensures that we identify
his manner as rash. The call for room has taken on, then, a function additional to space-
clearing and characterization: it represents a social gaffe, one which is beginning to
distinguish the roarer from those actually in power, men like Worldly Man, whose

45 Castle of Perseverance, 2121-33; Jacke Jugeler, Three Tudor Classical Interludes, ed. Marie Axton
(Cambridge: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 332-339. The date for Jacke Jugeler is from Mankind to
Marlowe, 65. In his “Male Surplus Value,” for Renaissance Drama, n.s. 31 (2002), Donald Hedrick claims
that part of the success of the Tamburlaine plays derives from the surplus "entertainment” value of the
“hypermasculinity” of the title role, 93. While I agree that the “surplus value” of the character is a product
of both Edward Alleyn’s and Marlowe’s virtuosity, I would suggest that by 1587 their surplus labor lies not
so much in what it took to produce a “fustian king” as in what it took to make Tamburlaine evince more
than laughter from his auditors, 94.
“reasonable” tactics locate their coercive force in the law rather than in arms (*Enough*
1141, 1146).

Yet Wrath for all his bluster—“speak one word and I will break thy bones”—never actually accosts the Virtues on which Moros sets him (*Longer* 1235). He trains his young charge in classic roaring style—“suffer no man with thee to reason. . . stick not blood, heart, and wounds to swear”—but refrains from ever scrapping, himself (822, 827). Remarkably, he is distinguished by his rather level-headed, sardonic wit. Of the play’s Vices, Wrath appears the least concerned by the news that Moros “goeth to school now with a vengeance” (658). “When they bring Moros unto sapience,” he cracks, “then of my sword I will make a cart” (666-7). It is Wrath who also points out the futility of the Vices’ careful assimilation of new names as an unnecessary “device” in their plot to get close to the youth (689, 739-40). “What need we to change our names for him,” he scoffs, “for he discerneth not cheese from chalk” (739-40). Wrath is the predecessor to Jonson’s Wasp (*Bartholomew Fair*): *senex iratus* enough to put a damper on the more exorbitant plans of those around him, sensible and irascibly charming enough to make us hesitate in our own wish for the success of these designs.

The other unremarked way in which Wager seems to anticipate Jonson is in his almost obsessive attention to the prologues of his plays. Agnew reads the Jonsonian prologue as the London stage’s improvisation of a “new social contract between itself and its audience, a new set of conditions for the suspension of disbelief.”  

It appears more accurate, however, to describe Jonson as overtly expressing a social contract Wager and a few peers began to delimit in the 1560s. Craik’s complaint that the prologue of

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*Enough* is “sluggish and heavy” in contrast to the rest of the play registers this section’s multiplicity of purposes even as it fails to question the unusual density of what Wager calls “our simple preface” (*Enough* 92).\(^{47}\)

Most popular moral plays of the period continue the fifteenth-century tradition of giving an initial character or more formal Prologue the use of one or two devices to bring the audience into the world of the play. The Prolocutor of *King Darius* (1558-65) sets out the quasi-historical “matter” of the narrative; the Prologue of *New Custom* (1558-73) unpacks the “sense” of his play’s title; Thrift and Drift, two roguish tinkers from *Common Conditions* (1570-6) conspiratorially let us in on their latest scheme to support their unthrifty lifestyle.\(^ {48}\) *Enough*’s Prologue not only declares its “argument,” “rhetorically” “amplif[ies]” its title, and sets its tone by introducing us to Worldly Man, “frolic, lusty and strong” but adds the preacher’s trick of culling out a specific segment of the audience—“them that have slept at Parnassus”—for special attention(71, 80, 88, 6). This sets up an unusually complex, alert pattern of looking in which the audience splits its attention between the speaker and other auditors whose faces might be searched for signs of acknowledgment, or (somehow) education. In the educated, the maneuver produces a reflexive apprehension, what Steven Mullaney calls the viewing of oneself “as if on a stage, through the eyes of a judgmental and imaginary Other.”\(^ {49}\) Wager’s use of a device Mullaney and others associate with the London stage for its fostering of

\(^{47}\) Craik, *The Tudor Interlude*, 100.


“vicarious participation and identification” with events and characters, suggests its much earlier genesis and development at the pulpit and on the village green.50

As the Prologue proceeds, those flattered into nodding sagely at the invocation to the Muses, reference to Orpheus, and complaint about the poverty of English vernacular may initially miss Wager’s slide from an explication of Mercurius’s significance to a warning to “ministers of talk” against “rash speech” (45, 48). Reason must govern the speech of leaders especially, the Prologue insists, for as reason is subject to virtue it stands that all reasonable speech is, by necessity, wholesome (56-7). Those who through “their evil words” “bring good men” (like the playwright), “into suspicion,” obviously “want [lack] reason their tongues to charm” (64). Mercurius, the god of eloquence, has abandoned such speakers to their “affections” (53), and the play is not intended for those who tend toward such vicious, unreasoning libel, sniffs the Prologue, for “we play not to please them that be curious” (85). In this way, Wager circuitously compels his entire audience, not just those who “have a learned judgment,” to speak well or not at all of his play, for to fault it for its rough edges is to be ignorant of the difficulties inherent in working with a deficient language, while to denounce it for its moments of honest mirth is to begrudge it its generous, commonwealth design to edify both “most and least”(67, 81).

Oliver correctly notes that Enough’s Prologue is the most elaborate, but all Wager Prologues employ a similar method.51 While Longer’s Prologue insists that Moros is an “image of such persons” as spend their life in “folly and idleness,” it points out that none

50 Ibid.
51 Oliver, “William Wager and the Trial of Treasure.” 422-3. While Longer’s Prologue insists that Moros is an “image of such persons” as spend their life in “folly and idleness,” it points out that none should take offense since the “wholesome lessons” of the play are “good for the ignorant, not hurtful to the wise” 50, 52, 64-5.
should take offense since the “wholesome lessons” of the play are “good for the ignorant, not hurtful to the wise” (50, 52, 64-5). The spectator hurt by the play must be ignorant, since wise men will experience no discomfort. The offended spectator of Trial is nothing less than ungodly, since “in our matter nothing you shall see,/That to the godly may give any offence” (p. 207). Like Jonson thirty years to the future, Wager preempts his audience’s objections, and through an alternately bullying and flattering Prologue, “coerces a new audience into being.”

Edge-tools

Wager’s masterful employment of conventions from popular entertainment is offset by an equally thoughtful engagement with the generic forms he is more likely to have encountered through textual sources. The following examination of the relationships Wager sets up between diverse generic elements refutes the received notion that credits Calvinist doctrine for enabling occasional moments of innovation in what is otherwise Wager’s unreflective rehash of humanist, psychomachic moral drama. It is my contention that Wager’s customary approach to genre apprehends what Jameson describes as genre’s capacity to carry ideology. Focusing on his variation of three basic


53 Brown, for example, views Wager plays as vehicles for Christian humanism, Christian Humanism, xiv, while Benbow sums up Longer as “a tract on education,” W. Wager, introduction, xiii. Bevington’s identification of Calvinism as making the shift from psychomachic forgiveness to retribution possible, in Mankind to Marlowe, 163-4, solidifies Spivack’s earlier suggestion that the unhappy endings of Wager plays are “clearly shaped by the Protestant emphasis on grace,” Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, 248.

54 For Jameson, one of the aims of genre criticism should be to expose the ideological message of a genre, “the historically determinate conceptual or semic complex which can project itself variously in the form of a ‘value system’ or a ‘philosophical concept,’ or in the form of a protonarrative, “a private or collective narrative fantasy,” The Political Unconscious, 115.
generic elements in *Longer*—the prodigal son play, the aphorism, and the psychomachic personification—I will suggest that Wager’s plays are distinguished by a conscious holding in tension of Protestant and humanist/traditional doctrine in ways that produce an immanent critique of the emerging capitalist state, and herald the ethical irresolution noted in some of the most challenging work of the London stage.

By the writing of *Longer*, the humanist subgenre of the “prodigal son” or “education-of-youth” play has proven to have what we might call ‘broad, cross-over appeal ’ as a favorite of courtly and popular audiences alike.\(^{55}\) Initially composed by schoolmasters to warn their charges away from the dangers of excessive merriment, spending, or even cleverness, these plays typically emphasized punishment over redemption.\(^{56}\) In their typical pattern of paternal admonishment, transgression, and greater or lesser suppression of the psychomachic conclusion to magnify the bitter rewards of wantonness, the prodigal son plays modified the structure of the moral play, a formal innovation too often overlooked in critical speculation about which conditions enabled the replacement of fifteenth-century mercy, as in the endings of *Mankind* or *Castle*, with mid-sixteenth-century retribution and damnation. While Wager’s *Longer* is the most strictly committed to the defeat of its protagonist—for even *Nice Wanton* (1535-53), the only pre-Wager play with a properly tragic ending, mitigates absolute disaster with the evangelical

\(^{55}\)It is estimated that some “two dozen plays in six languages” comprise a tradition beginning with continental playwrights like Ravisius Textor (1470-1524), who “dramatized contemporary versions of the biblical parable in the spirit and style of Roman comedy,” Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkely, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), 34; White, *Theatre and Reformation*, 112. A shortlist of English works might include the anonymous *The Interlude of Youth* (ca. 1513-29), the children’s courtly play *Nice Wanton* (1535-1553), Thomas Ingeland’s university play, *Disobedient Child* (1558-1569), the school play *Misogonus* (1560-1677), and the popular, anonymous *Lusty Juventus* (1547-1553).

\(^{56}\)Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals*, 3, 35.
triumph of its one virtuous son—on the whole, the prodigal son form should be recognized for its earnest exploration of that potential for tragedy Bevington and others locate in the “indigenous materials” of moral drama.  

The prodigal son play’s predating of Genevan influence in England should also prompt a complication of the usual explanation for the novelty of Wager’s tragic endings. Long before Wager revamped the form to deliver recognizably Protestant doctrine, it was a continental humanist vehicle whose action turned on the traditional concept of free will. And Wager permits free will to complicate the doctrine of election in ways Longer refuses to resolve. Given this, Bevington’s identification of the seeds of Faustian irresolution in Longer is convincing, but he stops short of reading his insight about the productive tension between genre and thematics in Marlowe back onto Wager, where it might have lead to the discovery that Marlovian irresolution, at least in the case

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57 Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 161. Disaster narrowly averted by protagonist conformity, perhaps accompanied by some form of (usually corporal) punishment is the more common ending, as is evident in plays like *Wit and Science* (1530-48) or *Lusty Juventus* (1547-53).  

58 See Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 162, and Benbow, who notes that within the theological scheme of predestination “it is possible for Wager to explore man’s pilgrimage to hell-mouth.” In the next paragraph, however, Benbow admits that Wager leaves Moros structurally open to making choices until the end of the play, *W. Wager*, xv. In *Enough*, Worldly Man also appears to have (at least) one last chance to repent with the appearance of Prophet (1885-1208), though the Physician later opines, “belike it is too late to amend; In wickedness thou hast lived, even so thou wilt end,”1374-6.  

59 Compare Rozett, who dismisses the possibility of free will in what she reads as Longer’s highly Calvinistic agenda. The “doctrine of election undermines the basic didactic principle that one can learn by example,” *Doctrine of Election*, 88. This assumes an historically questionable puritanical interpretation of a doctrine that the Anglican Church is rather well-known to have modified.  

60 White, who acknowledges the tension in Wager’s work between Calvinist election and humanism, reads it differently. Predestination, he writes, becomes a “particularly thorny problem to the Calvinist playwright who maintains at the same time the reformational power of education,” *Theatre and Reformation*, 99. As I hope to show, the Wager of the two later plays is neither a “Calvinist playwright” nor an untroubled believer in the “reformative power of education.”
of Faustus, probably emerged as the friction produced in Wager’s Protestantizing of a traditional, humanist form.\textsuperscript{61}

The evidence connecting Marlowe (or Jonson), to Wager consists mostly of verbal echoes, narrative and thematic similarities.\textsuperscript{62} Our increasing knowledge of the playing companies, however, may add some weight to this connection. If White is correct, and Wager’s considerable professional success is in any way indicative of his preferment by the Leicester circle for his plays, then it seems reasonable to imagine Leicester’s Men including a Wager play or two in their repertoire, especially since Wager’s material seems to have been of the type to interest the “aggressively Protestant” humanistically trained patron of the company.\textsuperscript{63} Leicester’s Men dominated the court seasons of the early 1570s, and the remainder of their time was spent touring their extensive circuit as the preeminent players of the realm.\textsuperscript{64} In that this circuit favored such central locales as the Canterbury of Marlowe’s youth and the Westminster neighborhood of Jonson’s, it would be odd if Marlowe and Jonson hadn’t at some point, either seen a Wager play performed, or having heard of such a performance, availed themselves of an available

\textsuperscript{61}Bevington thinks of Longer as a precursor for Faustus (165), but does not go so far as to claim that the tension he discerns in Marlowe between what he thinks of as traditional structure and secular thematics are already present in Wager, 245, 251.

\textsuperscript{62}Yet, respected studies have frequently made this claim, from C.R. Baskervill in the 1911 “English Elements,” to Potter’s sixth chapter, proclaiming Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare, “the apotheosis of the morality play,” The English Morality Play.

\textsuperscript{63}White, Theatre and Reformation, 70-1. For more on Leicester’s theatrical tastes and involvement, see MacLean’s remarkable chapter on Leicester’s Men in Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, The Queen’s Men and their Plays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22.

\textsuperscript{64}MacLean’s map detailing “Liecaster’s Men tour stops” shows a range which supports her argument about Robert Dudley’s canny use of his acting troupe to “spread cultural and political influence” (his and the Crown’s) throughout the realm. Annual tours of the kingdom began in 1559, 19-21.
quarto. What seems equally likely, given what works like Timber: or Discoveries tell us about (at least) Jonson’s proclivities, is that a later disavowal of Wager’s rather homespun influence in favor of more prestigious classical sources would not have been out of character.

What is certain is that moral-dramatic irresolution did not spring fully grown from the head of anyone. To understand the forces shaping Wager’s decision to leave the matter of volition indeterminate in Longer, we need to look first at the correspondence between the sudden interest in the prodigal son trope and the Tudor bureaucracy’s increasing reliance on trained public officials. The Crown’s growing dependence on administrators, like the Justices of the Peace, to maintain the traditional social and economic mores the disempowered Church was no longer able to enforce made the administrators’ investment in state-sanctioned values and agendas of paramount importance. The loyalty of administrators, though reinforced by prestige of office and fiscal opportunities, was secured primarily through their internalization of state ideology, the process of which became, as early as the More circle, one of the primary functions of

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65 White reminds us that of the few plays that made it to print in the 1560s and early 1570s, “it was apparently after they had served some time on stage,” Theatre and Reformation, 71. Candidates for possible ownership of a Wager quarto who may have encouraged a young Marlowe or Jonson to peruse them include Marlowe’s headmaster, John Gresshop, at the King’s School in Canterbury who had 350 books in his possession at the time of his death in 1580, William Urry, ed. and intro. Andrew Butcher, Christopher Marlowe and Canterbury (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 48, and William Camden, master of the Westminster School, to whom Jonson dedicated Cynthia’s Revels with the inscription Alumnus olim, aeternum amicus (“once a pupil, always a friend”), David McPherson, introduction, Ben Jonson Selected Works (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), xi.

66 James Shapiro argues that Jonson suppresses his debt to the popular dramatic tradition in order to fashion himself a type of classical poet, Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 40.


humanist education.\(^{69}\) To paraphrase Helgerson’s only partly tongue-in-cheek observation about Shakespeare’s generation: “to be” meant to follow “the father,” by which Helgerson means the very nexus of Elizabethan paternal authority (biological father, vocation, law, religion, Prince) discussed here, while “not to be” was to follow one’s own inclination, to be a prodigal. When Wager bases Longer on the prodigal son story, he is, in effect, taking up a form that is already writing the state.

Like Freud’s pleasure principle, the “inclination” of Wager’s prodigal seeks out immediate gratification and avoids pain. Formal training completes what Wager acknowledges to be primarily the family’s responsibility to guide the child beyond the pleasure principle to become a fully integrated member of society.\(^{70}\) Humanist education helps to fashion legitimate sons whose existence can be acknowledged “to be,” “so long as,” warned the letter of one famous father (Sir Henry Sidney) to his more famous son, “you live in the fear of God.”\(^{71}\) Prodigal son plays register the gravity of indoctrination into this system—the rule of the father—by staging the possibility of its failure.

It is precisely this crisis that Longer, like its predecessors, explores. To misread Moros as a dullard as has sometimes been suggested, is to miss the pivotal role of his will in the action.\(^{72}\) As the type of contradiction that directs a Jamesonian reader to those topical changes that make a formal element—in this case, the comic ending of earlier moral drama—no longer feasible, the problem of will in a play with overt Protestant

\(^{69}\)Ibid., 24-9.

\(^{70}\)More on Wager’s insights into family and gender dynamics, shortly.

\(^{71}\)Helgerson, Elizabethan Prodigals, 37.

\(^{72}\)In contrast with Benbow, Brown claims the audience enjoys a sense of mental as well as moral “superiority” to the simple-minded Moros, Christian Humanism, 83, but Discipline seems to pin-point the true nature of Moros’s disorder when he diagnoses Moros as “ill-willing to learn and therefore unapt” Longer, 1585.
thematics demands attention. If, by at least mid-century, a prodigal son was considered a tumor on the ideal body of the Commonwealth, an insupportable source of chaos in a system craving stability, it makes sense that the language of mercy and reintegration would be replaced with figures of cutting off, of purging, and bleeding. The new language sought to abject the prodigal from realms of social cohesion: the canker from the body or garden, the “Jonas” from the ship. Longer locates Moros firmly within this tradition, poised at the crossroads where an embrace of Discipline, Exercitation and Piety represents the self-snaffling necessary for entry into the social. “To laugh, to be merry, to sing, times there be;” explains Exercitation, “But in such things now we have no time to spend” (Longer 407-8). Wager allows a protagonist too clever for his own good to make conscious choices, and his Elizabethan audience to sort out the degree to which those choices reflect predestination.

Moros is, in fact, precisely the type of quick-witted student educational treatises like Roger Ascham’s The Schoolmaster identify as particularly vulnerable to moral corruption. Ascham compares the quick-witted to “oversharp tools, whose edges be very soon turned.” Embedded in this observation lies an aphorism Ascham uses later in The Schoolmaster’s second book, where he promises that diligent assimilation of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero will produce a man who is “learned, wise” and “honest” provided that such studies are “joined withal the true doctrine of God’s holy Bible, without the

73 Jameson thinks of history as a “limiting” as opposed to causal factor, closing down formal possibilities that were once available, The Political Unconscious, 146-7.

74 Jones argues that the body politic metaphor is the most common because so conducive to a nostalgic (medieval) structure that nevertheless prescribes increased and novel duties for its “head.” The garden metaphor employed by Elyot in The Boke of the Governour, and the ship of Hooper’s sermons, are other favorites of commonwealth literature, Tudor Commonwealth, 13-4.
which the other three [textual authorities] be but fine-edged tools in a fool’s or madman’s hand” (emphasis mine). This appears to be a redaction of Proverbs 26:9-10, also a favorite of Wager’s, deployed once in Enough (517) and twice in Longer (842-5; 1943-50) to considerably different effect than Ascham’s application.

In Longer, following Moros’s exit to hell on Confusion’s back, the virtuous characters Exercitation, Discipline and Piety address the audience. Piety assists Exercitation in translating the “notable verse,” “Ut furiosus habens gladium, sic doctus iniquus”:

Exercitation: A wicked man having learning and cunning
   And doth many sciences understand
   Is like one whose wits are running,
   I mean a madman having a sword in his hand.

Piety: For as a mad man having in his hand edge-tool
   Seeketh both himself and other to kill,
   So a cunning man without wisdom is but a fool,
   For both himself and many other he doth spill. (1943-50)

In isolation, the sentence appears to conform to the species of authoritarian admonishment common to all prodigal son plays; when taken with Longer’s plot of

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76Ibid., 116.


78George Gascoigne’s 1575 introduction to The Posies compares poetry to “a two edged sworde” in the “naked hands” of his readers, Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. Gregory G. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 1:14. Later, Geffrey Whitney’s 1586 emblem book features a version of this saying teasingly close to Wager in its linking of edge-tool, infantile fool and illegitimate honor/office. Equating “fondelinges vaine, that doe for honor sue” with children, the epigram’s concluding couplet reads, “For infantes hande, the rasor is vnfitte, And fooles vnmeete, in wisedomes seate to sitte,” Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes,
recalcitrant youth, its larding with classical allusions and Biblical sententiae, it encourages the reading—Ascham’s reading, if he culled his aphorism from Longer—of the play as an unconflicted humanist, prodigal son story. But as I hope my reading of the play has already suggested, Ascham may merely be the first in a long line of readers to miss the provocative ideological work Longer performs over and against the support of its generic structure(s). Longer is no more straightforwardly humanist than it is Calvinist.

Bevington’s dates for Longer suggest that Ascham completed The Schoolmaster well after the staging of Wager’s play, and taken with White’s persuasive arguments about Wager’s preferment by the Leicester circle, it seems entirely plausible that Ascham, a member of this prestigious coterie, saw Longer and adopted Wager’s version of the aphorism for his treatise. That other feasible explanations exist for the similarity of the writers’ renditions of the proverb is not denied; what interests me here is the aphorism’s diverse function in the two works.

In Ascham, the saying is largely ornamental, difficult to distinguish from the other bits of admonitory rhetoric supporting the book’s three-tiered purpose to inculcate “truth of religion, honesty in living, [and] right order in learning.” Ascham’s aphorism offers readers a handy “authoritative fragment” to be “gathered” and “framed” in what Mary


79Bevington, Mankind to Marlowe, 66. For Schoolmaster dates, see the writing history Lawrence V. Ryan constructs in his introduction to The Schoolmaster. Based on both internal and external evidence (Ascham’s letters, etc.), Ryan estimates that it took Ascham five years to compose the treatise, from its inception in 1563 until Ascham’s death in 1568, xxii. For speculation concerning Wager and the Leicester circle, see White, Theatre and Reformation, 70.

80See, for example, the emblem discussed above, which may mean the aphorism was in general circulation at time.

Thomas Crane describes as a typical practice of middling, humanist discourse. Unlike Wager, Ascham never seriously calls into question the virtue of “God’s greatest gift. . . learning,” nor its power to elevate all men “to serve God and country both by virtue and wisdom,” but consistently subscribes to the view that education has the power to “effect. . . a deep ethical transformation” in the student.  

In contrast, Wager’s Prologue, in its insistence that “nothing. . . can an evil nature to honest manners allure” immediately calls into question one of the core principles of humanist education (44, 46). And Wager does not merely deploy the aphorism in support of a loosely associated argument but engages the ideological basis of the aphorism itself. In Longer, the saying functions as a final chorus, asserting a particular interpretation of events: Moros has been a “cunning man without wisdom” whose tragic self-spilling derives from a willfully “wicked” abuse of the “sword” of knowledge (Longer 1949, 1943, 1944). For Wager, humanist learning is an edge-tool, a thing indifferent, as we shall see, that can be turned with equal facility to serve the glory of God or the pleasure of the wicked. The closest thing to a transformative force in Wager’s canon is God’s grace, but even this does not spare his protagonists from an arduous, ongoing battle with their own inclination and the wickedness of others.

82 Mary Thomas Crane Framing Authority: Sayings, Self and Society in Sixteenth-Century England (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4-6. “Gathering,” for Thomas, is the collecting of authoritative fragments from ancient literature as a “sign of status as an educated person,” a kind of amassing of cultural capital, 34, 61, while “framing” involves the use or expenditure of such aphorisms to train a mind toward the culture’s dominant moral orientation, 73.

83 Ibid., 11, 28, 35, 74.

84 Compare, for example Ascham, who believes that while the “will and wit” of youth can be perverted by bad upbringing, they can be coaxed gently back to good. This is based on his humanist assumption that “youth is fittest to all goodness,” and that man is naturally drawn to the good, The Schoolmaster, First Book, 34-5. Notably, Wager ventriloquizes the humanist stance earlier—“O how noble a thing is good education./For all estates profitable”—apparently to qualify it, Longer 15-6.
Belief in the transformative power of classical writing was the original humanist perspective, one which envisioned education as the natural solution to the ills of the world. Crane describes this “organic” perspective as coextant at mid-century with a second, “inorganic” model in which education, bereft of transformative powers, is imagined to be a type of fortification erected to defend against evil influences from the outside as well as from one’s own evil inclinations. While Crane offers a potent intervention in what is all too frequently an oversimplified, because ahistorical, account of mid-century humanism, her study stops short of establishing an etiology for the two views—a move which might link the transformative “organic” model to the Italian neoplatonic tradition and the latter, later, “inorganic” model to Calvinist-inflected Protestant doctrine. Works closer to the inorganic model, like Wager’s, deny the traditional humanists’ nostalgia for a superior ancient past, and redirect this melancholic energy into a rigorous, almost manic program of moral self-surveillance and society building. Before we turn to this, however, a few words about characterization are in order.

While there is consensus that Longer and Enough feature a significant advance in the portrayal of sympathetic characters, there has been scant speculation on the cause of this

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Rozett’s sensitive analysis of Wager’s “understanding of psychology,” connects it to two historical conditions: a general cultural secularization and the early modern audience’s doubling-induced, internalized synthesis of response to good and evil characters, resulting in a sort of duality of vision. Rozett implies that Wager’s familiarity with the theatre permits him to exercise this dual vision in his treatment of primary characters. But if an internalization of doubling is the key, why does Bale, or even Wager’s contemporary Ulpian Fulwel, both masters of doubling, hold fast to traditional, psychomachic forms of characterization? If cultural secularization is the catalyst, why would change first appear in the work of a minister whose several benefices and lectureships speak to his constant (though far from unthinking) commitment to orthodox religion?

A contemporary ideological novelty that would both anchor and make the connection between Rozett’s cultural and theatrical claims is the new interest in historical (as opposed to providential) causation that Phyllis Rackin and others ascribe to the transmission of Machiavelli, Patrizi and other Italian historical theorists. With its base of dissemination once again in the Leicester circle, the thought of Italian ex-patriots Giacomo Concio, Giovanni Castiglione and Petruccio Ubaldini fanned English enthusiasm for historical theory—what Hugh G. Dick has called early “environmental theory”—inspiring later works like Blundeville’s The true order and Methode of wryting

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88 Bevington praises Moros as “human, not universal” (165), and Benbow praises Wager for finally presenting a character “who will generate conflict,” W. Wager, xvii.
89 Rozett, The Doctrine of Election, 91-2.
90 White, Theatre and Reformation, 70.
and reading Hystories (1574). For more on the Italians in the Leicester circle, see Hugh G. Dick’s introduction to his edition of Thomas Blundeville’s *The true order and Methode of wryting and reading Hystories* in *The Huntington Library Quarterly, 2* (1940), 151-54.

A quick example from Enough should show how Wager’s interest in historical causation contributes to a deepening of psychological verity, as well as evoking in the audience an ambivalent response to issues that will eventually be thought of as belonging to the secular realm.

Worldly Man’s first speech distinguishes him from Covetous, Greedy Gut or other, simpler personifications of greed, for his interest in heaping up “treasure” is motivated not by a fixation on the stuff itself, nor even in the pleasure of spending it, but by a calculated amassing to ensure that “I may live merrily” in old age (Enough 93, 104). This is already a significant departure, as Rozett notes, from traditional notions of vice derived from a weakness of the flesh. Scoffing at those who believe “enough is as good as a feast,” Worldly Man cites an example from personal experience, recounting how his father, “beloved of all men” while wealthy, died in poverty, abandoned by one-time friends who “would have cut his throat” for twelve pence (105, 110, 116). Wager thus provides us with motivation for Worldly Man’s actions over the course of the play, from his ferocious accumulation of all forms of capital to his sudden, fatal attentiveness post-conversion to the Vices when they claim “your father knew us both very well” (754). Like Lady Fortune’s raising of Moros out of spite for an audience’s flouting (Longer 1038-69), Worldly Man’s motivation relocates the locus of mischief from the external world of vicious or virtuous spiritual powers, to the internal space of subjective reactions to events and circumstances, based upon those remembered. In other words, Wager gives us what historians of his time call “second causes,” and like the chronicle histories, he
“cheerfully mingle[s] providential [first cause] and Machiavellian explanations, with no apparent sense of contradiction.”\textsuperscript{94} The effect is a more volitional, dimensional character, whose personal history makes us sympathize with him even when he behaves badly. If the conventional way to get an audience to ponder the discomfiting similarity of, say, prudence to policy is to have a Vice disguise himself through renaming, then Wager’s innovation is to force us to work this relation through in our own sympathy with a single problematic character.\textsuperscript{95}

What should be apparent, at this point, is Wager’s ability to use materials fundamental to traditional genres—the ending and aphorism of the prodigal son play, the allegorical character of the psychomachic moral play—to achieve novel results. We have examined his negotiation of various ideologies and will soon see his ambivalent apprehension of the dovetailing of humanist and Protestant interests in the construction of the ideal Protestant, middling subject, one who can be trusted to tie his inclinations to the interests of the emerging state and its preferred mode of production.

3. Economic History and Topical Issues

The following discussion aims at an overview of those developments in sixteenth-century economic, religious and theatrical history that Wager’s plays most forcefully engage. We shall review the socioeconomic practices that demarcate the Protestant, middling class that is Wager’s primary audience and indicate the socioeconomic practices

\textsuperscript{93} Rozett, \textit{The Doctrine of Election}, 91.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{95} Craik explains that in this period Vices often “purchase credit” by assuming new, more attractive names, \textit{The Tudor Interlude}, 73.
that habitually draw the plays’ censure upon them. Also treating contemporaneous religious issues, the section emphasizes the role of the doctrine of vocation in opening the door for an ethic of labor that mitigates the scandal of middling exploitation. Wager, I argue, both promulgates and questions this ethic, and it is this which permits his consideration of a non-aristocratic tragic protagonist, and his recognition of the role humanist education plays in the indoctrination of the middling sort into an alienating new mode of production. Finally, I will look at playing and playmaking around mid-century to suggest how both print and performance markets, more or less responsive to Puritan antitheatrical sentiment, lay the terms for Wager’s relationship with his audience.

Monsters Ambitious

As we saw, Lachman’s historical account of England’s sixteenth-century shift from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production differs chiefly from Brenner’s equally class-determined narrative in its emphasis on the dissolution of monasteries as the pivotal moment in a national-level elite conflict between clergy, lay magnates and crown, in which the radical redistribution of resources effectively established the Prince sole allocator of all resources at the elite level. At the local level, control of resources shifted from the magnates, lured from their county seats to London where they became, in effect, beholden to the court, to gentry whose offices connected them directly to the interests of the crown. Forward thinking magnates formed legal and social alliances with wealthy, gentry landlords, a process which opened the aristocracy up to “innovating

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96 Lachman, Manor to Market, 21-3, 34.
97 Ibid., 128. Elizabeth famously used the last of the monastic lands as patronage to keep the magnates at court.
[economic] forces” while affording the gentry better access to the culture and ideology of the traditional ruling class. By Elizabeth’s reign, magnate control of the counties had been broken, and the clergy had been rendered economically impotent. As early as the 1540s, the gentry were the “dominant regulators” of all resources at the local level, wielding their power of office to control the monastic lands and clerical tithes they purchased from the crown. Tenants, no longer benefiting from the divergent interests of lay and clerical powers, found themselves at the mercy of unified, state-supported landlords bent on converting manors into lucrative private property.

For the first time, lay landlords were without a significant external bar on their extraction of local surplus. Tenant land rights became an inconvenience for which a legal solution was quickly found. After 1549, Warwick’s parliament discovered that the unwritten custom of the copyhold lease left a legal loophole in which rents could be raised and fines applied to such holdings through “ascertainment.” Landlord-freeholder alliances brought about the end of the manor courts that once upheld copyhold rights—courts already weakened, as we have seen, by similar yeoman-landlord coalitions in the previous century. With the demise of the manor court, the majority of peasants lost their land or retained holdings at such a high rent that many were forced, in the end, to sell their farms. The elderly Tenant in Enough understands that failure to comply with

[98Joyce Oldham Appleby, Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England (Princeton University Press, 1978), 31. This admittedly simplified overview of (largely) economic history does not attend to moments of opposition, such as Somerset’s protection of peasant land rights and the subsequent peasant revolts in 1549, which Lachman and others treat (90-3). Present concerns necessitate my focus on the faction that won such conflicts—the landlords and peers for example, who backed Warwick as the lord protector most amenable to their interests.

[99Lachman, Manor to Market, 128.

[100Ibid., 106-7.

[101Ibid., 101.
Worldly Man’s rack-renting, paying double the five pounds he has been charged for the last thirty-six years, means eviction for his family (973-80). “Alaz, alaz, to whom should I make my moan?” he cries (970). Hireling acknowledges to Worldly Man the futility of his supplication even as he makes it, for “in your hands you have the laws” (1146). In the lacuna left by the clergy and customary rights of the manor, the tenant-laborer’s only recourse is to divine intervention and, as Wager shows through the travails of Hireling, the uncertainties of wage labor.

As the relations of production change and fewer laborers are able to provide for themselves more are “compelled to produce systematically for the market,” and purchase their necessities there.\textsuperscript{102} And as what Brenner identifies as a “newly emerging tripartite capitalist hierarchy” (commercial landlord, capitalist tenant and hired wage laborer) takes hold at the local level, the extra-economic and extra-legal compulsion of the old landed classes we saw in the last chapter becomes superfluous.\textsuperscript{103} As law-makers with an increasingly strong presence in parliament, lay landlords could both control wage labor and force the newly dispossessed poor to specific terms, directing those “on relief” to work their own or friends’ holdings through the offices of poor law commission.\textsuperscript{104} This almost diabolically elegant system, developed after 1549 on the pretext of preventing another peasant rebellion, effectively controlled the mobility of commoners, making them available for wage labor, cut off from access to the land, and all at the smallest possible cost to, or even to the profit of, certain landowners.\textsuperscript{105} Enclosed villages and parishes

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{104}Lachman, Manor to Market, 137.
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., 34, 138.
were pronounced “closed” by local labor commissioners, with no work available for
resident laborers; instead, the struggling leaseholders were constrained to work in “open”
villages, where they were compelled to pay poor relief, which in turn subsidized rents
paid directly to wealthy landlords of “closed” villages. A not surprising effect of this
policy was that the added burden of paying poor relief lead to the dispossession of many
small landowners, swelling the ranks of the wage labor pool.

Lachman suggests that between the 1560s and 1600, decades when the general
population rose “by no more than a third,” there was a “360 to 420 percent increase in the
number of landless peasants.” Even if the numbers of those actually resorting to poor
relief have been, as A.L. Beier has argued, significantly exaggerated, the adjusted
numbers of one fifth the total households in towns and one tenth of those in the
countryside still leaves a sizeable amount of “almost free labor” for poor law
commissioners to allocate to their advantage. In this way, the gentry secured their
position as the dominant force at the local level, using labor and tenancy law to
circumvent the complaints of peasants clinging to traditional rights, and preempt the
intervention of crown or clergy on their behalf.

It takes a particular combination of socioeconomic pragmatism and facility with the
nuances of law and rhetoric to achieve and then maintain this position, something to
which the middling types educated to fill Henrician and Edwardian demand for a trained
Protestant, middling bureaucracy were eminently well suited. By the time the generation

106 Ibid., 128.
107 A.L. Beier, “Poverty and Progress in Early Modern England,” The First Modern Society: Essays in
English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone, ed. A.L. Beier, David Cannadine and James M. Rosenheim
108 Lachman, Manor to Market, 141.
of “older Elizabethans” (Burleigh, Wager, Elizabeth herself) had come to power, the link between a humanist education and access to lucrative public offices was unmistakable, and classically-based knowledges, the sign of education, had become cultural capital. But if scholars like Crane and Lamb are correct, a distinction must be drawn between the training of, say, the More circle and the boys of the Merchant Taylors’ School (founded 1561). Whereas the former learned to circulate classical knowledges in evidence of a suitability to counsel princes, the latter learned to “gather” and “frame” classical fragments (aphorisms, sententiae, proverbs, etc.) to augment their local reputation and facilitate business transactions with creditors and investors. In Framing Authority, Crane argues that the latter middling form of humanist training grew up in partial resistance to the more individualistic, assimilating, aristocratic imitatio we more commonly associate with Renaissance works.

Gathering and framing as a discursive practice, as opposed to the mnemonic device Thomas M. Greene and others have deemed it, offers a viable explanation for the putatively “dull” poetics of the mid-century as well as many choices in the handling of convention in years that followed. Yet, Crane’s specialized use of the term “humanists” to signify a class of “merchant[s] or lower gentry,” with a “socially constituted” subjectivity engaged in a “collective model of authorship”—especially where posed in sharp contrast to aristocratic modes—seems problematically restrictive. For example, a “socially constituted” subjectivity is fundamental to most sixteenth-century English

109 Esler, Aspiring Mind, 3-7.
110 I owe this observation to Mary Ellen Lamb’s unpublished conference paper, “Isabella Whitney and the Commodification of Humanist Knowledges” (British Columbia, Canada: Shakespeare Association of America Conference, April 11, 2003), 1.
111 Crane, Framing Authority, 4.
religious practices.¹¹² Nor can the “collective model of authorship” be said to be newer than the thirteenth-century literary practice of compilatio.¹¹³ Crane nevertheless trains a much needed light on the conflict arising between different types of humanism, one we discern in Science’s complaint in Thomas Lupton’s 1570s play, *All for Money* (1570s): “Manie doe embrace and studie me dayly” she observes, “But will you knowe why, and also to what end/Forth for great liuing, and also for money.”¹¹⁴

Sorting out the means and ends of humanism seems to be one of the chief concerns of Wager’s *Longer Thou Livest*. Moros is the “cunning man without wisdom” whose abuse of the “sword” of “many sciences” legitimates his rise to an undeserved office (*Longer* 1949, 1944, 1942). Men are rising for whom classical knowledges are indistinguishable from any other token of gentility—a sword, an entourage, a feather in one’s cap.¹¹⁵ “By us,” promises Exercitation, the trainer of youth to vocation, “you shall have this commodity,” by which he may refer to “instruct[ion],” earthly “reputation,” heavenly “joy,” or all (425, 423, 426, 428). Wager’s use of “commodity” here differs from that in


¹¹⁵Briefly, between 1565 and 1566, preachers’ complaints about the “superfluitie in apparell” focused on the “lust” for feathers even among middle class men, White, *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature*, 235, 237.
*Trial*, though both demonstrate a degree of what Barbara Correll has found to be the characteristic sixteenth-century “slippage that accommodates the abstract and the concrete, the quality of accomodation and the object of exchange.”¹¹⁶ A humanist education is, as in the former connotation, of great use to its possessor, but can, like the latter sense of “commodity” be purchased, provided one knows where and how to shop.

Studies of Elizabethan print culture suggest that the local bookseller’s is quickly becoming one of the most accessible markets where translations of classical texts allow women and other nonuniversity types to access humanist cultural capital.¹¹⁷ By the time the century draws to a close, Richard Mulcaster and Samuel Daniel will express annoyance at the ubiquitous and excessive deference being paid to classical authors.¹¹⁸ Yet, decades earlier (no later than in 1569), Wager identifies this problem in making *Worldly Man* ally himself with first virtuous then vicious characters based largely on their command of humanist authorities. *Worldly Man*, like Moros and Lust, lacks the critical faculty of “*sapere,*” a discernment grounded in piety which permits the well trained individual to safely manage the “edge-tool” of humanist knowledges (*Longer 1947*). For Wager, as for Marlowe and Jonson, humanist learning with its potential to “leave [alleviate] all grievousness and smart”(*Enough 33*) may just as readily be turned to Faustian “wicked” and “mad” deeds, destructive to oneself and others (*Longer 1943,*

¹¹⁶Barbara Correll, “Toward a Political Philology of the Early Modern Commodity,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of Shakespeare Association of America, Victoria, Canada, 9-13 April, 2003), 4. The use of “commodity” in *Trial* favors the older connotation of “convenience.” See Just’s observation, in a conversation about the vanity of worldly objects—from riches to “Helen in Troy”—that “Elation and Pride no commodity doth bring” (p. 221). Later, Inclination promises to tell Just “godly things for your commodity” if he will release the Vice, *Trial* p. 222.

¹¹⁷This will be discussed more thoroughly in the upcoming section on playing and playmaking, but certainly Shakespeare and Isabella Whitney come to mind when thinking of non-university types who benefit from the new translations.

1946). For Wager, such knowledge should be dealt with respectfully—enclaved, in an ideal world, from the market that permits its dissemination to the improperly trained—but never considered a magical, which is to say transformative, object innately virtuous in and of itself.

To Minister Correction

While Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass remind us that power in this period still derives from the value of objects accruing to an individual (i.e., Leicester’s earldom, Elizabeth’s identification with and as England, etc.), religious ideologies are swiftly giving rise to new understandings of the relationship between subject and object. One of the more far-reaching of these concepts is the doctrine of things indifferent. In the vestment controversy of the late 1560s, over which Puritans pressured Archbishop Parker to abolish the use of the surplice, chasuble, etc. in services, this originally Stoic doctrine, revived by humanist Philip Melanchthon in 1555 as the doctrine of “adiaphora,” was revamped to ponder the moral significance of things not expressly proscribed by Scripture. Such things indifferent were to be detached from moral associations; to

119 Instances of this latter abuse of classical knowledges abound in Jonson (i.e., Volpone’s Catullan wooing of a married woman, Littlewit’s popularizing conflation of Damo and Pithias with Hero and Leander in Bartholomew Fair, etc.), but in Marlowe, as this study will show, the potential danger of humanist learning becomes a crucial concern.

120 Marlowe makes precisely this latter move in Faustus. Over the course of the action, Faustus, who wants to believe in a magical form of knowledge that transcends the market, finds his hope cruelly shattered and exposed as impossible.


consider such objects “evil” or “virtuous” was to invest them with too much power, to idolize them. Even for a Puritan like Perkins, “things indifferent” had appropriate levels of use including “natural use,” to relieve necessity or produce “honest delight,” and “spiritual use,” defined as the moderate use of a thing “to the glory of God” within the “compasse of our callings.” The deadlock occurred over Anglican insistence that the Church should have final judgement of a thing’s moral significance, while Puritans maintained it to be the duty of each individual conscience to recommend an object’s use or abandonment.

When the vestment controversy came to a crisis in 1573, with the Privy Council’s directive to preachers to subscribe to the Acts of Uniformity or be suspended, William Wager, known to have had strong Puritan sympathies, conformed. Outraged, Puritan preacher Thomas Wilcox remarked in good extremist fashion that no one had “more deceived the godlie, then one Wager,” who “by his Subscription hath allowed all.” Such absolute capitulation, however, does not accord with the tenor of Wager’s work. It would be more characteristic if Wager’s agreement to wear vestments and make the other concessions so abhorrent to Puritans, was a form of political compromise. For Wager, such “things indifferent” must be measured in the greater context of their ultimate “profit [to] the public weal” (Longer 35). In a world where patronage determines so much,

arduousness of the doctrine with its “right managing” of a moral life whose every act must “be determined, and then determined again” in context with the subject’s surrounding circumstances, 171.

125 Ibid., 259; Cambridge University Library Ms. Mm 1,43, 441.
126 Not necessarily indicative of Wager’s relegation of the meaning of “things indifferent” to state authority, it may be that Wager’s own decision happened to coincide with state policy.
and change occurs only from the ‘inside,’ ideological purity is a drink that must be liberally cut with a sobering dose of Realpolitik. If edifying the largest congregation in the realm meant collaborating with common players, so be it. If agreeing to wear vestments caused one-time friends to murmur and look askance, one must be no less prepared than Heavenly Man to endure insult, for “he had need to live very circumspectly/That would take upon him to please all men directly” (Enough 739-40). What would a minister’s suspension gain the family or community for which he was responsible?

Compliance, on the other hand, appears to have been extremely rewarding, for later that year Wager was awarded the first of several highly desirable offices granted before his death in 1591. As suspicious as the sequence of events appears, it in no way proves that Wager’s compromise was made in expectation of rewards to follow. More in character with a one-time exile and writer of Enough would be a defensive move: a reassessment of priorities in response to threat rather than blandishment. The incident nevertheless discloses the discomfiting degree to which Wager is implicated in the very proto-bourgeois ambition he scrutinizes. To understand how Wager negotiates this

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127 As several have suggested—for example, White in Theater and Reformation, 71; Bevington in Mankind to Marlowe, 54; and Kutrieh in “The Doubling of Parts,” 80—Wager’s flawless doubling and deployment of stage devices appears to indicate first-hand knowledge of stage practices.

128 Later in the same year, Wager was named one of the first governors to the Hertfordshire grammar school at Barnet, founded on the suit of Leicester. In 1575 Wager was commissioned with Robert Crowley to hear and investigate petitions of poor prisoners at Ludgate and the two Counters of London. He gained an additional parish, St. Michael at Queenhithe in 1575, and was admitted to preach in any parish within the London diocese in 1579, Eccles, “William Wager,” 258-9. To this list of honors White adds the interesting note that Wager was made a licensor for the press in 1589, White, Theatre and Reformation, 70. One wonders what he thought of the new generation of popular playwrights, who solved the problem of vernacular stage poetry even as they swung the door wide on issues Wager’s generation shied from addressing directly.
difficulty, we might map the uncompromising purity of a Wilcox onto the beleaguered saintliness of Perotine Massey.

While Massey drew praise from Foxe, the Brethren and sympathetic readers for having sacrificed everything of personal value for the sake of the true Church, a diversely partisan view proposed that Massey’s child was burned not merely with her but for her. This was the Catholic Thomas Harding’s objection to Foxe’s praise of the martyrs, when he wrote in 1567 that “Perotine herself was the actual murderer of her child.”

Evidence that Bishop Bonner and other Marian clergy vilified in Foxe’s account labored to keep heretics from the flames, pushing for recantations and lighter sentencing, add the spectre of credibility to Harding’s, “uncharitable railing and brawling.” The “plea of pregnancy” offered a well-known legal loophole through which early modern women convicted of felonies escaped punishment. Prosecution in such cases could depend upon the attitude of the offender. While the Guernsey martyrs’ trial oath to “obey and keepe the ordinances of the king and queene, and the commandements of the church, notwithstanding that they had said and done the contrary in the time of K. Edward the 6,”

129 See Carole Levin’s account of the Foxe/Harding exchange in “‘Murder not then the fruit within my womb’: Shakespeare’s Joan, Foxe’s Guernsey Martyr, and Women Pleading Pregnancy in Early Modern English History and Culture,” *Quidditas* 20 (1999), 90-1.

130 A.B. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2d ed. (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 293. When examined about their faith, the Guernsey women answered “that they would obey and keepe the ordinances of the king and queene, and the commandements of the church, notwithstanding that they had said and done the contrary in the time of K. Edward the 6,” Fox, *Actes and Monuments*. While far from the most impertinent reply to ever be uttered in a Tudor heresy trial, the statement nevertheless draws unwelcome attention to the arbitrary nature of a Crown-directed Church. Later, the women asked to see their accusers to answer their libels, but were refused.

131 Levin explains that female felons claiming to be pregnant were examined in private by a specially appointed panel of twelve matrons responsible for reporting their condition to court. Women pronounced pregnant, or even of uncertain status, often had their sentence commuted for six to twelve months, or even indefinitely if the judge was so inclined. As might be expected, it was not unheard of for the matrons to lie, or for the accused to become conveniently pregnant while awaiting execution, “Murder not,” 82-3.
was far from the most impertinent statement to be uttered in a Tudor heresy trial, it
insolently highlighted the arbitrary nature of the law.132

Massey’s refusal to recant, an option ostensibly open to every heretic, and her
forgoing the plea of pregnancy prevented consensus of public opinion on the Guernsey
burning. Cardinal William Allen’s sneer in 1587 that Massey “looked for the glory of a
saint and of a virgin martyr” articulates the suspicion in some that “prattling parrot
Perotine” cared more for her own heroic elevation than for the death of her unborn
child—a death which scored a brutal scar upon the political unconscious.133 From a
certain perspective, the harder decision may have been to plead pregnancy, and suffer the
humiliation and damage to her own religious reputation for the preservation of her child,
not to mention her society’s belief in the limits of its own cruelty. Perotine’s own
“monstrous ambition” lurks at the edges of Wager’s invective on the canker of the
commonwealth even if he does not or indeed can not, engage it directly (Enough 246).
He may, however, have had it firmly in mind when formulating his own decision about
how far to extend himself, his family and his community for the sake of things
indifferent.

I am not suggesting we can know what motivated Wager’s compliance. It seems not
beyond the realm of possibility, however, that a man who could thoroughly convince his
contemporaries—Puritans like Wilcox, Nowell and Crowley as well as the Anglicans
responsible for his offices (including Leicester?)—of his piety, would view his decision
in terms of what was best for a Godly commonwealth. In agreeing to wear vestments,

132Foxe, Acts and Monuments, 228.
133Levine, “Murder Not,” 90-1.
and make the other concessions so abhorrent to Puritans, Wager could perceive himself as securing a living for his family, spiritual leadership for his community, and cohesion for the state. As for more material rewards, in applying himself to his “own and other men’s utility,” that is, in dutifully fulfilling his vocation, was it not right that he would prosper? (Longer 455)

The doctrine of “vocation” which emerged in the mid-sixteenth century as a powerful social agenda has its roots in Luther’s translation of I Corinthians 7:20: “let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” What Luther conceived of as man’s “worldly calling,” his divinely appointed estate and duties, Calvin and his followers elaborated more fully in the context of social “utility” to the glory of God. Historians like Quentin Skinner and Margaret Todd have argued that humanism constitutes an earlier influence on the development of “vocation” but Paul Marshall reminds us that the great novelty of the mid-century concept lies in the idea that everyday human labor, the working world itself, has become “the locus of piety”—a concept as alien to the aristocratic courtly ethos which inflected early English humanism as it was to manual-labor-disdaining ancients like Cicero and Aristotle. Vocation infuses all of Wager’s

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134 See Paul Marshall’s review of the rather fascinating argument that Luther’s rendering of Paul’s word “klesis,” as a “calling” of “external conditions” (i.e., social position, or occupation), is untenable and “without parallel in the Greek of the period,” A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 140. There is, in short, no Protestant concept of “vocation” in the Bible.

135 Ibid., 23-5.

136 Ibid., 29, 16-8. Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 1:215, 225; Margaret Todd, Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Other than the Stoics, who appear to have been alone in valuing labor for labor’s sake, the educated classes of ancient Greece and Rome disparaged most forms of manual labor as slavishly dependent upon necessity. Shepherding was idealized for its supposedly high component of “otium,” but it, like the bee-keeping of the Georgics, appears to have been valued more as a figure for other activities than as suitable paid employment for an educated man. Anthony Low claims that georgic valuing of intensive, persistent manual labor is practically non-existent in the Renaissance until the 1590s. His treatment of works like More’s
works, from the content of its Virtues’ speeches to the form of its characterizations. It explains, for example, why Hireling is neither a personification nor an historical personage.

One of the major effects of the doctrine of vocation is its foregrounding of occupation, its redefinition of identity through a person’s function in and contribution to the body politic.\(^{137}\) Whether one was a carter, a priest, or a Justice of the Peace, the diligent performance of that vocation became the most trustworthy sign of the only distinction that mattered: election. As every action came to be viewed as an expression of faith, “vocation” was pushed in the Weberian direction in which prosperity looked like “the result and expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling”—visible evidence, in short, of election.\(^ {138}\) In this way, the doctrine of election and vocation were mutually reinforcing, cutting across traditional social boundaries derived from the possession of property to insist on the equality of vocations before God. Wager’s staging of the honest Hireling’s exploitation draws attention to an abuse that was an historically-contingent socioeconomic pattern, one that would not have been so evident as such had Wager opted for personification (applicable, in theory, to all classes) or an historical persona like Bale’s “Sedition, alias Stephen Langton,” instead.\(^ {139}\) Toward the end of a tirade on Worldly Man’s miserliness, Hireling explains:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I have wrought for him this half year by the week,} \\
\text{And now my work is done my money is to seek.}
\end{align*}
\]


\(^{138}\) Ibid., 54.

If I and all mine should starve for money,  
Of him I dare say I should not get one penny. (*Enough* 1024-28)

Later, Hireling’s canny riposte to Worldly Man’s brusque “you shall tarry my leisure. I will pay you when I see cause” (1144-45), acknowledges “the laws” to be the only “cause” that will motivate Worldly Man to pay up (1146). In the 1560s atmosphere of growing class antagonism, the victim is not Everyman, Humility, or Meekness, but every mechanical Hireling. Hireling must *be* his vocation in order to drive home the very specific point that employers who do not pay for services as soon as they are able fail to perform a duty of their vocation *even when they are entirely within their rights* in a legal system permitting up to a year to pay for work completed. This corresponds to the commonwealth emphasis on “essentially social” as opposed to economic relationships, an ideal that clings to an agrarian, feudal economy in which the lord is responsible for “the temporal welfare” of those who toil for him.  

Worldly Man’s preference for the law’s mechanistic, generic limits over those of Hireling’s human needs—which happen in this case, to be immediate—bespeaks his willful embrace of an economy or system of covetousness, something Wager reinforces through the traditional allegorical move of making Covetous Worldly Man’s steward.

Including Wager in his observation that 1560s playwrights view socioeconomic evils as the fault of individual sinners, not “the system,” White underestimates the perspicacity of commonwealth thought. Crowley, who shared so much with Wager, is instructive in his classic metaphorization of the commonwealth as a body—hence natural, God-ordained, but a system, nevertheless—whose health “possessioners” are undermining

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with their use of “monastic booty” to oppress the poor. The ills which prey upon the body—the “leprosy” of “proud start-ups, or self made gentlemen”—are symptoms of the infernal workings of a system opposed to God’s system and to the health of the body.142

The crossroads at which Wager places his protagonists may bear the traditional designations “Heavenly” and “Worldly,” but Wager’s commonwealth desire to reconcile the interests of parish-level community with those of the state permits an oscillation between social, economic, moral and political registers which reveals his sense of emergent large-scale patterns and systems. Hireling’s lament about his lack of recourse expresses the breakdown of one system through which he might have refused his lord rent, or abstained from further labor until paid, and the emergence of another which, in the far future, will be forced to take its laborers’ contracts and unions more seriously. For this reason, sixteenth-century commonwealth ideology has been linked to the emergence of the modern state, but it can also be considered one of the earliest theories of capitalist economics.143 Wager, as a community leader whose work takes him from the cells at the Counters to the offices of the Bishop of London, knows something of the systems that effect his contemporaries. The lines which separate his idea of ‘state’ from its people may be softer than Marlowe’s or Jonson’s, but Wager does sense the emergence of forces larger than individuals that regulate social life through everything from control of property (through the nexus of law, law makers and law enforcers depicted in Enough) to the control of images of individual and collective identity (through the preaching of

142 The quote is from Marian exile and onetime physician to Somerset, William Turner, A new book of spirituall Physik for dyverse diseases of the nobilite and gentlemen of Englannde (Rome: by the Vatican for E.Van der Erve, 1555). For precedence of a medieval Satanic antisystem, we need look no further than Dante’s Inferno. On this, see Marc Cogan’s The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).
characters like Piety and Exercitation in *Longer*). If states are always animated and legitimated, as Marxist sociologists Corrigan and Sayer insist, “by a particular moral ethos,” Wager’s plays can be seen as a push to make that ethos a commonwealth one, defined over and against a self-centered, competitive, covetous capitalism.  

Do all Things to Edify the Congregation

Puritan antitheatricality has long been of interest to students of dramatic history, but only in the last few decades have scholars like Jean Howard, Jeffrey Knapp, Paul Whitfield White and Jonas Barish offered a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between early modern theatre and religion. Recent studies lay emphasis on what has always been Protestantism’s profound ambivalence toward the theatre, an attitude tied to a great degree to the necessities of the time, so that the theatre unabashedly embraced by Protestant propagandists of Bale’s era (ca. 1538-41) as an effective disseminator of religious and moral instruction, seems almost unrecognizable as the “schoole” of “Satan” condemned in John Northbrooke’s 1577 treatise on “Vain Playes or Enterluds.” Of special concern to Minister Wager would have been the claims of associates like Northbrook or Crowley that the theatre tempted men to the “abomination”

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of abandoning their true vocation for dreams of playing for instant wealth. In addition, players and playwrights were blamed for usurping the vocation of preachers (an accusation which the long tradition of play writing clergy must have strained in a curious way). The concept of vocation, then, was taken up as ammunition against playwrights and players in the new antitheatrical battle of reformed religion. In what is now a well-recognized irony, vocation as “profession” would soon be appropriated to justify the labor of those it had formerly been used to vilify, but Wager is not as openly provocative as his inheritors. He need not be. His vocation and profession, reflected in civil and legal documents that name him, “preacher,” is a traditional one: the authorship of three or four approved plays does not significantly alter it. If he lends his name to *Longer* and *Enough*, he is in good company with a number of published of playwrights whose customary jobs do not include writing poetry for the stage.

Another good reason for Wager to avoid becoming openly involved in the professionalization of playwriting is what must have appeared to be its worrisome instability. The common attitudes of young Wager’s childhood are not the same as those which Lewis Wager felt compelled to take on in “the first known [English] defense of the stage,” the prologue to *Mary Magdelene* (1547-66). That the adult playwrighting Wagers—whatever their relationship to one another—felt similarly defensive about their plays speaks to a climate whose growing suspicion of theater, and intolerance of its equivocality, has been well documented; as late as 1557, actor/playwright Sir John Roughe was burned in Smithfield for a “satirical play,” and Ben Jonson’s many run-ins

with local authority are legendary. In the sequential arc of William Wager’s work, it is apparent that he musters an array of defenses to meet or anticipate allegations of the hotter sort of Protestant detractors.

The moderate success of these provisions is demonstrated in the fact that Wager’s plays were printed. As Peter Blayney points out, “printed plays never accounted for a very significant fraction of the trade in English books,” and the number of new plays printed in the 1560s and 1570s never reached thirty for either decade. Printing plays was a risky venture in which the printer/publisher could not expect to break even before half the edition had been sold. Then there was the matter of securing the required “allowance” by the bishop of London or the archbishop of Canterbury. Wager’s publisher[s] must have been convinced of the plays’ popularity, their subsequent marketability in print form, and their compatibility with state and religious ideology, to have taken such a gamble. That the plays’ appeal may have been overestimated is suggested by their being limited to single editions.

Clopper, Blayney and others have debunked one bit of received wisdom about early printed plays by demonstrating that printing specifically for troupe and household entertainments would have been prohibitively unprofitable. If F. Smith Fussner is correct in identifying “the urban middle class” as the primary “book-buying, book-reading public,” then Wager’s print audience was much the same as that attending his

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150 Ibid., 389, 396.
Indeed, we are already familiar with many features of the plays that would have appealed to Protestant middling tastes: the wealth of classical references, Biblical sententiae, Protestant ideology, even the moral drama structure of the play. We know the plays were popular enough to encourage at least one publisher to speculate on them, so what prevented them from being better sellers? Ulpian Fulwel’s contemporaneous *Like Wil to Like quod the Devel to the Colier* enjoyed two editions for its similar “ruin” of the vicious, “advancement of virtue.” The critical difference, it seems, is that while Wager’s Vices are as likely to wear velvet as any member of his audience, *Like Will to Like* locates vice firmly within the ranks of unaspiring commoners: the colliers, immigrant “tosspots,” and cutpurses who seize upon scheme after get-rich-quick scheme and drink away any money they gain. *Like Wil to Like* flatters through difference the rationalized labor, frugality and deferment of pleasure of its middling Protestant audience. Wager, on the other hand, may have struck too close to home for the closer readers among his book buying audience. The pointedness of his satire—softened, perhaps, in performance where flipping back to a line is not an option and an actor’s delivery can mitigate even a harsh statement—may have proven too cutting on the page.

151 Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, 285.
4. Conclusions

My objective in this final section is to demonstrate how the plays use the generic and performative conventions we have been discussing to veil an inflammatory socioeconomic critique directed at the very audience they solicit. Framing this claim is the broader, historical argument that the Wager corpus embodies a narrative of his attempts to negotiate the internal contradictions of an ethic that encourages both worldly asceticism and an emergent spirit of voracious, exploitative capitalism. Anchoring my claims primarily around Longer, I will speculate about the ideological work the plays do separately and as a corpus, coercing into being the ideal middling Protestant, distinguished by new attitudes toward classical knowledges, gender roles, and social and economic relations. The common thread through all is a certain relation to pleasure, the intensely rigorous self-limiting we first find articulated in the figure of Inclination snaffled (Trial).

Them That Have Slept at Parnassus

Henry Hitch Adams has praised “homiletic” moral plays like Wager’s for being the first to recognize the citizen as “a character suitable for serious drama.” This discovery’s dark side, of course, is the realization that the citizen has the same potential for the perpetration of tragic action, for atrocity, as the tyrant. That Wager is cognizant of this is argued by his experiments with homiletic tragedy and Perotine Massey’s spectral presence throughout the plays as the ever-present potential for tragedy now in the hands of men like Elier Gosseline, “the bailiff” who ordered Massey’s child returned to the fire. Wager’s attack on the socioeconomic activities and attitudes most commonly
associated with ambitious middling types appears motivated by more than a preacher’s
duty to correct, or a playwright’s reaction to a hostile audience, though certainly it is
conditioned by these things, as well. As the plays as a group suggest, the commonwealth
is being threatened by what is eventually identified as the Worldly Man, a type of
“cunning man without wisdom” whose increasing power and small regard for
commonwealth principles renders him, like Moros, harmful to himself and others
(Longer 1949).\textsuperscript{155}

As we have seen, Wager views humanist learning with the skeptical eye of one
respectful of things indifferent. Piety and Exercitation’s observations about mad men
with edge-tools come as a final chorus in Longer to assert a particular interpretation of
events: Moros has been a “mad man” who has willfully and wickedly chosen to pervert
his education, arriving at a maturity marred by the “mad[ness]” of riotous living and the
abuse of official power until, in old age, his unrepentant oppression of others earns him
God’s Judgment and the “open shame” of a fall to Confusion (Longer 1946, 1949, 1832).
In this way, Longer produces the negative space against which the ideal can take shape.
But Moros is not precisely the ideal’s opposite, for while the play takes pains to fashion
him a “popish fool” (1065), who boasts his ability to ring “the saunce bell” (164) and
spouts papist oaths like “Body of God!” (703), “by the rood” (521) and “heart, wounds!”
(1359), Moros, who is fated to become like the very book-buying audience to which the
play is marketed “such as are like to come to dignitie and promotion,” reads more like a
composite burlesque of the worst traits of the thriving middling sort.

\textsuperscript{154}Adams, English Domestic, 55.
He has an intimate knowledge of which markets carry the finest produce in the vicinity (251-4). He possesses a quick, if easily distracted wit, and a competitive spirit, manifest in his love of outrunning and bullying other boys (146, 150-1). He is irrepressibly theatrical, from his “counterfeit” gestures and incontinent passions to his belief that props (the sword provided by Wrath, the feather by Ignorance) confer status and identity (830-35; 1537-46). As Jean Howard has shown, reproach for theatricality had become a common “apparatus for policing transformations of social identity by specific groups of Elizabethan social subjects.”

Most revealing of all, however, is Moros’s attitude toward education. In refusing to understand “profit” in any but the most literal, economic sense, Moros expresses a kind of bad pragmatism, evoking both the insouciant servants of late medieval drama and the *sola scriptura* literalism of contemporary Puritans (550). The logic supporting Moros’s abandonment of Piety’s book of saints for Idleness’s “book” (deck of cards) adumbrates the vein of capitalist “maximization of profit”: if economic prosperity signifies grace and election, surely time spent studying might be put to better use learning the swiftest route to profit—gambling (769-775).

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155 In this respect, Wager joins Robert Crowley, Chaderton, Perkins and other commonwealth preachers in condemning “the aggressive, self-confident, expansive middle class” as “thieves of the common wealth,” White, *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature*, 224, 148.

156 Joan Thirsk explains that “among the upper ranks of society, among gentry, yeomen, and merchants with an eye for good business, an almost encyclopedic body of knowledge existed by the late sixteenth century about where the best markets were to be found for different types of goods. . .” *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 119.

157 Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle*, 27.

158 Of this servant type, Garcio, the World’s impertinent young servant in *Castle of Perseverance* seems to be the earliest case of what would become a moral play regular, i.e. “A” and “B” of *Fulgens and Lucrece* (ca. 1497), and the Vyce of *Horestes* (1567).
Yet, a more devastating swipe at the middling attitude toward learning risks being overlooked in a swift exchange that plays on the moral drama convention of disguise through naming. Plotting to get close to Moros, Crudelity (cruelty), Impiety, and Ignorance agree to the by-now-standard ploy of introducing themselves respectively, as “Prudence,” “Philosophy” and “Antiquity” (1257-64). Moros, for whom corrupting names was once a game, now does so reflexively, mistaking “Prudence” for “Fip-pence” (five pence), “Philosophy” for “Pild-lousy (bald and infested) Boy,” and “Antiquity” for “Sanguinity” (1309-20). As Benbow notes, the name “Sanguinity” wittily highlights the blood-relationship between Moros the fool and Ignorance, but when Moros is corrected and Antiquity’s name is repeated, an even more interesting slip occurs as he heartily welcomes “Tandidity” (the fact of having so much) into his entourage (1317).  

Tandidity’s relationship to Antiquity and Ignorance is worth working through. Antiquity is the disguise through which Ignorance boasts of fooling “the papists” (1273-5). As we recall, Moros’ “popish[ness]” manifests chiefly in his idolization of objects, the “gay gear” he believes transforms him into a “proper gentleman” (1065, 432, 1306). In that an interest in and knowledge of antiquity also distinguishes gentlemen of the late 1560s, Antiquity truly is Tandidity—the fact of having so much—for those foolish enough to conceive of erudition as the stockpiling of facts. Longer suggests that possession of antiquity is revealed to be Ignorance when the possessor is an

160 Benbow, The Longer Thou Livest, W. Wager, note 1313, 54. Tandidity is derived from “tantity” (from the Latin tantitas), which the OED gives as a nonce-word meaning “the fact of being or having so much.” Interestingly, the earliest recorded user of the related “tanti,” meaning “of so much (value)” is Marlowe, in Edward II, I, i. Wager fails to make it into either entry.
undiscriminating collector of flashy tokens—Crane’s pragmatic “gatherer,” the
metaphoric prototype for the later Jonsonian fool, Bartholomew Cokes. \footnote{161}

Wager’s insight is to at once to demystify learning as a sacred virtue, and to lay bare
its utility in the aim of producing an ideal subject worked out over and against Moros, as
well as through the speeches of Exercitation, Discipline and Piety. At the same time, the
play covertly admonishes the ranks of citizens’ sons for whom learning is like any other
commodity—a sword, a feather, or even an office, a thing that signifies their social
distinction. \footnote{162} In chasing the symbols of honor rather than honor itself, the Moroses of
the world overemphasize “	extit{scire}” to the neglect of “	extit{sapere}.” \footnote{163} As Wrath observes, “he
[Moros] discerneth not cheese from chalk,” a lack immediately linked to Moros’s self-
centeredness (739-42). The connection between service to others and the scire/sapere
nexus of humanist learning seems confusing until we recall the working definition of
“vocation”: utility to oneself and the commonwealth for the glory of God. \footnote{164}

That Moros knows what is at stake in his resistance to education becomes evident in
an episode in which he pleads with the Vices to save him from Discipline, who arrives on

\footnote{161}Cokes collects merchandise from the fair booths, but Jonson places at the height of the play’s action
that moment when \textit{Hero and Leander} is commodified and consumed by Cokes and the Littlewits,
\textit{Bartholomew Fair}, Ben Jonson Selected Works, ed. David McPherson (New York and Chicago: Holt,
Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), 5.3. 249-68.

\footnote{162}Marx speaks of the object’s diminishment in the process of commodification through which an object
is depleted of its particularities and transformed into an exchange value, “Commodities,” Capital, vol. 1,

\footnote{163}That other sapere-challenged Protestant middling type, Worldly Man, is both converted by the
Virtues and lead astray by the Vices through his overvaluation of pagan authorities. His conversion begins
when he and Contentation agree on a reading of Herodotus, and ends with his credulous approval of
Covetous and Precipitation’s appropriation of Seneca, \textit{Enough} 194, 159-60.

\footnote{164}One thinks of John Frith, Crowley, and other Commonwealth divines for whom the doctrine of
vocation structured beliefs about “labour, poverty, oppression, degree and duty, as well as the structure of
society itself,” Marshall, \textit{A Kind of Life}, 34.
the scene to bring him to Exercitation: “There [in exercitation as practice of a vocation] in work and labor I shall be pent,” cries Moros, “And I had lever die, by God’s passion” (960-1). As easy as it is to dismiss Moros’s fear as part of his demonstrated proclivity for idleness, there is nevertheless something sinister about the three Virtues. Humorless, harsh disciplinarians, it is they, and not the Vices, who speak of their work with Moros as if they were capitalist investors risking considerable outlay in an attempt to secure a particular product. Exercitation is wary of bestowing “more cost” on him, lest they lose their “labor” entirely, to which Discipline resignedly suggests they “do [their] diligence” and cut their losses, if it comes to that (397, 522-33). Moros interests them solely for his potential utility to the “public weal” (35). The audience’s sympathy for Moros derives only partly from their familiarity with the tradition of fascinating stage Vices; at a deeper level, Moros gives voice to many an Elizabethan’s dread of being harnessed to the millstone of “ordinary, respectable,” but libidinally barren labor.\footnote{The \textit{locus classicus} for the Vice tradition remains Weimann’s \textit{Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function}, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978). On historical prodigals, see Helgerson’s \textit{Elizabethan Prodigals} which argues that the very gifts of the younger generation (Esler’s “generation of 1560”), including superior wit, virtue or faith, prevented many from taking up their expected place in Elizabethan society. Anthony Esler’s earlier \textit{The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Younger Generation}, makes a distinction based on historical events, between the older Elizabethan generation of Elizabeth, Burleigh (and Wager,
early period than Jonson will, later. 166 The very characteristics Wager denounces—middling ambition, and worldly pragmatism—haunt the facts of Wager’s biography; the coercive use of humanist discourse is something Wager has experienced from all sides. Wager, before Jonson, learns to tolerate this personal ambivalence by keeping his eye trained on the end which will justify his sometimes troubling means: an “ideal economy” called the commonwealth. 167

Playing the Man

Much has been written about the manner in which Elizabethan institutions, from humors psychology to rhetoric, were shaped by the imagining of gender. 168 Wager’s commonwealth was no exception, but its status as ideal permitted critical thinking about the diverse kinds of extant masculinity and femininity, and the extent to which their contribution might be an asset or a liability.

In Longer, Moros’s constant deferral to his inclination creates an alternative not only to the ideal of middling Protestantism, but to masculinity, as well. After evading the Virtues’ attempts “to make you a man,” Moros expresses a wish to nevertheless “look big who Eccles estimates to have been born in 1537), and the younger generation of Marlowe and Shakespeare. For biographical information about Wager, see Mark Eccles, “William Wager and His Plays,” 258–62.

166 Shershow emphasizes that “Jonson produces the market but was himself constrained to do so by the market, and his very resistance to market culture serves the social changes he resists,” “Idols of the Marketplace,” 11.


168 The 1980’s were especially felicitous for such studies. Among the better known are Coppelia Kahn’s Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) and Patricia Parker’s Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property (London and New York: Methuen, 1987).
like a man” (406, 820). Idleness promises to undertake with his fellows a number of “devices” guaranteed to make Moros “appear a man both mighty and wise” (861, 865). He must learn how to gamble, to swear, to swagger, and—a skill whose smirky phallic significance is not lost on Wager—handle his sword and dagger (854-65). A related ability, “to handle a wench” (803), is, in fact, a cornerstone in the Vices’ instruction in the arts of successfully “play[ing] the man” (939). “Joan,” “Nell and Nan” serve, in effect, as the first whetstone—one day to include “all the people where Moros doth dwell” (1696)—on which Moros sharpens his masculine image (860, 921). To “play the man” is ostensibly to “handle” one’s other so as to emerge always on top, dominant. In this Wager suggests, as feminist theorists will more than four hundred years later, an inherently flimsy sixteenth-century manhood is based on the invention and rejection of what it is not.\textsuperscript{170}

The danger as the plays recognize it, is one of rendering all admirable, useful qualities associated with the female, and perhaps the female, herself, unavailable. Urging a rethinking of manhood through Moros’s (mis)education, Wager might be said to carry over his media via approach to mid-century Anglican/Puritan differences to his understanding of gender. Moros’s emotional immaturity derives not so much from “the destructive [because enervating] effects of the female domain of childhood” as some

\textsuperscript{169}Wager often makes mild, puerile allusions to the phallic connotations of Moros’s weapons. “My weapon once again I must handle,” says Moros, as a way to pass the time while Pleasure (Incontinence) prepares their residence at the local bawdyhouse (927). Moros wishes that “my sword were a mile long” so he could kill Discipline where he lives, but when his foe suddenly appears, Moros “let[s] fall his sword,” comically deflated by fear, 942, stage direction at 947. Wrath suggests that Moros will grow bolder as a swordsman once “he hath companied with an whore,” 995.

\textsuperscript{170}On this constructed masculinity see Bruce R. Smith, Shakespeare and Masculinity, ed. Peter Holland and Stanley Wells, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford University Press, 2000); Janet Adelman, Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) and Coppelia Kahn, Man’s Estate.
suggest, but from his family’s poor approach to discipline, the culpability for which rests as heavily on Moros’s father as on his mother or nurse, perhaps moreso in that his advice, “if thy mother anger thee, call her whore,” clearly sabotages all attempts at maternal discipline (161, 173). For Wager, the weakness of domestic strictures, and not the mother’s songs or nurse’s tales, shares blame with “idolatry” as “the cause that so many evil men/Now replenish the earth with sorrow and care” (167, 175-6). In this, Longer tacitly acknowledges what feminist criticism faults writers of the period for suppressing: the importance of the mother/female primary caretaker in the formation of youth.

As a governor of the Hertfordshire grammar school whose own progeny included sons who took M.A.’s at England’s two universities, Wager was well positioned to observe how children then, as now, were typically introduced to language and other self-constructing disciplines in the “female domain” of the household, where the mother or nurse’s ordering of the child’s body, impulses and activities set the pattern for more formal training. Wager’s rather unconventional emphasis on the importance of early training derives from qualities we have already noted as characteristic: a keen and unflinching interest in his surroundings with an aim toward practical problem solving.

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172 Kahn treats this suppression of the feminine in Man’s Estate, and more recently, Gary P. Cestaro makes a compelling argument about the correspondence of the trope of “turning away from the nursing body” (from classical to medieval times) to Kristeva’s theory of language- and self-formation through the primary “space of maternal authority,” Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body (Indiana: University Press of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming), 3.

173 Wager had four children: Elizabeth, who died in her first year, followed by Dorothy, then Edward, born in the auspicious year 1564, who attended Cambridge at the same time as Marlowe, and Thomas, Eccles, “William Wager,” 258. “Female domain” is Lamb’s phrase for the vernacular oral culture she sees Longer putting in opposition to a male, written, Latin culture, “Old Wives’ Tales.” I find this dichotomy helpful as a baseline for expressing the dominant contemporary perspective, but I see Wager actively
Doubtless, admonishing all parents to balance their affection with discipline and present a united front seemed the most efficacious way to prevent the disciplinary problems Wager dramatized in *Longer*, but the advice also put an unusually high value on domestic (feminine) order and a cooperative approach (mother and father) to that venture. Wager was no agitator, as we have seen, but when the voicing, or in this case the implication of unorthodox views might serve the public good, he seldom stayed quiet.

Such a case is manifest in his unusual representation of women. What Helgerson says of female characters in prodigal son plays can be easily extended to mid-century moral plays in general: women in these plays are either “vicious harlots, shrewish wives, or criminally indulgent mothers.”  

Wager’s women depart from this pattern in significant ways. Moros’s mother taught him “many a pretty toy”, but not the reprehensible lessons in bullying and disrespect he learned from his father (152). Gayley notes with something like surprise, that “Lady Trust [of *Trial*] is one of our earliest specimens of the gracious, high-minded, and still not impossible woman.” And while Trust and Treasure may seem to approximate the classic Madonna/whore dichotomy, the fact of similarly split male protagonists in both *Trial* (Just and Lust) and *Enough* (Heavenly Man and Worldly Man), points to formal rather than psychic exigencies. Where Wager uses convention in this manner, it functions as a kind of shorthand, summoning tradition so that he can proceed quickly over less interesting ground. “Treasure” is a courtesan (*Trial*), and “Fortune” an emasculating strumpet (*Longer*) because the tradition comparing them to

probematizing the assumptions upon which it is grounded, such as the idea that the female domain is nothing but the “babish vanity” that must be abjected to gain.

unfaithful mistresses suits the overarching didactic aim of the plays to convince the audience to eschew treasure and fortune.\(^{176}\) He parrots the notion that “women of all degrees” are susceptible to flattery (\textit{Trial} p. 234), and although Fortune lives for recognition, and the darkest subtext of the Guernsey martyrdom places a twisted version of Fortune’s oath, “I will get me a name another way” in Perotine Massey’s mouth (\textit{ Longer} 1124), the male Covetous’s melting before Inconsideration and Temerity’s bald flattery makes it unlikely that the stereotype was anything to which Wager was actually committed (\textit{Enough} 581-596).

It is where Wager departs from recognizable tradition that an unusual perspective on gender emerges. Trust may deliver a speech with a suitably modest theme—on knowing one’s place—but the contents of the speech mask her activism. She preaches to the audience, boldly addressing both highest and lowest, from “O ye emperors. . . learn of Just with Trust yourselves to associate” to “ye poor men and commons, walk well in your vocation,/Banish lust and desire, which is not convenient” (\textit{Trial} p. 230-1). It is Trust who activates contention in man, brings Consolation to Just, and performs what Tudor audiences would recognize as the high ecclesiastical function of crowning Just at the play’s end. The extent to which Trust exceeds the feminine model of “chaste, passive obedience” is the degree to which she aids those around her.\(^{177}\)

\(^{176}\)Here I am thinking of Boethius’s depiction of Fortune, or Langland’s Lady Meed, but such powerfully fatal mistresses have obvious ties to more antique dieties, from Circe to the Roman Fortuna, herself.

An even more remarkable, wise female appears earlier in the play in the prologue’s redaction of the tale of the Cynic Diogenes and his *pithos* (tub). In his induction to *Trial*, Wager embellishes Juvenal’s tale of Diogenes’s ascetic residence in “a barrel” in the streets of Athens to include a female mouse from whom the cynic “learned. . . as much as he might” about contentment “though he were disciple unto Antisthenes” (p. 205). In that the mouse does not appear in any of the major source texts concerning Diogenes and his barrel, it seems likely that Wager not only invented the rodent sage, but chose to make it female.\(^{178}\) Wager’s Diogenes gains over Juvenal’s something like an intellectual mother whose instruction is imagined to be complementary to the more overt pedagogy of “Antisthenes,” his intellectual father (205). I am not suggesting that Wager was a proto-feminist, but that he, like his Diogenes, made careful study of those around him, noting qualities he admired or disliked wherever he saw them.

**Vain Pleasure**

Moros’s fears of being “pent” in labor are prescient of Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s observation that where the State co-opts the laborer’s power, time, and “joy,” labor “presents itself as a prison.”\(^{179}\) In Negri, “joy’s” tight connection to power and “savage energies” renders it a double for Lacanian *jouissance*, a meaning

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also tapped by the play’s associative links around the word “merry.” While this adjective’s ironic or satirical shading does not see much circulation before the nineteenth century, its association with violence is already available to early moderns, who may have accessed the word’s darker, Dionysian implications through its common medieval sense of “causing pleasure.” The pleasure for which Moros lives derives not only from singing or playing games, but from “com[ing] softly behind a boy/And giv[ing] him a blow and run[ning] away” (Longer 150-1). Such casual violence, what Discipline describes elsewhere as Moros’s “babish vanity” (139), flags Moros’s regressive state, his clinging to what psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott would have associated with the stage of solipsistic “ruthlessness” prior to the development of conscience, guilt and concern for others. In addition to establishing Moros’s immaturity, depicting Moros at this developmental level enables Wager to suggest the relationship between pleasure and discipline, a bridling of one’s own inclination that constitutes the ideal subject to the Protestant God and His commonwealth.

Exercitation’s constraint of Moros’s merriness—“to laugh, to be merry, to sing, times there be/But in such things now we have no time to spend”—seeks to domesticate his energy, structure his time, and defer his pleasure to some vague, appropriate ‘later’ in ways we have come to expect of Protestant ascetic ideology, from sixteenth-century

\[180\text{OED, s.v. “merry.”}\]

\[181\text{This connection is especially tied to drinking, as in the OED’s late sixteenth-century example, “Mr. Verdon... returning home pretty merry, took occasion to murder a man on the road,” 2. d, 640.}\]

\[182\text{More accurately, the psychoanalyst, Winnicott, would have described Moros’s behavior as a regressive “return to ruthless dissociation,” since a youth who has not advanced beyond the primitive “ruthless” state would be deeply disturbed, D.W. Winnicott, “Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development,” 1950-5, Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis: Collected Papers (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1992), 205-6.}\]
Puritanism to nineteenth-century utilitarianism.\textsuperscript{183} After the reformation, with the abolishment of many traditional, temporal outlets during Carnival and Christmastide, pleasure is viewed with profound suspicion.\textsuperscript{184} The idea that “spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment” can be suppressed assumes pleasure to be superfluous to living.\textsuperscript{185} Which is not to say that it can not be rendered useful. For preachers like Paul Bayne, who encouraged readers “in earthly things. . . [to] take the occasion of our gain, redeeming it with loss of pleasure,” pleasure is the coin whose exchange for heavenly “gain” legitimizes one’s possession of wealth in the heavenly ledger.\textsuperscript{186} For humanistically trained playwrights, “honest” pleasure advantageously sugar-coats a play’s moral and/or intellectually profitable message, but by the 1570s, preachers chafing at the competition of players for their auditors denounced moral plays as an illegitimate means of imparting doctrine, undermining the already shaky legitimacy of theatrical pleasure.\textsuperscript{187} Wager, as a minister and a playwright, must have felt especially beleaguered, a notion suggested by his treatment of pleasure over the course of his three plays, \textit{Trial}, \textit{Longer} and \textit{Enough}.

In the earliest play, \textit{Trial}, the treatment of pleasure seems consonant with Wager’s negotiation of things indifferent, elsewhere. While Diogenes is customarily celebrated for eschewing all forms of pleasure, Wager makes it precisely the Cynic’s “great


\textsuperscript{185}Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, 119.


\textsuperscript{187}For example, Thomas Wilson’s \textit{Arte of Rhetorique} (1553) warns, “excepte menne finde delight, thei will not long abide” to receive the moral profit of a piece, Brown, \textit{Christian Humanism}, 53; White, “Theater and Religious Culture,” 139.
delight,” or pleasure in philosophy that renders him immune to the temptations of the world (*Trial* p. 205-6). The character Pleasure may be Treasure the harlot’s brother, but apparently, he can also be made “to attend on the Just” (p. 239). Granted, we never actually see Pleasure in Just’s final triumph scene, but if we are to believe the casting list assigning both Pleasure and Just to the same player, this may be due to the exigencies of doubling more than to any perceived incompatibility (204). In *Longer*, “Pleasure” has become an alias for Incontinence, “the greatest vice of all./The greatest mischief that ever chanced” (631-2); by *Enough*, pleasure has been banished almost entirely from the stage, relegated to Satan’s second-hand account of Worldly Man’s off-stage “wickedness” (1433). Shadowing this thematic suppression is what I would interpret as a discernible curtailment of manifestations of the bawdy and the carnivalesque.

In *Trial*, Inclination oversees Lust’s wooing of Treasure with patent cynicism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lust:</th>
<th>My lady is amorous, and full of favour.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclination: [aside]</td>
<td>I may say to you she hath an ill-favoured savour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lust:</td>
<td>What sayest thou?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination:</td>
<td>I say she is loving and of gentle behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Vice’s crack about Treasure’s “savour” interprets her apparent amorousness as the trait of a professional for whom a lack of personal freshness might be considered an occupational hazard. The diminishment of female roles (from two in *Trial* to one in *Longer*, and none in *Enough*) may reflect troupe conditions such as the loss or maturation of a boy player, but it also nearly eliminates the site of any “carnal pleasure,” objectionable cross-dressing, or in Wager’s case, bawdiness. Compared to contemporary plays, such as *Like Will to Like*, or even an old popular play like *Mankind*,

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188 White claims the directions for doubling in *Enough* and *Longer* are “flawless,” 71.
189 Ibid., 140.
Wager’s fare is extremely mild—a concession, I believe, to the Brethren. Yet Wager’s concessions, as we have seen, are always the culmination of a judicious weighing of all options available. The final decision is (at least) as dependent upon the intuitive ‘inner light’ of conscience as on easily perverted “Reason” (*Enough* 822).

The trajectory of all three plays suggests a struggle to solve the problem of how to depict the specific vulnerabilities of the powerful, Protestant middling sort without exposing the players or playwright to “the danger of rash speech” (*Enough* 48). *Trial*, perhaps the first play of a youthful Protestant firebrand just returned from exile, has yet to adjust its continental influences to a fully English perspective. It displaces, for example, middling sins (i.e., Greedy Gut’s “eat[ing]” of “houses and lands”) on the aristocracy living “in high estate and dignity” in what might be a more accurate reflection of French socioeconomics (p. 215, 217). By *Longer* the adoption of a “popish” disguise enables Wager to close in on Protestant Moros’s foolishness. *Enough* solves the problem entirely by splitting its Protestant middling type protagonist into diametrically opposed aspects: Worldly Man and Heavenly Man, whose almost identical knowledge of rhetoric and textual authorities, ascetic valuation of rationalized labor, frugality and the deferment of pleasure, points to a similar upbringing.

In that the rigors which prepare Heavenly Man for spiritual salvation set Worldly Man up for economic prosperity, *Enough* appears to ponder what Weber will articulate centuries later as the difference between a Protestant work ethic and its unplanned

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190 Even the physical humor, at least in the text, is reduced over time, from *Trial*’s scenes of wrestling and the bridling of Inclination to a single, brief dagger fight in *Enough*.

191 Brenner famously articulates the economic differences between early modern France and England in “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” *Past and Present*, 70
effect—a secularized “spirit of capitalism.””\textsuperscript{192} It is not so much the protagonists’ means as their conception of the final goal—heaven vs. a “merry” comfortable old age and financial security for one’s family (218)—that renders one heavenly and the other worldly. Worldly Man’s dearth-in-surplus economy of Covetous[ness] that “cannot be contented neither with abundance,/For the more he hath the more still he doth require” (1508-9), is contrasted with Heavenly Man’s “contentation” with “Enough,” precisely the type of worldly asceticism Weber associated with a bare “satisfaction of needs.”\textsuperscript{193} Yet, Wager’s insight is to suggest that despite their appearance of radical difference, both economies are ultimately driven by the same lack—a lack Moros and Worldly Man mistake for status symbols and endless merriment, but Heavenly Man discovers to be Rest. Prescient of Freud in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, but no doubt instigated by contemporary religious thinkers like Thomas Lupset who observed that those taken up by “worldly passion” forfeit “rest,” \textit{Enough} proposes that merriness distracts from the true goal of silencing “the unquiet mind,” the cessation of all excitation (1502).\textsuperscript{194} But what Freud famously designated “the death instincts” can be satisfied in life by the Heavenly Man who masters Diogenes’s refusal to live as other men: “subjects and slaves to their lusts and affection” (\textit{Trial} p. 206).\textsuperscript{195} This is Wager’s prescription for the ailing body of his society, a solution that focuses on the individual not because it cannot imagine the

\textsuperscript{192}Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic}, 172.
\textsuperscript{193}Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{194}Marshall, \textit{A Kind of Life Imposed on Man}, 27; Freud, \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, 76-7.
\textsuperscript{195}At one point, in calling the drive to end all desire “the Nirvana principle,” Freud seems to consider the possibility that biological death of the organism is not the only thing that would satisfy the death instincts, \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, 67.
state but because it is wary of it in its present condition. It offers, through the economy of Enough, not the feudal past whose features it borrows to ward off the increasingly worrisome present, but a future commonwealth in which internal, spiritual reward—“the good land of rest”—is held fief-like by every person who can bridle their inclination and be content in their vocation (pp. 660-5). That the ever-mobile pleasure (now with Lust, then with Just), will continue to ruffle the utopian serenity of the design is nothing more than Wager expects: “So [thus] faithful men in the furnace of adversity be proved” Heavenly Man warns his audience (Enough 1494). It is nothing less than what we have come to expect of this indefatigably pragmatic idealist; nothing more than what we might hope from work conscious of its implication in and motivation by pleasure’s lure.
CHAPTER THREE

BY VIRTUE OF VIOLENCE: ETHICS, NATURE, AND STATE

IN THE CHRONICLE MORAL PLAYS

In the 1968 *Poculi Ludique Societas*’ revival of *Cambises*, Canadian theater critic, Nathan Cohen, was observed sitting “stonily in a front row seat with an open magazine on his lap.”¹ The next day’s scathing, and not unexpected, dismissal of the play in Cohen’s column as suitable only for “uncompromisingly loyal friends of the cast,” included a surprising, and nearly obscured admission that the play’s spectacular scenes of violence made for “luridly effective theatre.” Embedded in this narrative of the grudging compliment wrenched from the fiercely disinterested critic is an undertone that continues to pervade studies of the play today, a sort of guilty, disavowed pleasure that has spurred a variety of writers since the 1960’s to tentatively suggest that for one reason or another *Cambises* is, if not a better play, at least a different play than traditional criticism has shown us.”² Yet after more than a century of scorn for the “mawkishness of its alliterative fourteeners,” its “welter in gore,” and “ramshackle” plot, study of the play seems to require far stronger justification than pleasure.³ It is simply this, however, when

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²Ibid., 103.
pressed rather than repressed—this pleasure which has everything to do with the excessive violence in rhetoric and action that provoked the disgust of generations of early modern drama scholars—that begins to shed light on the putative mystery of Cambises’ tremendous success in the sixteenth century.\(^4\)

To get at Cambises’ lure, however, we would do better to make a detour through Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud than to review the play’s own critical history, for the former paradoxically identifies what is absent in the latter: the pleasure of iconoclasm. In the case of Brecht and Artaud, what is transgressed through violence and the alienating effects of a symbolic, highly stylized theater is bourgeois morality. Brecht’s epic theater and Artaud’s theater of cruelty aim to put their audiences at a thought-provoking distance from bourgeois ‘human nature,’ the ostensibly intrinsic ethical code that renders sadism or indifference to the suffering of others a monstrous exception to the rule of humanity.\(^5\)

While Cambises and Horestes employ equally alienating effects, their purpose is not to challenge so much as to constitute bourgeois morality. In this, the chronicle moral plays offer a privileged, early glimpse at the process of constructing ‘human nature.’ That this was achieved over and against the transformation or rejection of theological values coded as natural (or simply ‘nature’) accounts for the iconoclastic fascination of the plays.

\(^{4}\)Based on the many contemporary allusions and several sixteenth-century editions of the play, Spivack concludes that Cambises was “enormously popular in its time,” Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, 115.

\(^{5}\)Both writers were quick to acknowledge the “theatre of cruelty’s” debt to early modern drama. A quick overview of this can be found in Jonathan Dollimore’s Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (1984; Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xlv, 3, but for more in depth investigation, see Artaud’s “First Manifesto” for “The Theater of Cruelty,” or his ruminations on his play, The Cenci, Artaud on Theatre, ed. Claude Schumacher with Brian Singleton (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), 112-8, 162-6; or Walter Benjamin’s study on Brecht, “What is Epic Theatre?” in Illuminations, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 147-55.
In *The Savage Anomaly*, theorist Antonio Negri enables us to recognize the “conquest of nature” as “bourgeois” morality, the relation of a middling class to the forces of production (the laboring classes). In Negri’s reading of Spinoza in the late seventeenth century, the middle class simultaneously appropriates and invents labor culture as a pastoral/domestic ethos—an essential “nature” that ostensibly separates the emerging bourgeoisie from the state.\(^6\) A century earlier, this is precisely the configuration we find in *Cambises*, where absolutist rule is figured as violently destructive to the salubrious essential order of family and market. In contrast *Horestes*, which I argue consciously positions itself against *Cambises* (ideologically and dramaturgically), quite overtly rejects nature as an intrinsic ethos, representing it instead as an outmoded morality, a system of social behavior and duty that hinders an alternative, ideal, rational submission of all private interests, amorous, familial and economic, to the state. What I want to suggest, in short, is that the chronicle moral plays intentionally articulate contemporary theories of state that contribute to the construction of bourgeois class consciousness and the capitalist state. In negotiating the danger of theories that accommodate constitutionalism and reason of state policy, *Cambises* and *Horestes* thrust new demands on the juridical consciousness of their audience, provoking a type of reception that permits more nuanced treatments of morality than had formerly been the case.\(^7\) Finally, I will suggest how, in

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\(^7\) There are three known sixteenth-century editions of *Cambises*. For a textual introduction to all surviving quartos, see Robert Carl Johnson’s introduction to his published dissertation, “Thomas Preston’s
response to the pressures of theater’s increasing commercialism, the producers of these plays transform their surplus labor into distinctive company styles, and develop, as a by-product, the artisanal aesthetic that later playwrights like Jonson will employ to deflect anxiety about the superfluous pleasure of theatrical entertainment.

We have encountered this anxiety about theater in the previous chapter, but where Wager’s response was the progressive suppression of bawdy and carnivalesque elements, Preston and Pikering’s work encourages us to displace pleasure, even iconoclastic pleasure, onto both the villains of the narrative and the cooler, extradramatic realm of spectatorship—the recognition and enjoyment of virtuosity.  This strategy adumbrates


8In the past, doubt attended the assignment of Thomas Preston and John Pikering to what are now generally recognized to be their respective works, Cambises and Horestes. J.M. Manly, “The Children of the Chapel Royal and Their Masters,” The Cambridge History of English Literature, VI: The Drama to 1642, Part 2, ed. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907-17), 279-92 and E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923) expressed, respectively, the first and most authoritative objections that the Preston named in the 1576 Stationers’ Register entry for Cambises could not have been the celebrated Cambridge University scholar. Based not on evidence but on the putative implausibility that the erudite author of several Latin poems and orations could pen such “inferior drama,” the reluctance to accept Preston’s authorship has been overcome, in no small part due to William A. Armstrong’s work, including “The Authorship and Political Meaning of Cambises,” which develops cogent arguments for accepting Preston as the playwright, English Studies, 36 (1955). The question of the Lord Keeper and Speaker of the House John Pikering’s authorship has been even more heavily debated, complicated as it is by the vagaries of Elizabethan spelling (the 1567 quarto names the author “John Pikering,” but “Puckering” and “Pikeryng” are alternative spellings) and the fact
the direction taken by numerous plays of the later London stage. In this respect, the chronicle moral plays serve the present study as a turning point, but not, as in other accounts of theatrical development, as hybrids between a moribund, anemic line and the vigorous new breed an ingenious hand coaxes into existence. Instead, the chronicle moral plays express a shift more in orientation than in materials, from the privileging of church-centered morality to the privileging of a state-centered morality, the latter of which makes space for a new, more positive attitude toward emergent capitalism.

Mine is not the same as the well-known religion-to-secularism argument. For one thing, if we concur with Julia Lupton’s assertion that “every detail of life [in early modernity] was entrenched in religious paradigms and fought by religious conflict,” then the task of separating the religious from the secular (even in a single play), can not possibly be as unproblematic as some suggest. ⁹ Then, unlike current movement-toward-secularism arguments, I view the socioeconomic changes these plays articulate and materialize in terms of imperatives rather than freedoms. The novel approaches of these writers to their material is not the result of a sudden liberation from the shackles of religion or even from feudalism, but a response to new imperatives of expanding markets for plays, players, and playwrights. At the same time, it would be a mistake to equate their motives with those of, say, late twentieth-century marketing professionals. These

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that the Revels Account entry for “Orestes” performed at court over Christmastide 1567/8, appears to require props not indicated in the text. However, since the middle of last century, arguments like those of James E. Phillips, pointing to the political sympathies common to play and politico, have similarly laid to rest objections that divulge, like the Preston controversy, a rather classist bias. See Phillips’ “A Revaluation of Horestes [1567],” Huntington Library Quarterly, 18 (1954-5), 227-44 and Robert Carl Johnson’s section on authorship in his Critical Edition.

⁹ Julia Reinhard Lupton, Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), xxii. Lupton’s point is that the relationship between secularization and Christianization in this period is not as simple as it is often read, but that the two “are bound up in a dialectic that raises what it cancels,” xxvii.
soon-to-be ministers of state are no less committed to prescribing for an ailing society than the ministers of God who formerly wrote such plays.

The chronicle moral plays depart from their predecessors in summarizing a tradition of moral drama with an emphasis that not only alludes to contemporary historical and theatrical conditions, but tends to strip a device down to its sociopolitical function, overtly demystifying it to some degree. Thus, the trope of thievery that may be traced from *Mankind*’s quête to *Horestes*’s cutpurse goes from vilifying an entire class (the gentry) in *Mankind*, to targeting a certain type of burgher (covetous) in *Enough*, to exposing a quality (self-interest) that it names as problematic, universal but necessary to Elizabethan society in *Horestes*. The concept of theft, the cutpurse of *Cambises* suggests, is something we commonly use to create social distinctions, but it lurks, *in potentia*, in all of us.

The chronicle moral plays, then, question traditional morality, itself, a rethinking that while not novel is greatly accelerated in Preston and Pikering. We saw, for example, how *Mankind*’s denouncement of all things under the compendious rubric “new guise,” from fashionable coats to discretionary coins, was transformed in *Wager* to a critique of socioeconomic relations in a Covetous economy (*Enough*). The chronicle moral plays continue to ponder socioeconomic relations but detach them more completely from traditional value judgements, so that the economically prudent decision a harlot makes in Preston’s play (to forgo revenge) can be at once the barrier and the key to the prosperity of Pikering’s *Mycoene*. In roughly the hundred years since *Mankind*, we have witnessed the movement of the locus of ethical decision-making from an internalized Catholic church to a Protestantized subject-of-the-state. This latter distinction recognizes the new
priority of subject over institution as well as what Negri will identify as the space bourgeois culture will come to define for itself, over and against the state, in the fashioning of its own consciousness.¹⁰

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates what I have been arguing about the form of moral drama from the beginning, for here we see how the malleability of the genre eventually enables the expression of moral positions almost diametrically opposed to those articulated by its earliest writers. From *Mankind* to *Cambises*, we move from premonitory fear to tacit acceptance of market imperatives. From Wager’s Puritan-mollifying obfuscation of pleasure we move to its displacement and transformation in *Cambises* and *Horestes* into the pleasure of the violent other—the coarse soldier’s pleasure, the Herodian tyrant’s pleasure, the sophisticated connoisseur’s pleasure, but never the moral middling sort’s pleasure.

I. Criticism

The tumultuous fortunes of the chronicle moral plays, exceeded in extremes only by *Mankind*, tell the story of changing reception largely determined by a shifting aesthetic. The 1960’s and ‘70’s softening of a literary bias with a new interest in performance and dramaturgy permitted the reputation of these plays to rise from what one of their first editors called “an artistic disaster” to what one of the most recent dubbed a “new little masterpiece.”¹¹ But the latter perception continues to be a rarity, for rarer still is the student of sixteenth-century drama who has not been influenced by Edmund Creeth and

¹⁰Negri, The Savage Anomaly, 139.
his contemporaries’ litany of shortcomings justifying the application of the label, “university half-wit” to Cambises’ writer, Thomas Preston, and the similar charge that Horestes’ John Pikering is “either a bad playwright or a confused moralist.”¹²

Justification for reading these plays generally falls under two lines of inquiry: generic or historicist.

In the following brief survey of chronicle moral play criticism, we shall see that while indispensable in the pursuit of understanding the play’s contradictions, such approaches applied as discrete methodologies seriously limit our access to these works. Instead, the present study incorporates both historicist and generic reading in interpreting the work the text performs, including what it attempts to screen out. Others have examined the chronicles’ formal changes in relation to the political, economic and ideological shifts occurring in the early Elizabethan state, but only assuming a political unconscious permits forays into issues that have not been sufficiently addressed, such as the theme of law’s relation to nature; the causes and effects of the new vogue for on-stage violence and hypermasculinity; and the degree to which adopting conventions from old, suppressed forms places new pressures on audience as well as on genre. With an understanding of historical events we can shed necessary light on an author’s changes to the core texts he engages, illuminating even well-trod historical identifications. For example, in the face of the textual evidence that suggests Horestes knows Cambises, Horestes’s evocation of contemporary Scottish events is revealed as a move to overgo its model and earn its author a role in real-life policy-making. Separating historical from

¹¹Edmund Creeth, introduction, Tudor Plays (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1966), xxxvi.
generic modes of inquiry seems especially hazardous in moral plays, whose move, so often, is to deny change or innovation in an attempt to naturalize its message(s).

The chronicle moral plays were initially redeemed as the vital link between the old religious drama of a largely nonprofessional theater and the new “secular” forms gracing the London stage. In his *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, an early, highly visible champion of the secularization narrative, Bernard Spivak coined the term “hybrid” for these plays, and valued them for the transitional function they served in the historical trajectory in which he, and writers like Bevington and Wickham were interested. As hybrids, the problem of the play’s marginal poetry all but vanished before their significance as “an important link in the gradual secularization of the Psychomachia.”

In later decades, critics like Walter Cohen would continue to associate the plays with the burgeoning Elizabethan interest in “ethical, social and political matters at the expense of metaphysical ones.”

Other studies, around the same time, were pushing the chronicle moral plays in more specific directions. Four years before Spivak’s book was published, Irving Ribner produced his seminal article revealing the didactic “Morality Roots of the Tudor History Play,” whose implications for the chronicle moral plays were evident, if not overtly stated. Many years later, Robert Carl Johnson extended Ribner’s thesis specifically to

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Cambises, arguing that Preston’s forerunner of the Elizabethan history play promulgated Tudor doctrines of obedience and divine retribution.\textsuperscript{17} Others, like Robert S. Knapp and Ronald Broude identified in the chronicle moral plays’ dramaturgy and thematics an emerging aesthetic of revenge tragedy.\textsuperscript{18}

Interest in the medieval end of the historical line is represented by the handful of scholars in the 1960’s who were extending early speculation by Baskerville and Creeth to suggest how chronicle moral plays incorporate various medieval forms in addition to moral drama.\textsuperscript{19} Wickham found that miracle (or, saints’) plays “have much in common with the chronicle plays of the Elizabethan era.”\textsuperscript{20} More recently, Benjamin Griffin’s article which links miracle to history plays, does not specifically treat Cambises or Horestes but is helpfully applicable to both.\textsuperscript{21} Rosemary Woolf has argued for the chronicles’ “substantial borrowings from the mystery plays,” with persuasive comparisons of elements from Cambises, Herod, and Abraham and Isaac plays.\textsuperscript{22} This latter connection has gained such a critical foothold that last year’s review of critical

\textsuperscript{17} Johnson, Introduction, “A Critical Edition.”
\textsuperscript{20} The quote is from Wickham in \textit{Medieval Theatre}, 97.
\textsuperscript{21} Benjamin Griffin, who looks to the plays of John Bale rather than the “hybrid” moralities as pivotal forms, is correct in finding Bale a crucial figure in the development of history plays. My considerably different interests lead me to prefer the chronicle moral plays, which are historically positioned to engage the socioeconomic and legal concerns Bale cannot, “The Birth of the History Play: Saint, Sacrifice, and Reformation,” \textit{Studies in English Literature 1500-1900}, 39:2 (1999).
\textsuperscript{22} Rosemary Woolf, “The Influence of the Mystery Plays upon the Popular Tragedies of the 1560’s,” \textit{Renaissance Drama}, n.s. 6 (1973), 89-105.
studies for *Shakespeare Survey* could assert, en passant, that “secular English history” offered a celebratory drama to replace mystery cycles.\(^{23}\)

While the continuity of medieval to renaissance drama is a fundamental assumption of my project, we seem to have exhausted what this perspective alone can tell us about chronicle moral plays. Eugene D. Hill lucidly identifies this problem as “treat[ing] Preston’s work as significant within a larger story...without ever asking what the play could have meant in its own day.”\(^{24}\) The strength of Hill’s article, which offers a more nuanced understanding of *Cambises*’ relationship to topical religious and political ideology, is its recognition, lost on older historical studies, of the overdetermined nature of moral drama semiotics. For example, Hill’s reading of the “Henrician context” of an Elizabethan play that explicitly alludes to Marian persecution confirms the setting in motion of “multiple identities” around a central structure that I have argued typifies moral drama characterization.\(^{25}\) Yet even Hill’s admirable analysis of the diverse simultaneous threads of meaning available for reception fails to go far enough, for the interpretation is restricted by his promotion of the play as the “earliest surviving tragedy of the Elizabethan age.”\(^{26}\) An admittedly credible perspective, it nevertheless has the unfortunate consequence of putting undue emphasis on the high plot, rendering the low actions and characters little more than comic diversions or foils. In contrast, I argue that the low action, absent in the playwrights’ sources, holds the key to reading the play’s latent political and economic content.

\(^{23}\)Ruth Morse, *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003), 324.


\(^{25}\)Ibid., 425.  See my earlier argument about the allegorical mode of characterization in chapter 1.
Traditional historicist approaches have fared little better than generic readings in avoiding a premature foreclosure of meaning. *Horestes* has proven especially perilous for those drawn to reflective allegorical models in that it does not immediately deflect efforts to affix specific events and personages to the play’s situations and characters.\(^{27}\)

What struck Carl Kipka in 1907 as a series of incidental allusions to the Scottish 1567 scandal, grew over half a century into an “allegory of events in the life of Mary Queen of Scots,” featuring Clytemnestra as Mary Stuart, the Earl of Bothwell as Egistes, and James as Horestes.\(^{28}\) Yet this allegory was soon challenged for its methodology as well as its inconsistencies. Bevington’s reluctance to allow more than a loose thematic connection between *Horestes* and Scottish events was later solidified by Knapp and others’ insistence that “political allusion enriches the play rather than accounts for it.” Works like Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and Maureen Quilligan’s *The Language of Allegory*, which improved our understanding of allegory, hastened the demise of reading the plays as coded political satire.\(^{29}\)

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 407.

\(^{27}\)Hill’s treatment of political allegory in *Cambises* avoids the old trap of insisting on precise historical parallels, or trying to explain away all that fails to conform to a particular allusion. Consequently, Hill can argue that while the tyrant king would have invoked the recent religious tyranny of Mary, there is also an air about his absolutist bluster, combined with the ambidexterity of his associate Vyce, that is Henrician.

\(^{28}\)Carl Kipka, *Maria Stuart im drama der Weltliteratur* (Leipzig, 1907), 10-14. The quote is Phillips’ in “A Revaluation of *Horeste*,” 227-229, but Phillips, sometimes seen as a political allegorist, actually refuted the belief of “most critics” that Pikering was allegorizing actual events in Scotland. Phillips maintained that “the dramatist’s intention [was] to mirror the basic political problem rather than the actual details of events in Scotland.” Marie Axton remains one of those who read *Horestes* as political allegory. Her introduction to *Horestes* for *Three Tudor Classical Interludes* describes a play that “deals with the threat posed to England’s crown by regicide in Scotland,” 4.

Political allegory, however, like the perennial debate about auspices, raises a valid question about what we discern to have been the purpose of these plays. Bringing the specific historical and generic factors of the plays to bear on each other has suggested what I will argue in the next several pages: first, that both plays were written to obtain political preferment, and second, that Pikering specifically had Preston’s *Cambises* in mind when he wrote the emulative *Horestes*. The relevance of this argument will become apparent in the final, interpretive section, in which I read *Horestes*’s political theory as a rejection of *Cambises*’ affirmation of natural law, and *Horestes*’ symbolic resolution as the desentimentalizing of *Cambises*’ village idyll.

Given the success of William Wager, and the not-too-distant memory of John Bale, the writing of plays at this time may have been perceived as an opportunity for ambitious young men of the universities or Inns of Court to catch the eye of a patron and give evidence of their suitability for prestigious political appointment. Indeed, two years after the 1561 court production of his and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc: or The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex*, Thomas Norton was made Chairman of the House of Commons committee that presented Elizabeth with a petition “for the limitation of succession.”

Coincidence? Or was Norton’s suitability to treat so delicate a matter somehow gleaned

Gabriel Harvey indicating a degree of intimacy with Preston, that it was Preston who advised the younger poet to sing “of bloody Mars, of wars, of giusts” to gain preferment, “Thomas Preston’s *Cambises.*” While the three were acquainted through their studies at Cambridge, Johnson points out that no one has supported Higgin’s conjecture.


31 Kipka is the first to suggest, in a cautious footnote, that Pikering may actually be Sir John Pikering, a Lincoln’s Inn gentryman whose political acumen lead him to positions as Speaker of the House of Commons (1584-86, 1586-87), and Lord Keeper for Elizabeth (1592-96), *Maria Stuart im drama der Weltliteratur*, 14, n. 1. The degree to which this identification is accepted can be seen in Marie Axton’s assertion, in her introduction to *Horestes*, that “there is good reason to identify him [Pikering] with Sir John Pikering.” *Three Tudor Classical Interludes*, 4. Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 379.
from his rhetorical skills treating the problem in his play? If the latter is so, and well-
received didactic plays became an avenue for the aspiring, the old question of why both
“the distinguished scholar Thomas Preston” and the soon-to-be-powerful John Pikering
would stoop to write for popular, itinerant troupes, is resolved. Playwriting for
preferment would also identify one material explanation for Bevington and Weimann’s
observation that there was far greater traffic between elite and popular theater than is
commonly imagined. To draw and retain the touring company’s audience, a play would
need to combine the “action, spectacle and low comedy” of the popular theater with the
rhetoric, symmetry and ideological debates of humanist entertainments. That this is
precisely the kind of “dramatic synthesis” enlivening *Cambises* and *Horestes*, has settled
the majority of opinions on a popular venue for both plays.

The survival of certain documents have lead some to insist that auspices can be
determined to an even greater degree of accuracy. Creeth was first to suggest that
*Cambises* belonged to the repertory of Leicester’s Men, based on the combination of a
letter Chambers dates to 1560/1 referring to a new play at court called “huf suff and ruff,”
(thought to be the Huff, Snuff, and Ruff of *Cambises*) and the Christmastide Revels
account of that year naming Leicester’s Men the sole adult performers of sundry
entertainments. In addition, evidence of Shakespeare’s great familiarity with *Cambises*

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33 Cohen, *Drama of a Nation*, 129. The one voice of dissent appears to be Michael Shapiro, who
argues that *Horestes* was a courtly children’s production in “John Pikering’s *Horestes*: Auspices and
Theatricality” *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition*, W.R. Elton and William B. Long, eds. (Newark, New

34 Johnson gives the *terminus ad quem* as the play’s publication date of 1569, and the *terminus a quo*,
based on the play’s Bishop Bonner reference and praise of the Queen, sometime after Elizabeth’s accession

supports the possibility of a Leicester play, especially if the hypothesis is correct that Shakespeare began his career as an actor and perhaps a “patcher” for the Queen’s Men, who had absorbed the lead players and possibly the repertory of Leicester’s Men in 1583.36

_Horestes_ is thought to belong to the repertory of Lord Rich’s Men, on evidence of the Revel’s accounts’ recorded payment to Rich’s Men and four children’s troupes for the 1567/8 winter season in which “Orestes” played at court. While most critics have assumed that only an adult troupe could handle the strenuous doubling demands suggested by the printed casting list (twenty-seven roles, divided among six players), Michael Shapiro has argued for production by one of the children’s companies.37 _Horestes_ does appear to give its juvenile players greater exposure than the average troupe play (the most demanding role being that of the Vyce), but this, as I will argue, could be a novelty pinned on the abilities of an exceptionally gifted pair of company boys. All told, Bevington’s case for Rich’s Men with, perhaps, Paul’s boys for the Court appearance, is most convincing, especially given that the play bears no signs of having been written exclusively for boy players or a courtly audience. On the contrary, _Horestes_’ “extremely rare” addition to the standard, end-of-play prayer for the queen—“especially” let us pray for the “Lord Mayre” and “head officers, what ever they be” (_Horestes_ 1202, 1200)—

36 Among the “reason[s] to believe _Cambises_ belonged to the repertory of the Earl of Leicester’s men” Southern counts the well-known allusion to “King Cambises’ vein” in _I Henry IV_, _The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare_, 510-11. On Shakespeare as a Queen’s Man, see McMillan and MacLean’s compelling argument in chapter seven of _The Queen’s Men and their Plays_, 160-6. In _News from Hell_ (1606), Dekker defines a “patcher” as “a Cobler of Poetrie,” _Non-Dramatic Works_, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 2:146.

suggests that an adult touring company may have been pandering to civic authorities during town hall performances and mayor’s shows. Such attempts to curry favor may be indicative of 1) interests specific to a touring company (and these were adult companies); and 2), more speculatively, the deference of a company lacking the political clout of, say, Leicester’s Men. If plays must be licensed by the mayor (or his appointed staff) prior to their approval for public run, and if the granting of this license is contingent upon a screening, or private “Mayor’s play” for the magistrates of the town, might it not be a politic bit of foresight to include the local notables in the final, compulsory prayer for the prince’s welfare? 

I want to suggest that this final prayer for the mayor’s crowd, uttered by Truth, and positioned in the printed text prior to the author’s “Finis quoth J.P.” is a calculated response to what young J.P. discerns to be one of the great exigencies of the play, namely, inspiring the goodwill of local power. Nor was this the only exigency Pikering appears to have accommodated, for in many ways Horestes reveals that he was a shrewd (if not always apt) student of the imperatives of popular playing.

A would-be popular playwright in the 1560’s could hardly find a better model than the “enormously popular” Cambises. R.C. Johnson’s suggestion that Horestes lifts material from Cambises has gone largely unremarked since 1964, with the exception of a recent terse note in Michael Shapiro’s article on Horestes dismissing Johnson’s case. Shapiro argues that similarities like the squabbling rustics, the woman who captures her captor and the platea trick of the cutpurse are “centuries” old “stock comic bits” the plays

38Shapiro points out that the extension of the prayer doesn’t necessarily exclude a boys’ troupe, like the Westminster choristers, who performed for the Lord Mayor’s Day show in 1561, and in an Ironmongers’ pageant five years later. “Auspices and Theatricality,” n. 9, 223.

39Peter H. Greenfield provides a quick overview of this licensing process in “Touring”, 255.
borrow independently from the material of popular drama. Given, however, the quantity and quality of the borrowings, and keeping in mind Ockham’s principle of economy, Shapiro’s explanation seems less convincing than Johnson’s. Fights between rustics do occur in the shepherds’ plays of the great cycles, and in the plethora of seasonal folk games Robert Withington and Glynne Wickham have so helpfully surveyed, but the tone in these fights is generally different than the sneering, urban chauvinism of either Ambidexter—“ye cuntry patches!” (Cambises 788) —or Horestes’ Vyce, “Ar you so loustey in fayth, good man clound?” (50). In overcoming Ruf and forcing him to serve her, Preston’s harlot, Meretrix, may owe something to the “hocking” women who traditionally caught and tied up their town’s men once a year, but Pikering’s Woman, who like Meretrix takes her adversary’s sword before determining the terms for their truce, clearly echoes the action in Cambises. As for the “curious gag” of cousin cutpurse, common to both plays, the first textual instance is either, as Southern asserts, in the courtly play, Appius and Virginia (1564), or as Johnson contends, in Cambises. In either case, there does not appear to be textual evidence for the “centuries” of tradition Shapiro imagines.

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40 Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, 115.
42 Robert Withington, English Pageantry: An Historical Outline (Harvard University Press, 1918-20), 1:2, 4-10.
43 Axton’s glossing of the Vyce’s remark, “are you so aggressive, you clownish peasant?” emphasizes the anti-rural bias of the slur, Three Tudor Classical Interludes, 208.
44 Wickham, The Medieval Theatre, 135.
45 Southern, The Staging of Plays before Shakespeare, 516.
As intriguing as *Cambises*’ superficial similarities to *Appius and Virginia* may be in their own right, they do not concern us here. *Horestes*, at any rate, goes well beyond whatever borrowing *Cambises* may have done in order to engage its predecessor’s ideological underpinnings in the treatment of concepts like law and predestination.

*Horestes*’ debt becomes most readily apparent, however, in its adaptations of *Cambises*’ comic scenes, for Pikering does not appear fully cognizant of the capacity of comic episodes to enrich the meaning of a play’s main action. Bits like *Horestes*’ Woman and Sodyer, never sufficiently connected to the main action, fail to add anything but confusion to the plot (*Horestes* 626-46). Why is this nameless, faceless Woman the one person in the play to forgo revenge without an economic motive? If a gender statement is being offered about woman’s superior mercy or greater weakness in being unable to exact the vengeance the soldiers of the play dutifully perform, there is nothing in the text to guide us to it. In that Woman is of roughly the same social class as Hodge and Rusticus, who prove thoroughly susceptible to Revenge, a class-based statement also seems unlikely. My suspicion is that the Woman and the Sodyer of *Horestes* tussle in the first place because of the success of a similar comic fight in *Cambises*, between Meretrix and a soldier (Ruf), in what we will find to be a far more ideologically significant scene (*Cambises* 266-91). Pikering may well be, as Axton argues, the better poet, but Preston is the superior dramaturge. Pickering, I believe, knows *Cambises* and seeks to overgo it—not with the comfortable mocking distance with which another young playwright’s work

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46 Menelaus also relinquishes his desire for vengeance, but his motivations (the gain of an heir, and that heir’s property for his progeny) are clearly economic.
will one day invoke “Cambyses vein”—but with all the of the acknowledgements, negations and displacements of one who takes his model/rival quite seriously.47

2. Genre and Performance History

This section, as in previous chapters, concentrates on the plays’ use of various generic structures in both text and performance. The performance section starts by examining how the tradition of Herod plays in conjunction with Protestant typology enables Cambyses to engage a Protestant understanding of history as a figure for an eternal reality beyond historical time. In this paradigm, adopted by Horestes as well, historical events are signs in need of interpretation, something into which the plays’ much discussed ambiguity feeds. On a more mundane level, the plays’ secular variation on favorite popular conventions from suppressed saint and cycle plays effect a very Elizabethan compromise, dependent on ambiguity, in order to please diverse religious and political interests. My interest in the innovation of the cutpurse device links the performance and literary history sections. As a modification of the Vice’s traditional platea function, Cambises’ cutpurse gives greater relevance to the issues the play treats; as an emblem for the market economy with its anxieties around exchange and identity it also expresses a humanist discourse’s failure to entirely legitimate the popularizing of classical knowledge. Finally, we will see how Cambyses draws on two literary traditions to proffer a newly diachronic conception of human justice that will have the effect,

47The quote is from I Henry IV, William Shakespeare The Complete Works, 2.4.371-4.
especially in *Horestes*, of detaching the events of historical rule from traditional Christian morality, opening the door for a Machiavellian morality of state.

*Our Sports to Beautify*48

Considering what we now know to be have been a tradition of moral drama’s incorporation of popular forms, the chronicles’ borrowing from popular theater, particularly from cycle and miracle plays, may seem to have little more to tell us beyond contributing to a narrative of continuity.49 Attentiveness to differences between fifteenth and sixteenth century applications, however—i.e., the contradictions inherent in taking up traditional structures despite a commitment to comply with state suppression of “anythinge plaied which tende[s] to the maintenaunce of superstition and idolatrie”—reveals both new causes and far ranging effects of this modal assimilation.50 For example, *Cambises* villifies its tyrant king not as *Mankind* did Myscheff, by alluding to the disreputable status and theatricality of itinerant players, but by engaging a form of Protestant typology to confer a new truth value to the lessons of the play.51 For this, Preston counts on his audience’s recognition of two mutually reinforcing relationships:

48 All subtitles have been taken from *Cambises* and *Horestes*. They are as follows: *Cambises* 868; *Cambises* 1005; *Cambises* 887; *Horestes* 1193; *Cambises* 332; *Horestes* 759; *Cambises* 749; *Horestes* titlepage; *Cambises* 465; *Horestes* 449.


51 I refer here to Thomas Luxon’s persuasive reading of Protestant typology as “the Protestant dodge” to lessen dependence on allegory, “Allegory vs. Typology: The Figural View of History,” *Literal Figures*: 177.
the historical priority of Cambyses to Herod, and the relationship of the by-now-classic Herod play to *Cambises*. The tradition of Herod plays would have made Herod the more familiar figure, but Cambyses, who died in 521 B.C., might be understood, typologically, to adumbrate Herod, himself a type of other historical tyrants.\(^52\) In other words, the Herod play gives viewers of *Cambises* a context—performance conventions—in which to view the latter’s mad roaring and ruthless slaughter of innocents, while the particularity of Cambyses' crimes offers a Protestant reminder that Herodian villainy is intrinsic to the fallen world, it has always occurred and will continue to erupt in diverse times and places until the apocalyptic end of time.

Through Protestant typology, the fall of Cambises gains an immediacy that augments its relevance to Elizabethans, a point Ambidexter underscores in his observation, “he [Cambises] was akin to Bishop Bonner, I think verely!” (*Cambises* 1146).\(^53\) This logic, followed through to its conclusion, contains a strict lesson for magistrates, plausibly including what Hill discerns to be a presumptuous warning to the young queen “not to repeat the errors” of her kin.\(^54\) In this view, while Cambises and Herod are avatars of tyranny and impediments to divine order, they are merely two in a brotherhood that includes more than one Tudor prince (Mary and Henry), and retains ample room for

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\(^53\)Bonner was the London Bishop notorious for burning heretics during Mary’s reign. Of his end, Creeth notes, “he refused the Oath of Supremacy in 1559 and was deprived of his bishopric and cast into the Marshalsea, where he died in 1569,” *Tudor Plays*, n. 28, 558.

\(^54\)Hill, “The First Elizabethan Tragedy,” 430.
others. Seeing Cambises’ ignominy and bad end, Elizabeth is expected to recall the Protestant truth—that behind the apparent differences of history lies an unchanging reality that corresponds to God’s will—and eschew the tyrant’s path.

Protestant ideology, then, is far more subdued in the chronicle moral plays than in, say, New Custom, or any of Wager’s roughly contemporaneous plays. Though its earliest readers noted this, Bevington was the first to seize on the moral “ambiguity” peculiar to both the chronicles, which he identified as an effect arising “from the transitional use of moral structure in a secular context.” I want to reorient and briefly historicize the secularization of these plays, not as some generic collision it took a Marlowe to comprehend and a Shakespeare to control, but as a limited capitulation to the conditions attached to what Keith Thomas describes as reformation culture’s suppression of anything which seemed to contribute to the “apparatus of supernatural assistance.”

By the 1560s when returning Marian exiles preaching “the rational religion” contributed to an intensification of the campaign against popular ludic activities, there were two polarized positions between which most opinions fell. One pole attracted a heterogeneous group of authorities with religious and/or politicoeconomic reasons for wanting the old, idolatrous saints’ and cycle plays abolished. The other side rallied an

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55 Hill reads the Marian persecutions as a veil for a more dangerous critique of Henry VIII, 426-7.
56 This view of Protestant history is, again, based on Luxon’s reading, Literal Figures, 51-4.
58 Thomas’ work suggests the staging of direct supernatural intervention, by God or his intermediaries, was as deplored as such “magical” rituals as rogation ceremonies. Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons), 51-77.
59 Underdown, Revel, Riot, and Rebellion, 46-8, 52.
equally heterogeneous assortment of townsmen, youth and “disorderly poor,” who for reasons nostalgic to economic, resisted the call for suppression. It seems not at all unreasonable to suspect that even the “mixed success” of the suppression stimulated a longing for the supernatural characters and omens of the older plays, as well as the “grim and deliberately bloodthirsty, heavy melodramatic vein” that made Herod, Satan and the various Roman villains of cycle and saint’s plays popular favorites before Cambises.60

In such circumstances, the staging of a secularized Herod play was a good bet. But the grafting of historical causes to the providentially-based psychomachia achieved a rather remarkable effect: the cause of narrative action, man or heaven’s will, becomes debatable, producing a stronger version of the effect Wager’s assimilation of the Italian historiographic paradigm of primary and secondary causes had upon the psychomachia. Due largely to Cambises’ greater commitment to history than, say, The Longer Thou Livest, ambiguity arises in the following ways: in Cambises, as in Horestes, the supernatural gets displaced from the narrative level, where it has been dutifully suppressed, to the performance level, where the audience is free to discover it or not.61 More traditional plays manifest the supernatural as signs interpreted by characters—Abel’s offering burns, Cain’s does not, Cain interprets this as God’s rejection of his offering—but in the chronicle moral plays these signs are left to the interpretation of the

60 Southern, The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare, 510.

61 While the appearance of Venus and Cupid in Cambises might seem an exception to this suppression of the supernatural, the use of pagan deities to signify allegorical principles (like Love) is already conventional enough in secular humanist writing that it is more likely be viewed as a fashionable variation on allegory than a representation of the numinous.
audience. When chronicle moral play characters do interpret, they often contradict each other and sometimes even themselves.

Cambises’ death offers a case in point. The Prologue explains how “mightie Jove” will bring an end “with shame” to Cambises and his race, but this providential perspective is complicated over the course of the play (Cambises 31-3). A bloody death is “prognosticate[d]” for the king by Ambidexter, who predicts that “he hath shed so much blood that his wil be shed” but we retain even less confidence in the prognostications of Vices than mortals, related as Vices are to the Father of Lies (1177, 1155). When Cambises staggers into the penultimate scene, bemoaning the “sudain chaunce” that caused his sword to shoot up out of its scabard into his side as he leapt upon his horse, we may recall the drinking problem the play has gone to some length to set up (1157, 345, 494-6, 526-34). A few lines later, the dying king reinterprets what he has called the “mervels chaunce unfortunate” as “a just reward for my misdeeds” an idea that is reiterated when the Lords find him slain by his own sword (1166, 1170). The First Lord observes that “A just rewarde for his misdeeds the God/aboove hath wrought”(1193), yet, there has been no visitation by God’s Plague to assure us that Cambises’ death has been more than accidental. In that the rash act of “leap[ing]” upon a horse without securing one’s weapons seems entirely consummate with what we know of Cambises’ personality, his death might be seen as nothing more supernatural than the wages of a character flaw (1164). We can deduce the potentially unsettling nature of this

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62For Cain’s typical interpretation of God’s favoritism, see the “Cain” play from The Chester Mystery Cycle, 570-617.
ambiguity in the printer’s emphatic promise of “his [Cambises’] odious/death by Gods Justice appoin/ted” on the title page of the first edition.63

Cambises represents, then, a significant landmark along an historical path that Erwin Panofsky has theorized as the eventual limiting of the supernatural to the “visionary” experience of the individual psyche. When “the work of art itself works the miracle,” and the supernatural is banished from the “dogmatic and symbolic” level of the work’s narrative, “the miraculous finds its last refuge in the soul.” 64 In a manner familiar to students of visual arts, but also to those of early modern Protestantism and science, “the direct experience of the beholder” becomes the new priority, and the subject separates itself from its objects to bring to bear a more modern way of looking and knowing.65

Cambises and Horestes contribute to this epistemic shift, opening the door for representations of character that simultaneously stimulate and articulate the audience’s uneasy sorting of the uncertain signs of the phenomenal world.

A Quick Eye, a Sharpe Knife

Along with ambiguity, characterization is the most frequently cited feature of the chronicles’ putative advance in the development of English drama.66 The use of historical figures—Cambises rather than the King of Life—stands out as a distinguishing novelty,

63 Creeth’s reproduction of the title page with casting list, Tudor Plays, 445.
64 Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form, 72.
65 Ibid. See Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass’ collection Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture, for essays that locate and contextualize the historic specificity of the detachment of subject and object relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996).
but the plays’ pursuit of a “verbal realism” in social types represented by sub-plot characters like Huf, Snuf and Ruf has been noted as well. Oddly, the most remarkable character in terms of dramaturgy in both Cambises and Horestes has been the least discussed. The significance of Cousin cutpurse, who perhaps isn’t as much a character as a canny use of the platea space, extends well beyond the scope of the plays’ narratives, emblematizing and problematizing thematic concerns of self-interest and the accelerating money-based economy.

Southern locates the first appearance of the cutpurse device in the play, Appius and Virginia. In this courtly interlude, the Vice Haphazard teases the audience twice with variations on the warning, “have mind to your purse!,” but after being condemned to hang for his mischief he addresses his “cousin,” supposedly in the audience, urging him to “come, cousin Cutpurse, come, run, haste and follow me/Haphazard must hang; come, follow the livery!” In Appius and Virginia, the aggressivity of the device is directed toward cutpurses. The play thwarts the work of real thieves through the Vice’s strategic public service announcements—“put hands to your pockets”—and the insinuation that, as kin and servant to the same diabolical master, the cutpurse is doomed to follow his Vice to the gallows. In Cambises, the aggressivity of the cutpurse seeks a different target.

It is frequently noted that the cutpurse device “tilts the mirror [of the play] towards Preston’s spectators,” but the image therein has not been sufficiently described. Hill begins to work it out in his linking of the cutpurse to Cambises’ concern with judgement,

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67 Cohen, Drama of a Nation, 129.
68 Appius and Virginia, in Farmer’s Five Anonymous Plays, p. 17, 22, 44.
69 Ibid., 17.
and he rightly suggests that the device foregrounds how “our acts of interpretation become the main business of the play.” But when the lens of interpretation is turned on ourselves in the moment of the cutpurse episode, what are we supposed to see? As Cambises’ Ambidexter peers into the audience, calling, “how now, cosin Cutpursse, with whome play you?/Take heed, for his hand is groping even now!” ancient Persia swiftly recedes before 1560’s Ipswich or Canterbury as worries of a more immediate nature snap into focus (Cambises 702-3). The sight of our neighbor checking his purse evokes laughter as a reflection of our own concern, roused by the Vice’s warning. The suspicion, or guilty disavowal of suspicion, manifest on the faces of those nearby finds its match within as well. In this way, “cosin cutpurse” aggressively forces its auditors to confront their own self-interest, and retrospectively links our ‘prudent’ self-preservation to the Lords’ complicity in the king’s villainy, or Hob and Lob’s willingness to give each other up to the authorities—acts which might all be represented by Ambidexter’s motto, “it is wisdome (quoth I) by the Masse, to save one!”(302).

Agnew understands self-interest as one of several different solutions to the problem of incoherence in self and society, an issue he associates with the century after our period. Yet, the breakdown of social cohesion is, as I have argued in previous chapters, already a pressing concern for writers in the sixteenth century. Self-interest may be, pace Agnew, only rarely available as a morally acceptable symbolic solution before Mun and Misselden’s depersonalization of economics in the 1620s (after which personal projects and gain could start to be imagined in terms of benefits to the state), but Cambises’

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cutpurse, and the distinguished lineage of Vices from which he hails, identified self-interest as a probable cause of societal disintegration long before.\textsuperscript{73}

In light of Agnew’s explanation that “in a money transaction only one party receives what he actually wants,” it is not surprising that the cutpurse also comes to metaphorize market relations as theft and misrepresentation. Cambises’ cutpurse performs the work of condensation and displacement, representing in his habits a great number of the qualities of the new market economy. His movement among heterogeneous crowds mimics the circulation of money. His simultaneous intimacy with and distance from his victims reproduces, like staged eavesdropping, the new sensibility of commodity exchange.\textsuperscript{74} In other words, the cutpurse serves much the same emblematic function for its period of dramatic history as Agnew’s usurer for the later London stage.\textsuperscript{75} The high risk of the cutpurse’s profession is far more consonant with the volatility of the fortunes of 1560s itinerant troupes than usury’s notorious lack of risk, which seems closer to public perceptions of later companies, like the Chamberlain’s Men.\textsuperscript{76} And unlike the usurer, who can wait like an Admiral’s Man in season to be approached, the cutpurse must wend his way from crowd to crowd in search of opportunity. Finally, the cutpurse, who could look as gentle as Jonson’s Ezekial Edgeworth, synechdochally links all those who truck in misrepresentation, for his pose as a theater or market goer—an ability to capitalize upon the anonymity of the urban crowd—permits his activities.\textsuperscript{77} Like the increasingly popular rogue, the cutpurse suggests a new boundary of privacy, within the

\textsuperscript{72}Agnew, Worlds Apart.6.

\textsuperscript{73}In that the foundation for justifiable self-interest was already laid through late medieval canon law’s support of private violence in cases of self-protection, the concept of self-interest as prudent self-protection appears to have been available at Cambises’ early date, Skinner, “Foundations of Modern Political Thought,” 126.
self rather than one’s home: the idea that one’s public face may, in fact, have little to do with one’s private intentions. 78

To Former Used Use 79

In addition to the suspected incommensurability of the playwright/player’s exchange with his auditors, the cutpurse represents the playwright’s ambivalent appropriation of the coin of humanist knowledge. While the modern concept of plagiarism remains some distance in the future, anxieties about authorial legitimacy, and the proper use of materia go back in English writing at least as far as Lydgate. 80 It seems not surprising, therefore, that in the context of a burgeoning commercialization of theater, the figure of the cutpurse should emerge in such a remarkable way from a group of plays that transfers the university vogue for dramatizing humanist material to popular venues. Such dissemination appears at first to be a natural extension of the humanist project of cultural dissemination, more a cause for celebration than alarm, but humanism’s popularizing

75 For Agnew on the usurer as an emblem for displaced market antagonism see Worlds Apart, 122. The proliferation of cutpurse characters just after mid-century includes Cuthbert Cutpurse and Pierce Pickpurse of Like Wil to Like quad the Devel to the Colier (1558-68), Snatch in Catch in Merbury’s Marriage of Wit and Wisdom (before 1570), and Shift in Common Conditions (ca. 1570-76).
77 Ezekiel from Bartholomew Fair (1614).
78 Agnew, Worlds Apart, 64.
79 Creeth glosses this as “according to well-established custom,” 887.
impulse was ever in conflict with its culture’s impulse to enclave classical knowledge in a noncommoditized realm for the consumption of an elite few.  

Social anthropologist Igor Kopytoff clarifies this tension in his description of commoditizing and singularizing impulses as the “two extremes between which every real economy occupies its own peculiar place.” As the commoditizing impulse seeks to broaden its domain, culture limits it, sorting its objects into discrete, hierarchical spheres, from high, singular and sacred items to low subsistence commodities. The exchange of objects within each sphere is governed by that sphere’s strict morality, with exchange between spheres rendered difficult by the clash of moral codes. In general, conversion “upward” satisfies, while movement downward is deemed shameful. In this context, the discomfort aroused by a writer’s translocating a classical text from the high sphere of prestige literature to the low one of popular entertainment becomes intelligible. While the disseminating objective of humanism must have ameliorated such otherwise scandalous transfers, the whiff of impropriety continues to cling to them. It takes the shape, in the 1560s and ‘70s, of the absent presence of the cutpurse, with his arrant transfer of learned men’s gold—literary texts like Lydgate’s *Troy Book*, the primary source for *Horestes*—to his own promiscuous, common hand.

The literary history of the plays also enables a fresh testing of the concept of justice. Joel Kaplan explains that the crime of ambidexterity “first appears in the period [of

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81 See Crane’s *Framing Authority* on the coextant humanisms of the sixteenth century.
83 Ibid., 71-3.
Tracing a genealogy from the third and fifth books of Herodotus’ *Histories* to late medieval Netherlandish painting, Kaplan demonstrates how Cambises’ punishment of the ambidextrous Sisamnes gets assimilated to citizen venues as an exemplar of justice. ¹⁵ Fifth century Flemish painter Gerard David’s gruesome panel featuring Sisamnes being flayed alive in an open plaza aims to deter corruption, and remind the administrators of the Bruges Town Hall of their communal obligations. As Kaplan indicates, this continental tradition is succinctly summed up by the Latin tag of the sixteenth-century Helbing medallion: *poenai inivstorum ante ocvlos positae docent ivstitiam* (“punishment of the unjust placed before the eyes teaches justice”). ¹⁶

But if punishment of the unjust teaches justice, what lesson is learned from punishment of the innocent? And what is the relation between justice and cruelty? In taking up a second literary tradition that runs from Seneca to Taverner, one that stresses Cambyses’ brutality, Preston reminds his audience of the inherent instability of the magistrate’s sword, its equal, ambidextrous facilitation of acts laudable and reprehensible. In this formula, justice, or its opposite, become the cumulative repetition of acts in a temporality quite distinct from that of the hagiographic trial/martyr scene which so obviously (if negatively) informs David’s Bruges panels. The temporality of the hagiographic tradition invokes the cataclysmic event of the Passion, the sacrifice or proof of which splits and flattens all time into ‘before’ and ‘after’. By contrast, in *Cambises*, as

⁸⁴“Ambidexterity” specifically refers to “one who takes bribes from both sides,” Joel H. Kaplan, “Reopening King Cambises’ Vein,” 111.
⁸⁵Ibid., 103-114.
⁸⁶Ibid., 107-9.
well as in *Horestes*, no single act determines a ruler’s right or wrong wielding of civic power. Just as the punishment of the corrupt Sisamnes can not cancel the atrocity of the king’s subsequent executions, so Horestes’ slaughter of “both man, woman and childe” in his own unyielding city is unable to blacken his virtuous restoration of the kingdom to prosperity at the play’s end (*Horestes* 688). This seems far in excess of what readings of *Horestes* as an allegory of the Mary Stuart conundrum suggest is a loophole allowing Elizabeth to depose, and even execute, an annointed queen.\(^7\) Rather, it appears to instantiate the durative, secular time of historical rulers, in which an act of punishment or revenge is contingent on circumstance (history) to imbue it with both meaning and moral value.

3. Economic History and Topical Issues

The following historical section should be viewed as an addition to chapter two’s discussion of mid-century historical developments on religious, economic and theater history fronts, for Preston and Pikering face many of the same conditions as their peer, William Wager. What differs is the university and Inns’ mans’ conception of the target audience, no longer the wayward sheep of a minister’s congregation, but the better sort whose precedence or money secures seats, the players who court them, and most importantly, the town magistrates and aristocratic patrons who might notice a play’s particularly adroit handling of political theory, and recommend its writer for public office. In thematizing matters of state in the precarious early years of Elizabeth’s reign, Preston and Pikering are guaranteed an attentive audience; in cloaking their diverse

\(^{87}\text{Phillips, “A Revaluation of *Horestes.*”}\)
messages in history and the machinery of moral allegory, they insert themselves in the conversation of public policy-making without the taint of sedition.

The section begins with an analysis of how Cambises and Horestes negotiate the rival political moral plays of their time to open an ideological space for constitutionalism and a *reason of state* morality. It then looks at how, under pressure of commercialization and intra-troupe competition, players and playwrights learn to capitalize upon a company’s surplus labor, developing a style of hypermasculinity and spectacular violence with which all producers of theater will hereafter be forced to contend. I will suggest that both Cambises and Horestes draw on and contribute to the specialization of Leicester’s Men and Lord Rich’s company, and how, in raising the stakes of dramatic and technical expertise, the plays become self-justifying—replete with an artisanal ethos that deflects the scandal of paying for superfluous entertainment.

*Dewty Weyed*

Of criticism’s repeated efforts to contextualize these plays in terms of their political content none have sufficiently identified their position in relation to conflicting theories of kingship across the continent in the sixteenth century. Statements like William Armstrong’s “Cambises conforms to current doctrines concerning the obedience which subjects owe to legitimate kings” flatten what are, in fact, a diversity of positions delineating the limits of monarchy. 88 This, in effect, pulls the polemical teeth of the two plays. A brief review of the main lines of contemporary political thought concerning the

monarch’s relation to church and state will reveal more provocative possibilities in the ideological positions held by Cambises and Horestes.

Lutheran political theory is widely held to have encouraged absolutism through its Pauline delegation of all temporal authority to kings and magistrates. Yet as Quentin Skinner shows in the second volume of The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, the lesser-known Lutheran post-1530 position supported a lawful and forceful resistance to tyrants utterly alien to Luther’s previous ideal of passive nonresistance to civil authority. 89

This theory of resistance, adopted by Calvinists and the hotter sort of Protestant in the 1550’s, was further fed by a vein of radical political thought from sixteenth century Sorbonnists like Jacques Almain and John Mair. Reviving medieval conciliarist theory (including Ockham’s work) in opposition to the counter-reformation’s embrace of Thomist doctrine, the Sorbonnists claimed that no commonwealth could create a power over itself greater than the power it originally possessed. Consequently, Almain and Mair reasoned, political authority inheres in the body of the people, and their inherent “right of the sword,” is “merely conceded” to a “minister” for the convenience and protection of all. 90 Bound by his duty to the community, the ruler who fails to govern justly may be deposed by his own subjects, provided there has been “a solemn consideration of the matter by the [representative bodies of the] three estates.” 91

89 Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 73-4; 113, 117-20.
90 Ibid., 123.
91 Ibid., 173.
Against this constitutionalist theory, Dominican and Jesuit Thomists argued that the community concedes its power absolutely to the prince, who as one above the laws of the people, may wield the sword of imperium as his own personal property. At the root of their defense was the Thomist doctrine of a natural hierarchy of universal laws. In this paradigm, God’s law, the *lex aeterna*, is inscribed in each man’s heart as natural law, *lex naturalis*. This law—manifest in individuals as reason and conscience, and in the state as positive, human law, *lex civilis*—provides the moral framework for every community. In that dominion is based on civil law, and civil law is a manifestation of God’s law, disobeying the prince is tantamount to sinning against eternal law. Princes are necessary to ensure that the *lex civilis* is obeyed for the good of the commonwealth, since fallen man’s natural proclivity tends toward his own destructive self-interest, but a prince’s failure in this duty is no man’s right to correct.\footnote{Ibid., 148-162.} In claiming that it can be lawful, under any circumstances, to disobey the commands of a legitimate ruler, the heretical thinkers of the reformation imply that one can set aside the laws of nature and God.

In the background of our plays, then, are “two rival political moralities”—a positive Thomist morality of natural law, and the skeptical, Okhamist theory extended by both Luther and Macchiavelli.\footnote{Ibid., 169.} From both an early Lutheran and Thomist perspective, king Cambises must be supported as legitimate ruler despite his cruelty. He cannot be punished in good conscience for breaking the civil laws (murder, proscribed marriage), nor can his flouting of natural law (the killing of his own brother, the slaying of an
innocent), be avenged by anyone save God. This is the perspective assumed by those who understand Preston to be “faithfully” supporting an “Anglican doctrine of obedience.”94

A constitutionalist perspective would, however, throw a more disturbing light on the problem of the ungodly tyrant. If the king is the primary minister of the public good, charged to exercise the people’s power for the benefit of the community, Cambises’ increasingly absolutist rule constitutes a type of theft from the people. The king, in effect, steals the sword of imperium placed in his trust, and wields it for criminal purposes. In this, he proves no better than the “cruel thief” Sisamnes or, indeed, the play’s other purveyor of things not his own, Cousin Cutpurse (464). The lords who enable the tyrant function as accomplices, for in such circumstances, it is not merely the right but the duty of lesser magistrates to resist a ruler who has become little more than a glorified thug.95 Rather than overtly voice this dangerous theory, however, the play stresses what Hill calls the “absurdly obsequious alacrity” with which the court responds to Cambises’ demands.96 In this way, absolute obedience, like absolute rule, is represented as untenable, and the few who resist it—Praxaspes and the queen—exude the familiar, heroic glow of Christian martyrs.

The political theory debate strikes a deeper though more oblique chord in Horestes, for Pikering is not as concerned as Preston with matters of obedience and tyranny. Instead, the dispute between the title character and Nature stages the key question on


95 Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 127.

which the argument about political theory rides: whether the law of nature can be considered “an appropriate moral basis for political life.” Pikering’s answer, with post-1530 Luther and Machiavelli, is a resounding ‘no.’ The “lawe of godes and lawe of man,” which the play positions directly opposite Nature, demand “bloud for bloud” (Horestes 444, 443), and the chronological primacy of Clytemnestra’s regicide turns Horestes’ matricide into just, even necessary, punishment. For Pikering’s contemporaries, who have not yet engaged Aeschylus’ version of the tale (which adds Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his and Clytemnestra’s daughter, Iphigenia, as a complicating motive for murdering the king), Clytemnestra’s crime is entirely unwarranted. And what is, in effect, her usurpation renders her rule as illegitimate and illicit as the love of Paris and Helen, a parallel drawn by Clytemnestra and Egistus themselves in the duet they sing when we first encounter them (539-600). Justice, defined by the laws of men and gods as death to regicides, becomes a necessary evil. If it flies in the face of nature, then nature itself must be ignored for the sake of the state.

_Private Gain to Win_

If we define “project” with Joan Thirsk as “a practical scheme for exploiting material things,” then William Ingram’s assertion that theater constitutes “a project” as early as the 1567 Red Lion venture offers valuable insight into the economic roots of the

97 Skinner, _Foundations of Modern Political Thought_, 143.

98 Axton explains that while the “tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were available in continental editions (1518, 1502, 1495) and studied at Oxford and Cambridge throughout the sixteenth century, only George Buchanan’s _Jepthes_ and _Baptistes_ and Thomas Watson’s _Absolon_ show a strong Greek, rather than Latin influence,” _Three Tudor Classical Interludes_, Introduction, 24. In other words, as counterintuitive as it seems, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, while known, was not widely treated at this point.
drama’s development at this time. Most importantly, it suggests how a shift in the players’ relation to production, expressed and solidified in actions from their scramble for patronage to the building of public playhouses, gave rise to an intensified awareness of themselves as a marketable commodity. 99 This, in turn, engenders an increasingly competitive atmosphere in which successful companies learn to identify and exploit their own surplus labor value—that which renders them singular—to gain a profitable advantage. This new level of commercialization exerts a profound effect on everything from the decision of a particular company to acquire a particular play, to a playwright’s treatment of his material. To appreciate the unique pressures shaping the writing and performance of Cambises and Horestes, we need to review the circumstances of the troupes of the 1560’s and ‘70’s, and imagine the ways in which certain modes of theatricality may have developed in response to the exigencies of troupe competition.

Several recent studies have identified the decade beginning in the late 1560’s as the acid test for itinerant players and their companies. Unpatronized troupes were “dealt out of the market” by more stable companies whose patrons secured favor—the most famous form being the royal patent granted to Liecester’s Men in 1574. 100 Patron status influenced everything from the length of a company’s stay in town to the size of the players’ official reward, yet as W.R. Streitberger reminds us, in London where the sheer numbers of auditors and playing venues intensified direct competition between troupes (one’s production was never the only game in town), it was “a troupe’s reputation for

performing excellence” that assured its success. Lordly livery might get one in the door, but it did not guarantee the crowds a solid reputation could secure. By extension, it seems logical to assume that a troupe’s reputation in London effected regional reception, especially in counties whose geographic proximity or cultural/political/economic affiliations rendered London opinion of paramount importance.

*Lyke Manley Men*

According to Donald Hedrick, one route to acquiring a reputation for excellence on the London stage required the generation of a specific kind of surplus value. This Marxian concept, understood as “the difference between the value created by the worker and the cost of maintaining him,” is manifested as surplus labor, labor which by the late 1580’s, appears as a masculine style “marked by the extra labor involved in producing it, a surplus which can in turn become mined for theatrical effect”. Hedrick suggests that both the “hypermasculinity” that launched Marlowe, Edward Alleyn and the Admiral’s Men to fame and the “choice of masculinities” that became the stock-in-trade of Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, and the Chamberlain’s Men, were demonstrations of this surplus labor. Hedrick goes on to suggest, in an extension of an accepted narrative, that

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102 We might expect to see this speculation supported by such indicators as public attendance, unofficial monies and gifts. Unfortunately, as REED studies have shown, such records are rare, and unreliable when available.
103 Donald Hedrick, “Male Surplus Value,” 87.
105 Hedrick, “Male Surplus Value,” 100.
Shakespeare gained knowledge of the value of this surplus labor from Marlowe. But where did Marlowe learn it?

Classical sources are admittedly redolent with the kind of Marlovian “rugged Pyrrhus” masculinity Shakespeare held up for scrutiny in *Hamlet*, and the chronicle moral plays’ well-documented roots eventually lead to a revival of classical texts. Yet, as many have shown, the quite qualitatively different impact of medieval traditions upon the staging and writing of these “hybrids” was stronger than the classical influence. *Cambises*, and in a different way *Horestes*, manipulate tradition in such a way that it both nourishes and feeds upon the peculiar talents, the surplus labor, of Leicester’s and the Lord Rich’s Men.

Kaplan’s comment that “it is hard to imagine it [*Cambises*] was not a laughing stock well before Peter Quince and his mechanicals lampooned its poetry or Falstaff reddened his eyes with sack,” gives us some idea—even accounting for the difference of Elizabethan tastes—of the effort required of players to keep Cambisian pathos from sliding into bathos. If, as suggested in the last chapter, Herodian bluster was already beginning to seem ridiculous in *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art* (1558-69), rendering Cambises more frightening than funny would require a significant amount of concentration and control on the part of the players. Might it not have been precisely their ability to pull off this “ultramacho” masculine style that distinguished Leicester’s

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106 Ibid., 102. See McMillan and MacLean’s argument that Shakespeare rewrote Queen’s Men plays (his histories) by taking up Marlowe, whose style and matter the Queen’s Men consciously rejected as a threat, *The Queen’s Men and Their Plays*, xv.
107 *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, 2.2.390-458.
108 Kaplan, “Reopening King Cambises’ Vein,” 103.
Men from the competition? A surplus successfully mined by the producers of *Cambises* and later, by the Admiral’s Men who added the potency of Marlowe’s poetry to the mix, it was a style to set mouths agape.109

Ignoring the “oafish[ness]” of Preston’s fourteeners, a form which would not, in any case, have sounded as awkward in 1561 as it would later in the century, let us consider two lines from a tirade touched off by the new queen’s sorrow for Cambises’ recent fratricide:

Cambises: Thou cursed Jil, by all the gods I take an othe and swere That flesh of thine these hands of mine in peeces small could tere! *(Cambises 1056-7)*

Addressing her with the contemptuous “thou,” and hurling the fifth personal insult in eleven lines, the King raises the stakes of his invective by swearing an oath: he could tear her apart with his bare hands. Here the verbal evocation of the flaying of Sisamnes—the “ter[ing]” of “flesh” “in peeces small”—adds a foreboding veracity to Cambises’ claim, while the content of his oath revisits the parallel story, less than twenty lines earlier, of the young lion’s savaging of a “whelp,” a helpless puppy, coding the king’s behavior as beyond beastly (1057, 1017-1033). Like Tamburlaine, Cambises compounds the outrage of annihilating the innocent with the sin of blasphemy; like Marlowe, Preston expends the surplus labor of rhetorical manipulation to manage audience reaction, which ultimately secures profit for the company and spreads his reputation for “eloquence.”110

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In the face of such success, what is the competition to do? Studies of the London stage are again instructive in their suggestion that it is less prudent to attempt to overgo the competition on its own terms than to play, instead, to one’s own strengths. *Horestes*, for whatever reason, does not attempt to exceed the hypermasculinity of *Cambises*, perhaps because the Lord Rich’s Men were not up to producing the surplus labor of performative hypermasculinity. What they apparently could exploit, however, was the talent of their lead boy. The implication that Pikering wrote with a particular company in mind is suggested by the odd innovation of tailoring a role customarily acted by the company’s lead player, to a boy.\(^{111}\) In the face of *Cambises’* corner on the market for hypermasculinity, it is a decidedly clever move.

*Horestes’* Vyce would love nothing better than to “tryomphe passinge all measure” over all who displeased him, in the vein of *Cambises* (82); unfortunately, he is only “lyttell and of stature but smaull,” and his roaring—“Ille teache you to floute me”—evinces not terror but a patronizing politesse from the two rustics he attempts to overawe (73). In this first episode, *Horestes’* Vyce manages to trump the hypermasculinity of King Cambises by replicating a surplus masculinity from a position of apparent deficit. The surplus here is in the entertainment value of watching a “lyttell hourchet” stalk, menace, roar and shake his sword at grown men (46), an incongruity that snaps into greater focus in view of Will Fisher’s research indicating that Elizabethans considered

\(^{111}\text{There is consensus based on internal evidence, that at least the Vyce was played by a boy. Arguments for other juvenile roles run the gamut from Bevington, who allows for one boy beside the Vyce (who between themselves handle the majority of female roles), to Shapiro, who argues that all the roles are acted by boys. Bevington, }\textit{Mankind to Marlowe, }77; \text{ Shapiro, }\textit{“Auspices and Theatricality,” }213.\)
boys an entirely different gender from men. This episode alone would have demanded a substantial amount of surplus labor on the part of the boy actor: the ability to convey the Vyce’s smoldering vengefulness, even as he pragmatically admits “it is best to be styll,” and shifts his energies to exacting punishment through more oblique methods (102). In this way, Rich’s Men trade on a surplus labor different from that for which Leicester’s troupe was renowned, and Horestes contributes to a tendency toward specialization we will later see manifest in the most successful of the London companies.

*By Violence Sore*

The other, related type of surplus labor turned into theatrical novelty at this time is on-stage violence. In the past, an evolutionary model of Renaissance dramatic development identified Cambises as the link between fifteenth-century cycle plays and Jacobean tragedy, based on its violent dramaturgy, but such accounts erroneously suggest there was a hiatus in depictions of on-stage violence. In fact, as studies of late medieval drama indicate, while saints’ plays were subject to suppression earlier in the reformation, the cycle plays, with their similar on-stage killings, scourgings and mutilations, could be enjoyed in some form up through the 1560s. If the moral drama


113 For the “medley style” of the Queen’s Men contending with the tragic fare of the Admiral’s Men on one hand and the history plays of the Chamberlain’s Men on the other, see McMillan and MacLean, *The Queen’s Men and Their Plays*, 163-6.


like folk plays, came to rely on more stylized depictions of violence, the impetus was apparently economic rather than aesthetic.\textsuperscript{116} The enterprising men like James Burbage who began to assess the itinerant companies in terms of other Elizabethan “projects” must have recognized that the taste for blood did not end with the suppression of saints’ plays. The outlay of capital to produce crowd-pleasing effects would lend something extra, a competitive edge, to the moral drama-based troupe that could manage the techniques.\textsuperscript{117} And technique was truly a matter of consequence, as John Astington’s work on staged hangings demonstrates, for by the production of \textit{Horestes}, “the simplest solution to staging a scene was not always followed,” and the handling of the concealed harness, dummy noose, and specially erected gallows for hanging Egistus had to be seamlessly blended into the other action of the scene.\textsuperscript{118} An actor of a later century, whose company specialized in similar spectacles of on-stage violence, would insist that such staging “required millimetre precision.”\textsuperscript{119}

With certain qualifications, directors Marty Fluger and Dawn Williams’ discovery about the special demands of acting the Grand Guignol are illuminating:

\begin{quote}
. . actors [of Grand Guignol] must contend with two primary opposing problems in order to pull off the moment of violence. They must completely inhabit the psychology and physicality of the violence as though it is real. At the same time, they must disengage from the moment, in a sense, in order to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116}For a list of violent on-stage effects typical to cycle and miracle plays, see Tydeman, \textit{The Theatre in the Middle Ages}, 176-77, and Jody Enders, who also includes French production methods in \textit{The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence} (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{117}Thirsk, \textit{Economic Policy and Projects}.


execute the technical demands of the stage violence. . . while doing all this, each actor must maintain the arc of the play and remain aware of and open to the other actors on stage.\textsuperscript{120}

Surely, this is about as thorough a description of the surplus labor attendant upon such theatrical production as we are likely to find. “Inhabit[ing] the psychology” of a role is an admittedly vexed question in the 1560s—perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of players inhabiting their role(s) in the narrative—but what is clear is that the surplus labor of the production of on-stage violence is a challenging technique that can be reproduced and cashed in to meet what has been called the Elizabethan audience’s “tabloid appreciation for bloody detail.”\textsuperscript{121}

\textit{Cambises} is by far the more violent of the two plays, with several on-stage actions—the killing and flaying of Sisamnes (461-4), the shooting of Praxaspes’ son (553-563), the stabbing of Smirdis (719-731), and King Cambises’ death (1157-70)—to thrill and appall spectators. It has been argued that in addition to the sheer entertainment value of such spectacles, violence increased the didactic force of the play.\textsuperscript{122} This supports what Mary Carruthers tells us about medieval mnemonic/rhetorical practices, in light of which even Prudentius’ gory \textit{Psychomachia} can be understood as “\textit{designedly} disgusting and puerile because it is those qualities that make it memorable and thereby cognitively useful” (italics mine).\textsuperscript{123} The Earl of Leicester’s circle had any number of ideas it wished circulated and internalized throughout the realm. Given this agenda, and Leicester’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{120}Quoted in Hand and Wilson, \textit{Grand-Guignol}, 34.


\textsuperscript{122}McMillin and MacLean, \textit{The Queen’s Men and their Plays}.

\end{footnotesize}
“enlightened awareness of the power of theater to affect an audience and to spread cultural and political influence,” it seems not implausible that Leicester’s players, and the men who wrote for them, knew exactly how to use “violence as rhetoric” —perhaps even excelled at it.124

With the exception of Egistus’ hanging, Horestes’ counter-move is, again, one of acknowledgement and substitution. In this case, the majority of on-stage gore is replaced by the spectacle of martial ritual, the threat rather than the perpetration of violence. Here, Pikering quite consciously deviates from his source in Lydgate’s *Troy Book*. In Lydgate, Clytemnestra is gruesomely hacked to pieces by Horestes himself. Aegisthus is hanged after having being dragged naked through the streets with his co-conspirators. In Pikering’s version, Clytemnestra’s execution takes place off-stage (Horestes’ presence at the execution doubtful), and Egistus walks to his hanging fully clothed (780-835).125 Lord Rich’s Men do not attempt to beat Leicester’s Men at their own game, but offer their audience the alternative excitement of military musters and a spectacularly staged battle scene in which the surplus labor is literally embodied in the extras engaged to march in rank. As the use of extras at this time is exceedingly unusual, it seems not untoward to imagine Horestes’ well-choreographed “army” producing a sensation. As Pikering himself observes, “it is good sport to see the stryfe/of sodiers” (308-9). The siege of Mycoene, as Southern recreates it, features bold and engaging dramaturgy utilizing a curtain, stage and platea space to mimic the plot’s three points of

124 Kaplan, “Reopening King Cambises’ Vein,” 111; McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen’s Men*, 20.
125 Merritt, “The Source of John Pikeryng’s *Horestes, *” 257.
engagement: atop the city walls, within the city and without. “Make your lively battel,” urge the stage directions, “and let it be longe eare you can win the citie” (725f). Surely, the novelty of this scene alone is worth the penny.

Thus does the surplus labor of hypermasculinity, of violence, and of choreographed military spectacle translate to money, but it is money that requires justification in a culture increasingly anxious about the allocation of its own surpluses. Theodore Leinwand points out that in this period, “any risky investment that might pay off handsomely required affective ballast (an implicitly ethical security deposit) in the form of effort; better still, patently exhausting work.” Conveniently, the surplus labor we have been discussing has the effect of not only distinguishing production and performers from their competition but drawing attention to the labor of players and production qua production. The long English tradition of amateur theatrics ensures that the Elizabethan audience brings to the performance a more or less accurate knowledge of how spectacles are produced, what theorist Arjun Appadurai calls the “culturally standardized recipes for fabrication”: “production knowledge.” As productions become more specialized, however, and as the consumer ceases to know precisely how a certain effect is achieved, a scintillating gap opens between the consumer and producer’s levels of production knowledge. The consumer knows only enough to recognize the something extra (an

126Southern, The Staging of Plays, 495-6.
expertise) that has gone into production, creating the gap between consumers and production knowledge that Appadurai finds “usually conducive to high profits.”

Norman Bryson’s work in another realm of aesthetic commodities, early modern Dutch still-life painting, gives us further insight into the dynamics of this consumer/producer relationship. In the economic boom of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Protestant Netherlands, where domestic space was the only outlet for surplus resources, paintings of exotic, meticulously rendered flowers were in high demand. Bryson’s economic readings of these paintings are as instructive as they are ingenious, but of chief concern here is his observation that “pleasure [in these paintings] is disavowed, hidden by production; what replaces it is strain, effort and the work imperative.” The “honest labor of painting” manifest in the unearthly detail of each petal and leaf, deflects the scandal of luxury attendant on paintings as prohibitively expensive trifles. In a similar way, the surplus labor of players producing such morally instructive, morally-freighted images as the flaying of Sisamnes, must have gone some way toward answering the well known charges of players being “loitering idle persons” whose plays constituted “improper expenditure.” As plays like Cambises and Horestes contributed to the emerging idea that theater could be hard work, requiring training and expertise, and as this recalled the general knowledge that players were

129 Ibid., 43.
131 Ibid., 110.
132 Ibid., 132.
“culled from the ranks of joiners, weavers and other artisans,” an artisanal ethos became available for defense of the theater.\footnote{Patricia Parker, “Rude Mechanicals,” \textit{Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture},” ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47.} It is this ethic we shall see Jonson’s Asper throw down like a gauntlet to all would-be detractors of Every Man Out of His Humour, an ethic that colors his \textit{Works} and the works of many other London playwrights in years to come.

4. Conclusions

My reading of \textit{Cambises} and \textit{Horestes} suggests that the plays express anxiety about social fragmentation in the face of the disintegration of traditional maintainers of social cohesion: feudalism (with all the social and production relations it implies), the Church, and communal festivity. Foregrounding the problem of revenge, which links the diverse kinds of social and economic theft previously discussed in connection with the device of the cutpurse, both plays test the capacity of “law” to serve as the basis for social order. The solutions the plays invoke to pacify the desire for vengeance—spectacle and communal ritual—are those that writers like Machiavelli are already starting to describe as a false consciousness through which men may be controlled. I suggest that such solutions, combined with the plays’ articulation of new, recognizably modern relations between man and nature, contribute to the coalescence of middling class consciousness.
Cruell Revengment

Revenge, while not as overt in Cambises as in Horestes, is never so remote a theme that a good reader cannot detect its motivating energy behind everything from Cambises’ war on Egypt, where “the Egyptians against us repugne as varlets” (Cambises 16), to Meretrix’ assault on Ruf for chasing off her highest bidder (271-292). Indeed, revenge figures in Preston’s source, where Taverner moralizes that “thys exemple teacheth them that beare offfyce and rule to remember, that god suffereth not injustice nor injury unrevenge” (italics mine). Revenge can be rough justice when it pays back Sisamnes’ fleecing of the Commons (330-1), or requites Ambidexter’s endangerment of household economy—“if one [Hob or Lob] had kild another heer, couldst thou their deaths requite?” (828). Yet revenge degrades to madness and base envy when it calls for the blood of a virtuous royal brother or an honest counsellor’s “blisful babe” (509).

Machiavelli acknowledges this janus face of vengeance (as an expression of justice) when he describes cruelty as a method either well or poorly used. Used well, the cruel act becomes one of a handful of “rari esempli [rare examples]” the prince stages at the beginning of his reign to establish authority. As a spectacle whose ferocity both satisfies and astonishes the people, Cesare Borgia’s bisection of the unpopular minister

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137 Ibid., 52, 104.
de Orco qualifies, like Cambises’ flaying of Sisamnes, as a *raro esempio*. Satisfied in both Machiavelli and Preston’s examples is the people’s thirst for revenge. The ritualistic elements—the bloody knife and piece of wood placed beside de Orco’s corpse, the skin of Sisamnes draped over the seat of judgement—increase satisfaction through an apparent surplus of meaning. The display solicits interpretation even as, or perhaps because the opacity of the signs thwarts it. It entices with the suspicion that a definite referent—divine will, perhaps—exists somewhere by which we might fully grasp the transgression rectified by the bloody act. The act, itself, in ritualistic excess of what even hatred might contrive, achieves in “gli animi di quelli populi” [*the minds of that people*] not merely satisfaction but “purgare” [*purging*]—a catharsis through horrific spectacle reminiscent of the effects Aristotle posits for tragedy. Thus, the people’s thirst for vengeance is symbolically assuaged. Ambidexter, remarking on Cambises’ cruelty, says:

> What a king was he that hath used such tiranny!  
> He was akin to Bishop Bonner, I think verely!  
> For bothe their delights was to shed blood,  
> But never intended to doo any good. (1145-1148)

In 1561, Mary Tudor’s despised Bishop may still cling to life in the Marshalsea, but *Cambises’* public excoriation of his crimes does a service for the new authority by helping to purge lingering hostilities that may otherwise cause mischief as free-floating aggression and anxiety. In staging, like Borgia, the rare example, Leicester’s Men

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138Ibid., 52. Machiavellian thought was, of course, in currency at this time, but we know from the Harvey-Spenser correspondence that Preston read the Italian theorist by at least 1580 with Harvey, Hill, “The First Elizabethan Tragedy,” 410.

siphon some of the heat from recent events including the war with France, the simmering dissatisfaction with Elizabeth’s 1559 religious settlement, and the tragedy of the Marion persecutions.\footnote{140}

Tragedy is, of course, precisely what we expect from a play about Orestes, a son of the house of Atreus, but Cambises conforms more closely to what Wickham has shown to be the stronger, native form of de casibus tragedy.\footnote{141} The salient feature of this medieval form is the idea that “moral weakness of character is the primary reason for a tragic decline of fortune,” and not fate, itself.\footnote{142} The contest becomes, as J.M.R. Margeson writes in The Origins of English Tragedy, a “conflict between human will and a superior law [eternal law] which is either antagonistic to human will or remote and difficult to comprehend.”\footnote{143} In Cambises, natural law is the touchstone to which all men and their laws refer; it is this law that Cambises flouts. In this way, Preston establishes a more traditional way of thinking about law than Pikering, who will set the laws of nature in opposition to the laws of men and God.

In our previous discussion of reformation and counter-reformation political moralities, we saw that Protestant theology reoriented traditional thinking about natural law around this time. Examining the Protestant move more closely, we perceive how theologians posited an order of grace against the order of nature, which was described as

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[140] Space does not permit the working out of my hunch that the inept, regular soldiers Huf, Snuf and Ruf, and especially Ambidexter who first appears in makeshift warrior’s garb, satirize commoners involved in local rebellions (like Wyatt’s in 1554) and strike at the government policy that sends the vicious and unprepared to fight England’s wars.
\item[141] Wickham, Early English Stages, 3:219-222.
\item[142] Ibid., 220.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
a natural morality apprehended through experience and interpreted by reason (therefore as faulty as the fallen world). Under the influence of grace, however, the law of man is revealed as the will of God, received and interpreted by the faithful. Grace purges positive law of the errors that blight natural law, placing man’s law closest to God’s will. Cambises eschews this more radically Protestant position in favor of an older understanding of natural law, for both political and formal reasons. Before we entertain what these may have been, however, it makes sense to review two scenes in Cambises in which natural law shapes the narrative.

In the banquet scene, after the tyrant has shared his story of the bloody entertainment of the young lion attacking the two puppies, the new Queen’s tears produce moral commentary on Cambises’ having executed his own brother (Cambises 1018-1028). She laments that “faithful loove was more in dog then it was in/your Grace” (1039). The act of defending his brother proves the “whelp” morally superior to Cambises, and emphasizes the latter’s flouting of a law so natural—“it was your parte his [your brother’s] cause to have defended” (1037)—that even the youngest of beasts obeys it. But Cambises fatally places his own will above natural law, something we see repeated in his defiance of the “rule of birth” which both Venus and the king’s cousin/wife-to-be attribute to “Nature” (851, 895, 910). The king insists on a proscribed marriage. The Lady, seeing that the prohibition of natural law will not deter him, urges him to consult with his counsellors “the lawes aright [to] peruse”(924). Here, lex civilis becomes a stop-

gap measure for natural law, but Cambises asserts his “wil” in the matter over all proscription, “there is no nay,” he insists (929, 922).

In the scene which sets Sisamnes up for revenge, in which Small Habilitie fails to obtain justice from the corrupt judge, it may seem as if the laws of man and nature occupy relatively equal places, with only the law of God in a superior position. Yet, the fact that the operation of eternal law is left ambiguous throws the burden of final judgement of the play’s actions onto a juridical realm traditionally subject to natural law: the conscience. Here is where the play quite overtly departs from all tradition, for its “irresolution” leaves more to the individual judgement of its characters and its audience than was customary for the moral play or mirror for magistrates genre. Is Cambises’ mortal self-wounding “sudain chaunce” (1159) or a “just reward” for his “misdeeds” (1170)? Is the flaying of Sisamnes divine redress, or the happy accident that occurs in the inception of a brutal new king’s reign of terror?

As Annabel Patterson predicts, irresolution functions here as both protection of and potentially dangerous liberation for the playwright and his audience. The play’s dangerous ideas about constitutionalism, and the emergent middling class consciousness we will discuss here shortly, are concealed by an apparently conventional cautionary tale of the fall of princes: “the tragicall history of this wicked king” (Cambises Epilogue 2). The prologue and epilogue lean heavily upon the de casibus tradition with its providential punishment of Cambises’ “contempt of divine and natural law” to quiet doubts the body

of the play raises. In *Cambises*, then, we often find what has been called the “transitional conflict between story and [didactic] message,” hastily spackled over like a piece of faulty construction, but it is precisely this disjuncture that appears to provoke another student of the law to write a play that reinterprets *Cambises*.

*As Doth the Flaming Fier*

Reorienting *Cambises*’s focus, Pikering recasts Preston’s socially disruptive Vice, Ambidexter, as Revenge (also known as Pacience andCourrage). At the opening of the play, we see Revenge troubling Hodge and Rusticus, in what amounts to almost a mirror image of *Cambises*’ Hob and Lob episode (*Horestes* 22-170). Where Hob and Lob begin with a market run and come to blows over the danger of being denounced for sedition, Hodge and Rusticus enter wishing ill on king Egistus and are brought to violence over market matters. Pikering rightly gauges economic competition to be the true heart of the *Cambises* scene and it is this sore spot he has his Vyce press when he vows to “be revenged” on the men who have dared to flout him (105). At Ambidexter’s urging, Rusticus demands “amendes” for his dead “zwine,” which Hodge refuses on the grounds that “thy hoge hurtyd me,/And therefore I wyll have a mendes now of the[e]” (124, 153,138-9). Despite the exchange of blows, the Vyce is the only one to receive satisfaction. “Thwack[ing]” the rustics soundly, he scurries off, leaving the men to nurse their wounds, still smoldering in an enmity that could erupt at any moment (stage dir. at

“When I mete the againe,” seethes Hodge, “ich chaull. . . bezwinge the vor all” (164, 163).

Pikering’s solution, though his awkward execution strains its credibility, looks again to Cambises, pulling to the foreground what Preston only metaphorized in the intervention of Hob’s wife, Marian May-Be-Good: the power of a domestic, communal ethos, to dispel social conflict. In Horestes, Rusticus promises his estranged friend, “of browne ale at my house [I will] give the a whole whart. What Hodge, shake hondes, mon; be merey and lauffe” (Horestes 166-7). The rustics are reconciled as the Woman and Sodyer will be, in the manner of Cambises’ pragmatic Meretrix—which is to say, contingent on one party’s relinquishing the zero-sum mentality that views annihilation of the opponent as the best solution to social conflict. From a perspective more conducive to social stability and financial prosperity, Meretrix realizes that by sparing Ruf’s “honestie”—giving him back his sword—she gains the unlooked for economic advantage of an armed manservant (Cambises 277-292). The satisfaction she loses in forgoing Ruf’s “ignomy and shame” may be recouped economically when, through the prestige of appearing prosperous enough to afford a servant, she advances from camp follower to higher priced courtesan (280). In these plays, we find ourselves approaching the very modern conception of (socioeconomic) success as the best revenge.

At the same time, revenge as corporeal, rough justice continues to have its uses. As an unsanctioned private vice, revenge is depicted as an obstacle to the ideal state where
amity and duty order the relationships between all classes and kin. Yet, as a rare example that “ridu[ce] [la provincia] pacifica e obediente al braccio regio” (reduces the province to peace and obedience under the royal arm), Revenge’s execution of Clytemnestra purges the state of its taint of regicide, and instantiates a stable regime. In Horestes, reason of state justifies not only matricide, but the ruthless slaughter of those traditionally considered innocent, the women and children of Mycoene who will not yield to Horestes under orders of Clytemnestra. In this way, Pikering’s play appears bent on overturning what we will see to be Cambises’ sentimentalization of the family. But whether we are talking about Horestes’ firm subordination of the laws of nature to the laws of man, or Cambises’ revision of natural law, both plays put nature in a certain relation to man in order to articulate an emergent morality.

*Of Natures Mould*

Appleby has argued against more class-focused Marxist analyses that the capitalist revolution required not so much the formation of a new class as a new morality. This approach, while risking the same sundering of social “intangible[s]” from material resources and problems for which neo-Ricardian economists are often attacked, offers a healthy check to some Marxist structuralists who presume ideology to be predictably limited to particular class interests or positions. The present study suggests that while a new morality—one I have been calling “middling” in anticipation of a later

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147 This extends Spivak’s assertion that Horestes represents revenge as a force that disrupts what duty and degree ostensibly promote: harmony and peace in the state, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, 283.


“bourgeois” ethos—is being hammered out in the long sixteenth century, it was never more natural, coherent or impervious to change than the strong form of a literary genre. This is to say that the moral code’s internal contradictions—historical marks of diversity within something classic Marxist structuralism might treat as a unified class position—are never far from the surface. The beauty of a pair of plays like Cambises and Horestes is that they offer us a perspective of what were once alternative potential solutions to the same problem. And Horestes’ answer to its predecessor reminds us, in conjunction with the more-or-less congenial ideological in-fighting we see in contemporary forms from the university debate to the broadside ballad, that moral dramas are always embattled historical constructs.151

Cambises deploys a form of pastoral which effects the “transformation plus constitution” of nature.152 This mode is articulated most clearly through what is unanimously agreed to be the rather remarkable episode in which Cambises falls for his cousin, while “trac[ing] abrode the beauty feelds” (862). Admiring the novelty of the scene, Southern observes that the Lord’s speech, here, paints “a quite evocative. . . delectable pastoral scene with mention of flowers and birds—a primitive example of verbal scene-painting.”153 The entertainment value of this mode, offering respite from the mounting sociopolitical tension and tyrant-inspired pathos of the main plot is obvious if well-conceived, but pastoral, like the associated comedic episodes does more important work as well.

150Ibid., 17-18.
151Jameson credits Nietzsche with “unmask[ing]” ethics as “a fossilized trace of the concrete praxis of situations of domination” Political Unconscious, 117.
152Ibid.
In the episode of Hob and Lob, pastoral functions as a powerful absent presence. Even before Ambidexter identifies them as “cuntry patches,” Hob and Lob’s names, Cotswold accents and occupation (going to market to sell their produce) mark the “naibor[s]” as country folk (*Cambises* 788, 754). Yet, unlike the Lady wooing scene, this episode never transports us to the green world; instead, it presents us with the dynamics of a pastoral ethos, an ideal of interdependence and communal harmony through shared labor—a domesticity—that offers the only solution to the play’s antagonisms.\(^\text{154}\)

As much as *Cambises* ridicules country folk, they triumph where its king fails, through the intervention of Marian-May-be-Good, who is, like her broom, symbolic of domestic labor and its ethos.\(^\text{155}\) It is Marian who reminds the men of their long-standing friendship, convincing them to shake hands, make up their differences and complete their market transactions (813f.). The economic color of her concern in the matter comes to the fore as she interrogates the Vice: “If one had kild another heer, couldst thou their/deathes requite?” (828).

Pikering, at least, seems to have discerned this undercurrent, and strengthens it in having his bumpkins come to blows over unrequited economic loss. Danger, in Pikering’s answer to Preston, is far less likely to befall the man who gossips about royalty, than the one who cannot maintain an economically advantageous “amyte” with

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\(^{151}\)Southern, *The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare*, 517.

\(^{154}\)Anthony Brian Taylor begins to get at this redemptive pastoral function of Hob and Lob, though he associates it with the “heavenly ethos” of the cycle plays, in “The Clown Episode in *Titus*, *The Bible*, and *Cambises*, Notes and Queries, n.s. 46:2 (1999), 210-11.

\(^{155}\)Women in English domestic drama, like the other forms Helgerson studies in *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), represent the home through “simple metonymy,” because the domestic sphere is supposed to be the realm of women, 4.
his neighbor (Horestes 1164). What applies to Hodge and Rusticus works equally for the kings who gather in Athens to discuss the matter of Horestes’ return to Mycoene. To coax the vengeful Menelaus past the sticking point of his sister’s unnatural death, Idumeus urges him to, “consider first your one [own] estate; consider what maye be/A joyefull mene to end at leyngth this your calamytie” (1008-1009). Menelaus, to the relief of all but the Vyce, chooses to forgo vengeance in favor of what is “happey for [his] state” (1032): the securing of an heir (Horestes) for his property and a suitable match for his daughter.

Richard Helgerson might see this “narrative intersection of home and state” as an early appearance of what his study of “domestic forms” on the early modern continent identifies as a symbolic by-product of early modern state formation.\textsuperscript{156} The chronicle moral plays, with their slippage between history and ostensibly non-historical concerns of the home, even to their repetition of the motif of the soldier and woman, confirm Helgerson’s analysis of domestic genres as forms that assist their culture in mastering the “broadly shared fear of subjection and dispossession” connected with the formation, or reformation, of a new kind of state.\textsuperscript{157} What Helgerson’s lucid paradigm can not explain, however, is how Cambises and Horestes, ostensibly void of middling characters, transmit a middling morality. A similar disjuncture between the class of the virtuous characters and that of the primary audience for Spanish peasant theater leads Helgerson to conclude,

\textsuperscript{156}Helgerson, Adulterous Alliances, 6.
\textsuperscript{157}Ibid., 7.
against his instincts, that the new interest in domestic forms is not necessarily tied to the coalescence of a middling class.\footnote{Ibid., 6.}

Here again, Negri’s thinking about the bourgeois appropriation of nature is of help. To Negri’s mind, “the essence of the bourgeoisie will always be separated from the State” and the old governing classes who traditionally ran it, because it can only identify with its own mediation of the productive forces (labor).\footnote{Negri, \textit{Savage Anomaly}, 139} In a fetishization against the laboring “productive forces,” the bourgeois transform and reconstitute nature, appropriated from the productive forces, in order to create a space of imagined independence from the state.\footnote{Ibid.} Negri enables us to see how Hob, Lob and Marian, or rather their moral code, represents an essential “bourgeois” identity that is like a poor laborer in its opposition to the state and its equivocal (Ambidextrous) laws or more manneristically, like a clever rogue (Meretrix) in her extralegal negotiations.

In \textit{Cambises}, against the pastoral/domestic economy of Hob and Lob, the monarchical, feudal economy of the play is imagined as utterly destructive to the private sphere. The ‘natural’ domestic space of the nuclear family, is repeatedly victimized in the play’s affective scenes of murder and mutilation. Significantly, the lament of Praxaspes’ wife for her slain child (entirely Preston’s invention), is “at the mathematical center of the play.”\footnote{Critics impatient with “the mawkishness of its alliterative fourteeners” invariably overlook this scene’s potential for real affect. The Mother’s tender address and swaddling of her child’s body, her extended comparison/contrast of

\begin{itemize}
    \item[Ibid., 6.]
    \item[Negri, \textit{Savage Anomaly}, 139]
    \item[Ibid.]
\end{itemize}
her grief with the pain of childbirth and maternal ministrations could hardly have failed to
evoke the Christian imagery, popular theatrical conventions or even personal daily
experience in which most of Cambises’ original audience were steeped.\textsuperscript{162} Leah
Marcus’s study of the theme of childhood in early modern literature confirms that
writing’s increasing interest in the theme of the nuclear family “was a reflection of [the
dissemination of] burgher values.”\textsuperscript{163} Indeed, it will be a burgher’s son one day more
famous than Cambridge’s Preston who, in tracing the misdeeds of his own “tigers brood,”
(Tamora, Queen Margaret, Richard and Leontes), will revisit this scene’s early, keen
observation that striking down a child eviscerates an entire family (Cambises 593).

None of this is to imply that Preston straightforwardly idealizes the emerging market
economy. On the contrary, the play insists, in its back-to-back episodes of Meretrix
selling ‘love’ and Sisamnes selling justice (Cambises 220-340), that certain things should
be beyond the realm of purchase. Yet, Cambises’ idealization of the private/domestic
sphere as a village idyll ends up condoning the market mode of production as the lesser
of two evils. Nature, fetishized as a private, domestic sphere, becomes the “essense” of
all that is right in Persia, a “terrain of independence” that separates the hard working
people from the state.\textsuperscript{164} The purpose is clearly one of moral affirmation, and it manifests
itself palpably in a work like Cambises in which the ‘natural’ ties of blood permit the
“mediating” exploitative middling sort to project its ambidexterity, its tyranny, onto the

\textsuperscript{161} Hill, “The First Elizabethan Tragedy,” 407
\textsuperscript{162} Kaplan, “Reopening King Cambises’ Vein,” 104.
\textsuperscript{163} Leah Sinanoglou Marcus, \textit{Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in
\textsuperscript{164} Negri, \textit{The Savage Anomaly}, 139.
other as absolutist monarch and Vyce. In each murder subsequent to Sisamnes,’ Cambises breaks laws “that Natures course dooth utterly detest” (910). At the same time, the ‘low’ plot distills village and domestic virtue associated with the laboring classes as an antidote to the ills of the market economy, a balm that has the power to prevent the theft and suspicion of incommensurability built into the market system from erupting into event after event of personal, perpetually disruptive revenge. In reality, as suggested in our earlier historical discussions, and as Horestes will imply in Menelaus’ politic forgiveness, it is neither family nor village values which control the market, but the market and its concerns which are beginning to dictate the formation and operations of all social relations. In capitalism, insists political scientist Ellen Meiksins Wood, market becomes “the principal determinant and regulator of social reproduction.” Amity is, finally, good business that assures one’s survival. Horestes’ comic ending adumbrates Marxist market theory in that it reveals the “terrain of bourgeois independence” to be grounded in a tension of mutual indebtedness—a contractual relation merely mistaken for freedom and self-interest.

The village idyll of Cambises functions, then, on several levels. As an ideologeme, it offers a symbolic solution to the various problems of the play. Had Cambises trusted his brother, wife and honest counselor, the flaying of Sisamnes might have been viewed as the cautionary, rare example of an expedient but just prince rather than the first in a

165Ibid.
166Wood, The Origin of Capitalism, 97.
167Negri, The Savage Anomaly, 139; Agnew, Worlds Apart, 32.
168Jameson defines the ideologeme as, “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially agonistic collective discourses of social classes,” Political Unconscious, 76.
series of capricious, unnatural acts of a bloody tyrant. In the face of the latter, the play casts a critical eye on the [mostly] obsequious passivity of the courtiers. Their self-protecting flattery becomes obvious in the Lord’s reprimand of Praxaspes after his child’s murder: “this had not been but your tung must be walking./To the king of correction you must needs be talking” (*Cambises* 559-560). As we may infer from our earlier review of contemporary theories of constitutionalism, Cambises’ misuse of the sword of imperium as his own personal property and to the detriment of the commonwealth (deracinating his lineage and the stability of the realm through the murders of his brother and wife), justifies his removal.

Were it not still so freighted with medieval, theological baggage, the protective spirit of self-interest might seem to be legitimized by *Cambises*. Instead, the contradiction intrinsic to self-interest erupts in the narrative as the extradramatic device of the cutpurse—the rogue-in-potential who forces us to draw our own boundaries, and apprehend our own potential for both prudence and murderous alienation. And while *Cambises’* pastoral pretends to take us far from the pecuniary interests of a Meretrix, or the ruffian soldiers, Huf, Ruf and Snuf, it effectively naturalizes the market in opposition to the state, as the timeless background of a fantasized tradition in which codes of friendship and family hold sway—a world soon to be translated to London and limned in greater detail by such early citizen comedies as *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.169

169 Alexander Leggatt distinguishes between early and later versions of citizen comedy, the former of which is identified by a “good tempered, easy going...wry wit.” *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 7-9.
Farwel, Dame Nature

Horestes, like Cambises, places man at a distance from nature, but through abjection rather than idealization. In Pikering’s play, nature is thrust aside as irrational, a hindrance to the orderly running of the ideal state. The debate between Nature and the title character links conscience to nature rather than to God, throwing that formerly unassailable faculty into question. In the same affectionate terms Clytemnestra will use—“my child” and “Horestes myne” (408, 429, 799, 826)—Nature attempts to dissuade him “from mothers bloud,” protesting that even “the cruel beasts that raung in feldes” forgo the “cruell tyraney” of slaying their own kind (414, 424, 431). Horestes counters with the “wycked facte” of Clytemnestra’s murder of his father, and holds fast to his vow to do “as law of gods and man doth wil” (B4v 422). As Nature attempts to bar his way to revenge, conscience is construed as injustice—“to save her lyfe whom law doth slay, is not justise to do”—superfluous affect in a new, rational regime of “Truth” and “Dewtey” (436, 1164-1205). Reaching stalemate, Horestes and Dame Nature part ways over the matricide, Horestes going directly, significantly, to his men and their war games (449). In this way, Horestes reverses the error that that other stage-king, Gorboduc, made a year after Cambises’ first run: allowing personal feelings for blood relatives to cloud his judgement in ministering to his realm.

In Horestes, private feelings, from king’s to commoner’s, are to be sublimated to the institution of public good, the commonwealth. Even erotic love, posed from Petrarch on as a largely private experience, is pragmatically subsumed in Horestes to matters of

Rozett understands the main issue of the play to be between “private revenge and the public duty to restore political order,” The Doctrine of Election, 124.
Horestes’ marriage to Hermione is first and foremost the expression of right
relations, “amyte,” between Mycoene and Sparta (1164). In contrast, the illicit love of
Clytemnestra, “that vile adulteres dame,” and Egistus is represented, following Lydgate, as
the cause of subsequent wrong relations between Horestes and his mother, Horestes and
his Mycoene, and Horestes and the other Greek Kings (405). The duet of Egistus and
Clytemnestra recalls probably the most infamous erotic trigger for civic destruction
known to early moderns: the adulterous love of Paris and Helen (538-601). In Horestes,
the transparent self-interest that motivated Cambises’ marriage, as well as his atrocities,
extends beyond the destruction of Praxaspes’ and Cambises’ families to cause the
wholesale decimation of “the fatherles,” “agyd wight[s],” “mayd[s],” and “wido[ws]” of
an entire city (962-966). Significantly, Mycoene’s way back to social equilibrium is
through the same kinds of carefully negotiated sacrifices dramatized by Preston: Woman,
like Meretrix, returns a confiscated weapon, Rusticus offers Hodge a quart of brown ale,
Menalaus relinquishes a daughter he deems too “yong and much unfet” for marriage to
secure an heir (1031). The “sacrifice” that permits exchange, closure and forward
movement, materially and psychologically, is as Georg Simmel recognized, the very
heart of economic existence. Revenge enforces the urgency of such sacrifices.
Machiavelli’s Borgia must give up an “espedito [expeditious]” officer, but in return, he

171 The large qualification that “posed” suggests recognizes that love lyric was, in fact, no less
detached from political agendas than, say, Virgilian pastoral. See, for example, Michael Spiller’s chapter
on Wyatt in The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction (London and New York: Routledge, 1992),
83-101.

gains the stability of the realm; Horestes slaughters his own people, but as a result, he can build a firm, political state advantageous to all.\textsuperscript{173}

In \textit{Cambises}, as in Negri, it is identification with the state that is sacrificed, or rejected, while the space of nature is elevated to the status of sublime object. \textit{Horestes} reverses this relationship to such a degree that Nature becomes recognizable, in Kristeva’s terms, as the abject object, that which “disturbs identity, system, order.”\textsuperscript{174} Kristeva’s theory of abjection suggests how law is used to control the abject within, the conscience we have been discussing—what Clytemnestra describes as the “sparke of mothers bloud remaynd within thy breste” (\textit{Horestes} 730).\textsuperscript{175} The reconstruction of Mycoene as an idyllic realm of “peace, welth, joye and felycitie” is utterly contingent on the sacrifice of Horestes: the silencing of his own conscience, purging himself of “mothers bloud”—abjection of his nature, subjection of the personal and private (domestic) to the needs of the state (408). Thus, as Kristeva predicts, “abjection [in a Christian context] becomes the requisite for a reconciliation,” and in ways feminist studies have made eminently familiar, the play may thereby construct the “manley hart” over and against the feminine (718).\textsuperscript{176}

\textit{Horestes}, then, establishes a relationship with nature quite different than \textit{Cambises’} idyllic space of domestic virtue. In making its happy ending apparently contingent on the

\textsuperscript{173}Machiavelli, \textit{Il Principe}, 52.


\textsuperscript{175}Kristeva explains that to control the abject within, to “hem it in” and “thrust it aside,” requires “an unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law,” the forms of which are “religion, morality, law,” \textit{Powers of Horror}, 16.

\textsuperscript{176}Ibid., 127.
iconoclastic breaking of natural law, it suggests that human ‘nature,’ and the conscience so often attributed to it, may have more to do with something like Montaigne’s “custom”—an erroneous, perhaps superstitious, habit of the ages—than rational, positive law. Unlike Cambises, Horestes perceives no space legitimately independent of or transcendent over the state, but demands the entire submission of self-interest and all ostensibly private matters to it. Consequently, the ‘low’ characters, void of their redemptive capability, are reduced in Pikering’s play to muddy reflections of their betters, their losses laughable in comparison to Horestes’ deprivations and self-control, their gains, like that of the “Nobelles,” dependent on the righteous ministration of their prince, and their own reciprocal commitment to “Truth” and “Dewty” (1164). Divorced from nature, they become mere comic relief, low-caste foils, like the bumbling soldiers Haultersycke and Hempstryng, for the principle that even an apparent Vice like revenge, if authorized by the heads of state and wielded by its rightful prince, can be rendered virtuous. In this way, the bonds of the old morality—“Truth,” “Dewty” and “Amitie”—which once constrained the policy of the state are used to justify its perpetual reproduction at any cost.

177 Consider Montaigne’s declaration that “the lawes of conscience, which we say to proceed from nature, rise and proceed of custome. . . [which does] so bleare us that we cannot distinguish the true visage of things,” Michel Montaigne, Essays, trans. John Florio (London: Dent, 1965), 1:3, 114-5.

178 E.B. De Chickera makes a similar case when he writes of the idea of the instrumentality of even “vile” creatures, such as private revengers, in God’s overarching plan, “Horestes’ Revenge—Another Interpretation,” Notes and Queries, 204 (1959), 190.
CHAPTER FOUR

“BINDE THY SOULE”: CONTRACT, PROFESSION AND RESISTANCE

IN DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND JEW OF MALTA

In Radical Tragedy, Jonathan Dollimore launches his discussion of Doctor Faustus by noting a preoccupation common to many studies of the play with defining a “limiting structure” whose very transgression constitutes Faustus’s identity. For many, including Dollimore, this limiting structure is religious in nature, and Manichean in design. Faustus deliberately and masochistically crosses the strict line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in order to damn himself in an act which “reproaches the [very] authority which demands” obedience: the implacable, Protestant God. Dollimore proceeds to offer a fine

1There are nine known quarto editions of The Tragicall Historie of Doctor Faustus, first performed in 1588. They exist in two different versions: the “A-text” editions from the earliest 1604 quarto to the first “B-text” quarto in 1616, which includes additions which increase the play’s size by 676 lines, as well as numerous other changes. The edition of 1663, quite corrupt, has no authority. In their recent parallel text edition of the play, David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen make a convincing case for the A1 quarto (1604) having been based on the author’s foul papers. All except the 1631 edition appear to exist in unique copies; A1 is housed at the Bodleian. The earliest text of Marlowe’s The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Iew of Malta (produced between 1589 and 91) appears to have been the 1604 quarto, although an entry in the Stationer’s Register and Heywood’s Epistle Dedictory have lead critics to suspect that there may have been an earlier, 1594 edition. All agree, however, that the 1633 version is fairly corrupt, with lacunae in acts 3 and four and several erroneously assigned speeches. The meaning of these textual problems has been a source of debate, for which see Bevington and Rasmussen’s introductory material for an overview and pertinent sources, Christopher Marlowe: Tamburlaine, Parts I and II Doctor Faustus, A- and B-Texts, The Jew of Malta, Edward II, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xx1x. All citations in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are from C.F. Tucker Brooke’s The Works of Christopher Marlowe (1910; Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1969). I prefer Brooke’s edition for its fidelity to the quartos: he largely abstains from modernizing the spelling, interpolating stage directions, or imposing act or scene divisions on texts like Faustus which did not initially possess them.

2Dollimore, Radical Tragedy, 107-10.

3Ibid, 115.
reading of *Faustus* based on these manifest terms of the play’s content. Yet, if we assume that *Faustus*, following the genre of moral drama it engages, wants to distract us from matters more profane than Protestant reprobation, religion becomes the topic that masks more explosive matter. At the same time, the dynamic Dollimore proposes between limiting structure and Faustian self-assertion remains instructive.

In this chapter, we will look at *Faustus* and *Jew of Malta* in close proximity to one another as an extended meditation on the limiting structures—new instruments of market and state—imposed on the individual citizen. At root, both plays question market and state-imposed limits on the citizen’s freedom to enjoy the surplus of his own labor. In *Faustus* this means imagining an illegitimate practice of “living labor”: what theorists Hardt and Negri describe as “the [joyful] affirmation of [the laborer’s] own power.” Faustus resists the imperative to enter the market through a profession and contribute his alienated labor to state-building. In *Jew* the limit is on private labor *accumulated* in the form of wealth. The market may force this accumulation, but Christian commonwealth doctrine proposes that it exists for the good of the people. Marlowe reveals how this morality is manipulated to justify theft. In this way, both plays perform a demystifying function that opens the door for politically antagonistic ideas like the conceptualization of citizen’s rights, the alienation of labor and its fruits, and the state’s use of Christian morality for purposes of socioeconomic control.

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4That this limiting is so often, apparently self-imposed is one of capitalism’s more insidious features, and one of the reasons economic writers from Adam Smith on, have been inclined to view this mode of production as not merely volitional, but liberating, a snapping of feudal bonds that prohibited people from natural market relations, Wood, *Origin of Capitalism*, 4-5.

5I will discuss this in greater depth shortly, but “living labor,” as opposed to labor that capitalist imperatives detach from all Dionysian (undomesticated) “pleasures and desires,” seems to be precisely what Faustus seeks to practice, Hardt and Negri, *Labor of Dionysus*, 1-4, 7.
To ground what are necessarily complex analyses of Marlowe’s engagement with form and ideology, I focus on a few discrete episodes in each play to which I return in successive sections. In *Faustus* these are the conjuring episode, two contract episodes, the friars’ malediction, the emperor’s show, and the epilogue (235-336; 462-513; 884-902; 1025-1103; 1478-85). In *The Jew of Malta* I concentrate primarily on the trial episode, the hearts/hands figure throughout the middle episodes, and the final episode (1.267-392; 2.777, 1052, 1071-2, 1109; 3.1217, 1299; 5.2303-2410). As in previous chapters, my first section on “criticism,” situates my work within relevant scholarly discussions. In the subsequent genre section, I show how Marlowe engages both recent and long-standing moral drama conventions.

We begin with an overview of Marlowe’s rhetoric as a reworking of the market-inspired singularizing move I argued Leicester’s Men employed in plays like *Cambises*. As we saw in chapter three, Leicester’s Men profited from their surplus labor value: the perception of their talent and expertise in the execution of on-stage violence as rhetoric. Drawing on his humanist training, Marlowe enables the Admiral’s Men to specialize in rhetoric as violence: a form of surplus labor Elizabethan playgoers begin to acknowledge and reward as ‘style,’ even if they do not refer to it as such. 6 Next, we see how Marlowe appropriates and incorporates or “deforms” genres exterior to moral drama—a move I have shown to be characteristic of moral drama invention practices. Marlowe’s deformation of the *passio*, or martyr’s life, in *Jew of Malta* demonstrates that his use of this practice is in no way limited to classical forms. On the contrary, Marlowe often uses

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6It is difficult to determine how much Ben Jonson’s ruminations on style in *Discoveries* summarized or sought to shape cultural opinion, but it is clear that Marlowe and Edward Alleyn’s “furious vociferation,”
classical allusions and language to defamiliarize popular conventions, forcing his audience to question the ideological assumptions that cloud their reading of these forms. His pressure on the psychomachic split in Faustus, for example, problematizes the old positive, theological concept of a controllable, unitary human will. By pushing the good and evil angels to a level that is almost internal to the protagonist, and by emphasizing Faustus’s vacillation throughout the narrative, Faustus begins to imagine a psychological being subject to the terrifying urges of its own unconscious. Then, in Jew, Marlowe tests the perceptual and interpretive strategies of an audience that prides itself on distinguishing the virtuous from the vicious.

All of this is quite aggressive—a feature of Marlowe’s writing that has garnered considerable attention over the years—but our final look at Marlowe’s engagement with genre catches him on the defensive. While he neither draws up mock contracts, nor hazards Jonson’s sly insults, his analysis of performative language in Faustus comes close to suggesting that certain sectors of the audience are foolish. If market, religion and poetry all rely on belief, how wise is it to condemn, say, the fictions of poetry, while one maintains unquestioning faith in religion, or the instruments of market (i.e., the contract)?

The historical section opens with a look at how the etymology of the early modern word “profession” puts belief at the center of ideas about religion, and vocation, from traditional vocations like theology or law, to the new, problematic ones like playwrighting and mercantile adventuring. We will see how the professionalization of the newer vocations is often expressed through the form of the contract, and I will show how Marlowe puts pressure on contracts, to expose the degree to which prior belief validates

loomed large in his thoughts about poetic style, Explorata: or Discoveries, Ben Jonson: The Complete
them. Faustus’s rejection of the classic professions is, in fact, a rejection of a certain social contract whereby a skilled laborer agrees to cede control of his labor to institutions Faustus finds unbearably “seruile and illiberall” (64). We shall see how deeply the market imperative that one must submit one’s labor to the market for it to be of value, inflects Marlowe’s understanding of profession, and we shall see why Marlowe uses figures of merchant adventuring to explore how the state defines this value. In this period, a contract with the state meant the difference between praiseworthy service and abject piracy. Finally, we will see how the new market contract, which replaces the old feudal contract, gives of the appearance of equity between signing parties, when both contracts are, in fact, supported by the threat of violence.

In the concluding section of this chapter we will see how Marlowe uses the contract between Faustus and Mephistopheles to identify a pathology of commercialism. The narrative of Faustus’s blind idolatry, followed by the subsumption of his labor in a commodity relationship in which he is ultimately reified as a cautionary tale, puts a tragic and extremely topical spin on the early modern prodigal son story. Looking at Jew of Malta in light of early modern theories of sovereignty enables us to see how Marlowe presses the moral drama trope of the cut-purse to figure forth the relationship between the private citizen and his wealth to the state. The play suggests that morality has become part of the state’s arsenal in its struggle to control its citizens and their labor (including the congealed labor-time of wealth). As in Faustus, Jew of Malta’s ending suggests that resistance to the growing, mutually reinforcing machinery of market economy and state,

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Poems, 964.

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is ultimately futile, but the merciless crushing of the plays’ protagonists raises questions in itself.

1. Criticism

Several major studies since Bevington’s *From Mankind to Marlowe*, have explored Marlowe’s work as an “apotheosis” of the “moral drama” tradition. Consequently, much has already been written about the debt Marlowe’s plays owe to the formal and structural elements of medieval moral drama. Most concur, for example, that Marlowe adopts popular moral drama conventions as a positive support. What is disputed is the purpose and shape this assistance takes. My contention, that Marlowe expresses more forthrightly what mid-century moral plays like Wager’s *Longer Thou Livest* and Preston’s *Cambises* use convention to simultaneously mask and articulate about the early modern state—its tightening relationship to capitalist economics, and its use of the citizen—goes beyond much of the extant formalist criticism by asserting that Marlowe understands moral drama conventions not simply as dramatic (formal) vehicles for fresh ideology and language—old skins for new wine, as it were—but as heuristic tools that harbour in themselves intriguing socioeconomic contradictions.

*Faustus*

My observations about *Faustus* are based solely on the A-text of *Doctor Faustus*. The critical assertion that the A-text is closer to Marlowe’s original plan than the B-text strikes me as essentially correct, and since performance history is not the focus of this chapter, it seems wisest to maintain a narrow focus. As many have noted, the later B-

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7This reverses the earlier assertion by such notables as W.W. Greg that the B-text was more complete than the “bad-quarto” of the A-text. Among those arguing that the A-text is closer to Marlowe’s original...
text tends to produce the supernatural as more phenomenologically real than the A-text, a move which not only divests Faustus of some of the culpability for his own transgression, pulling the play toward popular conceptions of reprobation as the cause of evil, but one which seems precisely opposite to the trend I have attempted to describe in chapter three’s discussion of suppression of the supernatural. While Marlowe is no stranger to opposition, a play whose action promotes orthodox Christian principles seems seriously out of sync with the demystifying tendencies of the playwright who dreamed up Ferneze, and years before him, the treacherous Christians Frederick, Sigismond and Baldwin of Tamburlaine II.

Critical opinion has long been unified on the fact of Marlowe’s very conscious deployment of moral drama conventions in Doctor Faustus. Many understand this to be the result of Marlowe’s turning to the period’s default site for thinking about religious doctrinal issues. For this group, the main question concerns the extent of Faustus’s “orthodoxy” or “heterodoxy”: the relation of his “subversive” acts to hegemonic thought. This line of questioning has produced two strikingly polarized camps. Among those who consider Faustus subversive are David Bevington, Jonathan Dollimore and Michael Hattaway; the opposing camp, most visibly represented by Stephen Greenblatt, but


8H.W. Matalene, III writes in “Marlowe’s Faustus and the Comforts of Academicism,” English Literary History, 39: 4 (1972), 516-7, that the supernatural in the A-text is overwhelmingly dependent “on Faustus’ belief in it.”

9Recall how the Christians, Baldwin and Frederick, convince Sigismond to treacherously break the “Articles of peace” with Tamburlaine’s men on the grounds that Christians are not bound to honor oaths to infidels (The Second Part of the bloody Conquests of mighty Tamburlaine, 2.1. 2823, 2827-2857.)
present as early as Paul Kocher’s 1946 book on Marlowe, understands Faustian rebellion in the context of other Marlovian rebellions as, “unwitting tributes to that social construction of identity against which they struggle.”¹⁰ This position is, by now, well recognized as the problematic New Historicist model of “subversion and containment.” In that it never sufficiently accounts for social change, let alone the kind of revolutionary socioeconomic shifts studies like the present one argue arise from class struggle, the model is not very relevant here.¹¹ At the same time, studies that focus on Marlowe’s subversion of hegemonic ideology, while enlightening, run the risk of foreclosing meaning once they have identified the target of Marlowe’s attack.

For writers in this second group, the Marlovian canon’s deployment of moral play conventions performs the function of attacking popular notions about humanism, political authority, religion, and moral drama, itself.¹² Christopher Wortham’s “Read, Read the Scriptures” is representative of this group’s interest in Faustus’s interrogation of humanism, while Catherine Minshull’s “The Dissident Subtext of Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus” argues that the play covertly challenges the sixteenth-century idea of absolutism. Darryll Grantley claims that Faustus uses moral conventions to deconstruct


¹² Grantley argues that Faustus can be read as “the locus of conflict between a theocratic and humanist view of man,” “What meanes this shew?” 235.
religious authority as a product of theatricalized representation, while Robert Potter argues that moral drama conventions are brought onstage “to be mocked and atavistically wondered at, and ritualistically destroyed.”¹³ Potter’s is reminiscent of an older view of Marlowe’s relationship to moral drama that finds the playwright more scornful toward the form than his work actually suggests.¹⁴ If Marlowe overtly dismisses the “iygging vaines of riming mother wits” there is ample evidence that he has closely studied the ways in which the best of these mother wits staged contradictions where two or more cultural perspectives collide.

In this respect it seems more productive to view specific moments in Faustus as Dollimore and others following Alan Sinfield’s lead suggest, not so much as either “conservative” or “subversive,” but as sites of intense social struggle—as “faultlines.”¹⁵ Michael Hattaway takes this approach in a recent article surveying Marlowe’s canon, to argue that Marlowe depicts “life as it is constructed in ideology or belief, conscious or unconscious.”¹⁶ In other words, we can expect Faustus to reveal contradictions as it mimics orthodoxy and heterodoxy as the narrative and its characters require. Studies that focus on audience reception also allow room for thinking about Marlowe’s dramatization of contradictions. This approach can be seen in Ruth Lunney’s recent book describing Marlowe’s solicitation of juridical consciousness as an extension of the moral drama tradition. In Doctor Faustus, writes Lunney, “spectators were enabled to see and make sense differently” than the audiences of medieval plays, but these novel interpretations

¹³Ibid., 233.
¹⁵Sinfield, Faultlines, passim.
were indebted to the conventions from which Marlowe’s work productively and consciously deviates. Like Emily Bartels and Graham Hammill, Lunney foregrounds problems of “seeing” or “reading” in the play, but unlike the latter writers, Lunney largely avoids discussions of ideology in order to focus on the pragmatic concerns of the popular stage of the late sixteenth-century.

Emily Bartels helpfully places Faustus within a sixteenth-century hermeneutics of necromancy, by which any number of troublesome signs (grief, loss of cattle, erotic fantasies, etc.) could be identified as “black magic” in order to persecute an offender, but ultimately, she is interested in the dynamics of imperialism, which while not entirely unrelated to the interests of this study, give her work significantly different emphases. Of the studies interested in hermeneutics, Hammill’s alone offers extended thinking about Faustus in terms of an economic model. My interests differ from Hammill’s broader, cultural economy in my focus on a more strictly economic realm in which exchange gives an account of an historical movement toward capitalism. Yet, Hammill’s description of the performative mechanics of literary language and Marlowe’s use of it to solicit a particular kind of reading from his audiences informs my work on both Doctor Faustus and Jew of Malta.


Jew of Malta

As reflected in C.F. Tucker Brooke’s brief introduction to his 1910 edition of the play, early criticism on Jew of Malta sought to explain the “marked” change in tone between the first two acts and the three subsequent. As late as 1966, when Alan Friedman’s article appeared in Texas Studies in Literature, Brooke’s, Harry Levin’s and others’ arguments about the play’s cohesiveness had yet to quell speculation about Marlowe’s hasty composition or the possible plurality of authors. Yet, around mid-century, the problem was reframed through a new set of questions anchoring the incongruities of the text to the character of Barabas as either “a stereotyped personification of Vice, an Elizabethan Machiavel or the medieval concept of the Jew.”¹⁹

Spivack is most readily identified with the first position, which has subsequently been broadened and modified through performance-oriented studies such as J.L. Simmon’s article exploring how Barabas’s use of the semantically-charged theatrical space of the Elizabethan playhouse “undermin[ed] the moral pretences of the Establishment.”²⁰ N.W. Bawcutt’s review of the arguments concerning Marlowe’s Machiavellism expresses the grounds for the second position, in its conclusion that “Marlowe’s Machiavel [and Barabas, as well] has a somewhat limited grasp of the historical Machiavelli’s political and social philosophy.”²¹ Wilbur Sanders’ book in many ways set the tone for a number


of historical studies investigating *Jew of Malta* and other works depicting Jewish characters in light of the discourse of the Jew in medieval and early modern Europe.\(^\text{22}\) Exemplary among these are James Shapiro’s *Shakespeare and the Jews* and Joseph Shatzmiller’s revisionist *Shylock Reconsidered: Jews, Moneylending, and Medieval Society*.\(^\text{23}\) Such work, exploring theatrical, intellectual and cultural history, has been of considerable help in imposing outer limits to textual meaning, but the underlying problem of the play’s inconsistencies—one which often motivated these studies—is not among my present concerns.

Not surprisingly, given the play’s outrageous title character, the containment/subversion model has become a standard approach in studies of *Jew of Malta* as well as *Faustus*, but writers after Greenblatt tend to think about “containment” in highly specialized ways.\(^\text{24}\) Marjorie Garber historicizes the term to discuss the imagery of “enclosure” throughout the play and its immanent threat of liberation and dissemination.\(^\text{25}\) James Shapiro’s “containment” is an intertextual one that reveals the rivalrous composing strategies of Shakespeare and Marlowe in the context of the


\(^{24}\text{In an argument first published in Renaissance Self-fashioning, Greenblatt claims that Barabas, like all “Marlovian rebels and skeptics remain[s] embedded within this orthodoxy: they simply reverse the paradigms and embrace what the society brands as evil,” 120.}\)

“capitalist hazarding of the London stage in the mid-1590s.”

David Thurn also pushes containment in a more material, economic direction, largely in response to the New Historicists’s “general economy of culture.” While Thurn effectively shows how the “ideological imperatives” defining Barabas (such as the function of the Jewish stereotype in Christian economies) are “bound by the terms of a specific [protocapitalist] period in economic history,” he defines this moment in terms of “unrestricted expenditure” limited by the state. Ultimately, this almost neo-Ricardian perspective of market as a liberating force of “free exchange” conflicts with what I propose to be Marlowe’s antagonistic appraisal of the mutually determining forces of market, state and religious imperatives in the emergent political economy.

Another line of inquiry the present study engages, and one which is paralleled again by Faustus studies, examines the Jew of Malta’s sophisticated deployment of conventional signs and interpretative models. Lunney reads the play to advance her argument about Marlowe’s wielding of “dramatic conventions of the late moralities” to break traditional rhetorical connections between sign and signified.

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27 Thurn, “Economic and Ideological Exchange,” 169. In this latter argument, I am guided by a line of thought Hammill put forth in a recent paper delivered to the Modern Language Association. Hammill demonstrates how the play expresses atheism as “a political position aimed against the state and its uses of religion and religious morality to ensure the obedience of the people,” “Marlowe’s Atheism as Political Thought,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, San Diego, California, December 2003). In its precise working out of the terms and precedence of Marlowe’s critique of political theology, Hammill’s focus necessarily excludes the economic concerns I treat. In this respect, Dena Goldberg, as she looks at the trope of sacrifice in the play, is actually closer to my own focus in her insistence on the “inseparable” nature in the 1590s of what we now imagine as distinct economic, religious and political spheres. Goldberg, “Sacrifice in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta,” Studies in English Literature, 32 (1992), 243.

28 Lunney, Marlowe and the Popular Tradition, 133. For all of her assertions of continuity between medieval and early modern moral plays, Lunney tends to underestimate earlier playwrights’ ability to manipulate what she calls “the predictable world of the moralities,” 113. In contrast, my narrative finds
investigation of Marlowe’s “aesthetics of the closet” in *Jew of Malta* revamps the containment/subversion model with an emphasis on “concealed, semi-concealed and revealed meanings,” of an “unstable and productive metaphoricity,” while Randall Nakayama looks at how the play’s staged sartorial signs contribute to the constitution of identity.” While their foci differ from mine, these studies serve as models in their exploration of the form and function of Marlowe’s use of convention.

2. Genre and Performance History

I will add little to the copious amount that has already been written about Marlowe’s engagement with performance conventions—i.e., Barabas’s recuperation of Vice conventions, both plays’ deployment of popular dramaturgical devices and pageantry, etc. In this, I break from what has been this study’s pattern of devoting a section to discussing the plays’ manipulation of performance conventions. This should not be regarded as capitulation to an exhausted topic but as an assertion of what I perceive to have been Marlowe’s deliberate reorientation of stage poetry toward poetics in reaction to the market imperative of competition, part of the socioeconomic conditions surrounding public playing in the years just around 1590. I believe that beginning with *Tamburlaine* and then proceeding in a direction that proved profitable for all involved, Marlowe’s innovations were purposefully not in dramaturgy, where what were formerly Leicester’s

Marlowe’s ability to enable spectators to “see differently and interpret variously” more pronounced than in, say, *Mankind*, but not novel, 182.

Men and then the Queen’s Men tended to dominate, but in new uses of language, rhetoric and literary form. In this way, I echo what has been disparaged as older criticism’s overemphasis on language as one of the chief differences of London theatre from earlier drama. Yet, I think of this difference not as an inevitable evolutionary advancement, but as a felicitous deviation. There is nothing natural about the progression from fourteeners to blank verse; Marlowe’s linguistic venture was, in its time, as much of a gamble as the overseas privateering whose diction resonates so deeply throughout these two plays.

*Heavenly Verse*30

Fredric Jameson has defined style as a “language which deliberately calls attention to itself, one which ‘foregrounds’ itself as a key element in the work. . .”31 Such were Tamburlaine’s “high astounding terms” when he burst upon the scene in 1587.32 In the commercial context of that decade’s competitive theatrical market Marlowe’s stage poetics provided the profitable “something extra,” surplus labor that distinguished and singularized both the Admiral’s Men and their poet, permitting them to eventually overgo the premiere company in the nation, the Queen’s Men. As we know, in 1583 the Queen’s Men absorbed the greater part of Leicester’s Men who had dominated English theater for decades. As I argued in chapter three, this domination was abetted by their specialization in the production of hypermasculinity and on-stage violence. Marlowe’s poetry replaces on-stage violence with astounding terms, thus shifting the site of surplus labor production

30 All subheadings, and the chapter title, are taken from either *Faustus* or *Jew of Malta*. They are, in order, *Faustus* 481; *Faustus* 6; *Jew* 1.453; *Jew* 3.1221; *Faustus* 280; *Jew* 1.531; *Faustus* 108; *Jew* 1.85; *Faustus* 297; *Faustus* 515; *Jew* 1.359; *Jew* 2.761.
32 *Tamburlaine I*, Prologue 5, 9.
from the playing company to its poet. In later decades, this will translate to what we now call “celebrity,” but in 1587 Marlowe’s poetic style is the “get-penny” element that draws crowds to Rose.33

Thus, I suggest that when Donald Hedrick identifies the novelty of Marlowe and the Admiral’s Men making a profit on “hypermasculinity,” he is slightly imprecise.34 Marlowe’s employment of words over swords—rhetoric as violence rather than violence as rhetoric, as we saw in the Leicester’s Men production, Cambises—does indeed inaugurate a distinctive new style that “singularizes” Marlowe and the Admiral’s Men (and later, Lord Strange’s Men) in the competitive London market, but it develops in response to the more visual and less ironic conflation of masculinity and violence that were the hallmark of Leicester’s and subsequently the Queen’s Men, something London company experts McMillin and MacLean describe as “theatrical literalism.”35

Theatrical literalism assumes that the “real language” of theatre is spectacle: of body, of costume, of prop in any number of processional or emblematic combinations. It summons, in the case of the Queen’s Men, the not inconsiderable resources of the best outfitted touring company in the realm to “make. . . the obvious idea visibly unmistakable, and thus preclude. . . misunderstanding and subtlety at a stroke.”36 McMillin and MacLean explain how this type of dramatic “plain speaking” served the Protestant political agenda of the 1580s Elizabethan state, offering historical “truth” in

33Chambers cites this expression in two Jonson plays, Eastward Hoe and Bartholomew Fair, where it is said to mock Henslowe, The Elizabethan Stage, 1:373.
34Hedrick, “Male Surplus Value,” 93.
35McMillin and MacLean, The Queen’s Men, 128-30.
36Ibid., 132.
lieu of the “forged” metaphoricity of the competition.\textsuperscript{37} Yet, history suggests that the Queen’s Men’s technical proficiency with storytelling, spectacle, music and clowning were insufficient to please a public palate trained by a century of moral drama to desire more substantial fare; the Elizabethans valued the chewing as much as the flavor of their drama. This proclivity for intellectual engagement is evidenced by the prologues of Wager and Jonson which bracket a period in which the “state-decipherer, or politic picklock of the scene” must be warned with some regularity not to read the playwright into prison.\textsuperscript{38} Marlowe’s poetics invite the audience to once again access their own knowledge—humanist, political and commercial—to discover meanings literalism denies.

At another level, the surplus of Marlowe’s stage poetics finally answers a collective desire, once expressed by the prologue for \textit{Enough is as Good as a Feast}, for a “comely” English meter.\textsuperscript{39} So much work has focused, in the past, on Marlowe’s “mighty line” that an analysis of its particular features and mechanics would be tedious.\textsuperscript{40} Instead, I wish to emphasize Marlovian poetics’ relation to the fourteener’s of earlier moral plays, as another way of understanding Marlovian audacity. The work of social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai reveals the impropriety of Marlowe’s moving blank verse, a cutting-

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Bartholomew Fair}, Induction 122-3, \textit{Ben Jonson: Volpone}.

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Enough is as Good as a Feast}, 31, 72. Prior to \textit{Tamburlaine}, only Sackville and Norton’s \textit{Gorboduc} (1561/2), a play written for the elite venues of the Inner Temple and Elizabeth’s Court, put dramatic action into blank verse.

edge high-culture phenomenon, to the popular stage, as the transference of something from what is essentially an elite, enclaved realm to the “low” realm of popular consumption. Appadurai explains that “the diversion of commodities from specified paths is always a sign of creativity or crisis, whether aesthetic or economic.” In Marlowe’s case, Appadurai’s conjunctions might be more productively changed to inclusive ones: creativity and crisis that is both aesthetic and economic motivate Marlovian style. This surplus, which first manifests as “hypermasculinity,” draws on a long history of moral drama tradition in which outside genres and forms are incorporated in the primary form.42

*Of Finer Mould Than Common Men*

Marlovian style also owes a considerable debt to invention practices we have traced through earlier examples of moral drama. From *Mankind’s* use of the quête, *Longer’s* evocation of the prodigal son play, *Cambises’* revision of the Herod play, and *Horestes’*s courtly love song, we know that moral drama often incorporates fashionable performative and literary modes within the frame of the moral play in a manner that effectively masks and expresses potentially inflammatory statements. Importing an engaging popular mode effectively could distract all but the more perspicacious auditors, providing a ready defense—‘trifles’ to please the groundlings—in the event of censorship. This practice


suggests that we need to be more attentive to the function of literary and dramaturgical modes exogenous to the moral play in Marlowe’s work.  

So many studies have examined the moral drama elements in *Jew of Malta* that it is something of a commonplace now to speak of Barabas as a Vice, or to think about how Marlowe thwarts our expectations of the moralistic framing rhetoric or psychomachic character oppositions. All agree that Marlowe does something slippery with the conventions of moral drama, but few have remarked on the degree to which this calls for the incorporation of exogenous forms. Marlowe grafts exogenous modes onto the structures of moral drama in order to put the forms’ internal ideologies into productive tension with one another. To see how this works, we will examine *Jew of Malta’s* deformation of the hagiographic form of the judicial *acta* (from the martyr’s *passio*) in the conflict between Ferneze and Barabas in Act 1. First, we must recall the customary ideological functions of *acta* and *passio* before and after the reformation.

Judicial acta are the interrogation scenes that constitute key turning points in the accounts of most martyrs, pre- and post-reformation. Next to depictions of the tortures following these trials, *acta* are the “most amplified” element of the traditional *passio*, the martyr’s story. *Acta* literally dramatize a saint’s rejection of the false gods of state religion for the true God. They constitute a refusal to sacrifice Christian belief to civil authority, often materialized in the form of the saint’s defiance of an "edict" to make an

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44 For the most recent extended comparisons, see Lunney’s fifth chapter in *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition*.

45 My understanding of “modes” as “tinges of generic color” that invoke a genre but are usually an element or tone within a larger “kind” (generic form) is based on Fowler’s *Kinds of Literature*, 106-8.

offering to the emperor on pain of death. After the saint’s conventional rejection, *acta* generally segue into excruciating tortures and answering miracles as the saint’s body becomes the site for a contest between civil and supernatural power. While hagiographers typically expanded these interrogations to enable their protagonists to deliver what Hippolyte Delehaye calls in his now classic *The Legends of the Saints*, “dissertations on the absurdity of paganism and the beauty of Christianity,” the earliest *acta* do derive from official reports of Christian interrogations that were once housed in Roman proconsular archives.”

In traditional *acta*, the saint’s virtuous, patient, and sometimes rhetorically sophisticated responses are set in marked contrast to the rabid attacks of the magistrate, typically an emperor or judge “presented as a monster in human form. . . interested only in wiping the new religion from the face of the earth.” As a perusal of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* testifies, the basic conflict of the judicial *acta* remains as captivating and relevant to reformation audiences as its was to their medieval, Catholic ones. The difference, according to Benjamin Griffin in an article on the influence of saints’ lives on English history plays, lay primarily in the reformers’ emphasis on commemoration over immanence. The hagiographic purpose of inspiring devotion and moral righteousness in the *passio’s* readers or auditors weathered the reformation.

Significantly, the *acta’s* powerful dramatization of the saint’s providentially-fortified resistance to erring civil authority also maintained its resonance for post-reformation audiences. “If ye take away my meat,” declares Foxe’s Elizabeth Young to her examiner,

47 Ibid., 89-90.
48 Ibid., 69, 181.
Dr. Martin, “I trust God will take away my hunger.”

Gone are the days when the miraculous intervention of angels would physically sustain a beleaguered saint like Perpetua, with “sweet, white curd,” but reformation saints still gain access to the grace of otherworldly patience and superhuman endurance of suffering. Not so Marlowe’s Barabas. The Christian martyr’s characteristic “gentleness, mercy, forgiveness of wrongs. . . [and] renunciation of one’s own will” are potently absent in this character, so pointedly “impatient in distresse” (1.497).

With what surprise does the audience at the Rose watch Barabas, a character the vicious “Macheuill” has claimed for one of his disciples, answer the Governor of Malta’s summons only to find him facing the familiar dilemma of a saint at trial (1. 267-392)? The traditional ‘edict’ of the passio, that permits persecution of the saint, is read out as the “Articles of our decrees” (299)—a demand that each of Malta’s Jews sacrifice “halfe his estate,” to the state or convert to Christianity (302), on pain of “absolutely los[ing] al he has” (308-9). This secular reading of the acta’s formulaic threat parses it into two components. These were originally conflated by the passio’s conventional demand to “offer sacrifice [to the emperor] and live, or undergo the keenest torments and die!”

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53 This colorful version of the conventional demand is from the Life of Saint Catherine in The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger, (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1941), 713. Voragine, a thirteenth-century Italian, is a rather late compiler of saints’ legends, but the popularity of his vivid Lengenda aurea, first Englished by Caxton, then subsequently reprinted several times by Wynkyn de Worde, makes it likely that Marlowe read (or heard) its tales, even if within the context of the polemical reformation literature he may have accessed through the King’s School’s master John Gresshop, or at Cambridge. On the contents of Gresshop’s enormous private
First, the sacrifice acknowledges the emperor as a deity, in effect subsuming the monotheistic Christian religion to the polytheistic state religion. Second, sacrifice to the emperor as head of state signifies the performer’s unconditional obedience to the emperor’s civil authority. In refusing to be a “conuertite,” Barabas’s allegiance to the state is proven as suspect as a Thomas a Becket’s or a Sir Thomas More’s; in resisting the command to sacrifice to the state, he reveals himself to be dangerously unimpressed by civil authority (315).

Consequently, and not surprisingly, Barabas’s protest is swiftly deemed a “deni[al]” of the articles and Malta’s wealthiest resident is condemned, like a martyr, to lose all. Yet “al” no longer signifies life—a specious distinction, as Barabas notes, when his very means of subsistence has been taken (1.335-37). Like Marlowe’s reworking of Lucian, in what W.S. Heckscher has demonstrated to be the source for Faustus’s “was this the face. . .” set speech, the success of this moment turns on its auditor’s recognition of the conventional feel but breathtakingly altered meaning of the sentencing. The acta reminds Marlowe’s audience that while the terms may have changed, the threat of state coercion and persecution of the marginalized private subject remains alarmingly relevant.

The form of the saint’s life itself, as David Jeffrey reminds us in his study on “English Saint’s Plays,” relies heavily on the concept of recurrence. The saint’s trial, in the old faith, never really stops happening; in the new faith, it’s a type and

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54W. S. Heckscher, “The Source of ‘Was This the Face. . .?’” Journal of the Warburg Institute (1938), 295. Heckscher claims the eighteenth dialogue of Lucien’s Dialogues of the Dead was the source for Faustus’s desperate and impassioned speech in the penultimate episode of the play.

commemoration of Christ’s trial. Yet, in Elizabethan London, where the martyr is no saint, civil authority needs never raise its voice, and the suffering to which the martyr is condemned may be entirely economic, “what’s here to doe?” (1.307) Quiet suffering in the absence of pious allegiance to some objective moral “right” is shown to be meaningless (385). As Barabas struggles to absorb the shock of the Maltese government’s legal theft of “the labour of my life,” we come to realize with the pragmatic merchant, that not divine intervention but only “a reaching thought” will succor Barabas in his “misery” (455, 382, 444). Not in obedience to but in defiance of the “partiall heuens” does Barabas “rouse” himself “to make barre of no policie” (494, 504, 508). Not through “patience” but through “cunning” will the new era’s man-too-pure-for-this-world win the admiration of an audience who can appreciate the audacity of a character who uses Vice tactics to reverse the volitional martyrdom centuries of saints’ lives have demanded of the faithful (433, 541). If the saint’s story is about conversion, Barabas’s is about the steadfast rejection of conversion as a rapacious desire of the other that never stops hectoring—first as a condition in the Articles of Malta (306), then as the Abbess and friars’ support of Abigail’s false conversion (599f), and finally in the two friars, who hope to profit from Abigail’s deathbed confession (4.1529f). Marlowe exposes how (in common with other regimes), Christianity never stops craving absolute conformity.

So Well Perform’d

With the exception of Faustus, and a moment or two in Jew, Marlovian psychology, like that of the moral play, tends to be externalized and diffused over the play’s action, apportioned among its characters. This fact speaks not so much to Marlowe’s abilities, as

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earlier critics tended to assume, but to his interests. The corpus of his work supports the idea that Marlowe, whose relation to the various powerful institutions with which he was engaged, from Cambridge to the Elizabethan secret service, are much discussed, was fascinated by the dynamics of power in social relationships. Commenting on this, Jonathan Goldberg goes so far as to write that, “Marlowe inevitably moves in the direction of social science.” Consequently, he is often less concerned with what social conflict produces internally, within a single character, than with its impact on that character’s circumstances, and the ever widening circle of consequences contingent upon that character’s reaction to those circumstances.

Yet, to speak in such generalities masks the often subtle effects Marlowe achieves with moral drama psychology. An example of this can be seen in Faustus, in the play’s movement from the protagonist’s stated certainty that he desires unlimited consumption—the “orient pearle,” “pleasant fruited and princely delicatess” of the world market, ultimately emblematized as we shall see, in his tryst with Helen (111, 113)—to his discovery that what he really wanted all along is “an end immediately,” the oblivion of non-being (506). Faustus’s vacillating drive between “surfet” and “celestial rest” corresponds to the Freudian principles of eros and thanatos (25,1276), recalling, on a small scale, the opposing interests of Wager characters like Covetous and Enough, while noting on a larger scale, the manner in which this familiar psychic pattern informs the alternating episodic structures of all moral drama. It would complicate recent distinctions between older dramatic personae as “discursive” categories and more modern personae as demonstrating “interiority and psychological integrity” if we sensitized ourselves to the

56 Goldberg, “Sacrifice in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta,” 239.
At the same time, instances abound in *Faustus* in which Marlowe’s compression and internalization of the psychomachic battle within the so-called universal protagonist creates a subjectivity effect. In this Marlowe destabilizes the theological notion that the will, thought to incline toward self-interest, is a unitary faculty that can be entirely known and controlled. Faustus’s will is as split as his desire. In this, he anticipates a theory of the psychological subject.

Conversely, the very different problems of *Jew of Malta* motivate Marlowe to limit his use of the new subjectivity effect. I want to suggest that in the initial scenes, as we get to know Barabas, the subjectivity effect is deployed as counterbalance for the considerable weight of ideology—that complex of cultural stereotypes we know from studies like Shapiro’s, Elizabethans would have associated with any Jew. Once we realize that Barabas is considerably more than the “bottle-nos’d knaue” of medieval lore, it is precisely this trope of the Jew Barabas personates to such fine effect (3.1230). By the time Barabas wins Ithamore’s confidence with his vaunting narrative of anti-Christian malice, we know enough about the character to discern a serious discrepancy between the function and content of his rhetoric (2.939-966). For the benefit of his knavish auditor, Barabas produces a lie that flies. Meanwhile, the rest of us are left to wonder at what point a successful, well-trusted merchant who “all his life time hath bin tired,” with

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59 James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews.*
counting up and condensing wealth gained in overseas venturing, found time to develop and use skills as a physician, “Engineere,” and “Vsurer” to the destruction of Christians across the continent (1.50-1, 2.946, 951, 955).

Marlowe, like his predecessors Preston and Wager, tests his audience’s judgement: will we be content to let outward appearances stand in lieu of thoughtful consideration of evidence? When is the nobleman ignoble, the man in rags heavenly, or the rich, “earth-mettall’d villaine” a wronged man worthy of justice (1.311)? Barabas’s anti-Christian rancor makes judgement uncomfortable; there will be no easy sympathy for the persecuted man who will “fawne like [a] Spaniel” in order to lure his enemies close enough to bite (781-2). Jew deforms the saint’s vita to such a degree that by the end of the play auditors are forced to separate justice from sympathy or ally themselves with Ferneze’s blatant hypocrisy. The identification an audience might feel for a character in which the subjectivity effect remained strong until the end would interfere with this aggressive cornering of the audience, this forcing the difficult choice upon us.

The Jew of Malta suggests that Marlowe purposefully limits the subjectivity effect produced in the earlier Faustus to better focus on the social dynamic between a certain type of subject and the state, and to focus our appraisal on that dynamic. Yet, as writers like Dollimore have observed, Barabas’s character does conform to certain laws of psychology: those of revenge. Revenge, as Dollimore suggests, gives the subject a way of resisting the mental collapse of grief by taking on an active role, rescuing himself from mental disintegration, by “purposefully re-engaging with [a] society—albeit at the cost of brutalization”—that has attempted to marginalize or destroy him.60 Revenger tragedy

60Jonathan Dollimore, Radical Tragedy, 36.
generally ends with the revenger’s reintegration into hegemony, even if through death. Hamlet receives an honorable soldier’s burial from his admiring rival; Vindice and Hippolito’s blood washes treason from the Italian court of the Revenger’s Tragedy; the three virtuous characters of Antonio’s Revenge peacefully take their self-imposed exile to a monastery after “ridding huge pollution from our state,” but the final speech in Jew of Malta reveals that, despite the considerable piling up of bodies, including Barabas’s, something is still rotten in the state of Malta.  

Conjuring Speeches

In her reading of Dr. Edward Jordan’s A Briefe Discourse of a Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother, Jean Howard describes how Jordan urges his educated readers to use superstitious remedies when standard medicine fails, “not because they (the amulets, holy water, nails and feathers, etc.) have efficacy in themselves, but because people believe in them.”  

Marlowe, too, seems cognizant of the power of belief. Over the course of Faustus and Jew of Malta, he draws disturbing analogies between religion, the market and literary language that reveal the degree to which late Elizabethan culture’s most important transactions—from the holy to the profane—depend upon the same suspension of disbelief for which poetry, and especially theatrical poetry, is so often attacked. As an example, I want to modify Hammill’s observation that Doctor Faustus “conceptualizes exchange and its effects not by way of the cunning of the market, but through its considerations of the literary” to suggest that the play conceptualizes market


62 Howard, The Stage and Social Struggle, 2.
and literary exchange—what one is willing to (literally and figuratively) buy—as largely analogous. As we shall see, Faustus renders the operation of literary language, an abstracting process already subject to the “scorn and derision” George Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* laments, structurally the same as two abstractions Marlowe’s London audience is highly invested in trusting: contracts of market and of religion. Marlowe need not make Faustus or Mephistopheles discuss the cunning of the market—its manipulation of a structure of belief similar to that empowering literary language and religion—because the play’s action, itself, demonstrates it.

In the much discussed conjuring scene, Faustus blithely denies the possibility of Mephistopheles’s existential hell. “Come,” he tells the devil airily, “I thinke hell’s a fable”—a statement cut from the same cloth as his earlier dismissal of speculations concerning the soul as “vaine trifles” (559, 297). Faustus flaunts his worldly sophistication by refusing to suspend his disbelief, a move which in effect, moves the notion of hell and the undying soul from the realm of putatively transparent, non-literary language (in which Mephistopheles attempts to convey it), to the field of the literary—“a fable.”

Yet this same, skeptical doctor earnestly believes in the equally dubious signified of the material contract—that a piece of paper written “in manner of a deede of gift” binds him to give over the unknown commodity of his soul to the devil (492). Agnew’s

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63 Hammill, “Faustus’s Fortunes,” 331.

64 Sir Philip Sidney’s earlier *Defense* also speaks to the existence of an anti-poetic sentiment expressed in works like Stephen Gosson’s *An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse* (1579). For more on antipoeticism see Peter C. Herman’s *Squitter-wits and Muse-haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

65 Hammill, “Faustus’s Fortunes,” 309-11
The historicizing of contracts reminds us of these written documents’ novel, worrisome performativity in sixteenth-century England.\(^{66}\) Contracts represented a decided shift away from the “oathes, pledges, tokens,” and more traditional familial, personal, and embodied promissory forms Lorna Hutson describes as being commonly exchanged in the period just prior to Marlowe.\(^{67}\) The likeness Agnew describes between the material contract and its figurative social contract between fable teller and listener, or indeed any writer and his audience—the dependence on suspension of disbelief, in other words—is entirely lost on Faustus. Mephistopheles tries to explain this performative principle in his initial speech to Faustus when he assures the doctor that he was not conjured, but “came now hither of mine owne accord” (278). The shortest path to conjuring, the devil informs his puffed up interlocutor, “is stoutly to abiure the Trinitie” (288). All things being equall, Faustus’s precise Latin “incantations” mean nothing more than his servant’s “Dutch fustian”: the words, themselves, have the same (roundly) felicitous performative value (239, 431). They conjure devils by *signifying* the speaker’s rejection of God in anticipation of the devil’s assistance.

In his *How to do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin suggests how this performative force depends upon the act’s legibility within a certain set of conventions.\(^{68}\) Conventions, in turn, rely on the willful suspension of disbelief—the disbelief that a mere utterance can perform an action. For example, we might turn to the Friars’ ludicrous malediction “dirge” at the end of the banquet episode featuring Faustus and Mephistopheles’s visit to


the Pope (891). The chant begins with the solemn formula, “Cursed be hee. . .” before revealing itself as petty retribution for acts not so much diabolical as childish. “Cursed be hee that stole away his holinesse meate from the table. –maledicat dominus. . . Cursed be hee that tooke Frier Sandelo a blow on the pate. . .” (896-99). The dirge, from the banqueters’ perspective, performs damnation, but to Faustus and the Rose’s largely Protestant audience for whom the convention has become the desperate trump-card of an illegitimate religious tyrant, the form is as void of meaning as “a hogge[‘s] grunt, a calfe[‘s] bleate, and an asse[‘s] braye” (890). If the malediction works, it is because it has functioned like Faustus’s conjuring, which is to say with Mephistopheles “per accident,” and entirely subject to the judgement of its audience (281).69 In this respect, at least one critic has asserted that Faustus is damned only when and because he perceives that he is damned.

If this is so, what damns Faustus is his own belief in his contract with the devil. Here again, Marlowe dramatizes the dazzle of specialized language: “I Iohn Faustus of Wertenberge, Doctor, by these presents, do giue both body and soule to Lucifer prince of the East, and his minnister Mephastophilis, and furthermore. . . .” (536-7). Yet, unlike the trifles or fables Faustus dismisses as so much poetry, the contract is something in which he believes. “Base of stocke,” Faustus discerns truth in the lessons of his middling, Moros-like upbringing (11). In the Elizabethan world of the non-elite, people who break legal contracts are brutally punished, and it is this threat of punishment—embodied in Mephistopheles’ menacing, “Reuolt [from heaven] or Ile in peece-meale teare thy flesh” (1306)—that actually guarantees the fulfillment of the terms. Marlowe wants to show

69Matalene, “Marlowe’s Faustus and the Comforts of Academicism,” 515.
that there is nothing binding, in fact, about the piece of paper itself: neither the blood with
which it is signed, nor its legal language. The contract is a supremely performative
object, and Faustus, who is skeptical about the working words of theology, is shown to be
all the more fool for not recognizing it. Only a fool would scoff at one form of
performative language and put absolute faith in another. By going the moral drama route
of staging analogies—the contract is like Wagner’s conjuring which is like Faustus’s
conjuring which is like the friars’ malediction—Marlowe can lay bare without comment
the hypocrisy of a culture whose most important transactions (on ever more distinct
economic, religious, and legal levels) are no less dependent on felicitous performance and
interpretation than the theatre it regards with equal amounts of adoration and contempt.

2. Economic History and Topical Issues

Counterfet Profession[s]

Social Historians Wilfred Prest and Rosemary O’Day explain that in the early modern
period, the word “profession” etymologically linked the three traditional professions, law,
medicine, and theology, to the religious “profession” of faith. After the reformation, the
idea of Protestant “vocation” was appended. By the early seventeenth century,
“profession,” “occupation” and “vocation” were often used “interchangeably and
indiscriminately.” I want to propose that this constellation of meanings, linked to the
word “profession,” inspired Marlowe’s elucidation of the concept as a tension between

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70 Significantly, the Scythian Tamburlaine’s “woorking wordes” are backed by the threat of violence, 2.3. 623, *Tamburlaine I*.

71 In her preface, Wilfrid Prest explains that “profession” comes from the Latin *profiteri*, to avow or confess, *The Professions in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Rosemary O’Day, *The
performative signification—the degree to which all “profession” depends on the felicitous manipulation of specific signifiers put “in shew” and then subject to the juridical interpretation of onlookers who find the performance felicitous or infelicitous (Faustus 31). In this respect, Marlowe takes up the emblematic thinking moral drama so often organizes around a specific character, as Wager does with Ignorance/Antiquity/Tandidity, and drives it to the deep-structural level of thematics.

At the opening of Faustus the doctor sets out, “to sound the deapth of that thou wilt profess” (30). He ends up rejecting the three traditional “professions” (and Philosophy) only to discover, over the course of the play, the limits of the beliefs in which he does profess to have faith: necromancy, and contracts (30). This latter list, upon which Faustus’s beliefs and fortunes founder, would have put the knowledgeable Elizabethan auditor in mind of the controversy surrounding the relatively new and hugely prosperous London theatre. “Magic” is the derogatory descriptor leveled at deceptive uses of sartorial and scholarly ornaments that render players and other social-climbing citizens alarmingly, unnaturally protean. “Poetry [itself is]... an aspect of [dark] magic” for several respected classical authorities as well as in the pamphlets of antitheatrical Puritans. That Marlowe used necromancy in Faustus as a figure for the worrisome lure

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72 This idea is related in obvious ways to Austin’s idea of the felicitous performance but it leans more specifically on Erving Goffman’s concept of professional comportment as performance, Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959; Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1973).

73 Howard, The Stage and Social Struggle, 33.

of stage poetry, has been long suspected. But Faustus’s use of infernal arts to raise his status from “base” of “stocke” also metaphorizes a situation some Elizabethans found even more intolerable: the “disparity between the actor’s offstage status and the one he assumed on stage” (11). Vocation, as we saw in chapter two, has much to do with the maintenance of proper “place,” in the most socially conservative sense. For a well-known faction of antitheatrical moralists, the impropriety of considering playing and playwrighting “vocations” was proven not only by such worker’s trucking in idolatrously magical imagery and language, but by their undermining of vocation’s stabilizing function. It was the business of players to impersonate a king one moment, a rustic “losel” the next, and the player, as Jean MacIntyre and Garrett P.J. Epp remind us, “did not just play the lord on the stage; he hid his true status by wearing stage finery on the street and encouraging others to imitate him.” Playing was more than an illegitimate vocation, it was an anti-vocation, whose ubiquitous presence cast suspicion upon real kings and losels as being somehow ‘performed.’ Additionally, those players and playwrights who exhorted auditors to virtue came under fire for their vicious usurping of the preacher’s vocation. Marlowe did not offer

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75See, for example, D.J. Palmer’s “Magic and Poetry in Doctor Faustus,” The Critical Quarterly 6:1 (1964), 56-67. A variation on this theme is magic as a figure for scholarship seen in studies such as Robert B. Heilman’s “The Tragedy of Knowledge: Marlowe’s Treatment of Faustus,” Quarterly Review of Literature 2 (1946), 316-32 and Kott’s, Bottom Translation, 3.

76MacIntyre and Epp, “Cloathes worth all the rest,” 269.


78White, “Theater and Religious Culture,” 140.


Heywood’s or even Sidney’s more ambivalent defense of what Greenblatt calls “drama’s participation in . . . an admonitory fiction upholding a moral order”; instead, he seemed to regard drama’s engagement with inculcating morals “with a blend of obsessive fascination and contemptuous loathing.”

Consequently, his staging of a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, the devil’s going invisible, and other well-worn moral drama devices in *Faustus* exposes not only the extent to which Puritan accusations of theatre’s moral corruption depend upon a particular interpretation of matter, but how theatre’s answering pretension to moral enrichment relies on interpretation, as well.

Given the residual stigma of theatre, it is no wonder that so many well-known Elizabethan players and playwrights had themselves identified in official records with occupations like “grocer,” “saddler” or “yeoman”—appellations “that may have [had] nothing to do with [their] actual means of livelihood.”

But, if the legitimacy of a “profession” of playing or playwrighting was still being contested at the ideological level, it is evident that, at the material level, theatre folk had been functioning as professionals for some time. O’Day lists a number of characteristics modern sociologists and historians associate with professionalism, including an appeal to expertise, a large amount of autonomy in the workplace, an esprit de corps, a professional ethic, and internal control of training, recruitment, placement and discipline.

We have seen the appeal to expertise in the way companies like Leicester’s and Lord Rich’s Men, then individuals like Marlowe, learn to capitalize upon their surplus labor to create a bankable

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82 Ingram, *The Business of Playing*, 100. Also see Peter Stallybrass for economic reasons players became masters and maintained their memberships in the London guilds, “Worn Worlds: Clothes and Identity on the Renaissance Stage,” *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, 289-320.
commodity of style. Autonomy in the workplace and camaraderie are, as I have argued, among the features that made playing so appealing from its very inception as players took *Mankind* through East Anglia. A professional ethic, touched upon briefly in chapter three, will become more overt in our upcoming look at Jonson’s work, but the internal control of players is already a well-known feature of the playing company by the time of Marlowe’s success. It manifests, materially, in the form of the contract.

James Shapiro and others have drawn our attention to the new imposition of “outrageously exorbitant bonds upon Elizabethan players” by theatre owners and managers, but E.K. Chambers’s earlier investigation of “actor’s economics” reminds us that strict, legal bonds were arranged between sharers, as well, “accordinge to the custome of players.” Contracts, then, were as much a part of the “profession” of playing in Elizabethan London as for mercantile or artisanal professionals. They locked men into what Agnew describes as “a distinctive [because market-based] antagonistic relationship between partners”—one which the contract spells out and reduces to a simplified, binary structure of breach or fidelity.

This structure shadows the homologous covenant struck between God and his people, or rather, covenants, for as an even mildly skeptical early modern student of Church history could glean, the terms tended to change with historical conditions. For all the reformers’ avowed fidelity to an original, and therefore true, Church, sixteenth-century vocation is a fundamental novelty of Protestantism—as beholden to vestiges of late

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84 Shapiro, “Which is *The Merchant* here, and which *The Jew*?” 276-7. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 1:352. Ingram asserts that it was actually players who created Henslowes in order “to control the terms and circumstances under which they played,” *The Business of Playing*, 90.

medieval feudalism and its discontents as to Luther’s creative exegesis of I Corinthians. 86

To take a religious covenant on its own terms in the sixteenth century is to ignore what history and the market have to teach about the pragmatism of contracts and the competing interests of involved parties. Whatever God may have had in mind, there were men like Marlowe who recognized that earth-bound parties profited from the particular terms of what functioned as a social contract. Taken in context with the infamous Marlovian observation that religion began as a way “to keep men in awe” for political purposes, the comment that, “things esteemed to be done by divine power might have as well been done by observation of men,” suggests that he who understands what truly motivates men, and how to manipulate that motivation, may as well possess divine power. 87 Marlowe’s observations of men, as evidenced in his plays and the Baine’s note, suggest that what moves men and all they profess, be it religion or vocation, is belief.

Marlowe’s plays make a point of exposing the fallacy, and even malignity, of unexamined beliefs, or of being what Barabas would call “credulous” (1.2.361). In doing so, they suggest the extent to which belief inflects interpretation. This critique comes often, pointedly, in the precise place moral drama reserves for its moralitas, the very end of a play. Let us look, for a moment, at Ferneze’s much-discussed final couplet in Jew of Malta:

So march away, and let due praise be given
Neither to Fate nor Fortune, but to Heauen. (2409-10)

Even without the suggestively trite patness of the end-rhyme, the lines suggest the degree to which providential congruity is contingent upon prior belief, for Ferneze acknowledges

86 See the discussion of vocation in the chapter on Wager.
87 Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, 34, 47.
that while events could be interpreted to have been caused by pagan fate or fortune, he insists that only heaven should be credited. By arranging the play’s actions, and Ferneze’s ethos, in such a way as to make an earnest, Fernezian reading of the lines seriously problematic, Marlowe models the hollowness of Providential interpretation. In rhetorical terms, Ferneze’s assertion asks his auditors to lay down logos for pathos, to trade their knowledge of events in the play and their causes for what they felt to be true from the play’s prologue, before things grew so complex: before Jews, Turks and Christians became indistinguishable. Marlowe completes, in this conclusion of Jew of Malta, an extended Preston-like project of manipulating elements of moral drama to comment on the extent to which the supernatural depends upon the reading of signs.

Marlowe takes up the problem of discernment then, not by thematizing it as Wager and Jonson do, but by dramatizing both the characters’ and the audience’s willfully faulty, bigoted reading. Both Jew of Malta and Faustus train an especially critical lens on the mass morality hermeneutics disseminated through the state since the dissolution, a morality that professes to recognize diabolism or piety, devotion to duty or covetous self-interest through the apprehension of easy-to-read signs (linguistic to sartorial). Marlowe disparages this sanctimonious mode of interpretation for its reliance on prepackaged beliefs that distract from authentic social, political and economic conflicts of the day.

All Ambiguities

Between the value relations of the feudal mode of production and the generalized value form of capitalism, theorist Jean-Joseph Goux describes “a situation of rivalry, of crisis, of conflict. . . [in which] a commodity cannot express its own value once and for
all, cannot fix its own price in an absolute universal estimate.\textsuperscript{88} This insecure, transitional “phase II” position seems descriptive not only of the competing modes of production in late sixteenth-century England, but of the status of the middling sort themselves in the 1580s and 90s. Parity between the social and the economic, as increasingly distinct ethical, aesthetic and hermeneutic spheres—a parity arguably derived from the earlier totality of social and economic matters—produces the middling aspirant of this period as a commodity in competition with all other commodities to establish himself as valued or even singular.\textsuperscript{89}

The contemplative individual’s sense of the disparity between his labor and its market value interests Marlowe in both plays. Marx describes the relation of the capitalist worker to his own labor in the \textit{Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts} as, “an alien activity not belonging to him. . . the worker’s own physical and mental energy, his personal life indeed, for what is life but activity?—as an activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him.”\textsuperscript{90}

In this light, one way to understand the contract signing scene is as Faustus’s desperate attempt to regain control of his labor power by manipulating the worldly economy through the heavenly one. By trading the unknown value of his soul (elect or reprobate) for twenty-four years of temporal dominance, he attempts to fix his fortunes in this world and the next. At the worldly level, he ensures for himself the “power. . .

\textsuperscript{88}Goux, \textit{Symbolic Economies}, 15.

\textsuperscript{89}Hawkes restates the by now well-recognized fact that for early moderns, there is no distinct realm of the economic. Instead, the vocabulary from what we now describe as separate registers of ethics, aesthetics, religion, etc. was all used to think about economics, \textit{Idols of the Marketplace}, 17. I deliberately gender the commodity “himself” here, in acknowledgement that the female “commodity” takes a significantly different path to singular status in this period.

\textsuperscript{90}Quoted in Hawkes, \textit{Idols of the Marketplace}, 14-15.
honor. . . [and] omnipotence” “promised,” but in fact rarely delivered in the 1580’s to “the studious Artizan” of humanist studies (82-3). At the heavenly level, he strikes preemptively at the dilemma of Calvinist predestination—he resolves uncertainty through the surety of his own damnation.

Yet, Faustus discovers what Goux ascertains, that “value is presupposed by formal identity. . . even if no real permutation, no give-and-take trade actually makes the substitution of equivalents visible.”{91} Despite magic, Faustus can only achieve value if he enters an already largely established, institutionalized hierarchy of value. His desire to upend extant hierarchies, having “students” in the “publike schooles with silk. . . brauely clad” while the low-born Faustus reigns “great Emperour of the world,” is doomed to failure (119-20, 340). This is because value, as Goux illustrates, depends upon a specular structure grounded in the social—a structure defined by, though not limited to, convention.{92} Faustus’ fantastic world, where silks and emperies still constitute the pinnacles of value in their respective categories, is not new but merely topsy-turvey, like that of a hundred Vices before him.{93} As a Vice-world, or carnivalesque inversion of the hegemonic, it does not require the radical socioeconomic restructuring of something like, say, leveling. Instead, it operates by exchanging the elite (masters, elders, aristocrats) for the lowly (students, youth, commoners), a move which, in its tacit acknowledgement of standard values, has no truly radical effect. All of the sartorial and linguistic signs of distinction remain conventional because it is only in relation to these that Faustus’s novelties stand a chance of being taken as meaningful—judged felicitous.

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{92}Ibid, 14-5.
The Jew of Malta explores value’s dependence on convention in a way that is a variation of this treatment in Faustus, for when “put to [his] shifts,” Barabas defies the conventions of social custom, and embraces ideological conventions to manipulate those around him (1.503). For example, Barabas immediately rejects an exchange early modern auditors would have recognized as the typical path by which Elizabethans with marginal social status and an excess of money gained security for their households: through marriage. As neither of Abigail’s Christian suitors seem in the least bit concerned about any legal obstacle to marriage, the contemporary European concerns about Jewish assimilation and loyalty Shapiro has described as placing serious constraints on Jewish “issues of inheritance,” do not seem to pertain to Barabas’s Malta.94

Ostensibly, then, the linking of Barabas’s house with the governor’s could safeguard his wealth from further theft through the cultural currency of social legitimacy and political alliance. For the true “Machiau’il,” such an arrangement would be optimal, even if it meant going through the motions of conversion, but Barabas, as so many have noted, is a rather poor student of the nefarious Italian.95

Significantly, when faced with the same “amina[cable]” solution Menelaus accepts in Horestes, to bury the hatchet and join houses, Barabas rejects it for the very alternative both Pikering’s and Preston’s plays denounce: revenge. Any possibility for the socially and economically salubrious concord proposed by the earlier chronicle moralities

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93 Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition, 159.

94 Shapiro, Shakespeare and the Jews, 181.

vanishes once Barabas decides to exact vengeance on Ferneze by killing his son.

Barabas’s fatal trust in the merchant’s handshake he later exchanges to seal his deal with the governor is based on a mercantile ethic, that “he from whom my most aduantage comes,/Shall be my friend” (5.2215-6), but Marlowe insists that even this ethos is naïve. Business is never just business.

Additionally, Barabas fails to recognize the degree to which state power trumps mercantile power in this transitional period. As David Thurn reminds us, merchants’ capital is still “strictly limited in being subject to the hierarchical obligations imposed by sovereign power.” Barabas’s riches, like Faustus’s powers, augment his value only within certain conventional relationships defined by the state and its enabling ideology. And in the kind of would-be absolutism wielded by Ferneze, business is also intensely personal in that the health of the state is contingent upon the health of the sovereign. By grafting his personal grievances onto state policy Ferneze may proceed with the clear conscience of the righteous, to seize the occasion of Barabas’s ingenuous trust and rid himself of the man he wronged, cancel his personal debt to him, kill the murderer of his son, and reverse Malta’s debt to Turkey through ransom, all the while exonerating Malta of all blame by laying the destruction of the Turks on the “Iewes curtesie” (5.2394).

**Riding in Malta Rhode**

We saw in chapter two, especially, how humanism and commonwealth ideology depict service to the state as the proper, indeed, the sole Godly end, of all learning. It has been noted that Marlowe’s education, ideally suited for would-be clerics and gentlemen’s

96Thurn, “Economic and Ideological Exchange,” 162.
sons, fails to guarantee employment for an entire generation of university-trained scholars, and leaves a man of Marlowe’s class and proclivities exposed to alternative state service.\textsuperscript{97} That Marlowe, in his intelligence work abroad, gained a somewhat bitter understanding of how commonwealth ideology benefits particular political-economic agendas, euphemizing any number of morally suspect activities (such as counterfeiting), is suggested in these plays by the ubiquitous diction of merchant adventuring.\textsuperscript{98} Some twenty years ago Greenblatt linked the “acquisitive energies of English merchants. . . and adventurers” to Tamburlaine’s “restlessness and violence” and Faustus’s passionate consuming.\textsuperscript{99} More recently, James Shapiro has described how early modern commercial practices of “hazarding” inform Shakespeare’s dramatic response to Marlowe’s \textit{Jew}.\textsuperscript{100} I want to look, briefly but more directly, at the socioeconomic structures that color character and theme in the manner these writers suggest.

Theodore Leinwand and others have demonstrated how adventuring is conceptually linked to illegitimate profit in the period. At the same time, the hazarding of capital or self on overseas commercial adventures that were “alternately, or simultaneously. . . trade and plunder” tied adventurers of all social backgrounds to state interests.\textsuperscript{101} The dilemmas of Faustus and Barabas are to some degree produced and compounded by their entanglement in what an Elizabethan auditor would have associated with the deal-making

\textsuperscript{97}Hardin, “Marlowe and the Fruits of Scholarism,” 390.

\textsuperscript{98}For basic biographical information, including Marlowe’s service abroad, such older studies as Kocher’s, \textit{Christopher Marlowe} and John Bakeless’ \textit{The Tragicall History of Christopher Marlowe}, 2 vols (1942; Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964) remain useful. The most recent biographical study is David Rigg’s \textit{The World of Christopher Marlowe} (London: Faber, 2004; reprint, New York: Henry Holt, 2005).


\textsuperscript{100}Shapiro, “Which is \textit{The Merchant} here, and Which \textit{The Jew}?,” 275.

\textsuperscript{101}Leinwand, \textit{Theatre, Finance and Society}, 113.
practices of “venturers.” The paradoxes at the heart of these compromises, with the state and other venturers, must have seemed to Marlowe irresistibly indicative of the utter contingency of morality. Acts of piracy—violent looting, burning, killing, the seizure of ships, towns and persons—punishable by death as “high treason” as late as 1413, were worthy of a knighthood by Elizabeth’s reign. ¹⁰² What distinguished pirates from privateers was authorization by the state. As political scientist Janice E. Thomson explains, privateering involved a formal agreement whereby the Crown sanctioned the privateer’s violence (directed toward state enemies), for a cut of the profits. Thomson estimates that “some ten to fifteen percent of England’s total imports,” were gained through the authorized piracy of men like Drake, Raleigh and Clifford. ¹⁰³

The problem of privateering illustrates the problem of “policy”: the extent to which state approval legitimizes activities that a culture otherwise excoriates. The “mischief” or grievous harm denounced in Mankind’s era in whatever estate it appeared, now greases the economic wheels of a rapidly expanding network of national and international markets, allowing adventurers and artisans alike to work in relative security. It worked like this: the state, as the sole upholder of civil law through its monopolized machinery of violence (to punish transgression), offered surety of “the peace,” an orderly (or “amicable,” as Preston and Pikering might say) environment conducive to economic transactions. The novelty is not the order, but the early modern state’s installation of itself in the role of keeper and insurer of that order, for as Thomson remarks, “the process by which control over violence was centralized, monopolized, and made hierarchical

¹⁰³ Ibid, 23.
entailed not the state’s establishment and defense of a new legal order but the state’s imposing itself as the defender of that order.”  

Under state auspices, force was split into two, mutually reinforcing forms: the ‘carrot’ of economic reward (and the implied alternative of penury), which fueled everything from agricultural innovation to Walsingham’s spy network, and, perhaps more familiar to students of early modernity, the ‘stick’ of corporal punishment.  

We have in Faustus, a man poised figuratively between these two motivators—motivators Marlowe has taken care to color in very historically-significant ways. Faustus’ pageant for the Emperor, for example, performs a function much like a court masque, of fashioning “heroic roles for the leaders of society.”  

For performing this conservative “duety,” Faustus gains social currency from the Emperor and “a bounteous reward” (1102, 1022, 1105). Thus, his necromantic skills support the political hierarchy as surely as the orthodox vocations he rejected in the first scene. Hell, itself, becomes an adjunct of the state in this scenario, functioning as the threat of violence that coerces Faustus to at least pretend to believe in principles underlying both the diabolical contract and the Christian state. The Godly state and its ministers need the devil “to keep men in awe”: to coerce them to willingly part with the surplus of their own labor. 

What I want to emphasize is the degree to which Faustus dramatizes and ponders what has been described as the capitalist move par excellence: the separation of the

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104Ibid., 3, 11.

105On the early modern English state’s involvement in agricultural and other lucrative projects, see Thirsk’s Economic Policy and Projects.


107Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, 48.
“moment of appropriation” from “the moment of coercion.”

It is no longer the local Lord’s men who both seize surplus and punish those who would withhold it. Rather, the seizure and coercion of the old, feudal contract are disguised by the new contract’s impersonal and equitable appearance, a mannerly facade that cloaks raw violence in the dispassionate rhetoric of the contract until the unfortunate breach.

4. Conclusions

Faustus: *Vaine Trifles*

We have seen, now, how Marlowe deliberately invokes then thwarts the expectations of moral drama to create meaning. Often, this takes the form of the kind of social, political, or linguistic analysis we have already noted. At other moments, Marlovian deformation also trains a light on the psychological processes behind a cultural phenomenon. To think about the psychology of mercantilism in *Faustus*, Marlowe deforms old-school characterization—specifically that of the devil and the witty fool.

After his initial, conventionally “ugly” entrance, Mephistopheles presents quite a striking departure from his predecessor Vices and devils (259). He never outrageously deceives, but remains remarkably transparent in his dealings with the doctor, appearing undisguised, answering Faustus’ questions with baleful candor, even attempting to dissuade him from selling his soul, with the plea, “O Faustus, leaue these friuolous demaunds,/Which strike a terror to my fainting soule” (317-8). He does not volunteer information, such as the possibility of salvation implicit in his forcing Faustus to renew the contract, but neither does he white-wash the terms of the arrangement (1311-12). In

making the devil, traditionally a liar, honest, Marlowe reveals that Faustus’ deception is not a function of diabolical trickery, but of the nature of desire, itself—the mirage-like quality of the Lacanian object-a so sharply evoked in Faustus’ crestfallen receipt of the book of all knowledge: “O thou art deceiued” (Faustus 610).  

In point of fact, it is Faustus and not the devil who deals unscrupulously, for if Faustus does not actually believe in the “vaine trifles of mens soules” then the first condition to which he agrees, “that Faustus may be a spirit in forme and substance,” is falsely made (297, 528). If Mephistopheles’ description of hell is only the latest in the series of “meere olde wiues tales” Faustus has scorned all his life, then Faustus’s promise to give himself to hell must be fraudulent, as well (567). Mephistopheles, who knows at least what we know, nevertheless speculates on Faustus’s soul, illustrating throughout the course of the play, the “toil, risk and prize-taking” that characterize early modern adventuring. In this way, Doctor Faustus suggests that if “scholers” of stage-poetry are the cozeners others suspect them of being, speculation is the devil’s own game—one just as dependent upon astute judgement and manipulation of character and audience (1101).  

Mephistopheles can throw in with Faustus because he is familiar with his type. He can afford to be brutally honest—“Thinkst thou that I who saw the face of God,/... Am not tormented with ten thousand hels,/In being depriv’d of euerlasting blisse?” (313-

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109 In Marlowe’s source, the German Faustbook, Mephistopheles is not permitted to lie by the terms of the pact. Marlowe’s omission of this detail makes the devil’s honesty more terrible, for it seems based on an assessment of Faustus’s foolishness.
110 Leinwand, Theater, Finance and Society, 119.
111 Ingram makes a strong case for the prejudice against players being based on “market resistance,” The Business of Playing, 44.
16)—because he knows that the transaction depends not upon his salesmanship but on the nature of desire itself: “that like I best that flyes beyond my reach,” as the Duke of Guise will one day put it.\footnote{Marlowe, The Massacre at Paris, 99, Works.} Perhaps most reassuring of all, Mephistopheles knows that clever fools tend to destroy themselves, and belief, when it comes to such men, derives from what they can see and feel—“lines, circles, scanees, letters and characters,” contracts drawn in their own blood, the unyielding force of the constabulary hand as Mephistopheles begins to “arrest” the vacillating doctor “for disobedience to my soueraigne Lord” (79, 1304-5). In the tradition of moral drama, Faustus’s devil has changed to suit the times. In a little more than one hundred years, he has gone from the roaring Tityvillus of Mankind and lying Vice of Cambises to the plain-spoken but calculating options analyst with whom it might be said, in Marlowe’s vein, that, “things esteemed to be donn by devine power might haue aswell been don by observation of men.”

What Meanes This Shewe?

I have been arguing that Faustus dilates an earlier drama’s commonwealth nightmare of the foolish wit. Like his predecessors, Faustus clings to a kind of literalism, a faith in the simplicity or transparency of objects that is no less idolatrous than Barabas’s passion for his bags.\footnote{Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, 47.} Idolatry, per David Hawkes description in Idols of the Marketplace, is the “autonomy of representation” whereby “image and presentation overwhelm
content.”

Not Calvin’s definition, it nevertheless comes closer to what I believe Marlowe has in mind, for the danger of idolatry in these plays lies not in its offence to God, but in the way it obscures the idolater’s powers of perception, leaving him vulnerable to predators, including those who profess Christian piety.

Marlowe illustrates this in the conjuring scene, not only in Faustus’s smug confidence in “the force of Magicke and my spels” but in the peculiar way he interprets (266). Upon Mephistopheles’s entrance, Faustus fights his initial revulsion at the devil’s “too vgly” appearance—an instinct which might have goaded him to protect himself from what constitutes, in the world of the narrative, a very real danger (259). Play-loving Faustus ignores content to focus on the image, itself, and is reminded of Bale’s Three Laws, or a similar play in which evil enters, dressed “lyke a graye fryre.”

His pleasure at having remembered what “shape becomes a diuell best,” overrides his fear and Faustus stands at an amused remove as he commands the devil to “goe and returne an old Franciscan Frier”(260-1). Moral drama, whose proponents argue its wholesome purpose to help auditors to identify sin, becomes in the hands of the overly-clever, a means for self-deception.

Even confronted with the transformed Mephistopheles, a veritable emblem of moral drama’s warning that danger sometimes disguises itself as spiritual aid, Faustus can only appreciate his own witty recognition of the sign’s conventions. His reaction to the moral drama “shew” of the seven deadly sins is much the same. Rather than ponder

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114 Hawkes, Idols of the Marketplace, 4.

115 Kott notes that “The devil always appears in disguise, because otherwise he could frighten but not tempt,” The Bottom Translation, 6.

116 Bevington mentions this innovation of Bale’s in Mankind to Marlowe, 74-5. Mephistopheles also appears to Faustus as a gray friar in the German Faustbook, Kott, The Bottom Translation, 6.

117 Matalene confirms that Faustus is “a ‘wit,’ whose great delight is in watching himself make “obscure and tenuous verbal connections,” 506.
the pageant to identify “sinnes” within himself, he delightedly converses with them like one of Dekker’s despised gentleman auditors, pointedly refusing to recognize them (721). He is equally obtuse about the “mean[ing]” of Mephistopheles “delight[ing] his minde” with dancing devils in the precise moment he is attempting to read his own symptom, on his arm (510-514). 118

Many have speculated on the significance of this repression, from Greenblatt’s discernment of a “despairing faith,” to Darryll Grantley’s claim for the realization of “divine authority as a theatrical construct,” but I would suggest that at the root of what Faustus does not want to know, indeed, what is truly despair-inducing, is his submission to the very system he has struggled to escape, that to which he has been cultivated to serve. 119 The contract, in this light, figures forth the imperative by which individuals in proto-capitalist London must enter into market relations to gain access to the means of living. 120 Faustus becomes a test case for a new Moros, a Philologus (lover of the word) trained up for state service, who chafes at the bit and would rather make the surplus of his labor—the libidinally satisfying play of poetic production—an end in itself. 121

For Marlowe, whose work stands at the center of a number of linked controversies in the period concerning specific types of learned labor, black magic serves as an obvious analogy to literary and theatrical production, as well as to the power and lure of literary

118 Heilman reads the inscription as “neurosis” in “The Tragedy of Knowledge,” 323, 325.
119 Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 214.
120 Wood describes this compulsion as “the distinctive and dominant characteristic of the capitalist market,” The Origin of Capitalism, 7.
121 Wager, Longer Thou Livest, 1065.
language itself. Classical authorities in which Marlowe was well versed acknowledge rhetoric’s ability to “bewitch” its listeners, but Marlowe may have first learned about the perils of studying humanist texts from the “riming mother wits” of his own youth. What is William Wager’s “cunning man without wisdom” but one of Ascham’s “quick wits”? Such students “commonly may prove the best poets” for their ardent and rapid internalization of classical learning, but as Ascham notes, they often fail to be, “in the end, either very fortunate for themselves or very profitable to serve the common wealth”.

Like Faustus, quick wits find pleasure in the process of invention, itself, in their mastery and defiance of form and matter—the “infinite riches” they compress and deftly arrange in the “little roome” of the stanza, set speech, or dialogue. Despite his struggle to retain the libidinal gratification of such labor, Faustus is increasingly overwhelmed by the very objects that enable the humanist writer’s labor: the book, the contract, the legitimizing matter of Troy. This is the relationship Marx will describe as commodification, in which the object absorbs the subject’s labor until it resembles a property of the object, itself.

As the play progresses, Faustus’s productions fall more and more under the spell of humanist studies, reproducing the very education that made him: the scaling of Mount Olympus in Medea’s dragon-drawn chariot, the command performance of “blinde Homer”, the tryst with Helen of Troy. Even the moral

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122 Bruster suggests that Marlowe “cloaks pure production—as the theater did so often itself—in the folds of black magic,” Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare, 41. Bartels shows the perceived closeness of magic to such legitimate fields of knowledge as “religion, humanism, medicine, science, and law,” Spectacles of Strangeness, 118.


124 Wager, Enough is as Good, 1949; Ascham, The Scholemaster, 21-3.

125 Marx, Capital, 1:272.
program of late sixteenth century English leadership is reproduced, from Faustus’s gulling of the roguish “Horse-courser” (1189), to his harrassing of the Pope (861-904). All that is surplus—the *difference* between Faustus’s conjuring and the labor of a merchant who can bring a Duchess grapes out of season (1199-1237) or that of a poet whose seductive powers can put “horns” on an “iniurious knight” (1083-1103)—is absorbed back into the very economy his initial defection to necromancy sought to evade.

Even sexuality, which like surplus labor presents a provocative excess to an emerging “ethics of use,” draws Faustus back into an orthodox cultural dynamic. To see how this works, we must recall that what Faustus really desires is an “end.” This end ties the play’s formal patterns—from its ubiquitous diction of hunger and devouring to its staging of homophagic acts (Helen sucking forth Faustus’s soul, Faustus being engulfed in hell-mouth)—to its thematic ones of religion, economics, and literary and theatrical representation. The end is figured in myriad ways, for Faustus, but what it eventually comes down to is the typical end for a material commodity—to be used up. In the final scene, what he longs for in terms of being “dissolud in elements” as “ayre,” “little water drops,” a “foggy mist” in the Ocean, figures forth what theorist Leo Bersani describes in “Representation and Its Discontents” as “desire satisfied as a disruption or destabilization of the self”: in short, cessation (1445, 1446,1463). Bersani writes here of “sexuality,” not of death, but his focus on the violence of libido’s end, orgasm, “a condition of broken negotiations with the world,” a “shattering,” puts sexuality on a continuum that most

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126 See Heilman, “The Tragedy of Knowledge,” 317-8, and Hammill, “Faustus’s Fortunes,” 32-3 for two very different readings of the play’s preoccupation with “ends.”

students of Freud would find inclusive of death.\textsuperscript{128} Texts like 
Faustus, which make sexuality inextricable from commodity consumption, cause us ponder the degree to which this structure of sexuality is conditioned by a capitalist, and therefore early modern to modernist, perspective. Faustus frantically spends twenty-four years consuming in order to distract himself from the knowledge that the drive to consume—the expansive, libidinal drive of eros—is ceaseless, and the only way it ends is not when one is “glutted” with objects, but when one becomes the object that gluts, which is to say, when one is consumed (106).\textsuperscript{129} Faustus’s particular end is decreed by the very choices he made to augment his social value. He entered market relations only when he could vaunt himself a singularized commodity (unique, unexchangeable) but despite all of his efforts to shape himself into an epic hero—sung by Homer, kissed by Helen—his end will not be “walking, disputing &c.” in “Elizium” (571, 295). Instead, the conjurer is carried off to glut “Vgly hell” (1476), and something else. . .

Marlowe turns to a final deformation of moral dramatic conventions to suggest an ignoble afterlife for the necromancer. Turning to the final chorus, we recall that moral drama generally reserves this space to deliver a morally orthodox interpretation of preceding events. I have already suggested that the Chorus delivers a Wageresque condemnation of “forward wits,” but there is an equally significant allusion (1484). Compare the moralitas that concludes the section on Shore’s wife in the very popular Mirror for Magistrates (1563 edition), with the first lines of Marlowe’s Chorus:

\textsuperscript{128}Freud famously suggests that the erotic, “sexual instincts” “serve the death instincts” in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, n. 21, 73, and 75-8, especially.

\textsuperscript{129}Kopytoff describes the capitalist exchange system’s “drive to commoditization” as an expansive impulse to render everything exchangeable, and therefore, consumable, Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things,” 72-3.
They [“frendes”] brake the boowes and shakte the tree by sleyght,
And bent the wand that might have growen ful streight

Cut is the branch that might haue growne ful straight,
And burned is Apolloes Laurel bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man: (Faustus 1478-80)

For Marlowe’s audience, this unmistakable echo of the story of Shore’s wife—like
Helen of Troy a singular, and calumniated beauty—would have linked Faustus to these
two royal concubines. Faustus’s afterlife will finally be the same as theirs: the end of an
erotically-charged commodity doomed to endless consumption, passed from hand to hand
(untill disintegration or other destruction) to serve as a mirror for civic leaders. Faustus
becomes, in the end, precisely the “character in a story not his own” he once played at;
precisely the reified “drudge” who will ceaselessly labor at another’s (ultimately God’s)
pleasure in the role of the cautionary tale (62).

Jew of Malta: If You Rob Me Thus

The following discussion takes as its starting point the trope of theft, specifically that
metaphorized in the activities of the cut-purse. Returning to the trope adds a clear but
fresh warrant to claims about Marlowe’s continuity with older, moral drama, but and
demonstrates something characteristic about what I have been calling Marlowe’s process
of deformation. We shall see how the meanings Marlowe wrests from the cutpurse trope

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130 The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Lily B. Campbell, Huntington Library Publications (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 139-40. On the identification of these lines as the source for Marlowe’s epilogue, see Betty C. Martin, “‘Shore’s Wife’ as the Source of the Epilogue to Dr. Faustus,” Notes and Queries, 195 (1950), 182, and William Elton, in the same volume, “‘Shore’s Wife’ and Dr. Faustus,” 520.

131 Hammill, “Faustus’s Fortunes,” 332. On the early modern word “drudgery’s” association with sexual labor, see Bruster, Drama and Market in the Age of Shakespeare, 53-4.
contribute to issues we have seen raised in earlier chapters: anxieties about professional playing, market antagonism and the state.

At first glance, the nominal cutpurse of moral drama seems to be absent from *Jew of Malta*; in fact it is submerged until it is almost an unconscious tic of the text. It surfaces in the name of “Pilia-borsa” (Italian for pickpurse) the courtesan’s man (3.1158) and in Barabas’s own name, recalling the thief and murderer notoriously released in lieu of Jesus.  It emerges in Barabas’s crack that a Turkish slave must possess “some new tricke for a purse” to warrant his high price, and is emblematized, finally, in Ferneze’s cutting of the cord which deprives Barabas of his life (2.865, 5.2346). In being submerged, the trope extends the unsettling extratheatrical moment of *Cambises*’ “cousin cutpurse” to the entire tone of the play. Theft itself becomes the controlling metaphor for Marlowe’s conception of political economy in the way that “superfluity” once figured forth the *Mankind* author’s apprehension of socioeconomic change in East Anglia.

Looking at what I have called the trial scene, Barabas’s first engagement with Ferneze, we will see how Marlowe makes a subtle theft, the cut-purse’s larceny, a figure for the relationship between the private citizen, his wealth and the state.

My reading of Barabas as ‘private citizen’ stems from my suspicion that Marlowe uses his protagonist’s Jewishness much as Jonson will deploy the Iniquity tradition through Carlo Buffone, as a kind of distraction—what Jameson describes as a form of


133 Thievery was divided into three major categories under English law: “burglary,” which involved breaking into a building under specified conditions, “robbery” which involved the use of violence or intimidation, and “larceny,” which, as a form of theft without violence or intimidation, would include the cutting of purses, Heather Dubrow, “‘In Thievish Ways’: Troops and Robbers in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Early Modern England,” *Neo-Historicism: Studies in Renaissance Literature, History and Politics*, eds. Robin Headlam Wells, Glenn Burgess and Rowland Wymer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 219.
“censorship.” For Jameson, the censoring device’s function is “to forestall any conscious realization on the part of the subject [auditor] of his own impoverishment; and to prevent him from drawing any practical conclusions as to the causes for that impoverishment. . . in the social system itself.”

Marlowe counts on his audience’s narrow-minded hatred of Jews and Machiavels, as well as their fascination with the theatrical showmanship of the Vice to hide the identity of the actual social threat. At the same time, he offers them the means to see through this guise. For example, the trial scene’s allusion to the saint’s trial serves on one level to neutralize the audience’s animosity toward Barabas. This allows them to focus on the several important questions raised in this part of the play: what limits, if any, should there be on a private citizen’s freedom to thrive? What does the citizen owe the state, and to whom precisely is this debt owed? What circumstances legitimize the state’s seizure of its citizens’ goods?

When Barabas protests his dispossession, Marlowe puts a traditional, commonwealth answer to these questions in Ferneze’s mouth: “Better one want for a common good”, says the Governor of Malta, “Then many perish for a priuate man” (1.331-2). If Faustus condemns the humanist/Commonwealth program for indoctrinating its citizens, Jew of Malta attacks it for arming state leaders with the means to disguise their motives, from themselves as well as from others. The opposition in Ferneze’s sententious declaration between “common good” and “private man” throws the ugly pall of “covetousness”—considered in popular terms as an “inordinate and culpable desire of possessing that which belongs to another or to which one has no right”—over Barabas’s reluctance to

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part with his wealth. In short, Ferneze demonstrates how Christian morality can be used to make a not-unduly self-protecting citizen look like a covetous man, desiring (and acquiring) his wealth at the expense of others—in this case the commonwealth or “common good.” Marlowe can count on his audience to know how the covetous, Worldly Man, self-interestedly seizes, encloses, and privatizes the wealth that might otherwise be disseminated throughout the realm. Between this association of “private man” with enclosure, and that of mercantile adventuring with piracy, Barabas’s earlier stashing of “infinite riches in a little roome” takes on the distinctive taint of theft (1.72).

In assuring Barabas that “excess of wealth is cause of couetousnesse:/And couetousnesse, oh ‘tis a monstrous sinne,” Ferneze implies that the most virtuous thing Barabas can do at this point, is to vent his “monstrous” excess by permitting the state to siphon off his unnatural surplus for the good of the “multitude” (1.356-7, 330). The theft implied in the doctrine of covetousness justifies and euphemizes the theft of the state by giving the illusion of utter self-sufficiency and independent agency to “the private man”—an agency dozens of sermons of the period reiterate in order to castigate the lay lawyers, merchants, rich artisans and new gentlemen privatizing and piling up wealth in the new economy. The Jew of Malta demystifies this moralistic state-building by revealing a connection between what Immanuel Wallerstein calls “state machineries” and

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135 *OED*, s.v. “Covetousness.”

136 Appleby reminds us that in moral terms, enclosure of any kind signified “the individual’s intention of pursuing his own activities independent of others,” *Economic Thought and Ideology*, 58.

137 Thomson reminds us that “its [piracy’s] essence consists in the pursuit of private, as contrasted with public ends,” *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns*, 22.

138 For a condensed overview of examples, see White, *Social Criticism*. 

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their self-serving support of the private investor, for as we can infer from the play, the private accumulation of wealth does not occur in Malta (any more than it does in Elizabethan England) without the tacit approval of the state. 139 Ferneze’s rhetorical question to Barabas, “haue strangers leaue with vs to get their wealth?” evokes this tacit approval and makes pointed political sense of Ferneze’s later offer to allow Barabas to remain in Malta “where thou gotst thy wealth,/Liue still; and, if thou canst, get more” (291, 334-5). To execute or exile Barabas is “farre from vs and our profession” not because spilling “blood” is unChristian (378, 377) but because it is impolitic, in a strictly economic sense, to kill the goose that may, in time, produce more golden eggs. 140 The scene illuminates several disturbing ideas: that the state gives its citizens “leaue” to accumulate, strictly for reasons of state, and that religious and commonwealth ideology are mechanisms by which the state may legitimate its breaking of laws it putatively upholds to maintain the amicable peace.

This relationship between state and citizen snaps into focus under pressure of what Hammill, looking at the play in light of early modern political writer Jean Bodin, identifies as a “state of exception”: that moment of crisis in which the sovereign can legitimately assume full power to negotiate a situation for which there is a decided “absence of norms.” 141 In this extremity, the sovereign ostensibly arbitrates in such a manner.


140 Some have noted, however, that Ferneze’s decision not to exile or kill the Jews he despoils falls short of true Machiavellian prudence—something Barabas’s revenge appears to bear out.

141 Hammill, “Marlowe’s Atheism as Political Thought.”
way as to return the state to the norms of law as quickly as possible. Ferneze may bear the marks of the hard-working Tudor new man, from his deference to Calymath and del Bosco to his relatively modest lifestyle (Barabas informs us “the Gouernour feeds not as I doe,” [4.1984]), but the exceptional occasion of the Turkish tribute proves him capable of wielding sovereignty like a patrimonial-style Tudor monarch. Of this style of rule, Joyce Appleby notes that when faced with decisions that challenge traditional ecclesiastical or civil law (the dispossession of certain citizens, for example), “the king’s approval justifies the novelty; [and] the king’s disapproval signals its discontinuance.” But Marlowe suggests that the early modern English state’s theft is performed more covertly. Malta, like the criminal who commits “larceny” in early English law, seeks out the way to pick the purse of its wealthiest citizen “without violence or intimidation.”

Ferneze does not simply say, ‘In the name of Malta, I hereby seize all of your goods.’ Instead, he manipulates theological rhetoric to extend the state of exception, and thereby uses the very occasion of his appropriation to expand the scope and longevity of his sovereign powers. First, he describes the “leaue” Barabas and the Jews have been given to ply their trade as Malta’s culpable “sufferance” of those “who stand accursed in the sight of heauen” (1.295-7). In doing so, he rhetorically transforms novelty into long-standing tradition, for if, by Ferneze’s logic, the state customarily flouts “heauen[‘s]” laws by harboring the “accursed,” the occasional cessation of this “sufferance,” through the “extortion” of Jews, constitutes an act of Christian obedience (295-6). Theft is not theft, but the restoration of Divine law; the state of exception is not the Turkish demand

142Ibid., 2.
143Appleby, Economic Thought and Ideology, 30.
of back-tribute, but any time in which Malta suffers the “hatefull liues” of “infidels” (294-5). In consequence, as long as Malta harbors Jews and other “hereticks,” giving them “leaue” to prosper, the sovereign is at liberty to override whatever civil laws will conceivably return the state to its proper state of grace, under Divine law. In this way, Ferneze justifies stealing from Barabas even as he lays groundwork for future theft.

Barabas is free to prosper as long as the “euils” “apt to happen every day” can not be interpreted as divine punishment for Malta’s flouting of God’s law (1.457). When expedient, the governor may opt, like the sailors who reluctantly throw Jonah from their storm-tossed ship, to “saue the ruine of a multitude” by making a single, well-justified sacrifice (330). The legitimacy of this sacrifice depends upon the identification of certain subjects as “infidels” or what Hammill terms “accursed life,” that is, in the broadest sense, those “excluded from the everyday laws of the polis but included within the sphere of sovereign judgment” (2.1078). Early modern historical studies have identified such persons as sodomites, hereticks, witches and traitors—citizens whose property is seized by the state prior to their being made a spectacular example. Marlowe uses the first few scenes, up to the dispossession, to suggest how the state of exception helps to constitute “accursed life,” and how, as Victoria Kahn has argued in another context, “the problem of the exception is the problem of reason of state.”

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144 In his later, defiant rejection of melancholy, Barabas may ironically allude to Jonah when he vows to the “partiall heauens” (494):

And since you leaue me in the Ocean thus
To sinke or swim, and put me to my shifts,
I’le rouse my senses and awake myselfe. (Jew of Malta 502-4)


This is where “policie”—what Barabas drily describes as the Maltese Knights’ true “profession”—comes in (1.393). Policy, like the profession of Christianity, involves extensive rhetorical and interpretive work in the interest of promotion and preservation of a certain social norm. Alan Bray has analyzed the mechanics of this work and its construction of a specific form of accursed life in a well known essay for Queering the Renaissance. As Bray demonstrates, the identification of the “sodomite” depends upon the interpretation of a number of public signs, the majority of which are generally considered expressions of the ubiquitously revered “masculine friendship.” Through Bray’s test cases, we see the degree to which identification of the sodomitical relies upon those who “consciously manipulat[e] the signs of this code, for their own benefit.”

Keith Thomas and others have suggested similar, political motives behind the distinction between black magic and the white magic of religion and/or the new science. Policy, as Jew describes it, is an advantageous response to circumstances (state of exception or business as usual) legitimized by rhetorical manipulation of the state’s guiding principles. What plagues the perspicacious with “intolerable pangs” is the degree to which Christian morality lays the foundation for the politic theft of goods, or even life, cloaked and excused as the will of “Heauen” (5.2372, 2410).

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148 Ibid., 53.
149 Ibid., 51.
Bought with Bloud and Not with Gold

We saw in chapter three, how theft in the heightened antagonism of the market economy is understood to set into motion forces that may result in everything from the private loss of a harlot’s pay (Cambises) to the international losses of epic war (Horestes). Both plays urge an economically salubrious “amity” as an alternative to violent revenge. Twenty years later, when Ferneze steals Barabas’s wealth, amity is rejected as impossible. Why? *Jew of Malta* suggests that some injuries are larger than any amount of gold can ease. Barabas’s “excess aggressivity,” which has long troubled critics, is comprehensible when measured not by a standard of larceny, but as a requiting of what Barabas perceives to be theft of his “life” (1.376). To take a man’s means of support is tantamount to killing him, Barabas insists, “And therefore ne’re distinguish of the wrong” (384).

Wealth, as Barabas defines it, is no longer merely an amassing of valuable objects nor even the things the exchange of such objects obtains. Rather, wealth represents ”the labour of my life” (*Jew of Malta* 1.382). Like Marx, Barabas perceives his “ware”—the “. . .fiery Opals, Saphires, Amatists/Jacints, hard Topas, grasse-greene Emeraulds” collected in his counting house (68, 60-1)— as “definite masses of congealed labour-time.” If this is so, his vengeance for the theft of an entire life’s work cannot possibly be slaked by mere financial recovery, which he achieves, in fact, before the play is half over.

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151 Thurn notes that the excess aggressivity is frequently attributed to the revenger form of the play, or the ideological condensation of prejudice, “Economic and Ideological Exchange,”159.
152 Marx, *Capital*, 46.
To understand why only the death of Ferneze or Ferneze’s son will settle “the account” in Barabas’s mind we need to look more closely at the work done by the figures “hand” and “heart” in the play’s central scenes (2.1007). Together, these figures have become emblematic for the concept of political amity in the period, more commonly called “concord” in emblem books or poetry. In Geffrey Whitney’s 1585 *A Choice of Emblemes*, the entry for “Concord” features an engraving of two princes shaking right hands on a field flanked by calvary on one side, military tents on the other. The epigram reads:

Of kinges, and Princes greate, lo, Concorde ioynes the handes:  
And knittes theire subiectes hartes in one, and wealthie makes theire Landes.  

This is, essentially, the same enjoyment of wealth through political amity Preston advocated in *Cambises*, a play which also features an unusual number of references to ‘heart’ and ‘hand.’

In *Jew of Malta* the point appears to be that the hand, metonymous for all embodied acts (significantly speech), may be forced to act independently of and even in opposition to the heart’s intentions. Thus, does Barabas instruct Abigail in the necessary duplicity of “cunning Iew[s]”, to “let him [Lodowick] haue thy hand/But keepe thy heart till Don Mathias comes” (2.1000, 1071-2). The “fawn[ing]” and “grin[ning]” that Barabas says conceals the “bite” of Jews performs amity in the way J.L. Austin suggests, through the spectator’s assumption of a “spiritual shackle”: a belief that acts are tied to intentions.

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Marlowe trains us, through Barabas, to be smarter than this. He also gives us the negative example of Mathias, who credulously reads the convention of Abigail and Lodowick going “hand in hand” as the sign of true love (2.1041). Unlike Mathias, the sophisticated reader considers an act’s opacity, the fact that its true cause may never be known, and focuses instead, on what the act does. Like Faustus’s Mephistopheles, we need not concern ourselves with the intention behind the act (whether or not Faustus believes in hell, in God or his own soul, etc.); we need only note that his actions have “rack[e] the name of God” and put him “in danger to be damnd” (Faustus 1.282, 286). Faustus’s bad faith (his heart being inclined differently than his hand) is inconsequential before the spectre of compulsion that hovers around working words, which is to say performative words that do something in the social world.

The play’s best reader vows, after viewing the slain bodies of Mathias and Lodowick, to discover who “forced their hands divide united hearts” (3.1217). The spectre of compulsion that haunts Ferneze’s correct interpretation, here, leads us back to the play’s primal, coercive act. In the trial scene, Ferneze forces Barabas to “be patient” in the face of “exceeding wrong” (1.355, 386); in exchange, Barabas may “Liue still [in Malta]; an if thou canst, get more [wealth]” (335). Barabas protests his dispossession on the Christian moral grounds that he has always conducted his affairs “righteously” (349), but Ferneze manipulates the logic of predestination to cow the Jew: “If thou rely vpon thy righteousnesse./Be patient and thy riches will increase” (354-5). If Barabas is truly as

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154 I extend Austin’s argument about speech acts to gestures on the grounds of what Thurn and others have argued about Marlowe’s tendency to conflate the figurative and the literal, or substitute one for the other, as in the dagger Tamburlaine sends Agydas to interpret, Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 9; Thurn, “Sights of Power in Tamburlaine,” English Literary Renaissance, 19:1 (1989), 12.

155 Marlowe, Tamburlaine, 2.3.623.
“righteous” [or, elect] as he declares, the rapid recovery of his wealth will prove it (349-50). Patience, which demonstrates one’s faith in election and resignation to Divine will, is the righteous, or pious position Barabas is expected to adopt. It shows forth the good faith of the saintly, from “Job” to Foxe’s martyrs, and arouses the “pity” Barabas so despises (413-23, 153). Barabas’s lack of patience and thirst for vengeance render him as Dena Goldberg suggests, “a travesty of a suffering hero or Christ,” a move that strips the passio’s traditional glorification of human suffering down “to its political functions.”

In refusing to suffer quietly, Barabas denies Ferneze’s larceny ease. He will not contribute to the Christian affective economy of sainthood he describes when he observes in an earlier scene:

> Who hateth me but for my happiness?
> . . .Rather had I a Jew be hated thus,
> Then pittied in a Christian pouerty: (150-53)

Here, envy dogs the happiness of those blessed with remarkable surplus—those like Barabas, who rise above the common fray and are “on ever’ry side inrich’d” (1.142). If saints are not envied their blessed surplus—be it supernatural power, intelligence or virtue—it is only because their suffering outweights it. Barabas recognizes how poverty, or any lack for which “pouerty” may metaphorically stand, disarms envy, replacing it with an identificatory sympathy—with pity. This sympathy, as Bersani provocatively points out, is not without a “trace” of “pleasure,” something of which Barabas, in his refusal to edify others with the requisite performance of noble suffering, seems aware on

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156 Goldberg, “Sacrifice in Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta,” 237.
some level. Marlowe invites sympathy for Barabas, only to frustrate it. In this way, 

Jew teeters so precariously on the brink of the passio that some have defended Barabas as “the helpless victim of this act of legal theft.” His “extreme revenge” demonstrates that he is nothing of the sort. He very pointedly defies the Christian sacrificial position:

“. . . since you [heauens] leaue me in the Ocean thus/To sinke or swim, and put me to my shifts,/I’le rouse my senses, and awake my selfe” [emphasis mine] (502-4). This is no martyr praying for strength. This is defiance. Nor will Barabas concern himself with mollifying the envious eye. Once restored to wealth, he will use all of his resources—his power to purchase a “faire” house (2.775), a bought accomplice, a feast, the lure of wealth—to singlemindedly seek for that which was absent in the theft Ferneze disguised as an agreement in the trial scene, sealed with “Fernezes hand, whose heart I’le haue;/I, and his sonnes too, or it shall goe hard” (776-8).

One need hardly recall the arrow through the heart of Praxaspe’s son in Cambises to rememember that for early moderns, young Lodowick is Ferneze’s heart. And when we recall that Ferneze’s theft of “my wealth. . . my childrens hope” ostensibly deprives not only Barabas but Abigail of all means of subsistence, Barabas’s vengeance seems far more equitable than it is commonly considered: Ferneze’s heart for Barabas’s,

157 For Bersani, this pleasure is masochistic, based on “a fantasmatic introjection of the other—which appears to be intrinsically sexual,” 150. Bersani’s analysis pulls the virtuous underpinning out from this “intrinsically, somewhat dysfunctional” moralistic emotion, “Representation and Its Discontents,” 150. Similarly, Lupton, reading the passio form through a Lacanian lens, notes the “obscene enjoyment which hagiography lodges at the heart of the law,” Afterlives of the Saints, 48.

158 Bevington, Christopher Marlowe, xviii.

159 Hodge, “Marlowe, Marx and Machiavelli,” 7.

160 Thurn, “Economic and Ideological Exchange,” 159.
Lodowick’s future for Abigail’s (1.382-3).\textsuperscript{161} Others come to harm when they are perceived to thwart this vengeance, or threaten Barabas, himself.\textsuperscript{162}

In the end, Barabas proves like the Christian hero, the saint, in one other respect: he remains, against the tempting ease of alternatives, a soul too pure for this world—what modernists might call “authentic.” He neither converts, sells out (giving his daughter to Lodowick), nor wrenches himself into a political amity that would overlook the state’s doctrine-sanctioned seizure of a lifetime of his labor. As others have pointed out, when we first meet him, Barabas operates largely within what he imagines to be the set of principles by which the Maltese ostensibly live and work.\textsuperscript{163} His insistence on his own “righteous” dealings before Ferneze is supported by the play’s action in the first scene, which stages his labor in the counting house as well as his expert negotiation of mercantile difficulties at the docking of the \textit{Speranza}. His waxing poetic on how “heaven” “power[s] out plenty in [his] lap...,” is belied by the evidence of our own senses—Barabas has “toiled” and hazarded much for his living (1.146, 197).

When, in the end, he gains the governorship as a byproduct of revenge, Barabas unflinchingly considers that, having won it “by wrong,” he is bound to maintain it “by firme policy” (5.2136-7). He decides that the most prudent move would be to “get... him friends” among the Christians by restoring the island to their rule, and make some money in the deal (2140). The difference between Barabas’s policy and Fernezes’ is that

\begin{itemize}
\item The destruction of the Turks and others in Malta occurs outside this primary requiting and can be chalked up (albeit, coldly) to collateral damage.
\item Even the killing of the Turkish troops may be a form of self-preservation, done in the hope of gaining favor (and therefore a modicum of safety) with the Maltese.
\item Friedman was one of the earlier critics to read Barabas “a highly successful businessman” at the beginning of the play, one who “accepts the limitations society has placed upon him,” “The Shackling of Accidents,”157.
\end{itemize}
the former never deceives himself to imagine that his actions are “nought but right” (1.385). His deal, when he makes it, is explained in clear terms, sealed with a merchant’s handshake, and executed in the promised fashion (5.2190-2202). In contrast, Ferneze promises to “doe as thou desirest” only to betray his contracted partner (2206).

This is the difference, the play argues, between the exceptional man and all others: the difference between “a counterfet profession” and an “vnseeene hypocrisie” (1.531-2). The counterfeiter knows he’s fabricating, and does not deceive himself into believing he fashions true coin. The hypocrite, on the other hand, musters every rationalization so as to avoid the fact of his own falseness. The more admirable position, for Marlowe, as for post-modernists like Žižek, is that of the counterfeiter. This is because counterfeiting, like playing, “disturbs the symbolic field into which it intervenes. . . from the standpoint of [calling into question]. . . its hidden, disavowed structuring principle,” which is to say that the counterfeit coin (like the “personated” sovereign), throws the legitimacy of all coins into question, revealing their constructedness.164 This, for Žižek, is the condition for truly transformative political action. Through Barabas, the play suggests the danger of authenticity in a state that is, itself, founded on irresolvable moral paradoxes. The state that upholds the law also subsumes it as seems expedient. It wields political theology to mask its own amoral activities and bully its citizens into compliance. Most of all, the state depends on the goodwill of its citizens—their belief in its corporate vision—to function.

Marlowe’s play comes dangerously close to illustrating how the ill-will of a single citizen can destroy a state. But the Elizabethan Barabas, unlike the “Barabbas” of Mark 15:7 “that had made insurrection, [and] who in the insurrection had committed murder,” must die.\textsuperscript{165} Ian McAdam, G.K. Hunger and others have read Barabas’s fateful cauldron as a conflation of “hell” with a “symbolic of purification and baptism.”\textsuperscript{166} Characteristically, Marlowe presses this powerful, overdetermined emblem to a new, ironic effect. Purification of the Christic, hypocritical state is achieved through the Jew’s martyrlic baptism ‘in his own blood,’ as Foxe might put it. The cutpurse who has been lurking around the textual edges of the play, is incarnated for the final scene in the person of Ferneze, who cuts the cord that deprives Barabas of his most precious worldly possession: his life. If Barabas’s final expression of authenticity, the admission of his crimes, begins to shrive him, he caps the confession with a conditional curse: “. . .had I but escap’d this stratagem,/I would haue brought confusion on you all” (5.2368-9). In this way, the anti-saint dies not with the expected blessing or forgiveness of his persecutors on his tongue, but as the Puritan, Thomas Beard, will later describe the dying Marlowe: “curs[ing] and blasphem[ing] to his last gasp.”\textsuperscript{167}

What is now apparent is that while both Faustus and Barabas are produced as necessary players in and ultimately reproducers of their culture’s established orthodoxy—a deeply problematic nexus of Christian and state ideology—the plays themselves neither

\textsuperscript{165}Kocher quotes this passage from the Geneva Bible in his discussion of the allegation in the Baines’s note that Marlowe said “Crist deserved better to dye then Barrabas and that the Jewes made a good Choise, though Barrabas were both a thief and a murtherer,” Christopher Marlowe, 56.

inculcate orthodoxy, as some have insisted, nor outrightly subvert it. Instead, they do what moral plays do best: they stage radical contradiction as a site of social struggle, and they offer their audiences a novel perspective for the reading and judgment of signs, one that opens the door for authentic political action. Thus, while Faustus’s “tragedy” lies in his failure to perceive how his rebellion works with “servile and illiberal” efficiency to support and maintain the social and ideological structures of the protocapitalist state, and the normative, Protestant Christianity which supports it, the play itself interrogates and destabilizes these structures (*Faustus* 62). And, while Barabas’s vengeful manipulation of state ideology ends up profiting the state he would harm, the play itself exposes the hypocrisy of Malta’s political theology. The two plays are specially linked in Marlowe’s ruminations on profoundly dissatisfying, even despair-inducing, market imperatives and their tight relation to a deeply opportunistic, self-perpetuating political economy.

The plays deform the conventions of moral drama to raise questions with which we continue to struggle, including whether radical antagonism toward an extant hegemony can express itself in any way other than “through the particular differences internal to the system,” as some maintain. Does Vice demystification, approached through a Marlovian lens, endow us with a power beyond mere negation or does it merely invert the hegemonic? Perhaps the trend in early modern drama studies toward the recuperation of


168 Kocher and Matalene note that necromancy is the “established counter-culture” in the late sixteenth century, while other historical studies suggest the degree to which ‘the Jew’ is “a ready made theoretical construct,” in other words the orthodox vision of the heterodox in Elizabethan England, *Christopher Marlowe*, 148-171, and “Marlowe’s *Faustus* and the Comforts of Academicism,” 509.

169 This truncated section of Zizek’s critique of Ernesto Laclau’s political scepticism—something Laclau, himself, refutes—neatly encapsulates the ongoing friction between New Historicism and their critics concerning the concept of a subversion that is always already contained by (and may actually enable) the hegemonic culture.
Marlowe’s status as a master of drama in his own right is tacit acknowledgement that in some way, as Jan Kott suspects, “Marlowe’s hell may be our hell, too.”\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{170}Kott, \textit{The Bottom Translation}, 19.
CHAPTER FIVE

JONSON’S EVERY MAN OUT OF HIS HUMOUR: “MUSIC” FOR “THE BEAST”¹

As early as Herford and Simpson’s heated exchange with Henri de Vocht in the 1930s, critics have pondered the significance of Every Man Out of His Humour’s unusual length.² The title page of the first quarto hopes to make prolixity a virtue in announcing its printing of the play:

AS IT WAS FIRST COMPOSED
by the Author B.I.
Containing more than hath been Publickely Spoken or Acted.”³

Longer than Hamlet, at 4,625 lines Every Man Out of His Humour is a play one writer recently called, “the loosest, the baggiest, the most monstrous example in dramatic

¹Like the chapter’s subheadings, these citations are taken from Jonson’s works. They are, in order: Induction to EOH 63; Discoveries 3290; Every Man Out of His Humour, 4.5.30; Induction 182; 2.1.63; Hymenaei, 668-72; Every Man in His Humour, Workes, H&S 3:400; EOH 3.1.339; 1.3.236; “An Ode. To Himself,” 36.

²de Vocht maintained that Jonson had no hand in the textual variations of the Folio from the first quarto, while Herford and Simpson argued that the Folio was Jonson’s final conception of the play, see Helen Ostovich’s introduction for Every Man Out of His Humour, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 6. Three editions of the play, all issued in 1600, currently exist in quarto form. The second quarto, like the 1616 Folio, is based on Quarto 1. The third quarto, an apparently careless version of Q2, is without authority. There are five extant copies of Q1, two of Q2, and at least four of Q3. Copies of F2, printed in 1640, have no authority. For comprehensive documentation of F1’s variations from Q1, see Henri de Vocht, Comments on the Text of Ben Jonson’s ‘Every Man Out of His Humour’: A Research about the Comparative Value of the ‘Quarto’ and the ‘Folio,’ in Materials for the Study of Old English Drama 14 (1937). All citations in this chapter derive from Ostovich’s edition of Every Man Out of His Humour, based on Q1. For more provenance details, Ostovich, 1-11.

³Ostovich, Every Man Out, i.
I suggest that this monstrous length calls attention to the play as an example of phobic writing, and that *Every Man Out of His Humour* features the first extended indication of Jonson’s extraordinarily complex, trenchantly defensive engagement with a host of conditions now familiar to us from previous chapters—from concerns about censorship to dependence on a market where a play is a problematically superfluous commodity, to the liminal status of its writers and performers. Largely the same socioeconomic and ideological contradictions that produce in Marlowe a kind of incredulous horror—now somber, now bitterly funny—evoke from Jonson a reactive bravado, a ferocity-in-fear staged as satiric attack as evident in this play as in his later, more characteristic drama.

This chapter asserts that the early city comedy, *Every Man Out of His Humour* is phobic writing at its best: a rich matrix in which not only the seeds for Jonson’s future career, but the direction of an entire literary and performance tradition—popular moral drama—are evident. Reading select moments in the play, we will see how Jonson forces moral drama to finally integrate, albeit uneasily, the market imperatives defining new economic and social relations. Jonson achieves this unstable, highly productive tension between old and new forms (i.e., religiomoral code and market imperative, artisanal ethic and elite humanistic discernment), through a necessarily repetitive process of incorporation: a negation of negation. It is a move that will be a definitive feature of Jonson’s playwriting from the moment of this play onward. It extends from the level of trope to that of narrative structure, and it derives not from the classical texts that stud the

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4William Blissett, “The Oddness of *Every Man Out of His Humour*,” *The Elizabethan Theatre XII: Papers given at the Twelfth International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre held at the University of*
pages of *Discoveries*, but from the popular theater and more specifically, older moral drama, where the Vice performs his classic Vice-function of negation.

As Weimann has observed, the Vice’s negation in traditional drama produces a comic inversion of his culture’s most serious and sacred norms, an irreverence long associated with the festive.\(^5\) We have seen how the three N’s mock and flout the clergy, through Mercy in *Mankind*; Wager’s steward (Covetous) and Preston’s soldier (Ambidexter) do much the same to the institutions of feudal estate management and conscripted military service. Precedent for this, as Weimann shows, can to be found in everything from the “semiritual sport” of boy bishops and Lords of Misrule, to Mak of the Second Shepherd’s Play.\(^6\) Yet while festive negation may open the door for change, it does not compel it. Indeed, as many have observed, negation may work to keep conventional power structures intact through a “festive” venting of energies otherwise destructive to social cohesion.\(^7\) For a fierce moralist just reaching the height of his powers, negation effects social change too slowly and indirectly. Consequently, *Every Man Out of His Humour* creates a negation of negation in order to affirm the matter negation customarily represses. I will elaborate this process in detail, but for now, the negation of negation simply denotes the production of a new form by the process of taking a repressed form into account. It is, as we will see, an identifying feature of phobic writing: relentless in

\(^6\)Ibid., 117-159.
\(^7\)Ibid., 27.
its struggle to master the fundamentally irresolvable contradictions at its core—excessive and barricaded as a “defensive, over-coded discourse” must be.  

I will situate my work in relation to the criticism that has been done on the play, then proceed to a section on the play’s relation to genre. This latter section explores how Jonson’s negation of negation gains moral drama’s Vice a new role on the public stage, a vocation, in which the Vice’s ability to flush out on-the-fence sinners is repackaged as a practice of moral “physic,” a restorative act of letting humours. This high, moral and professional tone permits Jonson to elevate the status of the artisanal poet, to make labor and expertise the defining virtues of one uniquely qualified to purge a society of its ills.

The historical section reveals playwrighting’s contamination by the very socioeconomic ills the play excoriates: the fashion system, the scandal of luxury, and the sordid practices of urban, market relations. The play’s novelty, expert artifice and acknowledgement of the discerning audience problematize its satiric flaying of those dazzled by the new, the precious, and the purchasable. We will see how Jonson handles this contradiction in his own professional position in his development of the profoundly ambivalent figure of canine aggression. The final readings of the play will disclose how, in the capitalist-inflected world of turn-of-the-century London, the capacity to quickly assess, then play by whatever rules the various spheres of market exchange dictate for a given situation, enables the Jonsonian protagonist to survive. Jonson’s canine gallants learn to weather and even thrive on the very hypocrisy, fraud and market imperatives that overwhelm Marlovian tragic protagonists. Linking the canine in this play to two later emblems of canine ferocity in the Jonsonian corpus, I will conclude with speculation about how

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Jonson’s phobic writing, with its attacks and evasions, eventually drives moral drama in two diverse directions: to the dead-end of the court masque, and to the underground of print, where it not only flourishes but returns to fight another day.

1. Criticism

Critical reception has largely relegated *Every Man Out* to colorful citations and supporting matter in histories of Jonson’s development as a professional playwright and author. Recent, book-length examples include Joseph Lowenstein’s compelling *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* in which the play exemplifies “the determining period” of the poet’s “aesthetic responses to his economic predicament,” and Jonathan Haynes’ *The Social Relations of Jonson’s Theater*, in which *Every Man Out* signals Jonson’s commitment to a novel, social realism. Studies focused exclusively on the play are quite limited in number.

Those studies dedicated primarily to *Every Man Out* appear to have arisen from textual studies. Helen Ostovich, who has done the most work on the play, undertook a significant amount of archival work in preparing her handsome 2001 edition for the Revels series. Among the highlights of the introductory material are a sensitive analysis of the logic of Jonson’s lengthy, orchestrated scenic movements, and an illuminating reading of the St. Paul’s walk scene as an early modern dance sequence, which extends an earlier remark by William Blissett. Also in accord with Blissett’s article, discussing “The Oddness of *Every Man Out of His Humour*,” is Ostovich’s

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10Ostovich, *Every Man Out*. 
insistence that Jonson models his play on Aristophanes. “I assume,” writes Blissett, “that a writer of Jonson’s classical learning could not have meant by vetus comoedia simply the older native tradition but must have meant Aristophanes.”\textsuperscript{11} Ostovich devotes six sections of her introduction to making a case to support this assumption. After allowing that the play is without “exact correlations” to Aristophanes, she proceeds to list the many ways—from the use of the Grex to Jonson’s overarching aim in producing the play (“to reconcile the belly and the groin with the spirit or understanding”)—the play is Aristophanic.\textsuperscript{12}

It soon becomes apparent that the features she describes—the complication of social critique with “clever reversals and antitheses between city and country, new ways and old, physical buffoonery and mental gymnastics, naïveté and sophistic trickery”—are as typical of moral drama as of Aristophanic drama.\textsuperscript{13} She partially defers this recognition by subsuming moral drama into a larger modality of “farce,” which she sees inflecting everything from structural features of repetition and amplification in the play to character types like the Vice.\textsuperscript{14} The argument has been fruitful for my study in two ways. First, its intersection with the old evolutionary prejudice against moral drama suggests that when faced with the choice of attributing an effective dramatic move to “hackneyed traditions”

\textsuperscript{11}Blissett, “The Oddness of Every Man Out, 163.

\textsuperscript{12}Ostovich, Every Man Out, 19. The material/spirit split is strikingly medieval, but it is also, as Jonson criticism maintains, a central problem in Jonson’s work.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid, 21.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid, 16-7. I am not trying to imply that Ostovich is being intentionally deceptive. Rather, I believe her introduction is part of the line of scholarship that takes Jonson’s disavowals and omissions at face value, those whom Kate McLuskie finds, “inclined to concur with Jonson’s presentation of himself.” I suspect that the issue derives in part from the way we read texts like Discoveries, which may appear to offer less guarded access to a poet’s true feelings, “Making and Buying: Ben Jonson and the Commercial Theatre Audience,” Re-fashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and the Jonsonian Canon, ed. Julie Sanders, Kate Chedgzoy and Susan Wiseman (New York: St. Martins Press, 1998), 136.
or classical models, some will always prefer the classical. Second, it is no stretch to imagine that this tendency reproduces an even stronger urge in early modernity to reinvent things along classical lines, to forget the crucial ways in which the medievals transmitted and transformed the ancients so that early modern access to them continues to be mediated through such lenses as Christian morality, English politics, and emerging capitalism.

In this respect, Jonson’s assertion through Cordatus that Every Man Out is “somewhat like Vetus Comedia” appears like a confirmation of James Shapiro’s claim in Rival Playwrights that Jonson habitually suppresses his debt to the popular, medieval dramatic tradition (Induction 228). “For Jonson,” writes Shapiro, “‘Comedia Vetus’ was not Aristophanic but the native homiletic tradition of the Vice Play.” Shapiro’s observation that moral drama is simply “much closer at hand than Aristophanes” strikes me as essentially correct: an elegant solution that takes into account the most impressive and accessible theater of Jonson’s formative years. C.R. Baskervill, who made a strenuous case for Jonson’s debt to moral drama back in 1911, understands Jonson’s “Vetus comoedia” as a grafting of fashionable, end-of-the-century satire onto “the old interlude,”

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15 Shapiro, Rival Playwrights, 40.
16 Ibid., 62.
17 Brown similarly acknowledges that “Jonson was quite familiar with ‘the old way of the Vices and of the morality genre, utilizing morality elements along with classical aspects in his plays,” Christian Humanism in the Late English Morality Plays, 144. In his conversation with Drummond, Jonson compares his The Devil is an Ass to the “Commedia Vetus” of England, in which “the devil was brout in either with one vice or other: the play done the devil carried away the vice. . .”—an unmistakable reference to moral drama, Conversations with William Drummond, Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, 415-18.
an assessment which coincides with what I have consistently argued is moral drama’s characteristic incorporation of fashionable generic forms as modalities.¹⁸

Before I turn from Shapiro’s book, it should be noted that my project’s underlying assumption about the relationship between Marlowe and Jonson finds welcome support in one of Shapiro’s main arguments: that Jonson’s debt to his predecessor has not been accurately described since T.S. Eliot’s largely discounted theory that “Jonson is the legitimate heir of Marlowe.”¹⁹ For Shapiro, as for me, Jonson and Marlowe stand together in a tradition “that intentionally lacks the third dimension, [psychological] depth [of character], that we have come to associate with Shakespeare and Shakespearean drama.”²⁰ My work’s emphasis on the cause of this intentional lack differs significantly from Shapiro’s focus, but we both agree that classical models legitimate Jonson’s use of particular structures and themes probably more than they inspire it.

For past interpretations of Every Man Out’s response to moral drama, works by Jonathan Haynes and C.R. Baskervill are insightful.²¹ In Haynes’ analysis of The Social Relations of Jonson’s Theater, Jonson’s primary difference from the moral drama tradition from which he springs is the secularism of his plays.²² Haynes describes the logic of moral drama as “deductive,” while that of secular plays is “inductive.” This, for me, comes too close to the old evolutionary narrative of the breakaway London stage. As

¹⁸Baskervill, “English Elements,” 144-5. In Mankind to Marlowe, Bevington follows Spivack’s developmental account of moral drama in Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil as a form that eventually matures into “hybrid” form or “homicetic tragedy.” To my thinking, these definitions tend to occlude what is, in fact, moral drama’s most felicitous feature: its flexibility. They also contribute to the critical tendency to name either Marlowe or Jonson heir to the moral tradition, when in fact both are.
¹⁹James Shapiro, Rival Playwrights, especially his chapter on “Marlowe and Jonson,” 39-73.
²⁰Ibid., 64.
²¹Haynes, The Social Relations; Baskervill, English Elements.
²²Ibid., 8.
I have shown, secular topics were part of, if not a cause of, the moral drama tradition from its inception, and it has long been noted that Jonson’s city comedies feature social types with moral drama names, like Sordido, and Mosca. In other words, Haynes occasionally appears to lean too heavily on old models based on surface differences between pre-London and London plays. At other times, as in his claim that Jonson’s “realism” grows out of moral drama’s “tavern scenes,” he appears to focus too narrowly, missing such important landmarks as the historical specificity of the coat-cutting joke in *Mankind* and secular causation in *Wager*. Yet, Haynes’ vivid descriptions of the social conflicts around the theater, and his depiction of Jonson’s “armor-plating” and stubborn maintenance of a “middle-class identity” have strongly influenced this chapter. I also take up Haynes’ identification of Jonson’s gallants as “a new class style that can cope with and dominate the city,” and connect it to the ubiquitous canine imagery in Jonson’s work for the stage.

Baskerville’s study possesses the tremendous breadth that distinguishes the best criticism of his generation, yet without its contempt for popular forms, as when he traces Macilente’s debt from Marston and Greene’s malcontents back through Medwall to Langland’s *Envy*. The difference in our approach to Jonson is most pronounced, as might be expected, in the realm of theory, but I share Baskerville’s fascination with Jonson’s manipulation of convention, and transformation of other writers’ material.

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23 Ibid., 16, 20. He also tends to read “allegorical principles” as being in opposition to “real social interaction.” 24 In contrast, I understand allegory as a heuristic for medieval and early modern playwrights to analyze social interaction. See, for example, my discussion in chapter three of how Horestes’s debate with Nature helps him to weigh what he perceives to be his conflicting duties to his natural mother, Clytemnestra, and the state.

24 Ibid., 78, 89.

25 Ibid., 41.
Alexander Leggatt’s *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*, and article-length studies by both Susan Wells and Graham Hammill have been helpful in determining *Every Man Out*’s relation to Jonson’s later citizen comedy. By their definitions, which overlap to some degree, Jonson’s first printed play can reasonably be grouped with city if not “citizen” comedy. (In that satire is arguably a component of each of the diverse plays featured in my study, I do not find Jonson or Ostovich’s definition of *Every Man Out* as a “Comicall Satyre” particularly helpful.) Defining Jonson’s play in this way permits me, through Leggatt, to confidently connect citizen comedy to the “later English morality plays” that began to feature citizen class protagonists. Some of Leggatt’s conclusions strike me as hasty—for example, that adult companies offer moral lessons, as opposed to the satire of contemporary society offered by boys’ companies in the private venues—and for this reason, my use of this book is primarily taxonomic. Wells’ exploration of how the genre arose in response to contradictions in the hegemonic ideology of early modern London—a commercialism that strained traditional communal organization—has helped to better clarify the complex function of the Paul’s walk scene. My chapter, in many ways, extends her thinking about the way that genre (in Wells’ case, city comedy) responds to ideological and material conundrums (the clash of commercial and religiomoral imperatives), but my focus on a single play is much

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27 While recognizing, with Fowler, that “parodic satire” is a “half-recognized semicanonical genre” in early modernity, it appears to function as more of a “mode” within the generic “kind” of moral drama, *Kinds of Literature*, 54. 106-8.

28 For this conclusion, and a somewhat totalizing view of moral drama, see Leggatt’s page 10-12.

29 Wells, “Jacobean City Comedy,” 37.
narrower, necessitating more textual and less comparative analysis. Among the many ideas offered in Hammill’s stunning investigation of the functions of citizen comedy is a more sophisticated understanding of the historical move from religious to secular drama. This has been especially helpful in my understanding of conversion in the play, particularly Sordido’s, which has long been a source of irritation to the play’s modern readers. Why Jonson would locate this conversion at the central point of *Every Man Out* and why Sordido’s mere repudiation of his misdeeds would satisfy Jonson’s sophisticated audience becomes clearer in the context of the theologically inflected rituals that are still experienced as stabilizing Elizabethan culture. Hammill’s interest in city comedy’s instantiation of modern conceptions of time and sexual difference necessitates a wider scope than my study. He turns only briefly to *Every Man Out* to discuss the mode of disidentification that prepares the audience to accept secular conversion as a kind of judgement via rejection.

Finally, Joseph Leowenstein’s book, situating Jonson at the crux of the social and economic conflicts that resulted in an emergent sense of “possessive authorship,” sharpened my sense of the intersections between the early modern theater and book-producing environments that so shaped and were, in turn, shaped by Jonson’s passionate engagement. My argument about Jonson’s turn to print in frustration with his reception in the immensely competitive theatrical market closely parallels sections of Loewenstein’s narrative. Yet, his primary objective, to trace the development of a notion

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30 Hammill shows how citizen comedy reinscribes the theological urge toward conversion and purification with good citizenship and spectatorship, “Instituting Modern Time,” 76-87.
31 Ibid., 79-80.
32 Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship*. 

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of authorial property, differs significantly from mine, necessitating a greater focus on media than genre, and on classical rather than on popular influences. I view my work as complementary in some ways. My narrative of the moral drama tradition fills in prehistory to Loewenstein’s discussion of the Jonsonian moment. I do not doubt Jonson’s intellectual engagement with the sources and problems Loewenstein describes; I simply discern a more invested, because emotional, engagement with native moral drama. As we will see in Jonson’s treatment of the canine, his response to problems raised by the moral drama tradition typically conforms more to a logic of the psyche than to logics of rhetoric or induction.

2. Genre and Performance History

This section tackles the problem of Jonson’s denial of his debt to the popular tradition by examining two ways in which Every Man Out appears to very consciously reject—when, in fact, it recrafts—some of the more obvious conventions of moral drama. Focusing on the Paul’s Walk scene of Act 3, scene 1, and the Prologue, we will see how the play’s alternative to moral drama’s episodic structure, for example, deploys a new principle of subordination to 1) help viewers manage the more complex character relations and involved plot of an emerging city comedy; and 2) capitalize on the space of the large public amphitheater, by offering spectacle that mimics civic ritual. Jonson deploys this latter effect to expose, through its disruption, the distinctly nontraditional bases of class interdependency that are replacing the older, feudal ties: the court’s growing dependence on rich merchants, the projects and confidence games that cut across

33This admittedly oversimplifies Loewenstein’s deft linking of public theater practices and imperatives
all social distinctions. Turning to the induction, we will then examine how the prologue of moral drama is ostensibly rejected and revamped to stoke and defy expectations around the traditional figure of the Vice. This move prepares us for what the play reveals to be the surprising new features of lived vice and virtue in early modern London. In this, Jonson concludes a process of inquiry that has been an implicit part of the moral drama tradition since at least *Mankind*: to determine how effective the sweeping, eschatological structure of the Church’s morality is for explaining, and helping its members to better manage, the causes and effects of daily vicious and virtuous choices.

*Confined Within the Amplest Verge*

Before Jonson edited the play to conform to a more neoclassical style for the Folio, *Every Man Out* featured exceedingly long, complex scenic structures. Unlike Marlowe who embraced the traditional curt, episodic structure of moral drama, Jonson writes enormous scenes that use dialogue and movement to focus the auditor’s attention on a series of groups gathered in specific parts of the stage. Entrances and exits, gestures and silences, foregrounding, backgrounding and the moderating Grex, train, in essence, a spotlight on moments of interaction that build toward a larger narrative or thematic revelation. This form depends upon a principle of subordination that is largely absent, to those of print, and its market.


35 Bevington indicates how episodic structure, along with doubling and the suppression of minor characters, allows early itinerant troupes to create the illusion of copiousness so valued by early audiences. He shows that Marlowe, despite his exposure to other, classical structures, gravitates to the episodic form, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 200, 211.
because, as Bevington recognized, it is unnecessary, in the more sparsely manned, brief, focused episodes of popular moral drama of the pre-London era.  

On one level, the new scenic structure points to a pragmatic exploitation of new resources—from the larger corps of the more stable, London playing companies to the expanded space of the great, purpose-built amphitheaters. John Orrell reminds us of the novelty of the first Globe with its forty-three foot stage, so much more capacious than its rivals that Henslowe’s Rose could fit inside it. At another level, the play’s staging adumbrates Jonson’s proclivities. While the sheer enormity of the new Globe welcomes spectacle, Jonson, who is loathe to “fly from all humanity” simply to please “the ignorant gapers,” refuses to conjure a Lodge or a Marlowe’s monsters and triumphs. Instead, he stages what William Blissett (and Ostovich more extensively) compares to a dance: a kinetic spectacle of social relations.

Despite his protests, Jonson excels at thinking in terms of image and design. At the height of 3.1, the Paul’s walk scene, the stage holds ten actors, two animals and the Grex, yet, as Ostovich notes, the scene “coordinates time, motion and rhythm into a meaningful

\[\text{36Ibid.}, \, 4.\]
\[\text{37Jonson’s amassing players on the stage follows rather than initiates a London stage trend, if we compare his largest scene to that of a play like } \text{The Troublesome Reign of King John, with seventeen players onstage at once, or } \text{The Contention of York and Lancaster, with a board-cracking 23. See Macmillan and MacLean, } \text{The Queen’s Men and their Plays, 100-102.}\]
\[\text{39Discoveries, 961, 965. Jonson’s denials must be qualified with his masques, whose spectacular elements cannot be solely attributed to Inigo Jones.}\]
\[\text{40Blissett, “The Oddness of Every Man Out of His Humour,” 167; Ostovich, “’To Behold the Scene Full’: Seeing and Judging in Every Man Out of His Humour,” Representing Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance, ed. Martin Butler (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1999), 76, 81, 89. For the ingenuity of the old, episodic structure, see Bevington, not neglecting his illuminating charts, Mankind to Marlowe.}\]
pattern even while it ridicules.”

The walk, for Ostovich, provides an insider’s view of “the foremost site of competitive theatricality and one-upmanship in London.” Yet beneath the reactive, individualistic, rivalry dance described by Ostovich, a more conservative structure can be detected as well, one that evokes processions familiar to all of Jonson’s Globe audience. Given the closeness of the play’s apparent aim to what James Knowles suggests is civic ritual’s desire to produce “virtue” “through an adroit mixture of praise and criticism,” it seems fruitful to ponder what advantages the incorporation of this mode offers.

Like the sixteenth-century London processions Knowles discusses, 3.1 brings social “differentiation and integration into creative tension” even as it “promotes hierarchy and systems of patronage and deference.” The Grex verbally set the scene, punctuated by Shift’s furtive posting of advertisements from what is likely far upstage. Orange and Clove, two would-be gallants, enter separately, and begin the dance by hailing Shift before pairing off with one another. Like the pomander for which they are named, their strolling presence creates atmosphere for “a turn or two i’ this scene,” as the other parties move past them (3.1.39-40). Puntarvolo the knight enters, flanked by an entourage whose duties—leading the knight’s dog, carrying his cat—parody the processional employment

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41 Ostovich, “To Behold the Scene Full,” 89.
42 Ostovich, Introduction, Every Man Out, 63.
45 Ostovich compares moments in the scene to various early modern dances—a pavan and a galliard most convincingly—that contribute to the insider humor of the scene. My interest is in the underlying social structure that renders the movement more like civic pageantry, waits or ridings, that the subsequent rearrangement then deconstructs. Every Man Out, Introduction, 64-6.
of such “servants” as the Master of the Horse, and the monarch’s sword-bearer. Buffone, the “impudent common jester,” completes the tableau of this feudalistic group (Induction 351). The next group consists of the mobile, middling types still scrabbling for position: the wealthy citizen, the marginal courtier, and the scholar. When the “essential clown” Sogliardo shows up with his freshly purchased arms, he is summoned straight away to the knight’s party as a form of entertainment (characters 74). Meanwhile, largely ignored by the others, Clove and Orange swing back into view, hoping to attract attention with their command of “fustian” language (3.1.169). “Like a zany to a tumbler,/That tries tricks after [the tumbler] to make men laugh,” Clove and Orange offer a graceless version of the social posturing that takes place on other parts of the stage. (4.1.86-7). The arrival of Fungoso and his tailor signal an end to this entry procession.

Like Puntarvolo’s “dog [who] watch[es] him lest he should leap out” from the suit of “wainscot” imagined to create the knight’s upright posture, Fungoso “dog[s] the fashion,” trailing behind Brisk, while making sure his tailor notes every detail of his idol’s suit (2.1.275-6; 4.5.126). The scene continues to draw upon the semantically-charged processional order of pageantry. It resembles a Lord Mayor’s installation, with its ascending order of guildsmen paving the way for the mayor and his symbol-bearing entourage, followed by officials “of more nearly equivalent rank behind.” The effect, up to this point, is comic, but also strangely affectionate. If one of the points of procession is, as Knowles claims, to “manifest . . . the whole social body,” then a scene like this toasts a diverse and lively urban society. Adumbrating the crowd scenes in *Bartholomew Fair*, it acknowledges the frenetic activity, spectacle and exchanges that

are among the great pleasures of urban life. It also argues that there is a structure beneath the apparent chaos of the city, and that it is not the nostalgic one imagined in surveys like Stow’s.47

The subsequent pairing off of the walkers reveals that the structuring principles are no longer entirely traditional. Rather, social and economic exchanges which may resemble feudal forms are, in reality, increasingly capitalistic and market-based. Thus, the fop courts a well-connected but financially strapped knight who requires the former’s money for a project. Volatile interactions between the wealthy citizen and poor scholar alternately raise and diminish the other’s social value, mirroring the ambivalent and competitive relations of the Henslowes and Jonsons in the professional theater world. The symbiosis that exists between the Inns of Court man and his credit-extending tailor, mirrors that between the fop and his merchant creditor.48 The gull and his cozener might stand emblematically for every relationship depicted, but for reasons I will make apparent in an upcoming section, it is actually the pathetic little Shift, hilariously partnered with his rapier (with which he is at odds), who emblematizes this field of folk. As soon as he resurfaces, the dancers assume a new, centripetal formation around him. Gradually, either repelled by the poor sport of engaging him or drawn off in flight or in pursuit of other interests, the walkers disband. In this way, 3.2 manages to expose through proximity and distance, topical interclass interests and homologies that a real procession, or even the high plot/low plot comparisons of more traditionally structured drama, would occlude. Perhaps a knight’s retinue should be nothing like a courtier’s clothes or a

47For more on this contradiction, see Wells, 42-4.
swindler’s sword, but it is. Perhaps the social intercourse that makes or mars one’s fortunes should be conducted with more gravity than a leisurely, distracted stroll allows, but it is not. Perhaps aristocrats should be self-sufficient, scholars and citizens should be rewarded on the merit of their abilities, and the fraudulent should be exposed for punishment, but too frequently in Jonson’s London, they are not.

In Nature of a Vice

In his 1904 *Plays of Our Forefathers*, Charles Gayley proposed that medieval Vices evolved into social types in sixteenth-century humour plays, “where Every Man is in his Vice, and every Vice is but a Humour.” This early, astute observation does more than acknowledge continuity between moral drama and the humour plays: it alludes to what Jonson will describe in his city comedies as the modern proliferation of viciousness, as sophisticated Londoners grow ever more calloused and contemptuous of religiously-determined Vice, and its putative source, the devil. Seventeen years before writing the play that deals directly with this issue (*The Devil is an Ass*), Jonson takes up Vice conventions in order to play a sophisticated shell-game with his auditors. *Every Man Out* uses the traditional space of the prologue to suggest that Vice conventions actually obfuscate his auditors’ ability to recognize vicious behavior.

Not surprisingly, Jonson does this not through a character-based denial, as Marlowe does earlier with Faustus’s poor reading of Mephistopheles’ appearance, but through a structural negation. In chapter four we saw a Faustus too enamored with his own

49 In a note, Ostovich explains that at this time, “benchers at the Inns of Court tried to forbid the wearing of frivolous clothing by law students and members of the bar,” suggesting a common student proclivity for overdressing, n. 296, *Every Man Out*, 2.1.
theatrical sophistication to take seriously Mephistopheles’s first “vgly” entrance or his subsequent disguise as “a graye fryre.”\textsuperscript{50} Faustus’s foolishness criticizes moral drama for its pretension to inculcating virtue when it actually renders the signs of vice so familiar they no longer elicit alarm. Jonson’s metatheatrical confrontation of Vice conventions seems, at first, far more direct.

The prologue’s primary functions, as discussed in chapter two, are to set the tone of the play and bring the audience into the world of the narrative. \textit{Every Man Out} achieves these objectives by literally negating its Prologue. When, after hundreds of lines of business between Asper, Mitis and Cordatus the nominal Prologue finally appears, it is only to relinquish his part to Cordatus, whose stage-gallant insult he accepts in grateful earnest, admitting that he is “unperfect” in his part, and would happily give it over to the censor (291). Carlo Buffone arrives, and offering to drink a toast to the audience in lieu of such “grey-headed ceremonies,” saves the flustered Cordatus the trouble of producing an extemporaneous prologue (314). The replacement of “yond sackbut’s” ceremony with a cup of wine is a move any medieval Vice would approve, and as Buffone makes fun of Cordatus and Jonson, chatting familiarly with the “gentlemen” auditors, he claims the platea position recently dominated by Asper (318). Buffone, then, usurps the prologue, much like \textit{Horestes’s} Vyce. Indeed, after Buffone leaves the stage, Cordatus describes him to Mitis in just such terms, touching on his “epicure[anism],” his “violent rail[ing],” and his “impudent. . . jest[ing]” (351-2).

\textsuperscript{49}Charles Gayley, \textit{Plays of Our Forefathers}, 303-4.

\textsuperscript{50}Marlowe, \textit{Doctor Faustus}, 259.
Like the traditional Vice, Buffone is said to make targets of the most “honorourable or reverend personage[s],” and he possesses the Vice’s signature predilection for travel, especially to locales where “foreign atheistical policies” are discussed (359-61). In good Vice fashion, he is recognized by the vicious, who hail him as “sweet mischief” and “Sirrah Damnation” (2.1.119; 2.1.131-2). He appears, in short, the latest avatar of the impertinent, opportunistic, and overindulgently merry Iniquity. We are lulled into the sense that we can follow Buffone’s game half-asleep, it is so well known. In the meantime, we have stopped looking for the Vice.

Buffone’s lampoon of gentle manners through his instruction of Sogliardo, and his jokes about the knight’s romantic posturing perform what Weimann describes as the primary Vice function: negation of the culture’s orthodoxy, a flouting of its elite and revered institutions. Yet, Buffone’s brand of quipping and hectoring does not seriously challenge the status quo. On the contrary, Buffone, as a parasite, is economically motivated to stay this side of committing true offense. Puntarvolo’s observation that, “it is in the power of my purse to make him [Buffone] speak well or ill of me” confirms this limit (2.1.496-8).

Buffone’s low social status combines with his generic function to render him, “one whose company is desired of all men, but beloved of none” (Induction 352-3). The Vice makes a fun companion because negation is good for a laugh. In pushing jokes farther than the well-bred consider proper, Buffone elicits the rough, masculine approval

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52 Weimann’s discussion of Vice functions is more complex than this, but I think he is essentially right to stress that early Vices can be counted on to carry out the carnivalesque function of negating the orthodox, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 119, 146-8.
featured in such exclamations as Brisk’s “O villain!” and Puntarvolo’s delighted, ”Peace, you bandog, peace!” (2.1.277; 2.1.382 ). But negation, in Jonson’s grittier-than-traditional version of moral drama, has similar limits to those it experiences outside the theater. Buffone can affect no real change because, self-interested and utterly dependent on others’ scraps, he can do no more than playfully nip at the hand that feeds him.

No such niceties restrain Macilente. “A sufficient scholar,” “well parted” with intellectual gifts, his acceptance of others’ generosity stems more from a feeling of embittered entitlement than Buffone’s scavenging, and is therefore less beholden. His integrity manifests in his honest advice and warning to a host he knows will dislike the aspersions he casts on his wife’s honesty (4.3.156-77). Necessity, the play suggests, is making parasites of men who would not be otherwise vicious, and Ascham’s worst fears about quick wits thwarted or perverted through disappointment are being realized. Macilente’s wounded dignity suggests how envy can arise from disappointment coupled with contemplation of the less worthy who somehow manage to thrive. If the Sogliardos, Brisks and Deliros were not so unjustly favored by Fortune, Macilente would bear his poverty more patiently. The circumstances of the times, and not Macilente’s nature, give him the lean, threadbare appearance of medieval Envy. 53

The payoff of Jonson’s relocation of the malcontent, already beginning to dominate the landscape of revenge tragedy, to the comedic imaginary as an unpredictable man, “violently impatient of any opposite happiness,” is more than mere novelty (character descriptions 11). Macilente’s peculiar mixture of malcontentment and moralism permits him to effect change because he dares to go beyond mere negation. Yet, Jonson defers
our full realization of this fact, and indeed, of Macilente’s identity as Asper, until the final act, by distracting us with the more boisterous, conventionally vicious antics of Carlo Buffone—from his impromptu verbal caricatures of all he meets, to the lone, “drunken dialogue” that quickly degrades into a tavern brawl with himself (5.3.81-94). Buffone’s noisy, physical scarfing draws attention from the more dangerous, spiritual sponging of the play’s true, nested Vices: Macilente at the center, who sops up the ill humours of others, Asper who battens on the folly of the times, and finally Jonson, who feeds, when he must, on the plaudites of those who frequent the “loathed stage.”

When we do finally discover that Asper is Macilente at the play’s end, and that both have performed a Vice function, we see in retrospect that we have been given several hints. Asper dwells, Vice-like, in the margins of the play: its prologue and epilogue. Then, there is Asper’s name. In vicious times, the “rough” (Asper) or ruffian is the one who aggressively forces others to apprehend their own folly. The traditional, active Virtue would be so unwelcome in the polite circles of 1599—and men are, as Mitis warns so utterly “impatient of reproof”—he would be treated as an unmannerly Vice (Induction 123).

As one who was “made to” unbalance on-the-fence sinners, Asper is heir to a long line of moral drama Vices (143). Yet, inwardly compelled to administer bitter medicine for the improvement of “this impious world,” he is also the first Vice to have a vocation (Induction 2). Other Vices have taken jobs—Horestes’ Vyce as a soldier of

53 Baskervill points out Macilente’s curious mixture of “the allegorical character of Envy in the Seven Deadly Sins” and “the humour of malcontent” in “English Elements in Jonson’s Early Comedy,” 159.

54 “XXXIII Ode to Himself, 1, Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, 282.

55 Jonson repeatedly strikes this chord throughout his career. The worldlings of The Devil is an Ass are so vicious, the devil is routed in confusion, and in the later Staple of News, when Mirth asks Expectation, “How like you the Vice in the play?” Expectation has to ask which of “three or four” characters he might
fortune, Mankind’s Nought and Enough Is As Good as A Feast’s Covetous as stewards, Cambises’s Ambidexter as a courtier—but none have purposely labored for the good of the community before Asper. In this way, Every Man Out cunningly transforms the cathartic laughter induced by a character anti-theatricalists have long condemned as an evil influence into “physic of the mind” (132).

When Angus Fletcher insists that “virtue, the positive ideal of moral allegory, needs to be given its original sense of ‘power,’” he is invoking a strong-form understanding that is already significantly weakened by the time Jonson writes Every Man Out. To some degree this ideological shift can be traced to the reconfiguration of the political landscape that began with the Henrician dissolution. The literal disempowerment of the clergy, a social group traditionally associated with moral goodness, and a formidable power in politics and law, cut an important link between conceptions of power and religious virtue. As the century progressed, the virtue associated with power was more likely to have been Machiavellian virtù. Less than a decade before Every Man Out, audiences watched piety staged as a liability in the very self-consciously “secular” Henry VI plays.

Asper through Macilente, and Jonson through Asper, has the ability to affect change through a turning about of the Vice function: a negation of negation. In this they possess a constructive as well as destructive force. The extent to which the Vice has always worked for the side of virtue is made overt in Every Man Out, as Asper-Macilente puts all self-deluding fools “out of their humor.” Only after such a crisis, such a therapeutic

be. Dorothy H. Brown comments on this latter moment in Christian Humanism in the Late English Morality Plays, 144.

deflation, does self-correction become possible. Jonson dramatizes the potential for earnest change through Sordido’s mid-play conversion.

After being saved from his own suicide by the same impoverished rustics he preyed upon, he understands what a “monster” his avarice has made him, and vows, “I’ll make fair mends/For my foul errors past” (3.8). The near suicide is so generically daring that Mitis complains to Cordatus that, “the intent and horror of the object [suicide] was more than the nature of a comedy will in any sort allow” (3.2.148-50). Yet, with this stroke, Jonson has turned the moment of Faustian despair, when the emptiness of what he has bought (literally and figuratively) finally breaks in upon the character, back into the comic resolution of moral drama’s strong form. Sordido’s repudiation of his past vice—“Out on my wretched humour! It is that/Makes me thus monstrous in true human eyes” (3.2.104-5)—flows into a shriving and repentance as earnest as Mankind’s. It permits Sordido’s reintegration into the social field. As Hammill points out, this flags city comedy’s debt to moral drama: the reinscription of the religious urge for purification with a civic function. Sordido’s transformation renders him as charitable as he was avaricious: a new benefactor to the community’s poor.

Structurally, this move signals the beginning of all the play’s characters imbibing the author or Macilente’s “pills to purge” (Induction 174). It gives weight, in potentia, to Macilente’s wish in the revised catastrophe of the Folio, that those tricked out of their pretensions “might turn wise upon it, and be saved now” (The Revised Catastrophes 10). By the epilogue, we know that Asper has far less in common with the vicious “Ruff” of Cambises than with the bales-flourishing “Mercy” of Mankind: his strict labors save lost

souls. If they also save his own, in purging him of all envy in his guise as Macilente, so much the better. Jonson’s Asper/Macilente confounds the traditional Vice with the traditional Virtue, exposing the dependence of the Vice on the orthodoxy he negates, and stripping the mask from the Virtue’s aggression.

3. Economic History and Topical Issues

The Humour of Gentility

In the years after 1540 that Lawrence Stone famously dubbed, “the century of mobility,” the English aristocracy scrambled to develop tactics to prevent the upward climb of ambitious commoners.\(^{58}\) Like their earlier, Italian counterparts, English elites took to writing courtesy literature designed to maintain their preeminence by describing certain putatively God-given attributes distinguishing the man of noble birth. Ironically, as Frank Whigham points out in *Ambition and Privilege*, the very manners identified as noble were quickly studied and imitated by the very social climbers they sought to exclude.\(^{59}\) By the end of the sixteenth century, gentle manners became, through printing, a widely available technique; elite identity was reduced to an iterable visible style. Books like *The Courtier* and *Civil Conversation* become, as Whigham describes them, “ammunition” for both sides in a class struggle between old and new guarde.\(^{60}\)

This “social combat” is prudently qualified by what economic studies have determined to be the aristocracy and the wealthy commons’ complex socioeconomic


\(^{60}\)Ibid.
interdependence. We recall from past chapters that “county-based” yeomen and gentry like Jonson’s Sogliardo and his “hob-nailed chuff” of a brother, Sordido, “were the greatest beneficiaries of sixteenth-century national and local-level [interclass] conflicts” (character descriptions 58). Studies by Joan Thirsk and Joyce Oldham Appleby have affirmed how marriage and projects, like Puntarvolo’s travel insurance venture, permitted a more or less amicable exchange of material and cultural capital between wealthy, merchant-class citizens and the cash-poor but politically connected aristocracy. The line between gentle and base, then, was increasingly difficult to identify, especially when such amphibious creatures as Jonson—low-born masters of the “letters” that now replace the military knowledge once associated with the first estate—were so highly visible.

Yet, unlike some of his associates, say Edward Allen or Shakespeare, Jonson buys neither land nor crest to augment his status. His scorn for such “mushroom gentlemen” may, as some have suggested, have had its roots in the envy of a character like Macilente, but it also seems to have sprung from an earnest belief in differences in merit (1.2.163). Nobility means nothing when any “whoreson puckfist” may purchase it (1.2.159). As Whigham suggests, the cultivation of style “was itself a political action, which might either help accomplish or substitute for actual political advancement.”

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61 For example, Appleby describes how the involvement of nobility and gentry in economic development linked “traditional leaders to the innovating forces of the times,” Economic Thought and Ideology, 31, and Thirsk shows how projects linked men like Burghley and Leicester to day laborers at the bottom of the social ladder, in Economic Policy and Projects, 12, 20.

62 Lachman, From Manor to Market, 128.

63 Thirsk, Economic Policy and Projects; Appleby, Economic Thought and Ideology.

64 Whigham, Ambition and Privilege, 13.

65 Interesting in this light, is the fact that Jonson accepts honorary degrees from the two universities but turns down James I’s offer of a knighthood. Perhaps his decision ultimately boils down to the offense and expense of the latter honor’s price tag.
potential power of gentility is for sale to all who can afford to try their hand at imitating the manners of their superiors.

Such mimicry may “make the circles of [Jonson’s ‘gentlemen auditors’] eyes/Flow with distilled laughter,” but for the less cavalier, it constitutes a social crime (Induction 214-5). When Haynes speaks of “the appropriation of manners from a superior class” as Jonson’s “great theme” he is thinking in terms of “fraud.” Yet, the “appropriation” specified points to the kind of theft that connects courtesy manuals to rogue literature—the kind imagined in Thomas Nashe’s tale of an unscrupulous page, Jack Wilton, posing as his noble master, the Earl of Surrey, in order to travel Italy, first class. Once alienable, nobility, like any other commodity can be stolen, bought or sold. It is against this outrage that Jonsonian works like Every Man Out struggle to define an intrinsic and inalienable nobility: an ideal “spirit” of virtue and beauty that transcends the crude, “material” stand-ins of courtly manners and fashion.

Herein lies one of those extraordinarily productive, because essentially irresolvable, paradoxes: by Jonson’s own admission the “glass” that figures forth the “mind,” or noble spirit—the very “language [that] most shows a man[‘s substance]”—is embodied: in speech, on the page, through the actor’s body. While it would seem to fly in the face of what is so often identified as a habit of Jonson’s poetry, the dismissal of his culture’s

66 Whigham, Ambition and Privilege, 15.
67 Haynes, Social Relations, 58.
69 Maus’s well-known essay compiles a list of things typically stolen, or “appropriated” in Jonson’s comedies, including wives, food, clothing, and, in Volpone, it would seem that “even the soul is not a uniquely personal possession,” “Facts of the Matter, 68.
70 Jonson, Explorata: or Discoveries, 435.
attachment to externals, Jonson himself advocates a kind of style. The troubling
closeness of this linguistic style to that of manners and fashion does not escape him, and
Jonson works ceaselessly to forge distinctions between those cultivating outward displays
to gain social credit, and those whose tasteful display (in consumption as well as
production) reveals them to be always already noble, whether they were born to this
status or not. Yet, this very dependence on display complicates his championing of
morality in a way he can only ever partially resolve, for all style, linguistic or sartorial, is
contingent upon taste.

Appadurai specifies how taste becomes the supreme limiting factor in the “fashion
system” of complex societies, by comparing it to the status system of medieval
sumptuary taboos. The latter system seeks to restrict and hierarchize “a stable universe of
commodities” along the lines of an extant social hierarchy. In contrast, in “a fashion
system what is restricted and controlled is taste in an ever-changing universe of
commodities, with the illusion of complete interchangeability and unrestricted access.”
It is the sheer velocity (determined by taste) of fashion that inculcates social stratification,
a distinction that is mystified by the appearance of equal access to status items. The
illusion of accessibility obscures the fact that only those with continuous access to large
quantities of disposable income can afford to be fashionable, and, as the despondent
Fungoso remarks, “is any man termed a gentleman that is not always i’ the fashion?”

71 Fish describes how this tic of negation defines its poetry and poet as “the very opposite of that which
shows.” Understanding this defensive gesture in Jonson’s epideictic poetry—how certain poems “labor to
present nothing at all and to remain entirely opaque”—allows us to better appreciate the bravery (or
bravado?) of Jonson’s apparently opposite, artisanal move of exposing his drama to the harsh light of
public appraisal. Fish, “Authors-Readers: Jonson’s Community of the Same,” 233, 244, 254, 260. See also
Sanders, “Print, Popular Culture, Consumption and Commodification” 192-3.

(4.1.13-4) The gentleman of late Elizabethan London must stay abreast of and even contribute to “the flux of apparel” (4.5.128); it is never enough to buy one or even two stylish suits.

Yet, Jonson would have us eschew the game of fashion. To indulge in the kind of slavish imitation Fungoso practices in having his tailor copy Brisk’s suit point for point, is to deserve the derisive social sanction of laughter. The point is emphasized over and over again throughout the course of the play, for not only does Fungoso repeat this error unto penury, but Brisk, himself, is mocked for “servilely observing everyone” at court (4.1.78). This fixation on bad imitation suggests, in this early play, a kind of displaced loathing of theft-as-imitatio, something Jonson will address more directly in plays like Cynthia’s Revels and Poetaster, in what theater historians have dubbed, the “War of the Theatres.”73 Through these later plays, which satirize his rivals, Jonson makes the “ethics of imitation” “his own proper problematic.”74

The Artisanal Ethos: Such Art and Industrie

As we saw in chapter three, the artisanal ethos emerges in the latter half of the sixteenth century as a hallmark of the non-elite artist, a response, at least in part, to market imperatives. Jonson elevates this ethic to the level of an alternative to the elite ethic: virtuous industry and expert artifice opposed to aristocratic sprezzatura. As we shall see, Jonson’s artisanal ethic defends in roughly two ways: it undermines the time-worn prejudice against mechanical work as base by making the industrious artisan’s

73 On Jonson’s early concern with plagiarism see Lowenstein, Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship, 96-111.
74 Ibid, 111.
product a crucial touchstone for the refined tastes that mark a putatively natural elite, and it justifies the crafting of what remains in some camps the superfluous luxury of stage poetry.

Of the many elements of the late sixteenth-century player’s ideological baggage, the artisanal ethos may be (potentially) the most positive. Alluded to through such commonplace expressions as “the qualitie,” with its unmistakably moralistic tone, the artisanal ethic derives first and foremost from the widespread knowledge that most players were “culled from the ranks of joiners, weavers and other artisans.” In addition, there is by this point a history of itinerant players whose labor allows them to maximize extremely limited resources through techniques such as doubling, proficiency in musicianship, dance and sword-fighting. In short, there is by the latter half of the sixteenth century, an increased public awareness of the skills involved in playing that has contributed to a revised image of players.

This is aided in no small part by new conditions like the permanent London playhouses in which one could watch a single company play through its extensive repertory (up to thirty-five different plays) in a month. If players are still not entirely respectable, they are at least perceived to be hard working—a decided virtue in the post-reformation climate. If they are still categorized among the lowly who toil at

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75 Parker’s “Rude mechanicals,” tracing the influence of mechanical labor and status on the profession and aesthetic of public playing, felicitously confirms what Bryson’s work on Dutch flower painting suggests about strategies for coping with the production of luxury goods in early modern Christian cultures. Both studies have aided my development of the idea of Jonson’s artisanal ethos, “Rude mechanicals,” 43-82; Looking at the Overlooked.

76 Chambers notes that even the reformed Stephen Gosson admits to knowing some of “the qualitie” who are “sober, discreet, properly learned honest householders and citizens well thought on amongst their neighbours at home,” The Elizabethan Stage, 1:351.

“mechanicall artes,” they are also known to dine with gentlemen, dress in silks, and purchase land and arms. Out of this categoric confusion, “the bricklayer’s son” constructs an artisanal ethos to defend himself and his plays. Instead of defiantly transgressing the limitations of a humble birth as Marlowe does through Faustus, Tamburlaine, and Gaveston, Jonson writes this very weakness into a strength Leo Salingar has called, “the pose of an honest tradesman.”

By the 1590’s, in an era in which the staging of copiousness is no longer merely a matter of illusion, anxiety about the allure of public playgoing has grown to include the sumptuousness of the theatrical experience at the amphitheatres. From Henslowe’s inventory of lavish costumes and props to de Witt’s rapturous account of the bankside playhouses’ “obvious beauty,” we may infer that the sheer opulence of the playgoing experience contributed to antitheatrical invectives condemning playhouses for their tempting displays of superfluous finery. This is one of the points Howard makes in connecting Phillip Stubbes’s attack on clothing “more gorgeous, sumptuous and precious than our State, calling or condition of lyfe requireth” to more straightforward antitheatrical tracts. Theater, like extravagant dress, is an unnecessary luxury.

Jonson recasts the scandal of luxury as “bounty”—an exchange of mutual generosities between master poet and discerning playgoer (5.4.61). Then, using much the same strategy as the Dutch flower painters of Norman Bryson’s study, he cultivates a

78 Parker, “Rude Mechanicals,” 47.
80 MacIntyre and Epp attribute the change to the settling of the London companies into permanent theaters where they could build up stock, “Cloathes worth all the rest,” 275.
81 Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 88-9. For more on the attack on luxury in antitheatrical discourse, see Howard’s second chapter in The Stage and Social Struggle, 26.
laborer’s ethos through the high artifice of his work. “Pleasure is disavowed, hidden by production; what replaces it is strain, effort and the work imperative.” In Dutch flower painting, each petal is preternaturally rendered in what Bryson calls a “taxonomic perspective,” which “reveal[s] variation against the background of underlying structure and type.” Much the same might be said of Jonson’s plays, whose distinct character types Jonson meticulously arranges in what Jonas Barish and Harry Levin urge us to think of in terms of shifting compositions of “pattern and colour.” This aesthetic carefully diverts attention from the pleasure of the work to the rigors of its production. The virtue of “honest labor”—a labor reflected in the exquisite details and high artifice of a piece—excuses, or at least neutralizes, the vice of consuming the blatantly sumptuous commodity.

Through the mutuality of “bounty” Jonson even goes a step further, to relocate the “prodigality” still connected to the concept of luxury back to labor, or his own expenditure of energy. To “such as will join their profit with their pleasure,” Asper promises (200):

For these, I’ll prodigally spend myself,  
And speak away my spirit into air;  
For these I’ll melt my brain into invention,  
Coin new conceits, and hang my richest words  
As polished jewels in their bounteous ears. (202-6)

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82 Ibid., 34.
83 Bryson, Looking at the Overlooked, 110.
84 Ibid., 107.
86 Bryson, 96, 110, 132.
87 Ibid., 96.
In this nearly metaphysical conceit, Asper himself becomes a kind of coin, extravagantly offering to spend and recast himself for “these,” the poet’s “attentive auditors” (199). The process implied is an excruciating one of being melted down, stamped, beaten, and polished to be given out as jewels or coins. His very spirit and brains furnish the raw material; the final product is a trove of rare but transferable commodities, the kind of witty, literary fragments gallants and citizens will no doubt circulate as cultural capital well beyond the playhouse. Yet, in typical Jonsonian fashion—a move Maus has called “the transcendent gesture”—the poet manages to retain the best part of himself. His words may dangle from his auditor’s ears, but at the speaking of them, his “spirit” ultimately escapes, “away” into air.

In its depiction of poetic labor, Asper’s conceit both masks and articulates the fact that the poet sells his matter—that is, his work—and not himself. Anticipating the Bartholomew Cokeses of the audience who consider players and playwrights their personal property by right of superior social status and financial contribution, Jonson asserts through Asper that he is no base slave “servilely to fawn,” but a master craftsman whose confidence in his expertise makes him “fear no courtier’s frown” (Induction 25).

Yet, here is a craftsman who makes it his business to “crush out the humour of such

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88 The model in mind is Crane’s “gathering and framing” of literary fragments as “ornamental flowers or jewels,” Framing Authority, 39, but Gurr documents the case of a Mr. Edward Pudsey who kept just such a commonplace book full of extracts from plays by Jonson, Marston, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dekker, in Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 200-1.

89 Maus’ description of this “transcendent gesture” enables us to recognize where Jonson manages to hold back part of himself, even in the ostensible transparency of an exchange with his audience in which he promises to utterly spend himself for their approval, “Facts of the Matter,” 82. Loewenstein later characterizes this tendency as Jonson’s “stiff-necked reserve,” Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship, 165.

90 Even if Jonson thinks of spirit as being “dissolved and depleted by the act of creation,” as Maus insists the commonplace has it, such a fate might not be the worst imaginable. It seems consonant with the Jonson we know that being “dissolud in elements” would be preferable to being eternally consumed by others in a Faustian hell.
spongy souls/As lick up every idle vanity,” be they courtiers, “broker[s]” or “lawyer[s]” (144-5, 23). It is an impropriety that so strains traditional roles—a mechanical correcting a courtier—that Jonson sagaciously adds a liberal dose of professional jargon to Asper’s artisanal lexicon. Asper’s apparent expertise with “humours” and anatomies makes his pretension to administer moral “physic” more acceptable (86-107, 187). That this diction also corresponds to the satirist’s conventional job of “scourg[ing],” and purging vice from men to “make ‘em fit for fair societies,” is beyond felicitous (115, 175). The craft that returns the social body to health is applied at the expense or “spend[ing]” of the “physician,” whose specialized knowledge licenses him to treat the “sick,” be they great or low-born, willing or unwilling (187-8). Only “a sort of fools,” “sick in taste” can possibly object (130).

In these ways, Jonson distinguishes himself from less skilled artisans—writers he will soon revile as poetasters. He will not stoop to sell his “wares” at a “stall,” like Robert Wilson’s humble Prologue, who begs auditors to return again if they find Three Ladies of London “well wouen, good and fine.” Rather, like a goldsmith with his own shop, Jonson quietly incorporates market principles into displaying work he largely expects to generate its own demand. We see how this works more clearly in light of Jean-Christophe Agnew’s review of late medieval marketing principles.

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91 In McLuskie’s very similar take on Jonson’s distinction between himself and lesser poets, she describes this as, “one of the illusions, created by Jonson’s self-fashioning and articulated by the distinction between art and commerce, between high culture and low entertainment which increasingly dominated theatrical commentary,” “Making and Buying,” 142.

The quality of “transparency in exchange” is most prized in market transactions, in that it upholds the ideal “utility, security and equity” of the marketplace.\(^93\) In practical terms, transparency means that goods are “presented” rather than “represented,” and inspectors are permitted to enforce assizes and inspect the quality of all merchandise.\(^94\) By metatheatrical methods some have called “Brechtian,” *Every Man Out* maintains a presentational mode throughout the play.\(^95\) It is a theater that “does not reproduce conditions but, rather, reveals them.”\(^96\) As such, it alienates the auditor from what is presented, thwarting our passive identification with the action. The constant, onstage presence of the Grex is itself an “alienating” effect, especially if the Globe, as some have suggested, does not permit gallants to sit on the stage.

With their intermittent assessment of scenes and characters, the Grex prevent us from forgetting that we are watching a play. In this, Jonson goes beyond the conventional direct address of prologues or the Vice’s asides, to keep us ever mindful of our true location and activity. In the Induction, when Mitis tries to warn Asper of the wrath his comments may incur, he snorts, “You might as well have told me yond [pointing to roof over stage] is heaven;/ This [to platform] earth, these [to stage posts] men, and all had moved alike”(Induction 125-6). Asper models a fundamental discernment he expects in his auditors: to know fiction from reality, and attacks on specific men from attacks on general vice. The Grex announces changes in locale, not with the thunderous, blank

\(^{94}\)Ibid., 29-30.
verse eloquence of *Henry V*’s chorus, but through the cordial conversational asides of Cordatus to his companion, Mitis: “O, marry, this is one for whose better illustration we must desire you to presuppose the stage the middle aisle in Paul’s; and that [Pointing to the door on which Shift is posting his bills] the west end of it” (3.1.2-4). Jonson does not attempt to pass off the playing space as a Persian court or a pitched field in France. Instead, he sketches an aisle of St. Paul’s, and in this way, claims to lay the play entirely open to our inspection. The country, Deliro’s house, and St. Paul’s are not to be taken as faithful representations of places, but as dramatic localities, impressionistically generated and presented through language and blocking alone. In a claim of utter transparency, Asper urges that, “envious critics with their broadest eyes/Look through and through me” (60). A conscientious artisan with nothing to hide, he welcomes the most rigorous public inspection.

The Grex, Mitis and Cordatus, ostensibly serve this function. “I leave you two as censors to sit here,” Asper instructs them, “Observe what I present, and liberally/Speak your opinions upon every scene” (152-4). Like assizers, Mitis and Cordatus are appointed to inspect the quality of the merchandise. Asper, who would not flinch to be examined “by th’ austerest brow” urges the well-disposed Cordatus, a friend who has already viewed the play, and his companion, Mitis, to “tax me freely” (Induction 58, 59). The Grex, then, lend an air of transparency to a craft that is notoriously illusionistic.

In actuality, the Grex serve a number of defensive functions. Their dialogue preempts the censure of critical audience members, draws attention to the thoughtful construction of the play, and trains the audience to be better auditors. To these ends, Mitis plays the shallow, trendy auditor to Cordatus’s more deep-thinking, judicious one. A beat after
Cordatus has excused himself from judging the play before Mitis and the audience have seen it. Mitis asks if the play “observe[s] all the laws of comedy” as any “authentic” comedy must (Induction 231, 240). Clearly, Mitis seeks the mental shortcut of judging the play before he has seen it. He attempts to measure it against classical unities he uncritically accepts as authoritative. Cordatus dismisses these “too nice observations,” and historicizes them as one-time deviations from form (239). Later, Mitis complains when Macilente neglects to “speak somewhat in reproof of Sordido’s wretchedness” as one might expect of a Virtue in moral drama (1.3.151-2). Cordatus patiently explains that Mitis, in desiring “propriety” in form rather than in character motivation, is in error (157): Macilente, as an envious man, does not focus on Sordido’s villainy, but on his undeserving good fortune.

By Act 2, Mitis is prepared to admit that his received sense of dramatic decorum is not helping him much with the play. He defers to Cordatus’s superior knowledge but confesses he is unable to merely watch. Cordatus graciously encourages him to keep asking questions, since the answers may satisfy those “who would object the same you do” (592). Eager to impress, or perhaps simply unable to maintain his focus on any object for more than five minutes’ time, Mitis’ interjections range from wondering why the author wrote such long scenes (2.2.577-8), to objecting that near suicide is too serious for comedy (3.2.145-50), to wanting a different kind of play altogether (3.1.516-521). At one point, as Mitis tries to imagine how the play’s many conflicts will resolve themselves, Cordatus paternally shushes him with, “Never preoccupy your imagination withal. Let your mind keep company with the scene still” (3.2.162-3).
Thus, Mitis and Cordatus model, respectively, poor and good playgoing behavior. Through the Grex, Jonson not only preemptively answers the most obvious objections, but trains an audience to read as Jonson wants to be read. At the same time, the Grex, who look and behave like gallants, appear to represent consumer interests. If Jonson were trying to pull something over on us, surely the Grex are close enough to observe it, and independent enough to report it.

Jonson’s turn to prose over poetry also supports this ethic of transparency. His early plays spearhead a “newer school of antirhetorical naturalness,” which, he later laments go underappreciated, “as if no face were fair, that were not powdered, or painted!”\(^{(97)}\) The ornate Euphuism of Lyly or the oratorical, meticulously balanced utterances of Cicero are for Jonson, as Jonas Barish observes, “often associated with insincerity or affectation in a character.”\(^{(98)}\) Verse, as we know, is the standard way in which plays prior to the London stage are written. When prose appears, it is often used, as Barish notes, to distinguish the rustic or roguish character from the eloquent, verse-speaking nobleman. Jonson upends this formula in *Every Man Out*, for Sordido, both a rustic and a cheater, is more likely to speak in verse than the romance-loving knight, Puntarvolo. Prose is the default mode of the play. Those moments where characters who otherwise speak prose break into soaring verse are, in fact, most likely to be those in which they are most strongly in the grips of their particular humour. Sordido waxes poetic on his plot to grow richer by forestalling his grain (1.3.126-146). Macilente sings a sour grapes lament about the fraudulent power of good clothes (3.3.6-31). Asper’s rhetoric is inflated until the ebb of his humour at the

\(^{(97)}\) Jonson, *Discoveries*, 719-21,  
play’s end, reflecting the “change” by which his own vice—envy, as Macilente; ire as Asper—has dissipated (5.11.47). The exception to this rule seems to be moments of conversion, Deliro’s or Asper/Macilente’s, where a character experiences a violent change understood in humour theory as one humour driving out another (3.2.101-121; 5.4.1-40).

The Every Man plays produce a world in which high bombast or passionate lyric is most often produced by fops, fantastics and con-men. Jonson thus links ornate language to deception, and its producers—not coincidentally Jonson’s most important rivals—to the most odious cozeners of the day. In chapter four I argued that Marlowe developed a linguistic style to transform what had been Leicesters’ Men’s hypermasculine violence-as-rhetoric, into rhetoric-as-violence. Marlowe’s style, with its dazzling imitatio, becomes the surplus labor that awes its audience, profits its players, and singularizes its poet. It thrusts Marlovian tragedy to the forefront of the London theatrical market. If Shapiro is correct, Jonson finds that he cannot overgo Marlowe strictly on his own terms. Instead, he makes the Marlovian move of altering the level of engagement. This allows Jonson to do two things. First, it permits him to overtly thematize the classical knowledge on which Marlowe trades in silence. Mitis and Cordatus discuss everything from classical form to theories of decorum (Induction 231-265; 1.3.149-160). Later, this move will permit Jonson to critique the mighty line itself. Marlowe had taken violence from the performative to the rhetorical level; Jonson moves it from the rhetorical to the thematic. Jonson will characterize a certain type of poetic surplus, Marlovian style,

99Shapiro, Rival Playwrights, 43-62.
100Ibid., 40-62.
as a type of violence to nature. English poetry so ornate, so speciously gorgeous, is not natural, and Jonson declares himself staunchly “loth to make Nature afraid in his plays.”

Conversely, of the poetry in Jonson’s plays, he would have it known that, “though [the true poet’s] language differ from the vulgar somewhat; it shall not fly from all humanity, with the Tamerlanes, and Tamarchams of the late age. . .”

As Barish recognized, Jonson undoubtedly labors as hard to “roughen” and “irregularize” his speeches as the writer of *Tamburlaine* did to polish and balance his. Yet, in comparison, and against the background of an ideal market ethic Jonson develops a “plain-style” which works toward the construction of the “honest” poet he believed to be worthy of state approval and reward.

4. Conclusions

*The Labor of a Defence*

At the end of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Jonson thrusts his way fully into the competitive fray of the London theatrical market as the “envious” man, with his metadramatic reference to Shakespeare. In all three authoritative versions of the play, Asper/Macilente’s epilogue airily refuses to “beg a plaudite” in the traditional vein, but allows that, “. . . if you, out of the bounty of your good liking, will bestow [applause]: why, you may, in time, make lean Macilente as fat as Sir John Falstaff” (5.11.76-7). As “fat” also carries the sense of wealth, Jonson glances at his older, prospering rival,

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specifically mentioning the latter’s comic character most beloved by the Queen. Through his alter ego, the “lean Macilente,” Jonson can complain of his unwarranted hunger, his lack or “wanting” of “that place in the world’s account which he thinks his merit capable of,” in a way pitched to the royal ear (Characters 8). That the “graces” of Elizabeth, alone, cause “envy” to flee Macilente’s “malicious” soul, and “drown” his envious “passions” is a pretty, Spenserian conceit, but it is also a promise veiling a bid for the “graces” of the highest patron in the land (7, 9, 8, 17). Perhaps it is also a threat, the prologue for a darker kind of play, in which the malcontent—overeducated and undervalued—asserts his exceptional ability by wreaking havoc on his society.  

This section explores the degree to which the competing markets of patronage, public playwrighting and print shape and are shaped by the matter of *Every Man Out*, from its themes to its diction. We have already spent some time discussing Jonson’s formal solutions to market pressure: it is time to test Leo Salingar’s suspicion that “Jonson’s banter covers a serious inspection of the relations between writer and public under conditions of the market.”

I want to focus on two elements in the play that will grow to characterize Jonson’s play writing. The first of these is the theme of what we would now call object relations. The play contributes to the modern distinction between subject and object, just as later comedies like *Bartholomew Fair* do, through their ridicule of those for whom such distinctions do not exist. The second focus of this section concerns the trope of canine

\[104\] Jonson, *Discoveries*, 659.
\[105\] For more on Jacobean malcontents, see Dollimore’s *Radical Tragedy*.
aggression. I read Jonson’s dog as a recognition of the ascendancy of the prime market imperative: that we are all bound—even the Puntarvolos and Grace Wellborns of the world—to enter the market for our living. In entering it, the market enters us, degrading us: none go unsullied. Jonson’s artisanal ethos goes a good way toward turning his fear of this degradation (commodification) into a more manageable aggression. Yet, aggression, in a Christian moral universe, invokes its own terrors, for as a long tradition of moral literature tells us, God punishes the ambitious, the envious, the covetous, the wrathful, etc.. The dog is a mechanism for coping with aggressions amped up in the cramped, competitive theater community. It allows Jonson to both punish and reward himself, and to work out scenarios for his future survival. In one of these, Jonson constructs for himself a poetic persona, “forever inaccessible to any public inspection or validation,” enclaved above the crass materiality that breathes life into his dramatic productions for public and royal audiences: the Jonson of Maus’ “ideal economy.”

_The Matter Between His Rapier and He_

For the audience trained by moral drama, Sogliardo’s belief that the purchase of an object, a coat-of-arms, makes him a gentleman places him in the familiar tradition of fools exemplified by Wager’s feather and sword-seeking Moros in _The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art_ (3.1.220). Knowing this helps us to recognize the extent to which Jonson’s novelties depend on his auditors’ understanding of convention, as well as making apparent how his treatment pushes what we might call the fetishism denounced in such earlier moral drama to a new, more revealing level.

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107 Fish, “Authors-Readers,” 244; Maus, “Facts of the Matter,” see especially 74-81.
Studies on early modern object relations have gone a considerable way toward historicizing our modern understanding of fetishism. Writers like Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have explored how pre-capitalist notions of the relation between persons and things presuppose a kind of interdependency between object and subject, suggesting that our modern “disavowal of the power of objects” (which casts fetishism in an unnatural light) emerged only recently in the early modern era in response to the capitalist problem of commoditization. As the forces of capitalism sunder the laborer from his objects, reducing their point of contact to a relationship of commodification, a dignity-saving ideological split occurs, as well: no longer is “the person. . . the bearer of the power that comes from things,” but a “subject” or master who autonomously buys, sells or disposes of his “mere things,” or “objects.” This occurs, in the Marxian view, because of a hostility that arises between persons and things as both are debased through the commodifying process. The object “overpowers” the subject as the subject’s labor is consumed by the object to resemble a property of the object, itself. At the same time, the object loses its distinguishing traits as it is reduced to an exchange value. The relationship between subject and object shifts from a mutually constitutive one to a struggle for mastery. Jonson exposes and ridicules this modern struggle by putting objects on par with and in actual conflict with their owners.

109 de Grazia, Quilligan and Stallybrass, use “subject,” here, in the psychoanalytic sense of the word. They convincingly unpack the historically problematic nature of the distinction between “subject” and “object” in their introduction to Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture, 8, 27, 29, 31.
110 Ibid, 3.
111 Ibid., 3.
In the Paul’s walk scene, Puntarvolo, Buffone and Brisk’s running commentary on the would-be ruffler, Shift, makes light of his “expostulating with his rapier” (3.1.325). Hoping to impress an audience, Shift broods in conspicuous solitude, repeatedly “clap[ping] his sword o’ the head,” threatening an imaginary foe, but Puntarvolo’s mocking observation reveals that, phenomenologically, all the “violence” is limited to the interaction between man and instrument. The knight marvels, “I wonder the blade can contain itself being so provoked” (3.1.331, 335). Sogliardo, ever eager to contribute, suggests that the knight’s group labor to, “make ‘em friends, and take up the matter between his rapier and he” (338-9). Buffone dryly suggests that the intercession might indeed be welcome, as “this rapier, it seems is in the nature of a hanger-on, and the good gentleman would happily be rid of him” (341-2).

The men continue to make “excellent sport” of Shift by exposing the absurd core of his posturing (320). In offering to buy the rapier, Brisk pretends to be ignorant of the tradition by which a military man’s honor is tied to his weapon. Shift’s feigned outrage signifies both a suspicion that his honor is doubted, and firm allegiance to the older form of object relations in which, “my rapier is my guard, my defence, my revenue, my honour” (396-7). In fact, Shift, who is thoroughly embroiled in capitalist object relations, turns out to be pathetically eager to swap his “honour” for “half a crown” (386).

The lesson here is that display of objects is never the same as the thing it longs to figure forth—in Shift’s case, military honor—though the foolish are always perceiving it so. Douglas Bruster would consider this logic a feature of end-of-the-century London’s “materialist vision,” in which power or wealth must be “put in evidence,” and “being is
degraded into having.”¹¹² Jonson condemns this vision as reprehensibly amoral, but Shift’s potentially rebellious sword points to a more practical understanding of the problem. Power and worth entirely bound up in things can be plucked or lost as easily as one’s purse. Thus, display of alienable objects, in Jonsonian comedy, functions much like a mirage, and Jonson strives to remind his auditors of its ephemeral quality. In the worst-case scenario of the commodity relation, the person is so taken, so overwhelmed by the object, that his delusion convinces others. A false economy springs up, like Deliro’s crediting Brisk as a successful courtier.

Nowhere is the contentious relationship between person and property better illustrated than in the “strange encounter” of Fastidius Brisk’s duel (4.3. 406). This tale of a duel of exquisite clothing weirdly detached from the men who wear them, concentrates all the play’s contempt for those who take stuff for substance. It begins as Brisk, seeking to one-up Sogliardo’s boast about Shift’s proficiency at quarrelling, offers a blow-by-blow account of his own fight with a courtier. He strives to best the “terms and circumstances” of any quarrel Shift may have had by framing his duel in epic terms: he and Luculento fall out over a woman, like Agamemnon and Achilles (378, 385-6). The similarity ends here. In lieu of the armed battalions poised to rush to their leaders’ defense, the courtiers possess. . . beautiful clothes.

Yet, the power of the clothing is more than symbolic in Brisk’s duel, and it is this that makes what amounts to a pose-down all the more hilarious. Brisk’s hatband deflects a blow from his opponent’s sword by virtue of its sheer “mass[iness]” but the sword persists, ruffling Brisk’s hair in an attractive but insulting manner (397-8). There is

¹¹²Bruster, Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare, 68.
collateral damage to “an Italian cutwork band I wore, cost me three pounds in the Exchange but three days before” (403-5). Brisk meets this affront by ripping his opponent’s shirt and doublet, only to receive a punishing slash to his own “embossed girdle” in return (416). The duel is just heating up, with “mutual damage” (that nevertheless miraculously “skips the flesh”) when Brisk’s silver spur becomes entangled in his own boot’s “ruffle,” and he falls to the ground (427-31). Thrashing to free himself, he accidentally draws first blood through his own silk stocking. Luculento flees at the sight of blood. As Ostovich’s gloss explains, by the rules of dueling, the fight ends ignominiously for both combatants.113 And yet, the duel is also a tremendous success.

First, it displays Brisk’s cultural capital to fine effect. From gold hatband to silver spurs, the duel works like an aggressive inventory of Brisk’s fashionable purchases which cannot help in the telling, but draw attention to his present, fashionable suit. And Brisk punctuates his tale with fencing postures—“I cast myself into this figure” (391)—certain to display his current finery to stunning advantage. By focusing on sartorial details, Brisk calls attention to the contrast between the suit he wears in his role as narrator, and the one he describes himself wearing in the encounter. “I had a gold cable hatband then new come up (which I wore about a murrey French hat I had)” (397). As in Appadurai’s model of the fashion economy, Brisk draws on both the symbolic cache of the foreign, or “exotic,” as well as the velocity of fashion’s turnover.114 The rhetorical effect, much like the costume anachronisms of the London stage, prettily defamiliarizes the familiar, rendering the outfit he now wears potentially exotic. Second, on the metadramatic level,

113 Ostovich, Every Man Out, n. 436.
and here we must try to infer the reaction of other characters on stage, the duel of
clothing provides Jonson with another teaching moment. It seems certain that Sogliardo,
and perhaps Shift and Puntarvolo, watch Brisk’s performance in awed silence. We
deduce from the snide remarks of the more skeptical Buffone and Macilente—“I wonder
he speaks not of his wrought shirt”—that the tale falls very differently on their ears
(421). Their witty, incredulous asides about what Macilente earlier dismisses as “such a
deal of outside” teach the audience to laugh at sartorial displays that might otherwise
mesmerize (2.2.209). Brisk’s clothing is very literally endowed with what Stallybrass
calls “the magical power. . . to absorb its wearer.”115 Ultimately, the fight of the
disembodied suits delights for same reason Freud tells us we laugh at “mechanical” toys
or figurines: for their uncanny doubling of an object experience tells us ought to be
unique.116 The clothes are courtiers as much as the courtiers are themselves. Macilente is
moved to exclaim of such men, “what things they are!” (2.2.215). Bodies are becoming
the equivalent of hangers, supportive but of dubious necessity to competing garments.

If Peter Stallybrass is correct, and “Renaissance England was a cloth society” in
which “things take on a life of their own,” then Jonson’s joke of the dueling suits is not
so much a swipe at the fop’s folly—that particular social type of later comedy—as it is a
demystification of the relationship between most Elizabethans and the status-bearing
objects under which they fall sway.117 Objects have begun to overwhelm their possessors

in the commodity climate, transforming them in ways that are not always in the possessor’s control.

The problem is even more pervasive for the spectator in what has become a culture increasingly fascinated with the incisive reading of complex signs—from who walks with whom at St. Paul’s or at court, to the changes in the natural world almanac writers use to forecast future weather. Jonson, as Marlowe before him, and Wager before him, and the Mankind author before him, urges his audience to distrust surfaces. The old moral drama warning about deceptive appearance is more relevant than ever. By the time Jonson is writing, moral drama has long given its audience ideas about the distance between possessors and possessions. The playing profession itself, solidified by moral drama more than any other dramatic form, has also imbued its spectators with a knowledge of theatricality that contributes to the peculiar sense of alienation from objects that marks commodity culture. Theatricality, as so many early modernists have shown, is that which makes everyone potentially a player, curiously dependent on props to maintain the illusion of a role, even as one protests one’s fundamental difference and independence from all things “exchangeable, displaceable, [and] forgettable.”

An Open-Throated, Black-Mouthed Cur

I suggested briefly in this chapter’s introduction, that the dog in this play and in subsequent Jonson plays, is yet another avatar of moral drama’s wily, metaphoric cutpurse. But this covert theft, which was produced as a free-floating anxiety in Cambises, and the threat of a state with absolutist ambitions in Jew of Malta, becomes, by

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118 Jones and Stallybrass, “Fetishisms and Renaissances,” 27.
*Every Man Out*, a personalized response to anxieties specific to Jonson’s markets: the theft of *imitatio*, other poets’ theft of his work, the problematic of the work as property. To understand why comparisons to dogs, canine epithets, and descriptors should occur with as much frequency as the word “humour” in this play, we need to add to our list of types of theft the kind that an ambitious and competitive London playwright might find particularly worrisome. Appadurai writes that, “theft. . .is the humblest form of diversion of commodities from preordained paths.” 119 If commodities can be taken to include the humanist learning now diverted from the elite paths of manuscript circulation to be hawked in the public amphitheaters and bookstalls, then poets of the late Elizabethan theater are ideological thieves. Jonson vacillates between denying and nearly accepting his role in this downward conversion of elements from spheres of elite consumption to the popular throng. In *Bartholomew Fair* he will silently make the citizen/playwright, Littlewit, the ultimate butt-because-writer-of a tasteless puppet show that “reduce[s]” the erudite poem, *Hero and Leander* “to a more familiar strain,” “a little easy and modern for the times.” 120 Yet, in the same play, he will admire, at arm’s length, the calculated aggression of the dog-like protagonist, Quarlous, who creates his own opportunities by stealing a license that wrests advantage from the undeserving. At the point in his career of *Every Man Out*, however, Jonson’s dogs are prototypes. They do not yet plan much beyond their next meal, and they are more likely to be punished for their transgressions than rewarded. Buffone has his mouth sealed up with wax (5.3.261). Puntarvolo’s overinsured dog is poisoned by, and perhaps in place of Macilente, who is put out of his

own humour by the play’s end (85). Even “our poet” with his “caninum appetitum” is publicly ridiculed for his drunken truculence (318-20).

It is generally felt that Jonson’s city comedy protagonists, who prove to be more cunning beast than virtuous vir by the play’s end, come as close to voicing an authorial position as any other characters. While we might usefully qualify this observation with Baskervill’s note that such characters “embod[y] the spirit of the play [emphasis mine],” it is clear that at least occasionally, Jonson aligns himself with these gallants. To understand why the writer who wields the artisanal ethos to such fine effect would identify with such apparently idle gentlemen, and how these characters feed into the deep structural significance of canine aggression in Jonson’s work, we need to return to the idea of the negation of negation.

As an example closer to what Jonson does, because it so clearly refers to aesthetics, I wish to bring Hegel to bear on the work of suppression. For Hegel, suppression initiates the three-fold process of the negation of negation. Let us use Hegel’s example of nature “banished” as all that is fantastic and unclear in a “twilight” reign of animism. In the first stage, an animal deity, the eagle, is worshipped as a vessel of some of nature’s more admired traits and powers. In the second stage, nature is replaced by a logical regime of systems, the establishment of law, the organization of the secular social, including city/state ideology and the codification of ethics as morals; the city/state-cultivating

121 Blissett, for example, says that Jonson “looked into Asper’s mirror and saw himself as Asper, to be sure, and even as Macilente in the resentment they shared,” “The Oddness of Every Man Out,” 179. While I agree that there are characters with whom we are meant to sympathize, a sort of gravitational center of a play, linking an author too strongly to one character obfuscates the degree to which authors work through all characters, sympathetic or not. This allows them the flexibility of occupying and testing multiple perspectives, as I suggest in my reading of the bear baiting scene, below.

Olympians overcome and banish the chaotic Titans. In the third stage, suppressed nature is incorporated to work “beside” the systemic in “symbolic” form, through the “mysteries” of art in which “the meaning remains dark and contains something other than what the external, on which it is supposed to be represented, provides directly.” In other words, for Hegel, the old form, subtly empowers and augments the force of the new form in this third stage: the eagle is retained as an adjunct and sign of Jupiter’s attributes.

Hegel’s belief in “progress” toward a spiritual/aesthetic “ideal,” however, limits his understanding of the eagle’s contribution to Jupiter’s ideological force. The eagle of the third stage is not, insists Hegel, “inappropriately” mixed with the human, but functions “beside” Jupiter. Unless we can say for certain, however, that Zeus’s rapaciousness, the resemblance of his thunderbolts to diving raptors, his cruelty, his surveillance of sexual prey, and his transformation into ariel visitors (a shower of gold, a swan, a cuckoo) are all prior to his association with the eagle, the eagle’s attributes must be understood to determine Zeus’s, appropriately or not. The eagle is Jupiter’s, which is to say, “of” Jupiter, representing Jupiter, but also figuring forth an unseen Jupiter through a visible object with properties familiar in the natural world. To insist on one of many conflicting early modern definitions of this relationship, say, Quintillian’s over Aristotle’s, would be unhelpfully precise. Instead, something like Lynn Enterline’s definition of “allegory” as that which “brings the process of reading and writing into focus as an unresolved

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124 Ibid., 473.
signifying. . . dilemma,” gives sufficient room for the variety of ways the figure of the
eagle and Jupiter may productively interact at the symbolic level.  

It is not surprising, then, that the psychoanalysts’ process of phobic writing is so
close to the Hegelian dialectic. For Kristeva, as we deny or suppress the existence of our
own animalistic want and aggressivity (Hegel’s stage 1), it is “projected [to] come back
[to us] from the outside” (stage 2). In the process of socialization, the active “voice”
changes to a passive one, and the fear and aggression that the social world of stage two
rejects become, for the phobic, that which menaces from without, a “turning around” in
Freudian parlance, from the sense that “I am afraid of biting” to “I am afraid of being
bitten.” The phobic writer differs from other phobics only in regaining an active voice
(step 3)—aggressively deploying words to master a fear whose only rhetoric has been, up
until now, affect and imagery, terror and that which metaphorizes it. In this way, the
phobic writer makes language a “counterphobic object,” the “strongly barricaded
discourse” Kristeva identifies by its copiousness and “extreme nimbleness.” From here
on out the voice of the phobic will be heterogeneous, for threaded throughout the new
and highly wrought phobic discourse, traces of the animal—“the anguish of original
want” and aggression—remain.  

The trick is that step three is never entirely complete.  
The dog appears again and again because the contradictions to which it alludes as a symptom, can not be resolved.
In some cases, as in Jonson’s fear of and aggression toward the judgemental audience

126 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 41.
127 Ibid., 40.
whose approval materially sustains him, the lack of resolution reflects on the very conditions of the public theater market. In other cases, the contradictions remain unresolved because Jonson will not resolve them. Kristeva explains that “the phobic object is precisely avoidance of choice, it tries as long as possible to maintain the subject far from a decision.”

Much has been written about Jonson’s poetic and personal vacillation between two morally inflected modes: a satiric, grossly material way of being in the world and the transcendant “ideal” way that inflects much of his epideictic poetry. As long as the dog exists, Jonson need never submit himself wholly to the rigid demands of what it means to be virtuous in the old moral code. At the same time, rather than undercut morality itself, as Marlowe might, Jonson’s dog merely makes a strong case for the limited necessity of undomesticated energies so often associated with vice—the excesses of wit, aggression, and sheer enjoyment Jonson silently approves.

The dog we see roving through Jonson’s works, then, is not merely the despicable cur who steals scraps of other men’s work—the Crispinuses and Volpones who, in turn, represent the London “plagiari[ies]” with whom Loewenstein finds Jonson so bitterly at odds.  In the popular realm of sixteenth-century proverbs and emblem books, the dog is also known to be “sagacious,” loyal, sociable, and as tenacious and precise when tracking its prey as “a scholar enunciating a syllogism.” Above all, the urban dog is a

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128 Ibid., 42.
129 Leowenstein writes, for example, of Act IV of Poetaster in which Tibullus recognizes the verse the Dekker character Crispinus has tried to pass off as his own as belonging to Horace, the Jonson character, Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship, 120.
130 See, for example, the section on dogs in T.H. White’s The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts, Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954), 61-7.
survivor.\textsuperscript{131} Clearly, this is more than a controlling metaphor, or an emblematic figure “beside” Jonson. The dog is of Jonson, at least as much as the grave, continent Horace of Poetaster.

In the dedication of his Epigrams to Pembroke, Jonson anticipates a “common voice” that will disavow the accuracy of the satiric sketches with a dismissive, “Beware the poet.”\textsuperscript{132} Apparently disparaging the poet with this allusion to the dog (still featured in the ubiquitous Roman sign cave canem), Jonson in fact uses the device to elevate himself to the tradition of ancient cynics and satirists early moderns associate with the dog.\textsuperscript{133} Yet, as we see in the hand-to-mouth existence of Macilente, Buffone, and even “our poet” whom Buffone derides for magnanimously knocking back the bimonthly banquet with the players, though he lives on “beans and buttermilk” the rest of the time, the dog’s vigilance is more often rewarded with counterattacks than with sustenance (Induction 332, 333).

The mature Jonson will stage a stunning emblem of this belabored position in Bartholomew Fair. In Act 2, scene five, the bored gallants, Quarlous and Winwife, having made their way past the gauntlet of fair booths where gingerbread and hobbyhorse sellers cry their wares, find themselves at the heart of the action—Ursula’s booth, where the flesh of “your punk and your pig” become nearly indistinguishable through the depraved magic of commoditization (BF 2.5.38). As Ursula lumbers in, cursing her assistant, the two “gamesters” start in with insults. The humorously misplaced, classical

\textsuperscript{131}Remarkably, even Puntarvolo’s dead dog is given a potential afterlife. Carlo tries to persuade the knight to stuff him, or skin him and glue the hide on a smaller dog, so that the knight may continue the venture that is so dependent upon the health of this animal, Every Man Out, 5.3.219-235..

\textsuperscript{132}Jonson, Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, Dedication, 11.

\textsuperscript{133}Blissett, “The Oddness of Every Man Out of His Humour,” 173-4.
perspective through which they earlier pronounced Leatherhead with his toy animals
“Orpheus among the beasts” pauses on her firebrand before Quarlous decides “she is too
fat to be a Fury” (6, 70). Ursula roars to life, giving back as good as she gets, and
Knockem the horsecorser goads her on with the early modern fight spectator’s cry of “to
‘em” (80).

Depending upon how the scene is staged, especially the blocking of the primary
actors, it becomes apparent fairly soon, at least by the time Ursula calls Quarlous a
“dog’s head” and “trendle-tail” (mongrel), that we are watching a bear-baiting (2.5.111).
After Ursula is bested, Knockem’s earnestly solicitous promise to treat her wounds, tend
her booth, and let her give directions from her chair, where she shall “shine Ursula major”
puts us out of doubt that the scene plays on the Hope theater’s other, literally inhuman
entertainment (168-73).134 The play sides with the gallants, giving them all the best
quips and rejoinders, but Jonson, after the War of the Theaters, must also know
something of how it feels to be the “plain plump soft wench o’ the suburbs,” attacked by
leaner, better favored animals (75-6). Indeed, in a striking description of this turn-of-the
century War, Haynes asserts that “the bearish Jonson was clearly disgusted by the game
[“the baiting of the poets”], but could not resist playing it.”135 In Bartholomew Fair’s
fictional retrospective of this most public if not ferocious display of poetic antagonism,
Jonson gets to be both bear, dog, and emotionally detached spectator. The
overdetermined scene works out what must infect even the ostensibly homogenous “tribe

134 Gordon Campbell, Introduction, Ben Jonson: Volpone, etc., xix.
of Ben”—the difference that gets ascribed to each man in a system of market value where “Every ones price is written on his backe.”

One’s price or value in the world of Elizabethan public theater is determined, as Jonson will complain, not by the quality but by the popularity of one’s work. The epilogue to Every Man Out acknowledges the tight connection between “plaudit[s]” and the prosperity, the “fat” of the playwright (EOH 5.4.60-3). Yet, even the arriviste Jonson disdains to “beg a plaudit” (60). Tellingly, the Horatian epigraph edited out of the Folio, “NON EGO VENTOSAE PLEBIS SUFFRAGIA VENOR,” warns that he is not one to chase down the approval of the fickle masses (63.2).

It is this latter group, even more than his rivals, that evoke nightmares of being torn asunder by a savage, many-headed “monster” (Sejanus 890). The tragic ending of Sejanus, His Fall features not one but two such brutal dismemberments. Significantly, the title character is ripped apart both in flesh and in effigy, through his monuments. Yet, unlike a Preston, or Marston, Jonson stages none of it. Instead, events are relayed through the character of Sejanus’ friend, Terrentius. We hear how the mob at word of Sejanus’s “decline,” “greedily devour the way” to the capitol as they would to “a new theatre” (774, 772, 775). Compared to “so many mastiffs, biting stones,” the wrathful, undiscerning crowd is characterized in emblematic terms, yet Jonson underscores their animal unreason by literalizing the emblem book dog that bites the stone in lieu of the thrower, as the crowd rips into the monuments “as if his statues now were sensive grown” (777, 778). The onetime powerful consul becomes target of the “popular rage,” first

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137Geffrey Whitney, after Andrea Alciato, glosses “Alius peccat, alius plectitur”:
through his statuary, then in his body proper, as the crowd seizes on what remains after
state execution to “ren[d] it limb from limb” (786, 821). Here, it is worth quoting the
coloracter, Terentius:

. . . A thousand heads,
A thousand hands, ten thousand tongues and voices,
Employed at once in several acts of malice!
Old men not staid with age, virgins with shame,
Late wives with loss of husbands, mothers of children,
Losing all grief in joy of his sad fall,
Run quite transported with their cruelty— (821-27)

Jonson’s source, Claudian, compares this citizen mob to a “pack of savage Molossian
hounds.”138 Jonson, in contrast, describes in this moment a “rude multitude” that is more
than the sum of its bestial, ripping parts—its “hands”—to lay equal blame on the tongues,
voices and heads that “malic[iously]” tear down (Sejanus 818, 823). We must also note
Jonson’s emphasis on the cathartic release of the dismemberment, for Terentius observes
that those are most “transported” in joyful cruelty, who were formerly oppressed by
grief—by the loss of “husbands,” “children” or their own youth (824-5). At the moment
when the mob most resembles a pack of savage dogs to Claudian, Jonson sees a
nightmare version of the public theater audience, eagerly devouring their way to a new
play, employing their thousand tongues in “several acts of malice” around the
performance, and finally “losing all grief in joy of his [the tragedian’s? the poet’s?] sad
fall” (823, 826). This shift from Claudian to Jonson’s metaphor is more than just good

The angrie dogge doth turne vnto the stone,
When it is caste, and bytes the same for ire,
And not pursues, the same that hathe it throwne,
But with the same, fulfilleth his desire.

The English Emblem Tradition, 149.

138 See Ostovich’s note 828, Every Man Out.
imitatio. Sejanus’s double destruction at the hands of the “so stupid” “monster” emblematises what lies at the core of Jonson’s phobic writing: the fear that the power to destroy any poet and his monuments, regardless of merit, lies in the hands of the undiscerning, “fickle masses” (893, 889).

Yet the tale of Sejanus may also prove attractive for the case it makes for the durability of the remainder. Long after his statues have been melted down in “the furnace,” the Roman consul experiences an afterlife in the monuments of writers like Claudian and Jonson (784). Perhaps the story even suggests a potential substitution: monument for man, stone for thrower of that inert object. Moral drama has, in the century prior to Jonson, nurtured an audience now capable of inflicting the deconstructive “grievous torture” to which the stage plays of Jonson and his contemporaries are now subject (EOH 2.2.357-8). Through the neoclassical refashioning of his “Workes,” Jonson creates an alterego whose parts can be severed and examined and dragged “along the streets” by the “many-mouthèd vulgar dog” while the poet sits at a safe remove, writing for a more appreciate audience (Sejanus 780; EOH 1.3.135). And, as Jonson sits aloof with his tribe, his stage protagonists made canine through something like an Ovidian metamorphosis, emerge victorious, if not in their narratives, then in the playhouses.

At what point does Jonson realize that one either grows the stomach, teeth and daring to compete and triumph, or consigns oneself to being another man’s gull, “excellent sport”: a “fairing”? The dog emerges as an answer to this and other problems raised by the successful history of moral drama—specifically the changes it has helped to shape and establish in audiences and playing conditions. To confront the competitive, overcrowded conditions that leave the professional writer in fear of being hurt by, and of
hurting others, the dog emerges as a phobic “hieroglyph,” condensing and containing Jonson’s many fears. Not least among these is his suspicion that commercialized London makes no sense in the perspective of a traditional Christian morality he can no more relinquish than the traditional forms upon which he grounds his innovations. The dog allows Jonson to imagine what he otherwise could not: “the impossibility of Religion, Morality, and Law—their power play, their necessary and absurd seeming.”\textsuperscript{139} And what Jonson clearly observes is that the world spares the Macilentes, Quarlouses, Dauphines and Manlys because they learn, with the canniness of the urban stray, how to distinguish the proverbial good meat from a shadow on the water, friendship from the many relationships that counterfeit it, and the fight that can be won from one that can not. If this renders them less than human, it also makes them winners.

In a world for which the exceptional man—the man of excessive aesthetic or ethical sensibilities—is expected to martyr himself, in the ways and for the reasons that Marlowe suggested, the new hero is the one who finds a way to survive. Unlike Marlowe’s tragic protagonists, Jonson’s comic gallants know when to bark and when to retreat until circumstances afford better opportunity. But they are not writers of lasting Workes. They do not inscribe themselves in land, as Tamburlaine, or in legend, as Faustus. They would not be welcome at Penshurst. So, along with the dog, there is the figure of Horace, who, after the War of the Theaters makes his dignified retreat to the sequestered realm of the page.

\textsuperscript{139}Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, 16, 34.
As part of Jonson’s classicizing program of professional self-fashioning, significant alterations in act and scene divisions, stage directions and character entries make reading *Every Man Out* in the Folio a much different experience than reading the quarto version.  

In a recent essay, Kevin Donovan has described how Jonson’s revisions for the 1616 Folio labor to contain the “subversive energies” of the original *Everyman Out of His Humour*. Among elements that subvert the image of Jonson as an autonomous, classical authority, Donovan, with E. Tribble before him, points to characteristics of structure and dramaturgy that reveal “Jonson’s indebtedness to others.” Shapiro makes a more precise attribution to “a tradition reaching back to morality Vice figures, through Marlowe. . .” Jonson’s act of editorial repudiation, his conscious and apparently characteristic erasure of as many traces of the native tradition as the plays will allow, is highly constitutive. In this light, it appears that the fashioning of what Loewenstein calls his “bibliographical ego” is contingent upon his engagement with (and subsequent disavowal of) earlier moral drama. Even the fear of his plays being torn asunder by an unhappy audience’s interpretive powers gestures toward the kind of moral drama audiences I have been describing: those specifically empowered by a long tradition of drama that solicits and rewards active interpretation. The defensive apparatus of the

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140 Donovan, “Forms of Authority,” 61.

141 Ibid., 59-75. Ostovich complains that “the choppy ‘single scenes’ of the Folio, disrupt the ‘momentum generated by plural actions’ in a scene like Paul’s walk, evident in the quarto text, ‘To Behold the Scene Ful’,” 90.


143 Shapiro, *Rival Playwrights*, 46.

censors, multiple Vices and induction of *Every Man Out* jump-start a lifelong effort on Jonson’s part to limit and control the “liberty of interpretation” associated with these performances.  

Loewenstein describes how competing and complementary media (stage and page) give authorship new power in this period. Building on the many recent studies that explore the intensely competitive and commercial milieu of the London stage, Loewenstein constructs a compelling narrative of a Jonson whose movements from public to private stage, then from Whitehall to “the quiet confines of the Folio *Works,*** mark a series of retreats from the noisy, public skirmishes in which he so often engaged. Yet these retreats were not without their strategic gains, for Jonson becomes the first of his generation to actively “measure one publicity against the other, and to assert the advantage of the printed to the played.” In other words, Jonson the author develops in response to the experiences of that other, beleaguered identity, Jonson the playwright. No “civilized urbanity” without the savagery of Asper. No high-minded Horace without the low antics of Buffone. No university-licensed gentleman with “laureate intentions” without the rude mechanical who transforms words to “polished jewels.”

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147 Ibid, 97.


At the end of the sixteenth century, Christopher Marlowe pushes moral drama in the direction of tragedy, while Jonson channels it into comedy. The extraordinary momentum of these two writers transforms moral drama into the revenge tragedy and city comedy of the Jacobean stage in ways we continue to discover. Yet, Jonson’s plays—and specifically, *Every Man Out of His Humour*—is also a flashpoint for something beyond the tradition’s comic line, for it lays ground for the ultimate fate of moral drama in the seventeenth century. If Jonson’s masques are, in part, responsible for popular drama’s being, “reduced to an insulated and solipsistic diorama of Caroline politics” as Agnew contends, Jonson’s *Works* are equally responsible for enabling the moral tradition to slip underground, or more accurately, under cover, to reemerge in texts that will become the domain of the Miltonian author and his private reader. 151 There, the moral strain receives such affirmation and support that a critic of a far century will identify the novel as, “the contemporary form of moral propaganda.” 152

The print market effectively alters the terms of engagement between the parties contending for mastery of the public stage. Most importantly, it more definitely separates the writer’s labor (in one time and space) from the reader’s. There are no intermediary players to speak for and take hits for the poet. It seems conceivable that this change opens the door for a later development on the public stage, where a ‘fourth wall’ will come up to divide actor from auditor. Both parties will enjoy whatever sense of security this division involves until Brecht and Artaud revive the old, “didactic” theater relationship with its aggressive push and shove between player/poet and auditor. With Ben Jonson,


the age of “playing”—whose etymology encompasses a dialogic universe of multiple, conflicting agencies and unpredictable interactions—gives way to an age of more controlled authorial delivery. Jonson’s dream of being “one whom no servile hope of gain or frosty apprehension of danger can make to be a parasite, either to time, place, or opinion” becomes a greater possibility, but in the process, the countless negotiations and high stakes that keep theater exciting, dangerous, and socially relevant are, for a time, lost (Every Man Out, character descriptions 4-5).
Mankind tracks its protagonist’s vacillations, from his initial effort to live virtuously, to his temptation and fall at the hands of the mischief figures, Tityvillus, Myscheff, New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought, to his ultimate redemption through the intercession of Mercy. The play begins with Mercy’s exhortation to the audience to repent their sins and seek God’s mercy. Myscheff arrives to mock Mercy’s Latinate language, and is followed by his men, New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought, who belabor the “goode fader” with irreverent horseplay (Mankind 86). After convincing them to leave, Mercy denounces their vicious behavior. Mankind enters, lamenting his body’s unruliness, and requests spiritual guidance from Mercy, who counsels him to beware superfluity and fight vice for Christ. As New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought begin to heckle Mercy from outside the playing space, Mercy warns Mankind about the mischief figures, urging him to use doctrine and labor to defend himself.

After Mercy departs, Mankind writes out a badge to remind himself of his “condycyon” and sets about digging with his spade to eschew idleness (318). New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought appear, and when Mankind’s attempt to ignore their jokes and spurious questions fails, he drives them off with his spade. He departs to get seed for sowing. Meanwhile, the three N’s run to Myscheff, who comforts them and helps them devise a plan to deal with Mankind through the intercession of Tityvillus. Myscheff
leaves, and the three gather money from the audience, ostensibly as a pay-off for the devil-lord, but when he arrives, the three keep the money for themselves. They plead poverty as he asks each in turn for money. In frustration, he orders them off into the countryside to gather horses and whatever else they can steal for him. Tityvillus then pays an invisible call to Mankind, hiding a board in the earth to thwart his digging, mixing weeds into his corn seed, and lifting the rosary he leaves behind as, compelled by Tityvillus, Mankind runs off to relieve himself. Returning, and having lost all patience with labor and prayer, Mankind falls into slothful slumber. Tityvillus whispers lies that discredit Mercy into Mankind’s ear and advises Mankind to beg mercy of New Gyse, Nowadays, and Nought instead. Upon waking, Mankind heads straight for the ale-house, where the three N’s and Myscheff have come to recover from crimes committed with mixed success.

Myscheff refuses to accept Mankind’s apology until he has held a court on the matter, during which Mankind is sworn to rob, steal, kill, avoid church, and sleep with his neighbors’ wives. The three N’s, in the meantime, convince Mankind to hand over his “syde gown” to be cut into a fashionable jacket, ostensibly to pay for court expenses through the sale of leftover material (Mankind 671). Mankind is swindled as first New Gyse, then Nought cut the jacket shorter and shorter, apparently pocketing the money from the cloth, themselves. Mercy’s approach breaks up the scene, and causes them to flee. Mankind puts Mercy off with an excuse, and follows the mischief figures.

Mercy laments Mankind’s mutability to the audience, but vowing to save him, begins to look for him. The Myscheff figures, hidden in the audience or somewhere nearby, heckle Mercy, and return to the playing area once he has gone. Myscheff and the three
N’s agree to dispose of Mankind now that Mercy is on his trail by appealing to his guilty conscience. Mankind nearly hangs himself before Mercy arrives to harry out the Vices out with a “bales” (a whip) (807). At first, Mankind refuses to believe that God’s mercy will exceed just punishment for his crimes, but when Mercy chides him for obstinancy, Mankind repents. Mankind tries to blame the mischief figures for his fall, but Mercy gently reminds him that he was warned in advance of his “iiij aduersarys,” the devil, the world and the flesh (883). After receiving Mercy’s blessing, Mankind exits, and Mercy delivers the epilogue. Having done his duty in delivering Mankind, Mercy asks the audience to search their own “condicyons,” and realize that temporal existence, as manifest in the world’s “diuere mutacyon,” is “but a wanite.” He prays that the audience will receive their portion of eternal bliss and become “pleyferys wyth the angellys abowe” (908-10, 913).
APPENDIX 2


By most accounts, The Trial of Treasure appears to be the earliest of the three plays.\(^1\) A dual protagonist play, Trial organizes its action around the progress of Lust, a young “gallant,” and Just, a pious man (Trial 207). After a lengthy prologue exhorting the audience to follow the examples of Diogenes and St. James, who refused to become “slaves to their lusts,” Lust enters singing and encouraging members of the audience to carouse with him. Just enters behind, admonishing us against excessive levity, a warning to which Lust takes offence. The two quote opposing humanist sententiae, escalating the conflict to the point where Lust draws his sword. Just offers to wrestle instead, and he subdues Lust after some difficulty. Before leaving, Just sums up the battle as just another day in the “the conflict of the just” (211).

Inclination the Vice enters, vaunting his power and antiquity. Lust returns with Sturdiness, seeking a rematch with Just. Sturdiness picks a fight with Inclination, is overcome, and agrees to serve him. He introduces Inclination to Lust, who complains about Just and of the occasional twinge of conscience. Inclination offers to cheer him with new companions: Elation (ambition) and Greedy-gut, who eats “both house and lands like bread and meat” (Trial 219). The Vices coach Lust in methods for increasing

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\(^1\)Cf. Wright, who assumes that Enough was the earlier play in his “Social Aspects,” 116, and Southern, who concurs. The Staging of Plays, 476.
his wealth, and they all head out for a good time the at the house of Carnal Cogitation.

Just and Sapience enter, and while discussing the one treasure that does not fade with time—wisdom or “treasures of the mind” (220)—Inclination enters without seeing them, congratulating himself on the riotous behavior of Lust and his companions. The virtues accost him, and despite Inclination’s trickery, Just snaffles him, and leaves him bridled, in the playing area. Greedy-gut enters, mistakes Inclination for a colt, but is finally persuaded to find Lust to unbridle him.

Once unbridled, Inclination plays the bawd for Lust, offering to fix him up with Treasure. They leave. Just, Trust and Contentation enter, discussing their “true happiness” and loathing of false treasure. Trust, a crowned but otherwise plainly dressed woman, exhorts all estates of the audience to walk in their way and embrace Contentation. The Virtues depart. Inclination enters, boasting of his match between Treasure and Lust. The couple arrives, and Inclination mocks them through asides, using wordplay to escape detection. Treasure swears her undying loyalty, and introduces her brother, Pleasure, who also agrees to attend Lust. At height of Lust’s happiness, God’s Visitation expels Pleasure through bodily pain. Treasure promises to get a physician but is prevented by Time, who comes upon them suddenly, seeking to make an example of Lust and turn Treasure to rust. Time leads Treasure and Lust away, and Just returns, leading Inclination in a snaffle and shackles. Trust and Consolation crown Just with felicity and the riches of renown, which Just is permitted to enjoy “in this world” (Enough 244), while the Vice is lead away, grumbling. Time demonstrates the bad end of Lust and Treasure, pouring out vials of dust and rust, and the virtuous characters end the play with a prayer “for all Estates” (246).
While *Longer* appears to be Wager’s next play chronologically, I want to turn instead to *Enough* to compress the synopsis by comparing, where appropriate, the two more similar plays. *Enough*’s dual protagonists are Worldly Man and Heavenly Man, whose names indicate their basic orientations. Like *Trial*, *Enough* concerns a short segment of its protagonists’ adult life. The lengthy Prologue in this play treats the “argument” only fleetingly, reserving most of its energy for an apology for English poetry, followed by a more discrete defense of the author (*Enough* 71). Worldly Man enters, his first speech revealing desires less sensual but no less consuming than Lust’s. He concludes his story of struggling to overcome his father’s financial ruin with a paean to money. Heavenly Man enters with Contentation, spouting doctrine and entreaty Worldly Man to be content with what he has. The amused Worldly Man argues civilly, but when Heavenly Man and Contentation muster exempla from classical literature, Worldly Man is converted. The three leave together.

Temerity, Inconsideration and Precipitation enter, singing praises to Covetous, who approaches, vaunting. There is much comic work as the Vices vie for dominance, but Covetous emerges as lead Vice, taking on the others as servants in the task of securing Worldly Man’s downfall. The Vices disguise themselves, adopting aliases, and one leaves to enlist the help of Ignorance. Worldly Man and Enough enter and trade doctrinal observations on one part of the playing area where Covetous and company intercept them. After convincing Enough to introduce him to Worldly Man, Covetous pretends to lament Worldly Man’s new lifestyle. Worldly Man shrugs it off until the Vices mention that they were close to Worldly Man’s father. This, combined with the authority of a Senecan sentence, moves Worldly Man to rationalize friendship with them. When
Enough voices his suspicions, Worldly Man dismisses him and depart with new friends who vow to make Worldly Man twice as rich as before.

Chorus-like, Heavenly Man informs the audience of Worldly Man’s offstage debauchery, and leaves as Tenant enters, bemoaning the rack-renting of Worldly Man, his landlord. A poverty-stricken Servant adds to Tenant’s complaints, and Hireling commiserates, having not been paid for work performed for Worldly Man. The arrival of Covetous, the Steward, causes Servant to dash out. The Vice deflects the pleas of Tenant and Hireling until Worldly Man arrives. Worldly Man claims to be doing the best he can for Tenant and Hireling, both of whom leave, cursing him. Worldly Man and Covetous share a laugh as they discuss the next phase of property expansion. A Prophet enters, disturbing Worldly Man with his call to repentance.

Worldly Man falls ill at the appearance of God’s Plague. As in Trial, the figure of divine vengeance, invisible to all but the audience, delivers a formal speech that predicts Worldly Man’s demise. A comic episode follows in which Covetous coordinates efforts to ease Worldly Man’s suffering, first through his ignorant chaplain, then through a physician cheated of pay for admitting that Worldly Man is beyond his power to heal. Attempting to make his will, Worldly Man falls dead before he can utter the name of God. The Vices snicker over his “trim end” and depart (Enough 1410). Worldly Man’s corpse remains abandoned in the playing space until Satan enters, gloating over his expanding kingdom. Listing Worldly Man’s sins, he promises to reward the worldly men of the audience if they follow the dead man’s example. After Satan carries Worldly Man out on his back, Heavenly Man returns with Contentation and Enough to reemphasize the
play’s several morals. Rest enters to reward Heavenly Man, and Contentation ends the play with a prayer for the Queen.

*The Longer Thou Livest* takes its structure from that humanist subgenre of moral drama known as the prodigal son play. Consequently, the play’s action follows Moros, a recalcitrant, witty fool from late childhood to old age. Another extended Prologue allows Wager to articulate his position concerning the importance of nature versus nurture in education. A disclaimer that the satire is general is offered before Moros enters, “singing the foot of many songs as fools were wont” (*Longer*, 70). Discipline upbraids him for childishness, exhorting him to take up a responsible adult role. Piety and Exercitation enter, and the three virtues acknowledge one another honorably as Moros remains willfully oblivious. The virtues attempt to instruct the “popish” boy in nationalist Protestant doctrine, which he translates into insouciant nonsense, until, beaten by Discipline and under threat of further violence, he pretends to abide by their plan to train him up to an “honest man” (1065).

Idleness enters, gleefully recounting Moros’ resistance. Incontinence and Wrath join him in a plot to divest Moros of what wit remains. As they adopt aliases, Wrath grumbles about wasting disguise on one too undiscerning to appreciate the effort. Moros enters, reading Piety’s book, and is easily convinced to exchange it for Idleness’s “book,” a deck of cards (*Longer* 769). The Vices offer to make a man of Moros, Wrath training him to use sword and dagger, but before they can repair to the stews, Discipline enters. Moros is too cowardly to do more than utter his defiance and run off after the Vices, after which Discipline addresses the audience about the danger of overindulgent child-rearing, and leaves. Lady Fortune enters, demanding reverence, and when none do her honor, she
threatens to raise the fool, Moros. Incontinence enters, and offers to introduce her to Moros.

Piety laments the wickedness of the times, but is chased off by Wrath’s threats. Wrath recruits Ignorance, and a mature Moros enters wearing “a foolish beard” (stage direction, 1292). He gains the new servants Ignorance, Impiety and Cruelty, who flatter him, explain how they will run his affairs, and free him for the pursuit of pleasure. Moros obtains a red feather to make himself a gentleman, but just as he is practicing “jet[ting]” Discipline enters. Moros attempts to outface the disgusted Virtue, but the latter, taking no heed, merely criticizes Moros’s lifestyle. Moros and Ignorance hurry out, and People enter, complaining of Moros’ abuse of office and his “rabble of roisterly rufflers” who prey on all (Longer 1709). The People exit and Moros, now an old man, enters, shadow-fighting with an imaginary Discipline. God’s Judgment approaches, invisible to Moros, and condemns him for a lifestyle that presupposes neither God, heaven nor hell. Moros sickens. Confusion enters, the reward of all “wicked fools” (1808), and changing Moros’ clothes to rags, divests him of all honor and power. Moros resists going with Confusion, but is ultimately carried out on the latter’s back to hell, still quipping foolishly. Discipline, Piety and Exercitation moralize the action of the play and say a prayer for each estate in the commonwealth.
Cambises’ Prologue frames the play with classical definitions of good kingship, and interprets Cambises’ fall as divine punishment for his willful transgressions. At the advice of his council, the youthful new king, Cambises, agrees to war on Persia and Egypt, leaving Sisamnes the judge to minister the kingdom. Sisamnes appraises the temptation of the power now in his hands, then departs. Ambidexter the Vice enters in ad hoc soldier’s gear, and is set upon by three regular soldiers, Huf, Snuf and Ruf. They fight to a draw, fall in together when they understand Ambidexter’s nature, and fall out again when Meretrix, the harlot, offers her services to whomever will pay most. When the highest bidder is chased off, Meretrix leaps into the fray, beats the men and takes Ruf’s sword. She gives it back on condition that Ruf will be her servant.

Meanwhile, Ambidexter has convinced Sisamnes to “play with bothe hands” and profit from his position (321). When Small Habilitie can not afford Sisamnes’ bribe, he is turned away without justice. Shame enters to report on Cambises’ bad behavior abroad. When the king returns and hears the Commons Complaint about Sisamnes’ abuse of office, he makes an example of the judge, killing and flaying him before his son, Otian.

Soon after, upon being informed that the praise garnered by this act of justice is tarnished by his reputation for drunkenness, Cambises punishes his honest advisor Praxaspes, by using his youngest son to prove himself capable of holding his liquor. The
king shoots the boy through the heart, and leaves Praxaspes and wife grieving. The Vice speaks to us of his “cosin Cutpurse,” supposedly working the audience, then reviews Cambises’ moral status, predicting reprehensible acts to come. Meanwhile, Smirdis, Cambises’ virtuous brother, regrets the king’s cruelty, but Ambidexter counsels him to bear all silently, and reform the kingdom after Cambises dies. Ambidexter then claims Smirdis has been plotting against the king. Although Cambises perceives Ambidexter’s duplicity, suspicion has been aroused and he orders Smirdis murdered. There is another reference to the cutpurse in the audience, and Smirdis is set upon by Crueltie and Murder. Ambidexter returns weeping false tears, and reports the court’s grief, emphasizing the king’s lack of foresight.

Happening upon two country men on their way to market, Ambidexter tricks them into speaking seditiously of the king. Hob and Lob’s apprehension sets them at each other’s throats, and the Vice eggs them on to fight. Marian May-Be-Good, Hob’s wife, runs in and parts them with a broom, convincing them to make up and go to market. She beats Ambidexter until he escapes. Meanwhile, Venus and her blind son, Cupid, plot to make Cambises fall in love with his kinswoman. The Lady and followers enter, rhapsodizing on the natural beauty of the surrounding “feelds” (862). Upon seeing her, Cambises is struck by Cupid’s arrow, but his retinue informs him she is his “Cosin-jarmin,” unsuitable for marriage. Cambises forces his suit upon her anyway—“there is no nay”—and despite her protests, orders the wedding (922). Ambidexter returns to describe the court festivities and expound upon the bitterness of marriage. Ambidexter and Preparation fight for mastery, then cooperate to prepare the wedding feast. Before the
wedding party enters, Ambidexter addresses the audience and his “cosin Cutpurse” (1000).

Seated at the “banquit,” the king relays the story of a recent entertainment in which he pitted a “yung lion” against two “whelpe[s]” (1019-20). The queen cries to hear how one puppy protected its brother, and gently upbraids Cambises for Smirdis’ death. The king explodes in a rage, and ignoring her pleas and those of the court, orders her execution. The queen sings a “psalme” bidding farewell to courtly life, and is lead off to face Crueltie and Murder. Ambidexter returns, weeping false tears, and after reviewing Cambises’ crimes, predicts a bloody death. Cambises enters, dying, with “a swoord thrust up into his side” and laments the “sudain chaunce” of his accident, recognizing it as “a just reward for my misdeeds” (1158, 1170). Ambidexter departs, fearful of being blamed for the mishap, and the lords take up the body to give it a “princely buriall” despite his misdeeds (1193). An Epilogue urges the audience to explore any fault in the play with the playwright, and thanks them for their patience before leading all in a prayer for the queen.

_Horestes’_ first contact with its audience is through its Vyce, later revealed to be Revenge (a.k.a. Courrage). He advises the audience to follow his lead and take up Horestes’ fight, “the [rebellious] catives to quell” (Horestes 6). Hodge and Rusticus enter, gossiping about Horestes’ impending war of vengeance against the murderers of his father: his mother, Clytemnestra, and the usurping Egistus. Seeing a “lyttell hourchet [urchin]” they take the Vyce for Horestes’ messenger, and attempt to get news, but he attacks them for flouting him (46). Unable to evoke more than laughter and patronizing courtesy from the two rustics, the Vyce avenges himself by sowing dissension. He
informs Rusticus that Hodge set his dog on his pig, and Hodge admits to doing so in retaliation for the crops Rusticus’s swine habitually devours. As the two start to fight, the Vyce hits them then hurries off. They inexplicably make up, and head off to Rusticus’s house for a quart of ale. Meanwhile, Horestes asks the gods if he should revenge himself on his mother when suddenly the Vyce appears and opportunistically claims to be “Courrage,” the answer to his prayers (207). King Idumeus, Horestes’ host, agrees to support Horestes’ war to regain his inheritance. Two young soldiers, Haultersycke and Hempstringe, sing a farewell to courtly life, converse about going to war, then fall to squabbling. Hempstringe gains the advantage, but Haultersycke stalks off, vowing vengeance.

As Horestes prays to the gods to help him exact revenge on Clytemnestra, Nature arrives to debate matricide. Horestes, unmoved by her arguments, goes off to muster his men. Idumeus and the Councell bless the troops and their cause. Back in Mycoene, Egistus and Clytemnestra are singing a duet about Paris and Helen of Troy when news of Horestes’ approach reaches them. Egistus departs to gather troops while Clytemnestra stays to defend the city. In a brief interlude, a “Woman” “lyke a beger” agrees to yield to the soldier who has killed her husband. Attacking him when his back is turned, she beats him and takes his sword, but agrees to give it back because he spared her life. The Vyce sings a war song, which features himself, Revenge, as conqueror, and ends with a warning to his “cosen Cutpursse” (674).

Horestes lays siege to the city, and gives the ultimatum that the city must yield or be razed--buildings, men and children. The Vyce congratulates Horestes on manly comportment, and Mycoene is obliterated. Captured, Clytemnestra begs pardon but
Horestes, though inwardly vacillating, remains firm. Egistus is hung as Clytemnestra watches, then she is lead out by Revenge to die. Fame enters and explains her function, while the Vyce seeks out “a newe master” now that Horestes has completed his revenge (849). Fame explains that Clytemnestra’s brother now seeks to revenge her death on Horestes, and the Vyce rushes off to Athens where all the Greek kings have assembled to judge the case. Provision prepares for the Greek counsel. Menelaus accuses Horestes of matricide, and Horestes answers. Idumeus and Nestor move the others to side with Horestes, and Menelaus relents, sealing the truce with Hermione, his daughter. The Vyce comes in, apparently reduced to begging. He reports on the wedding ceremony where “Amyte” and “Dewtey” held sway, and assures us that he will find employment soon, for women are amenable to him. With a warning to his “Cosen Cutpursse,” he leaves. Horestes and Hermione take stock of the kingdom, and the Nobelles and Commons express their contentment with the new peaceful reign. Truth and Dewty crown Horestes, emphasize the necessity of truth, duty and amity in a kingdom, and offer a prayer for the Queen, nobility, mayor and all.
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